

CONTROVERSY OVER VISION/IRFANI-BASED DA'WAH AUTHORITY: THE NARRATIVE OF THE BIN YAHYA LINEAGE IN JAVA DURING THE JAVA WAR OF 1825-1830

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Abstract

This study examines the controversy surrounding vision-spiritual (irfani)-based dakwah authority within the narrative of the Bin Yahya lineage, particularly in relation to the historical context of the 1825-1830 Java War. The irfani method used by certain groups to construct historical legitimacy presents significant problems because it is subjective and difficult to verify scientifically. The study employs a comparative historical analysis by reviewing internal Bin Yahya data—such as oral traditions, testimonies of tomb custodians, and vision-based narratives—and comparing them with primary historical sources and academic studies, including the works of Peter Carey and colonial archives. The findings reveal that many internal narratives are inconsistent with verified historical chronology, including claims of specific figures' involvement in the Malacca War, alternative identifications of Prince Diponegoro, and the key assertion that Habib Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya was KRT Sumodiningrat. Nevertheless, several figures of the Bin Yahya lineage, such as Raden Saleh and Habib Usman bin Yahya, possess historically valid and well-documented records. These results affirm that irfani-based religious authority cannot serve as a foundation for historiography because it does not meet standards of scientific verification. Historical writing requires empirical evidence, coherent chronology, and verifiable written sources to preserve the accuracy and integrity of historiography.

Kata kunci: *Vision-spiritual/Irfani Controversy, Java War, The Bin Yahya Lineage, Preaching Authority*

INTRODUCTION

Authority is not something that emerges suddenly, nor is it an innate attribute; rather, it is formed through articulatory labor, which includes the construction of religious authority (Alatas, 2021). In this context, Islam —particularly in Talal Asad's framework— is understood as a discursive tradition (Ahmad, 2015), while Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd describes Islam as a “civilization of the text” (hadarat al-nass) (Miftah & Riyani, 2018), Alatas, however, does not treat the text as the point of departure. The text remains important in the formation of authority, but it is neither the sole nor the primary factor. The figure who serves as a living connector, someone capable of linking the prophetic past with the present context, plays a far greater role in shaping authority than the religious text itself. Ultimately, the text becomes inert and meaningless without the effort of a scholar or leader to enliven it and render it relevant (Alatas, 2021).

At this point, many parties would agree that religious authority is a long-term process that must be constructed in order to actualize Islam within the social order of society (da'wah). Nevertheless, in practical terms, there are several approaches adopted by religious figures — particularly in Indonesia— in building such authority. This is important because religious authority, at the social level, entails consequences as it positions certain actors as references for the Muslim community in shaping attitudes and conduct.

Accordingly, Andhika et al., (2024) argue that religious authority is constructed through three interrelated elements that must operate synergistically and comprehensively. First, mastery of knowledge, namely the positioning of ulama as “guardians of Islamic scholarly authority,” which grants them an important status due to their command of religious sciences. Second, lineage (sanad) and tradition, in which established scholarly authority is grounded in a clear chain of transmission and

long-standing intellectual traditions. Third, social and political roles, whereby ulama often function as socio-political intermediaries, provide legitimacy to rulers, and play roles within governmental institutions.

The first two points are certainly clear and verifiable by anyone. However, in the third type of authority formation, some parties often rely on institutions or mechanisms that are difficult to justify scientifically. As a result, biases emerge and, in subsequent social realities, these biases can trigger controversy. One issue that has drawn significant public attention over the past three years is the attempt to construct religious authority by relying on the historical narratives of certain figures whose information and data are derived from vision-based (irfani) claims. Yet, according to Abid al-Jabiri, the irfani method is an epistemological approach centered on inner experience and intuition. Al-Jabiri also criticizes irfani epistemology on several grounds, including: the rejection of reason, some irfani tendencies minimize or dismiss the role of rationality in understanding religion; and individualism, irfani is often tied to personal experience, thereby neglecting the social dimension of religion (Al-Bustomi et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of irfani in directly establishing historical facts is highly limited, as this method focuses more on spiritual experience and subjective intuition than on empirical evidence that can be objectively verified.

