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Indonesian Sultanates and Their Alleged Allegiance to Islamic Caliphates: A Historical Analysis of “Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara”

Tiar Anwar Bachtiar¹ and Nandang Nursaleh²

Abstract: This study aims to discuss the contents of a documentary film entitled *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara*, which was released on 1 Muharram 1422H (August 20, 2020). The central claim of this documentary, which is also the main discussion of this study, is that the kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago (Samudra Pasai, Malaka, Demak, Aceh Darussalam and others) have pledged allegiance to the centers of the caliphate in Egypt and later in Turkey. The study intends to discover whether such an allegiance really occurred and if these Islamic kingdoms were vassals of the Islamic caliphate. This study concludes that this claim is weak by using the methods of discourse analysis, historical analysis and the *fiqh al-siyāsa* approach. The Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago did not pledge allegiance to any center of the Islamic caliphate, even though the relationship between these centers of power was likely intensive.

Keywords: Caliphate, allegiance, Islamic kingdoms, Indonesian archipelago, international relations, *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara*.

Introduction

On 1 Muharram 1442H (August 20, 2020), the public discourse of Indonesian Muslims was appalled by a controversy. The trigger was a ban on a documentary film entitled *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* (or *Traces*

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of the Caliphate in the Indonesian Archipelago) that was streaming on YouTube earlier on the same day. The Indonesian government asked YouTube to stop streaming this documentary. The ban made netizens curious, which, in turn, made the documentary more sought after. The filmmakers resorted to various ways so that the documentary could still be available online. The documentary then became available for viewing on Facebook after a particular page was created and managed by the filmmakers; it was also made available through another link on YouTube after they erased the term “caliphate” and changed the title to *Jejak Islam di Nusantara* or *Traces of Islam in the Archipelago* (Khilafah Channel, 2020).

The controversy also attracted many people into discussions, both online and offline. Seasoned historians, such as Azyumardi Azra and Peter Carey (Gunawan, 2020), were even directly involved. Ismail Hakki Kadi, a Southeast Asian historian from Turkey, also shared his views, although he did not directly mention the documentary. In an interview with the Turkish news agency, *Anadolu Agency*, Ismail Hakki Kadi commented that the Turkish-Ottoman relationship with several sultanates in Java or Sumatra was not hierarchical (Azzam, 2020).

If any question were to arise, it would be about why the presence of this documentary caused controversy. The answer is not related to the quality or content of the documentary itself, but to the term “caliphate” in the title. In the last five years, since the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) was disbanded in 2017, the word “caliphate” has often been viewed negatively and has become the target of criticism after the word *jihād* also previously received the same stigma. The word “caliphate” was then associated with radicalism and even separatism. This stems from the maneuvers of the HTI movement itself, which always affirmed that the caliphate is the only standard Islamic political system. The democratic system practiced in Indonesia today is considered as a *kufir* (disbelief) system, so any product that is born of a democratic system is a product of *kufir*. Therefore, Pancasila—Indonesian national principles—and its derivative laws are also considered as a product of the *kufir* system. This propaganda is frequently repeated since HTI has always firmly clashed between “caliphate” and “democracy” (al-Amin, 2012). As a result, this has become common knowledge. At the same time, the producer, script writer and all source persons of this documentary were known as

activists of HTI. Therefore, it is no wonder that this documentary has been associated with HTI.³

This is what caused many people who do not understand the different views of the term “caliphate” among experts to be influenced and think that this “caliphate system” is contrary to the democratic system implemented in Indonesia today. Similarly, the government overreacted by assuming that the “caliphate” is a threat to Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). This imprudent assumption then gives rise to unwarranted fear. When the word “caliphate” is heard, or if someone is campaigning for it, it is immediately assumed that the existing system in this country will be destroyed.

The fear that haunted the government and its quick reaction to the streaming of *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* made this documentary even more sought after by many people who became curious about its content. The authors were interested in watching the documentary not because they were also curious about the content, but to know how detrimental the documentary actually is that the government decided to ban it. After paying attention from beginning to end, the authors believe that the narrative of this documentary is ordinary. There is nothing that could have potentially harmed the current government, let alone reject the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). There are no deliberate attempts to provoke treason against the government or express any separatist idea. This documentary only tells about the emergence of the Islamic caliphate after Prophet Muhammad died, its spread throughout the world and its relation with the Islamic kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago. However, the timeline of this documentary ends in the 16th century, during the Demak Sultanate.