One example is the circulation of the names of the Bin Yahya lineage within historical narratives constructed around sacred tombs. In this context, the figure who is notably concerned with the practice of *ngrumat makam* (maintaining sacred graves), according to Alatas, is Habib Luthfi bin Yahya. However, as discussed in Alatas's book *What is Religious Authority: Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia*, not all Muslim groups and leaders agree with the approach he has taken. Even within the Ba'alawi branch of the Alawiyyin community, many describe his efforts in maintaining these tombs as an attempt at "Yahyanisasi" (Alatas, 2021). These names are typically found within historical narratives that, in one way or another, intersect with the Diponegoro era.

Beginning with the author's investigation at the tomb of Habib Umar bin Yahya in Kalisalak Village, Limpung, Batang, it can be observed that the narratives presented at the site—at least according to the tomb custodian—describe the Bin Yahya lineage as having an intense relationship with political power, specifically with Prince Diponegoro in his struggle against Dutch colonial rule. Ibad, the son of the tomb's custodian, explained in an interview at his residence that Habib Umar was not the only member of the Bin Yahya lineage associated with Diponegoro's resistance. According to similar narratives surrounding other Bin Yahya figures, particularly those whose tombs are located in Central Java such as Habib Abu Bakar bin Yahya (Kayugritan, Karanganyar, Pekalongan), Habib Alwi bin Yahya (Karang Gondang, Karanganyar, Pekalongan), and Habib Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya, who in local narratives is also known as KRT Sumodiningrat (Jl. Duku, Semarang), along with several other Bin Yahya figures from the same period, are said to be connected to Diponegoro's circle of struggle, or at the very least to the era of Islamic Mataram and the subsequent courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta.¹

Initially, everything proceeded smoothly and the community accepted the emergence of narratives surrounding these tombs. However, from 2023 onward, these narratives began to provoke debate among Muslim communities, particularly in Java. As a result, religious authority as a *wasīlah* (means) for guiding the ummah along the path of Islam remains a crucial matter. Nevertheless, the methods employed must be carefully selected. In this context, when a vision-spiritual or 'irfānī approach is used to establish historical facts and data, it is reasonable that such an approach generates bias and triggers controversy. This is because 'irfānī knowledge is inherently imbued with subjectivity, making it extremely difficult to verify scientifically in terms of establishing its validity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach within a critical–comparative historical analysis framework to examine the controversy surrounding vision/‘irfānī-based da‘wah authority in narratives concerning the involvement of the Bin Yahya lineage during the Java War (1825–1830). This approach is selected to critically investigate the encounter between claims of spiritual authority grounded in ‘irfānī experiential knowledge and documented historical facts, as well as to compare such claims with established academic historiography on the Java War and the figure of Prince Diponegoro. The analysis focuses primarily on source criticism and historical interpretation in order to minimize subjective bias in the reading of religious narratives circulating in the public sphere (Kuntowijoyo, 2003).

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with several informants, mainly individuals closely associated with the Bin Yahya lineage (followers) as well as caretakers of tomb sites linked to the lineage. Given the sensitivity of this issue in Central Java, particularly within the former Pekalongan Residency, informants’ identities are anonymized and presented using initials, in accordance with informed consent. Field observations were also conducted at several tomb sites located in Semarang, Pekalongan City, Pekalongan Regency, and Batang Regency. Secondary data include historical archives, documents, scholarly articles, and major historiographical works, notably Peter Carey’s research on Prince Diponegoro, which serves as an authoritative comparative source.

Data analysis was carried out through external and internal source criticism, followed by historical–comparative interpretation to assess the coherence between ‘irfānī narratives, oral traditions, and written historical data. This approach aims to situate claims of vision-based da‘wah authority within an academically testable framework, while also mapping points of controversy arising from epistemological differences between ‘irfānī knowledge and modern historical methodology. Accordingly, this study seeks to offer a more balanced reading of the relationship between religious authority, collective memory, and the historiography of the Java War (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Overview of The Bin Yahya Lineage (According to Internal Sources)

The Bin Yahya lineage is a familial branch of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), accounting for approximately 3% of the Alawi population in Indonesia. This lineage is attributed to As-Sayyid Al-Imam Yahya bin Hasan bin Ali bin Alwi al-A‘naz bin Alwi an-Nasiq bin Muhammad Mawladdawilah bin Ali Mawla Darak bin Alwi al-Ghoyyur bin Muhammad al-Faqih al-Muqaddam Ba‘Alawi (d. 956 H), who served as an Imam of the Sa‘adah Bani Alawi in his time. He is also the forefather of the al-Bin Yahya family, one of the branches of the Bani Alawi descending from Imam Alawi bin Ubaidillah bin Ahmad bin Isa.

The name “Bin Yahya” was originally intended by the early ancestors with the hope that their descendants would receive blessings akin to those of Prophet Yahya, whose presence could illuminate barren hearts. The detailed genealogical line of the Bin Yahya lineage is as follows:

1. Nabi Muhammad SAW
2. Sayidatina Fatimah az-Zahra + Amirul Mukminin Ali bin Abi Thalib KWJ
3. Imam Husain ash-Sibth
4. Imam Ali Zainal ‘Abidin as-Sajad
5. Imam Muhammad
6. Imam Ja‘far
7. Imam ‘Ali al-Uraidhi
8. Imam Muhammad an-Naqib
9. Imam Isa an-Naqib ar-Rumi
10. Imam Ahmad al-Muhajir Ilallah
11. Imam Ubaidillah

12. Imam Alwy Ba'Alawy
13. Imam Muhammad Shahib Shaumah
14. Imam Alwy ats-Tsani
15. Imam Ali Khali Qasam
16. Imam Muhammad Shahib Mirbath
17. Imam Ali
18. Imam Al-Faqih al-Muqaddam Muhammad Ba 'Alawy
19. Imam Alwy al-Ghuyyur
20. Imam Ali Maula Darrak
21. Imam Muhammad Mauladdawilah
22. Imam Alwy an-Nasiq
23. al-Habib Ali
24. al-Habib Hasan
25. al-Imam Yahya Ba' Alawy

One written version of the history of the Bin Yahya lineage's arrival in Indonesia dates their presence to the 18th–19th centuries, based on the recorded birth of Sayyid Usman bin Yahya who later became the Mufti of Batavia in the early 19th century, born in 1822 CE in Pekojan, Jakarta. This implies that his father, Abdullah, had already migrated to Jakarta before that period. The arrival of the Alawiyyin in the 18th century is further supported by Van den Berg's account, which states that the peak of migration of Arabs from Hadramaut occurred in the 19th century. Following this view, many conclude that the earliest possible arrival of the Bin Yahya lineage in the Indonesian archipelago was in the 18th century.

However, there is additional evidence at the tomb of Kyai Jugke (Sayyid Husein) on Jl. Gendingan, Pandansari, Central Semarang, indicating that he was buried in the year 1600 CE. Kyai Jugke was the father of Kyai Bustam (d. 1759 CE), a translator for the Mataram Kingdom, who is buried in Bergota, Semarang. Their descendants would later include the world-renowned painting maestro Raden Saleh Bustaman, all of whom are known to belong to the Bin Yahya lineage.

Returning to the discussion of chronological periods, if we refer to the death of Kyai Jungke, it indicates that he lived during the 1500s CE—an era corresponding to the transition from the Pajang to the Mataram Kingdom. Moreover, according to several sources interviewed by the researcher, including the custodian of the tomb of one member of the Bin Yahya lineage in Semarang (the tomb of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya / K.R.T. Sumodiningrat), there was a figure prior to Kyai Jungke named Habib Thoha bin Yahya who had come to the Indonesian archipelago but later returned to Hadramaut, Yemen. He left behind two sons with the same name, Abu Bakar—one of whom is buried in Kayugritan, Karanganyar, Pekalongan Regency, while the other is buried on Panjang Island, Jepara. Based on these accounts, it can be concluded that the arrival of the Bin Yahya lineage in the archipelago began at least as early as the 16th century (1500s CE).²

The distinctiveness of the Bin Yahya lineage throughout its history of dakwah in the Indonesian archipelago can be seen in its involvement in nationalist movements in various forms. Indeed, their roles have at times generated controversy. For example, Habib Usman bin Yahya—during his tenure as the Mufti of Batavia (the first, last, and only one to hold the position)—was often perceived as accommodating colonial interests. He even received a Golden Star medal from Queen Wilhelmina for carrying out his duties in Batavia. However, upon closer examination, according to internal followers of the Bin Yahya lineage, he merely fulfilled his role to ensure that social stability at the time was maintained and to prevent greater harm to the indigenous population (Noupal, 2012).