Until now, the Indonesian government has not published any official letter or broadcast about this documentary. Therefore, we are unable to substantiate exactly that the government officials asked YouTube so the latter would stop the premier release of this documentary on its platform. However, it could be speculated that the disband of HTI—which

³ One of the sources of information is Ismail Yusanto, who is a prominent person in Indonesia and known as a spokesman of HTI. Other persons, such as Salman Iskandar, Hafizh Abdurrahman and Rokhmat Labib, were also known as activists of HTI.

promoted the issue of caliphate—by the government, along with the release of this documentary with the same theme, lead the government to officially request YouTube to drop this documentary. If this were true, we can also guess that the reason for this was that this documentary was deemed a threat to the Republic of Indonesia because it was considered as a way to propagate about the caliphate. However, this consideration is an exaggeration. In fact, books that detail the history of the Islamic caliphate and the Islamic sultanates in Indonesia have been published for many decades now. These books are even taught in various Islamic educational institutions, from elementary to university. However, such teachings have not caused Muslims to become hostile to the Republic of Indonesia until now.

The problem that will be explored in this study, however, is related to historical claims. As a documentary, this film contains many historical claims that are different from the widely accepted history. The narrative constructed by this documentary leads to the conclusion that the Islamic kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago, namely Samudra Pasai, Melaka, Aceh Darussalam, Demak and Mataram, have made allegiance (*bay'a*) to the Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt (in Mamluk era) dan the Ottoman Caliphate. If this claim is valid, then hierarchically, the Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia were direct subordinates (vassals) of these Islamic caliphates. This claim, if true, will undoubtedly revise the general view among historians who hold that the Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago were independent from the caliphates (Abdullah & Endjat, 2015). Therefore, this paper intends to examine the extent of the accuracy of this claim.

Methodology

The method used in this paper is discourse analysis, which is best suited to analyse the contents of *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* (Sabur, 2012; Gillen & Alan, 2006). The discussion of the contents of the documentary uses two approaches, namely the historical method approach (Gottschalk, 2006) and the *fiqh* method approach, especially Islamic political jurisprudence (*fiqh al-siyāsa*) (Muhajir, 2017). The historical method approach analyses aspects of historical claims about the relationship between the kingdoms of the Indonesian archipelago and the Islamic caliphates. Meanwhile, the political *fiqh* approach is

used to understand Islamic politics in the past through the fundamental conceptions of Islamic law. This is because the political act of power that formally bears the name of Islam generally must have legitimacy in *fiqh*.

Results and Discussion

Synopsis of Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara

According to Nicko Pandawa, who is the screenwriter, this documentary was inspired by his thesis in fulfilment of the degree programme in History of Islamic Civilization (SPI) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. His thesis was later published under the title *Khilafah & Ketakutan Penjajah Belanda: Riwayat Pan-Islamisme dari Istanbul sampai Batavia, 1882-1928 (Caliphate and the Fear of the Dutch Colonisers: History of Pan-Islamism from Istanbul to Batavia 1882-1928)*. Therefore, it is possible that during his thesis data collection process, Nicko was motivated to turn it into a documentary film, an idea that he eventually realised.⁴

Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara begins with a narrative about the so-called “Islamic Caliphate” from 632 AD to 656 AD. This period began with the reign of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (632 AD) and ended with the reign of ‘Usman ibn ‘Affān (656 AD). For some reason, the reign of Ali bin Abi Talib was not included in the initial account of the formation of this Islamic caliphate. This documentary defines the caliphate itself as “a government structure regulated according to the Islamic teachings as brought and conducted by Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime, and then continued by the Rashidun”. This form of caliphate was also continued in the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman periods.

Moreover, this documentary narrates that the Islamic caliphate had spread to all corners of the world, including Indonesia. The

⁴ This information was received by the authors from Nicko himself and was strengthened by his interviews in several YouTube channels. Some of these interviews were dropped from YouTube when this article was written. However, a few YouTube channels related to this claim can be found, such as that of Moeflich H. Hart (2020, October 24). In fact, we can also find many similarities between the documentary and the script writer’s thesis.

spread of Islam to the Indonesian archipelago also led to the birth of Islamic political power in this region, which then submitted or pledged allegiance to the center of the Islamic caliphate. The main reason for the allegiance of political rulers in this region is that those who spread Islam to this region were actually direct envoys of the “caliphate”.