Internal Narratives of The Bin Yahya Lineage in The Indonesian Archipelago During The Period Surrounding The Java War of 1825

In this section, the author seeks to present several findings regarding the names of Bin Yahya figures associated with the period surrounding the Java War of 1825, based on internal sources from followers of the Bin Yahya lineage. These sources include Mr. S., the custodian of the tomb of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya (the Semarang version of K.R.T. Sumodiningrat); Mr. B., the son of the custodian of the tomb of Habib Umar bin Yahya (Limpung, Batang); and Mbah B., a student of Habib Luthfi bin Yahya and caretaker of the tomb of Habib Abdullah bin Yahya (Gunungpati, Semarang). These three individuals served as primary sources during fieldwork, and to provide context, the author connects their accounts with relevant references to obtain the closest possible interpretation of what these internal sources intend to convey. One reference commonly cited by those who support this version is Siti Fatimah's 2019 thesis, *The Role of Habib Hasan bin Toha (K.R.T. Sumodiningrat) in Preserving Islamic Traditions at the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace during the Reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwono II, 1792–1819 CE*, whose main informants were administrators of the Darul Hasyimi Foundation in Yogyakarta—an institution established by figures of the Bin Yahya lineage. The following section provides a detailed explanation based on a period-based classification or standpoint related to the Java War:

1. Pre-Java War

a. Habib Abdullah, Habib Hasan, Habib Husein bin Toha bin Yahya

One of the earliest and most foundational figures within the Bin Yahya lineage is believed to be Habib Toha bin Yahya. In several circulating videos, both from his memorial gatherings (haul) and those of his son, Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya he is heroically described as having participated in the Malacca War. Specifically, radarsemarang.id (27 April 2021) once wrote: *“Upon returning from the holy land of Mecca, he was compelled to fight against the colonial forces in Malacca. Habib Toha was requested by the Sultan of Malacca to expel the Portuguese colonizers from the region.”*

From him descended several children, the most well-known being his three sons: Habib Abdullah, Habib Hasan, and Habib Husein. These three sons of Habib Toha shared the same sphere of struggle namely during the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwono II, particularly at the time of the Geger Sepahi, when the Yogyakarta Sultanate confronted British colonial forces. Specifically, Habib Abdullah, who later migrated to Semarang, held the position of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt (Chief Judge/Mufti), for which he was thereafter known as Habib al-Faqih Abdullah bin Toha bin Yahya. Meanwhile, Habib Hasan became the son-in-law of Sultan Hamengku Buwono II through his marriage to Bendoro Mas Ayu Rantam Sari, and within the governmental structure he was granted the title K.R.T. Sumodiningrat. According to Habib Luthfi bin Yahya (Fatimah, 2019: 9), the title Kanjeng Raden Tumenggung Sumodiningrat was bestowed upon Habib Hasan bin Toha by Sultan Hamengku Buwono II. As for Habib Husein bin Yahya, he accompanied Habib Hasan in the struggle and was later martyred during the Geger Sepahi.

The Geger Sepoy or Geger Sepahi refers to the British assault on the Yogyakarta Palace, which took place on 19–20 June 1812. The event began when, in 1811, the British established their rule in Java and sought to gain full control of the island, which at the time was administered by Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles. Raffles's initial objective was to secure complete control over Java and defend it against potential threats from other nations, particularly France and the Netherlands. He subsequently dispatched residents to various regions of Java, including the existing kingdoms on the island. The British effort to dominate Java encountered resistance from Sultan Hamengkubuwono II, who had formed an alliance with Sunan Pakubuwono IV. Raffles then sent John Crawfurd and Prince Notokusumo to negotiate with Sultan Hamengkubuwono II. However, diplomatic efforts reached a dead end and ultimately culminated in the British military invasion and

subjugation of the Yogyakarta Sultanate (Sulton et al., 2022).

Habib Hasan, also known as K.R.T. Sumodiningrat, was one of the principal war commanders during the Geger Sepahi. He was widely regarded as courageous and relentless in resisting the colonial forces. As a result, the colonizers frequently portrayed him in negative terms, depicting him as immoral, a drunkard, and a hedonist. Habib Hasan's stance indeed aligned with that of his father-in-law, particularly regarding opposition to colonial rule. It is therefore unsurprising that he was repeatedly subjected to negative labeling by the colonial authorities. Sultan Hamengkubuwono II was, in fact, the only ruler of the Mataram lineage who was not allowed to be buried in the Imogiri Royal Cemetery Complex, and was instead interred in Kotagede. Although official narratives attribute this solely to his severe illness at the time, a closer reading suggests that it was, in truth, driven by the colonial administration's hostility toward him.

Like Sultan Hamengkubuwono II, Habib Hasan was known for his uncompromising stance against the colonial forces. Consequently, multiple historical accounts describe different versions of the circumstances surrounding the death of Habib Hasan, also known as K.R.T. Sumodiningrat. The first version states that he was brutally killed by a gunshot from John Deans, after which Prangdewo and his troops surrounded him, looted inside the mosque, and set it on fire. The second version claims that he was killed by Lieutenant Colonel James Dewar before the battle took place, and that his body was later buried by his followers in Jejeran, Wonokromo, Yogyakarta.

The third version rarely mentioned in historical narratives asserts that the person who was actually killed was not Habib Hasan (K.R.T. Sumodiningrat), but his younger brother, Sayyid Husein, who closely resembled him. According to this account, Habib Hasan was urged by his brother to flee and continue the struggle, as he was known to be clever, courageous, and highly skilled in warfare strategy. Habib Hasan then escaped to Semarang, where he lived out the rest of his life and was eventually buried in Lemper, Semarang. In this version, the figure buried in Jejeran, Wonokromo is said to be Habib Husein bin Toha bin Yahya

In the Semarang region, he assisted the Regent of Semarang, who at that time was overwhelmed by the unrest occurring there. Habib Hasan established a defensive fortress in the Jomblang area, and his struggle continued unceasingly until the end of his life. The agricultural produce from the lands he owned was never used for personal benefit; instead, it was always distributed to those in need. As a result, he was deeply loved by children, the common folk, and even the middle and upper classes. His soldiers, too, were highly obedient and loyal to him. Despite this, the colonial authorities repeatedly slandered him in an attempt to destroy his reputation, but their efforts were never successful. On the contrary, the people only grew to love him more.

However, regarding K.R.T. Sumodiningrat himself, there exists a controversial issue concerning the true identity of the figure bearing this name. In terms of physical sites, there are two graves that are claimed to belong to individuals with the same title. The first is K.R.T. Sumodiningrat buried in Jejeran, Wonokromo, Yogyakarta, and the second is the one buried in Lamper, Semarang. The latter is the figure whom the Bin Yahya perspective identifies as Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya. For matters of historical accuracy, the researcher will present an informed assessment in the analysis chapter, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation.

b. Kyai Bustam bin Husein bin Yahya (Kertoboso) Semarang

Kyai Bustam bin Husein (Kyai Jungke) (d. 1600), also known as Kyai Bustam Kertoboso, lived during the VOC period. He lived until 1769, although historical records present several differing accounts regarding his exact chronology and role. In various

narratives, he is described either as an interpreter for the VOC/Dutch authorities or as a translator serving the Mataram court. Regardless of these differing versions, the values and traditions he left behind in Kampung Bustaman, Semarang, demonstrate the deep respect and affection the local community holds for him. The naming of the village after him stands as clear evidence of his significant contributions to the community. To this day, the tradition of “gebyuran”—originally a ritual in which he bathed all his grandchildren prior to Ramadan—continues to be preserved and practiced by the residents of the area (Rahmat & Widjajanti, 2019).

The figure buried in the Bergota complex in Semarang is known as a skilled negotiator, as Kampung Bustaman itself is believed to have emerged from his ability to mediate tensions between the Chinese community and the Dutch during the Geger Pecinan conflict. At first glance, his profession may suggest an alignment with the VOC/Dutch authorities. However, in that period he fully utilized his position not merely for personal gain, but also for the benefit of the wider community. For this reason, the people of Semarang held—and continue to hold—deep respect and sympathy for him. His role would later enable one of his descendants to become a prominent anti-Dutch narrator of the Java War: Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman. Indeed, Raden Saleh obtained access to extensive education, including formal training in the arts in the Netherlands, thanks to the influence and legacy of his grandfather, Kyai Bustam Kertoboso.