To prove this narrative, this documentary shows several pieces of evidence: first, the letters of Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of the Umayyads to the King of Srivijaya, which occurred between 717AD and 720AD (Azra, 2004) and; second, the discovery of coins from the Umayyad dynasty in Sumatra. After all, the above evidence do not actually show the allegiance and submission of any local king to the Umayyad caliphate. However, the evidence is used as a prelude to frame that, later, the first Islamic kingdom in the Indonesian archipelago, namely Samudera Pasai in Aceh, had pledged allegiance to the Abbasid dynasty. This claim is different from the theory, developing so far, that the birth of Islamic political power in the region was due to cultural encouragement from people who had previously embraced Islam (Abdullah & Endjat, 2015; Abdullah & Lopian, 2012).

The narrative about the existence of *bay’a* (pledge of allegiance) to the Islamic Caliphates begins with the existence of a tomb in Aceh that is claimed to be a descendant of the Abbasid rulers, namely the tomb of Shadrul Akabir Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Abdul Qadir bin Yusuf bin Abdul Aziz bin Al-Mansur Abi Jafar al-Abbasi (d. 1413 AD). This information is taken from the inscription on this tomb. According to this documentary, the father of the deceased was said to have come to Transoxiana and Delhi in India. His presence was highly respected in those places. Even the ruler of Delhi always pledged allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate, even though it collapsed in Baghdad in 1258 and moved to Cairo three years later. In addition to the ruler of Delhi, the newly established Ottoman ruler, Bayezid I, also pledged allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo. Allegiance to a caliph was considered as the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the times) of that time. So, with this assumption, it is possible that the ruler of Samudera Pasai also pledged allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo at that time. Therefore, the existence of the tomb of the descendants of the Abbasid Caliphs in the burial complex of the royal family of Samudera Pasai in Kuta Krueng Aceh is considered as an indication of the possibility of a *bay’a* to the Abbasid Caliphate.

Armed with the “belief” about the existence of Samudera Pasai’s pledge to the Abbasids, the narrative of this caliphate network continued with the sending of Samudera Pasai’s envoy to Java, namely Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Sunan Gresik). Still relying on the analysis of the tombstone inscription, this documentary believes that Maulana Malik Ibrahim is an important person in Pasai. By connecting Sunan Gresik with the rulers in Pasai, this documentary seems to suggest that the spread of Islam in Java through the establishment of the Kingdoms of Demak, Cirebon and Banten had a solid relationship with the Aceh-Abbasid connection. This documentary has not yet provided an in-depth analysis of Islam in Java. According to the producer, the documentary film sequel about Java is still in production. However, with this entry point, it is strongly suspected that the direct connection through the allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphate, which succeeded the Abbasids in Cairo, by the Javanese rulers will be the narrative’s focal point.

Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara itself then focuses again on the continuation of the story of the Acehnese rulers after the ruling power was no longer in the hands of the Pasai kings, but in the hands of the Aceh Darussalam kings centered in Banda Aceh. Since the rulers in Aceh and the caliphate changed, the documentary tries to build a new argument about the allegiance of the Sultan of Aceh to the Ottoman Caliphate in Turkey. Again, the focus of this documentary is based on the inscriptions of graves in Aceh, some of which are said to be related to the Ottoman rule, such as the tombs of Turkish soldiers in Gampong Pande.

In this section, the argument is strengthened by the existence of two letters from the Sultans of Aceh to the Ottoman Caliphate in Istanbul. Both were asking for Aceh to become part of the Ottoman Caliphate. The first letter was from Alauddin Riayat Syah in 1566. The second letter was sent in 1849 by Ghauts Sayful Alam, vizier of the Sultanate of Aceh, to the Ottoman Governor of Jeddah, Mehmed Hasib Pasha. In the letter, it is stated that the people of Aceh and Sumatra are subjected to the Ottoman Caliphate. Several other sources that are considered secondary by the documentary were then used to reinforce these two letters, such as the graves of the Turks in Aceh and coins from the Ottomans. Apart from Aceh, the Ottoman assistance to Demak, Melaka and even Ternate is also briefly mentioned.

The concluding narrative of the documentary emphasises on the existence of a functional power relationship, which in the history of Islamic politics was marked by *bay'at*:

With such an extraordinary achievement, of course, Baabullah did not stand alone. There is a bond of solidarity with the sultans of Aceh, Java, and the Philippines. The bond is as one ummah—bonding with one creed, the Islamic creed. The bond with one spirit, the spirit of jihad, and the bond with one leadership because all the sultans in the archipelago were submissive and respectful to the Ottoman Caliphate (Khilafah Channel, 2020).