2. The Java War Era

a. Sayyid Abdul Hamid bin Yahya and an Alternative Version of Prince Diponegoro

To this day, Indonesians generally know Prince Diponegoro as the son of Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono III and his consort (*selir/garwa ampeyan*), Raden Ayu Mangkarawati. His birth name, Bendara Raden Mas Mustahar, was changed by his grandfather, Sultan Hamengkubuwono II, to Raden Mas Ontowiryo (born 1785). He later received the title Pangeran Harya Diponegoro when his father ascended the throne in 1812. In the years that followed, he changed his name to Ngabdul Hamid and adopted a new appearance characterized by a white robe and turban. He would eventually become the central figure of the Java War, which took place from 1825 to 1830 (Hartono, 2021).

The narrative above is the version most widely found in various historical references. However, an alternative account concerning Prince Diponegoro also circulates within the internal circles of the Yahya lineage (*Trah bin Yahya*) and among their followers. Within certain segments of the Yahya lineage—based on the author’s observations and interviews at several burial sites associated with the Yahya family, involving tomb caretakers and local community figures—Prince Diponegoro is believed not to refer to a specific individual, but rather to a title. From this perspective, therefore, Prince Diponegoro does not represent a single historical figure.³

One of the alternative versions regarding the bearer of the title Diponegoro refers to an individual who shares the same name as the son of Hamengkubuwono III, namely Ngabdul Hamid. Within the genealogy of the Yahya lineage (*Trah bin Yahya*), Abdul Hamid is identified as the son of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya, who was, notably, the son-in-law of Sultan Hamengkubuwono II. This means that Sayyid Abdul Hamid was, in fact, the grandson of the ruler of Yogyakarta at that time. A thesis proposed by one follower of the Yahya lineage—who also serves as the caretaker of the tomb of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya in Lemper, Semarang—posits that this version of Abdul Hamid is a more plausible candidate for the title of Prince Diponegoro when viewed from the perspective of the chronological gap between his birth and that of his father.

This chronological reasoning is presented by examining the year of birth from two

different perspectives. First, Ngabdul Hamid is regarded as the son of Sultan Hamengkubuwono III. Hamengkubuwono III was born in 1769, whereas Ngabdul Hamid was born in 1785. This means that the age difference between them was only sixteen years. This becomes the basis for the second version's argument: it appears somewhat improbable for a king to have a child at such a young age, particularly from a concubine (*garwa padmi*). The second perspective places Sayyid Abdul Hamid (born 1785) as the son of KRT Sumodiningrat (born 1765), which results in a more reasonable twenty-year age gap. This forms the argument that it is more plausible for Abdul Hamid to have been the son of KRT Sumodiningrat according to the Semarang version (Habib Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya) rather than the son of Hamengkubuwono III. Once again, this remains an alternative perspective within the Bin Yahya lineage, which certainly requires further verification.

According to the transmitters of this version, it was Sayyid Abdul Hamid who later established various networks of the Bin Yahya lineage in several regions as part of the resistance movement during the Java War of 1825–1830. Evidence of this is found in the records of the Kalisalak tomb complex in Batang, which note that Sayyid Abdul Hamid once resided there, although not for an extended period. In another line of inquiry, oral accounts preserved at the burial site of Habib Alwi bin Yahya also indicate that he was the teacher of Sayyid Abdul Hamid (Prince Diponegoro).

b. Sayyid Umar bin Yahya and the Kalisalak Rebel Network

Sayyid/Habib Umar bin Yahya was a member of the Yahya lineage who became one of the strategic nodes in the resistance network of the Java War under the leadership of Prince Diponegoro. He was among several figures identified in Dutch records as part of the "Kalisalak Rebels," a designation rooted in Dutch frustration toward Kalisalak as one of the strongest centers of resistance during that major anti-colonial conflict. In later years, Kalisalak would also give rise to a prominent religious scholar whose theological stance was regarded as firm—shaped by a sociological background marked by continuous confrontation with Dutch colonial authorities—namely K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, founder of the Rifa'iyah movement.⁴

In general terms, Kalisalak is a village that today is administratively part of the Limpung subdistrict in Batang Regency, Central Java. It is also the site where Habib Umar bin Yahya, along with his teacher, K.H. Ibrahim bin Qidam Muhammad bin Raden Mas Sa'id, and their families are buried. Habib Umar's full name is Sayyid al-Imam al-Mujahid al-Habib Umar bin Haamid bin Idrus bin Syaikhon bin Yahya.

He had two children: Habib Salim bin Umar and Syarifah Zainab binti Umar. Among his teachers were Habib Hamid bin Idrus bin Yahya and Shaykh Ibrahim bin Qidam Muhammad bin Raden Mas Sa'id. According to existing records, he had forty students. Those identified as residing in Kalisalak and the neighboring village of Kalibening include: Sayid Ahmad, Sayid Abdurrahman, Shaykh Nur Jamal, Shaykh Husein bin Ibrahim, Shaykh Rofi'i, Sayyid Hasan bin Abdullah, Sayyid Husyein bin Abdullah, Kyai Mustari, and Kyai Ahmad Rifa'i.

According to Mr. B., the son of the custodian of the Kalisalak saints' tomb complex, Habib Umar bin Yahya held the position of financial coordinator (logistics) within the resistance movement during the Java War. He explained that, in addition to teaching religious recitation to the community, Habib Umar was also a merchant and a horse trader, placing him among the economically well-established figures of his time. Therefore, Kalisalak can be regarded as one of the strong strategic nodes in Prince Diponegoro's struggle against the Dutch between 1825 and 1830 CE.

What is particularly distinctive in the views held by the families of the tomb custodians is an orally transmitted account which presents a concept of Prince Diponegoro that differs from the mainstream historical narrative. For them, "Diponegoro" is a title rather than a personal name. Kalisalak is believed to have been a temporary place of residence for one bearer of this title, who, according to the custodial family's tradition, was Sayyid Abdul Hamid bin Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya. He is regarded as the son of KRT Sumodiningrat (Habib Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya), who was, notably, one of the sons-in-law of Sultan Hamengkubuwono II.

Although this perspective still requires further verification, one certainty remains: Kalisalak was indeed a strong base of resistance against Dutch colonial rule. According to an account by the late Kyai As'ari of Kalisalak, a researcher once visited the village carrying a dossier listing the names of individuals who had been active there. The data, obtained from the archives of Leiden University in the Netherlands, identified all of them under the label "Kalisalak Rebels." This indicates that under the leadership of Habib Umar bin Yahya, the village played a significant role in mobilizing resistance against Dutch colonial oppression.

3. The Post-Java War Era

a. Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman bin Husein bin Yahya: The Master Painter and Counter-Narrator of the Colonial Version of the Java War

Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman bin Yahya was born in Terboyo, Semarang, Central Java, around 1814. Both his father and mother were grandchildren of Kyai Bustam bin Husein, a Resident of Terboyo and the founder of the prominent Bustaman family, which produced several residents, regents, and key members of the priyayi aristocratic class. According to Mr. S., Bustam/Bustaman was also known as Kyai Kertoboso (whose tomb is located in Bergota, Semarang), the son of Sayyid Husein, known as Kyai Jungke (buried in Pandansari, Semarang City, Central Java). He explained that Kyai Jungke is regarded as the earliest figure of the Bin Yahya lineage, as his tomb inscription dates back to the 1600s. In any case, the narrative concerning Raden Saleh does not significantly differ from common historical accounts.

As explained in an earlier section, Kyai Bustam was an effective and loyal translator for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Kertoboso received a large tract of land in Terboyo from the VOC as a reward for his outstanding service, particularly during the difficult period of the Susuhunan rebellion and the Chinese uprising against the Dutch (Geger Pecinan). At a time when nearly all Javanese leaders and local officials sided with the Susuhunan and the Chinese rebels, Kyai Bustam was able to negotiate and serve as a mediator between the Chinese and the VOC. The Susuhunan was ultimately defeated and forced to surrender the entire northern coast of Java to the VOC, including the Semarang region. It was under these circumstances that Kyai Bustam greatly benefited. The Dutch colonial administration, on behalf of the VOC, appointed one of his ten sons as the Regent of Semarang. Two other sons were likewise appointed as Regents of Lasem and Batang. Through these appointments, the Bustaman family was elevated by the Dutch to the highest social status in the northern coastal region of Java (Scalliet, 2020).