Caliphate in Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

What is meant by “caliphate” in *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara*? The concept of the “caliphate” must be discussed first before examining the data and interpretations presented by the documentary because the entire narrative centers on the conceptualisation of the word “caliphate” itself. Two people can both say “caliphate,” but their concept of the word may differ. For example, the concept of the caliphate in the discipline of Islamic history can be different from the concept of the caliphate in the discipline of *fiqh*, which is projective or legitimate. Likewise, the understanding of the concept of caliphate between Islamic movements could also be different. In Indonesia itself, several Islamic groups use the term “caliphate” with different definitions. In fact, there are those whose movement leaders have been called as “caliphs”. In Cileungsi, West Java, for example, there is someone claiming to be the “caliph” who leads the Jamaatul Muslimin Hizbullah movement (Mi'raj Islamic News Agency, 2017). There is also a “caliph” in Lampung who claims to be the leader of the Jamaatul Muslimin movement (Damarjati, 2019). They define the word “caliphate” according to their respective understanding so they could tenaciously claim their leader as a caliph.

Before discussing the legitimization of existing Caliphs in history by Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), firstly, we have to elaborate on the definition of “caliphate” itself by Islamic jurists (*fuqahā'*). Imam al-Mawardī, in his prominent book entitled *al-Ahkām al-ṣultāniyya*, did not name the Islamic state leader with only the single title of “chaliph”. He did not differentiate between the term “caliphate” and *imāma*.

Hence, al-Mawardī (2006, p. 15) notes that “*imāma* was used for those who are the descendants⁵ of prophet missions as guardians of religion (*al-dīn*) and governors of the umma.” Al-Mawardī’s concept of *imāma* (caliphate) was mostly referenced by other jurists. For example, the modernist jurist, Rashīd Riḍā, referred to al-Mawardī when he discussed the definition of “caliphate” in his book, *al-Khilāfa wa al-imāma al-ūzmā*. He states that the definition of this term by Sunni scholars was not taken from al-Mawardī’s concept (Riḍā, 2013). From this term, we know that in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the man who assumed such a responsibility was called “caliph” or “imam”. The term “*sultān*”, “*walī*”, “*amīr*” and other names known in Islamic political history have more political connotation rather than sharia’s connotation. Meanwhile, these terms are not different with “caliph” and “imam” in its essential meaning.

In Islamic history, the term “caliph” or “caliphate” is determined based on the person’s acknowledgment as well as the legitimacy of other contemporaries for his claim. The actual existence of his power also supports this recognition. Therefore, after Prophet Muhammad’s death, the Rashidun are all called “caliph” by consensus among Muslim historians. Likewise, the Umayyad rulers are all called “caliphs”. The Abbasid rulers were the same, until their reign collapsed in 1258 AD. However, at the same time, ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil, a descendant of the Umayyads who managed to escape when this caliphate collapsed in 750 AD, declared himself an independent ruler in Andalusia who did not acknowledge (did not give allegiance to) the Abbasids in Baghdad. Therefore, historians, such as al-Suyūṭī in his book entitled *Tārīkh al-khulafā`*, still referred to him as “caliph” because Muslims in Andalusia pledged allegiance to him as caliph and there was a clear territory of authority. The Andalusian ruler of the Umayyad dynasty later openly declared the reuse of the title “caliph” by ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Nāṣir (313-350 H) in 316 H (al-Suyūṭī, 2013). The use of the title “caliph” was a response to the declaration of a new “caliphate” in Cairo by the Fatimid dynasty.

⁵ The adverb “descendant” in Arabic used is *khilāfa*. This adverb that is then used as a term of Islamic state leadership is “Caliphate” and the man who takes this responsibility is called “caliph”.

Meanwhile, the Abbasid Caliphate under the reign of al-Muqtadir was getting weaker. As a result, at that time, at least three dynasties were using the title “Caliphate”, namely the Abbasids, the Fatimids (Thaqqusy, 2015; Muir, 1963) and the Umayyads in Andalusia. Although the title of “Caliph” was only used during the time of ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Nāṣir, historians still use it to refer to the Umayyad rulers in Andalusia since ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhlī, who came to power in 138H as a “Caliph” (al-Suyūfī, 2013). This indicates that the term “caliphate” is used by historians loosely.

This loose use of the term “caliphate” also caused al-Suyūfī to continue to refer to the Abbasid descendants, who were protected by the Mamluk dynasty in Cairo after the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 AD (656H), as “Caliph”. In fact, when they fled to Cairo to take refuge under the Mamluk rulers who managed to stem the Mongol attack in 1260 at the Battle of Ain Jalut, the heirs to the Abbasid throne no longer had power. Real power was in the hands of the Mamluk dynasty. Most likely, the Mamluks, who were the descendants of freed slaves, did not have enough legitimacy to claim to be a “caliphate” because Muslims still believed that the caliph must be of Quraysh descent. The Abbasids, Umayyads and Fatimids were dynasties of Quraysh descent. Therefore, each of them dared to claim their dynasty as a “caliphate”.

Before and after the split of Islamic rule into the dynasties of the Abbasids in Baghdad and the Umayyads in Cordova, various smaller Islamic dynasties also separated themselves independently from the two caliphates. These dynasties are, for example, the Rustumiya Dynasty, the Idrisid Dynasty, the Aghlabid Dynasty and the Bani Zeri Dynasty. These dynasties ruled in North Africa or the Maghreb region (now Morocco and Tunisia). There were also the Tulunid Dynasty in Egypt and the Bani Hamdan Dynasty in Syria, among others. These dynasties did not claim to be a caliphate and did not pledge allegiance to other (independent) caliphates (Egyptian Islamic Research and Studies Team, 2005).

What is the status of these independent dynasties from a *fiqh* perspective? Historians and experts of history must understand this because it is significant in understanding the dynamics of power of the past of Islamic politics. The unity and division of Islamic political power have been studied by previous *fiqh* experts, who gave birth to different

fiqh views. The task of the historian himself is not to choose a legally more decisive view, but to use all these different views to analyse the factors of religious thought underlying the integration and disintegration of Islamic political power. As kingdoms that made Islam their political foundation, their actions still must have legal (sharia) legitimacy.

Basically, as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad and the four Caliphs, the leadership of the Muslims can be held by only one person. This also happened during the Umayyad Caliphate. However, the seeds of division began to appear during the Umayyad era. The split occurred when there was a caliphate dualism between Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, who received allegiance in Iraq (Kūfa) shortly after his father, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, was buried, and Mu‘āwiya, who was also sworn in as Caliph in Damascus (Shallaby, 2008). Power and leadership were legally valid for both men. The peace between them marked the unification of these two caliphates several months later. The legitimacy of the two powers indicated that Islamic power had begun to split, although it would be reunited later.⁶ Even before that, for several years, Mu‘āwiya did not give his *bay‘a* (acknowledgment as Caliph) to ‘Alī since the latter became a Caliph until his death. Indeed, Mu‘āwiya did not mention himself as Caliph. However, since he gave no *bay‘a* to ‘Alī as Caliph, it meant that he declared himself as an independent power that is separate from ‘Alī’s power. Ibn Taymiyya said that both ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya were valid as leader in their own region (Taymiyya, 1998).

The above situation, of course, never happened during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, the *qaṭ’ī* law was based on events during Prophet Muhammad’s time and the clear and firm texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Therefore, scholars opted for the process of *ijtihād*. *Ijtihād* must incorporate arguments from the time of Prophet Muhammad, even though it is only *qiyāsī* (based on analogic reasoning),

⁶ The incident where Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya reconciled is called *Am al-Jamā‘a* (Year of Unity), which occurred in the 41st year of Hijri. The two reconciled on the initiative of Ḥasan ‘Alī, who wanted to end the conflict and slander that occurred among the Muslims. Since Ḥasan, who had been pledged as Caliph, and Mu‘āwiya were in the same position, Ḥasan chose to hand over his power to Mu‘āwiya. This situation indicated that, at that time, there were two concurrent caliphates in Kūfa (Iraq) and Damascus (Shām), each with legality of its own power.

because current situations are not the same as what happened during his time. If this step cannot be conducted, the determination of legal status can be based on general *qaṭʿī* law by considering all other legal-making tools.

In this regard, there are different views on the emergence of two leaders in one period. For example, some *fiqh* scholars believe that it is not permissible to have more than one Muslim leader in a certain period. However, many *fiqh* scholars argue otherwise. In conditions that do not allow a leader to control areas that are too far from the center of power or other pressures, Muslims can have other powers separate from pre-existing powers (*taʿaddud al-khilāfa*). This is the view of one such *fiqh* scholar named Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. According to him, this view is also the view of his teachers, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī and Abū Ishaq al-Isfīrayīnī. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Baḡhdadī and Imam al-Qurṭubī also shared the same view; the same goes with Ibn Taymiyya, followed by al-Shanʿānī and al-Shawkānī (Murad, 2019).

The permissibility of *taʿaddud al-khilāfa* in this situation is a response to the emergence of various Islamic political powers that were independent of each other during the time of these scholars. This situation occurred for the first time during the Abbasid Caliphate, which was centered in Baghdad. At the same time, the Emir in Andalusia declared himself an independent leader when ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil managed to save himself after the collapse of the Umayyads in Damascus. Even during the time of ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Nāṣir, the grandson of al-Dākhil used the title “Caliph” and *Amīr al-Muʿminīn* in Andalus (al-Suyūṭī, 2013, p. 790).

The different views among scholars regarding this issue indicate that the caliphate is a branch (*furuʿ*) issue in Islam. However, this matter does not cause a person or group of Muslims to leave their religion. Therefore, such differences of opinion should be treated fairly and not excessively. This attitude will make us appreciate the efforts of Islamic leaders and activists to establish Islamic rule in various parts of the world, even though they take different steps and strategies.

One appreciative view that considers the differences of opinion in *fiqh* above, for example, can be found in Shawish Murad’s article entitled *Ḥukm taʿaddud al-aʿimma fī dār al-Islām*.

As for when the Muslims' outstanding leadership has disappeared, the saying of the Islamic leaders has become a reality, befell the Muslims, and cannot be denied anymore. Thus, like it or not, we must use the opinion of the scholars who allow the number of leaders in a state of urgency (*dharurah*) to maintain the existence of the Islamic community. Therefore, every Muslim in various regions must obey their respective leaders and take allegiance to them. Furthermore, leaders are also obliged to protect the people under their control by enforcing Islamic criminal law (*hudūd*), fulfilling their rights, and upholding justice and equality, until Allah SWT allows the establishment of the unity of Muslims throughout the Western and Eastern hemispheres under one leadership. (Murad, 2019, p. 800)

This is identical to the view of Ibn Taymiyya, who lived during the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt and other Middle Eastern regions. He also witnessed the division of power of the Muslims and said:

The Sunnah is that the Muslims only have one leader. The rest are only their representatives. If it is unavoidable that some people leave the single leadership because of the disobedience of some other people, while the existing leadership is weak (unable to unite the people again), or for other reasons, eventually several leaders emerge. In this situation, every leader is obliged to enforce the law (*hudūd*) and fulfill the rights (of the people). (Taymiyya, 2001, p. 111)

However, several Islamic movements contend that only their view on the concept and practice of the caliphate is correct. Therefore, only their version of the method of enforcing Islamic rule is considered to be in accordance with the sharia. This assumption is relatively extreme in negating other views. Actually, the attitude to choose a particular view that is considered the strongest is the right of every individual or group. However, when this attitude is followed by an attitude that only one's choice is correct while ignoring other views, then this is where the problem occurs. The problem is perceiving something that is not absolute as absolute; in other words, does not want to negotiate a case that is actually very negotiable.

One example of where such views and attitudes can be found is in the doctrines and teachings of Hizbut Tahrir (HT), parent organisation of

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). This cross-border network organisation is very passionate about re-establishing the caliphate in the form of a single leadership. In HT's view, the caliphate is a system of state management based on Islam, meaning it must have the following four primary characters: (1) there is only one caliphate; (2) power (*sultān*) is in the hands of the people; (3) leadership (*siyāsa*) is in the hands of sharia; and (4) only the caliph has the right to pass down (*tabanni*) sharia laws into legislation. If one of the primary characteristics above does not exist, then the system is no longer a caliphate system (Al-Nabhani, 2002: 231). Based on the above principles, HT rejects the concept and practice of more than one caliphate, the national state system practiced by the majority of Muslim countries today as well as the democratic system. All these systems are considered as being incompatible with sharia and cannot be called "Islamic leadership".

In the context of understanding and writing history, this kind of view will lead to difficulties. For example, suppose we follow the principles conveyed by Al-Nabhani above. In that case, we will find it difficult to accept the fact that in the course of history, the divisions that occurred within the Muslim *umma* (community) are facts that are impossible to refute. Furthermore, the separation of one territory from another Islamic territory will also be challenging to accept theoretically. However, these difficulties will be easily overcome if we return to the diversity of views of both classical and contemporary *fiqh* scholars. They have already faced, and even experienced, the divisions of Muslims in this political field. However, suppose from the beginning that the diversity of *fiqh* views regarding the caliphate—which can significantly help us understand historical facts conceptually—has been rejected by the Hizbut Tahrir. In that case, difficulties and confusion in understanding Islamic history cannot be avoided.

Examining the Caliphate Traces in the Indonesian Archipelago

After analysing the conceptual weakness in the use of "caliphate" that ignores the diversity of views, the current section will examine the claim that the Islamic sultanates in Indonesia pledged allegiance to the caliphate in Cairo and then Istanbul. The fundamental conceptual weakness of *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* is the idea that throughout history, up to the end of the Ottoman Caliphate, the Muslims were always

ruled by a “single caliphate”. The documentary tries to support this idea by presenting historical facts that are considered “very convincing”.

Therefore, these historical facts need to be thoroughly examined, the first of which is the number of sultanates in Indonesia, which were in the hundreds, if we count those whose territories were small. There were a number of large sultanates, such as those of Aceh Darussalam, Palembang, Demak, Cirebon, Banten, Mataram, Banjar, Pontianak, Malaka, Kutai Kartanegara ing Martadipura, Gowa, Ternate, Tidore and so on. Second, if it were true that these sultanates became natural subordinates of the Ottoman Caliphate, what evidence has this documentary found? Is it just one, two, three, or is it all? If it unveiled only one evidence that shows a central-regional relationship between the Ottoman Caliphate with a certain sultanate in the archipelago and not in other sultanates, then the evidence cannot be used to determine the exact relationship between the Ottoman Caliphate and the other sultanates. In politics, an independent sultanate had its own policy, which was either the same or different from that of other independent sultanates. The policy of the Aceh Sultanate could either have been or not been the same with the Sultanates of Demak, Banten or Cirebon. Therefore, this documentary has to present more substantial evidence from each Sultanate in the archipelago to defend its claim. If not, then the claim will fall automatically.

As far as the authors observe, the effort to prove the existence of political relations between the Islamic caliphate in the area that we currently know as the Middle East—whether in Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Andalusia or Istanbul—and the Indonesian sultanates is relatively complex. This difficulty stems from the absence of historical sources, both in Indonesia and in the early Islamic centers of power. The absence of evidence, of course, does not absolutely mean that the relationship did not exist, regardless of the form of the relationship. However, without evidence, historians cannot write any history. In historical methodology, there is an adage that if there is no document, there is no history. Thus, one cannot write and make any claims about history without evidence from the past. If we continue to insist on making historical narratives, even without evidence, then what we create is merely fiction or fantasy.

However, the documentary *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* seems ambitious to prove its claim that all sultanates in the Indonesian

archipelago pledged allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphs and even to the Abbasids in Cairo (Mamluk). Unfortunately, this claim is hard to prove and even leads to deeper misconceptions. This is because there is actually nothing new regarding the various data presented in the documentary. All of the historical data are commonly known by experts who study the history of Islam in the archipelago. The data presented include: (1) Srivijaya letters to the Umayyad Caliph (2) three graves in Aceh that are allegedly of descendants of the Abbasids who had a diaspora in the Aceh region during the time of Samudera Pasai; (3) the spread of Walisongo's (Nine *Wali*/Islamic preachers) *da'wa* in Java during the Majapahit Kingdom; (4) the Walisongo's role in the establishment of Demak, Cirebon and Banten Sultanates; (5) the arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch colonisers; (6) the resistance of the Demak, Aceh and Tidore Sultanates against the Portuguese; and (7) several written sources in the form of correspondence that allegedly showed a *bay'a* by the Sultanate of Aceh to the Ottoman Turks.

The data disclosed above are mostly related to the Aceh region, especially Samudera Pasai and Aceh Darussalam. In the documentary, Samudera Pasai was said to have “pledged allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo in the early 15th century”. Unfortunately, the information used is only tombstone inscriptions whose historical data have not been corroborated with written documents that support the interpretation of the documentary. The inscriptions say nothing about *bay'a*, so the claim is very weak. Historically, until now, the authors have not found any data that can prove the allegiance or show that the Samudera Pasai kingdom was a vassal of the Mamluks or Abbasids based in Cairo. Thus, the documentary does not present substantial evidence for its main narrative that revolves around the claim about the influence of the caliphate in the archipelago. The narrative also somewhat confidently states that Samudera Pasai spread Islam throughout the archipelago and conquered regions that were not controlled by Islam. Again, this conclusion is not supported by proper facts to prove that there was a kind of “order” from the Abbasid Caliphate to Pasai to spread Islam and conquer distant lands. This shows that the conclusion drawn are mostly opinion-driven, and not based on solid scientific data.

After discussing Samudera Pasai and Aceh, along with the abovementioned weak evidence—namely the tombstone inscriptions, which do not provide any concrete proof for its claim—this documentary

suddenly jumps to the story of Walisongo and their role in Java. It confidently narrates that these Islamic preachers were the messengers of the kingdom of Samudera Pasai and assigned to Islamise the kings of Java. Just as before, it does not provide solid evidence. To convince the audience, this documentary only states that the first preacher among the Walisongo, Sunan Gresik (Maulana Malik Ibrahim), is a descendant of the ruler of Samudera Pasai. This genealogical claim alone is still highly contentious because the main argument for this claim was the inscription on the tombstone of Sunan Gresik, and the inscription is not legible.

Moreover, by using the inscriptions as the only evidence to suggest that Walisongo were envoys of Samudera Pasai, perhaps *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara* intends to convey that if Walisongo succeeded in spreading Islam in Java and establishing the Sultanates of Demak, Cirebon and Banten, then the mission of the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo to conquer Southeast Asian region (including Indonesia) would have been successful. This documentary will most likely claim that the emergence of the other Islamic sultanates in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku and West Nusa Tenggara, of which it has no time to discuss, are exclusively the result of official missionaries of the Abbasid Caliphate in Cairo and the Ottomans in Istanbul. Therefore, the Islamic sultanates in the archipelago are valid and legitimate as part of a “single caliphate” that ruled the whole Islamic world.

Bombastic claims, such as those mentioned above, often ignore facts as the basis for historical analysis. The facts stated above are only limited to Aceh. Even then, they have not firmly showed that Aceh was under Ottoman rule. It may be true that Aceh requested to become a vassal of the Ottomans, but did the Ottomans accept it? Until now, there has been no official data from the Ottomans on this matter. A request to become a vassal does not prove that Aceh was ever a vassal. An official Ottoman record must prove the status of Aceh as an Ottoman vassal. If the allegiance of Aceh is still not firmly established, then the allegiance of other kingdoms outside Aceh will require stronger and independent evidence.

The data claimed as evidence of allegiance between the Ottoman Caliphate and Aceh were reported by the Portuguese apothecary, Tomé Pires, from his journey to Aceh and the narrative of *Hikayat Aceh*. These

two pieces of evidence have been interpreted differently by historians. However, they only prove that during this period, there was an intensive relationship between the Ottoman Caliphate and Aceh (Samudra Pasai). This relation was more likely a usual international relationship between the two states, rather than a *vassalage* relationship (Lombard, 2006). Meanwhile, Anthony Reid posited from the same pieces of evidence that there was a *vassalage* relationship between these two states. However, he concluded that the allegiance was very weak and pointed out that it was unlike the one between the Ottoman and Hijaz, for instance. This allegiance was only a strategy of the Sultan to face the Portuguese invasion. Therefore, the allegiance no longer existed after the era of Sultan Ala' Ad-Din Ri'ayat Syah Al-Kahhar (2011).

Conclusion

The claim that all Islamic sultanates in the Indonesian archipelago pledged allegiance to the Islamic Caliphate in Cairo (the second period of the Abbasid Caliphate under the Mamluks) and the Ottoman Caliphate in Istanbul, which was propagated in *Jejak Khilafah di Nusantara*, has elemental methodological weaknesses from the perspective of history. First, it ignores the fact that there are various understandings of the terms “caliph” and “caliphate”, both theologically and historically. The rejection of the historical reality of thought that underlies the emergence of power dynamics and the caliphate in Islamic history is the leading cause of misunderstanding of the caliphate’s history in Islam. Second, the facts presented by the documentary to show that the Islamic sultanates in the Indonesian archipelago were vassals that gave their pledge of allegiance to the Abbasid and Ottoman Caliphates are very vague and not based on concrete evidence; thus, the claim generated from them is mere conjecture. Since the data are not concrete, the conclusion is then actually an opinion, not a scientific finding. As a result, scientifically, the narration of this documentary is fragile. It will eventually lead to suspicion that this documentary has more propaganda elements than historical education.

The screenwriter and producer of this documentary should be more open-minded and consider the various views of *fiqh* on the caliphate and not forcefully impose a certain interpretation on existing historical facts simply for the sake of that interpretation. Nor should they make

claims without solid evidence. If one wants to prove the existence of the unity of Muslims throughout the world, the proof of the unity of “knowledge” is easier to be found and pointed at. This is because the teachings of Islam are grounded in “knowledge”, which has obviously been spread by Islamic scholars, preachers and teachers. This unity of knowledge is not affected at all by political divisions. This knowledge factor, more than power-related politics, can be used as the primary basis for the formation of *jamā‘at al-Muslimīn* (unity of Muslims). The unity of Muslims will indeed be more solid and complete if Muslims are under one political leadership. However, the existence of a political division in the Muslim world is not necessarily a sign that Muslims are divided in faith.

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