Through the merits of his grandfather, Raden Saleh was accepted and spent his childhood living in the residence of the Regent of Semarang, Kyai Adipati Soero Menggolo, who was none other than his own uncle. The Regent was an administrator of broad knowledge and progressive outlook. He was a member of an exclusive small society, the Javaansch Weldadig Genootschap (a philanthropic association). Within this circle, the Regent had close acquaintances among Javanese nobility, priyayi, and several cultured European aristocrats. Through his uncle's activities and social engagements, Raden Saleh developed an interest in painting and European culture (Shibasaki & Sulistiasih, 1993).

This was what eventually paved his path to becoming the nation's Master Painter. Although his family's position in the eyes of the native population was not always viewed positively, he would later prove himself to the world and attempt to rectify the narrative surrounding the valiance of one of his forebears, Prince Diponegoro. He resisted colonial power through artistic narrative. At a time when all eyes were fixed on Nicolaas Pieneman's depiction of The Submission of Diponegoro, he astutely reversed that narrative through his own painting, The Arrest of Diponegoro. The symbolism presented by Pieneman—portraying Prince Diponegoro as weak, disheveled, and surrendering to General De Kock—was directly countered by the semiotic resistance of Raden Saleh Bustaman bin Yahya. In his work, Diponegoro is depicted as valiant and defiant, resisting Dutch treachery. The Dutch figures, painted with small bodies and disproportionately large heads, serve as manifestations of the arrogance, deceit, and conceit of the colonial rulers.

Raden Saleh was not a direct witness to the ferocity of the Java War under Prince Diponegoro's leadership, as he had already departed for the Netherlands by the time the war broke out. Nevertheless, his sympathy for the struggle of his fellow countrymen compelled him to produce this monumental work. In the end, Raden Saleh indirectly took part in several events related to Diponegoro. One example is the French press reports that criticized Dutch officials for mistreating Diponegoro during his exile, depicting him as being confined in a cramped space within a small fortress in the Moluccas. Raden Saleh learned of these reports because, during that period, he frequently traveled to and from France and even lived there for some time. Through this experience, he developed connections within the French press, which he used as channels to voice his various views—especially those concerning Prince Diponegoro (Carey, 2022)

b. Habib Usman bin Yahya, the Controversial Mufti of Batavia

Habib Usman bin Yahya's full name was Ustman bin Aqil bin Syeikh bin Abdurahman bin Aqil bin Ahmad bin Yahya. His father was Abdullah bin Aqil bin Syeikh bin Abdurahman bin Aqil bin Ahmad bin Yahya, while his mother was Aminah binti Syekh Abdurahman Al-Misri. He was born in the Arab Quarter (Pekojan) of West Jakarta on 17 Rabi' al-Awwal 1238 AH (1822 CE) and later settled in Petamburan, Central Jakarta.

Viewing the figure of Habib Usman bin Yahya is akin to observing two sides of the same coin when placed within the context of Indonesian history. Although he is known as the first and last Mufti of Batavia, his position within the Muslim community remains contentious. Some regard him through the lens of his contributions and efforts, yet historical records also reveal aspects of his actions that were perceived as undermining the struggle of other Muslims during the broader resistance against colonialism.

One example can be found in his work *Manhajul Istiqâmah fid Dîn bis Salâmah*, in which he stated that the rebellion against the Dutch East Indies government in Cilegon, Banten, was a movement that disrupted public order and stood in opposition to the teachings of Islam (Yahya, n.d.). Naturally, this provoked protests and cynicism among the fighters in Banten. In the midst of their struggle against the colonial power, instead of receiving support, they were labeled as the ones at fault. His close relationship with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, a missionary who pretended to convert to Islam, further intensified the criticism. It is even known that Habib Usman served as Snouck Hurgronje's adviser during his mission in the Dutch East Indies. It is therefore unsurprising that many Muslims felt that the path taken by Habib Usman bin Yahya was incompatible with their struggle.

However, on the other hand, from the perspective of those who view Habib Usman bin Yahya favorably, several points are often put forward to understand him as a scholar of his time, among them are the following (Habsy, 2023):

- 1) He worked to develop an Islam grounded in the Sharia in Batavia and its surrounding regions, including parts of West Java.
- 2) He sought to reinforce the principles of Sharia and Tawhid while opposing various forms of superstition, religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and customary practices that contradicted Islamic law. These included offering food sacrifices to ancestral spirits, determining auspicious days for building a house, performing rituals for a younger sibling who marries before an older one—such as being kicked, struck, or pelted with grains of rice—maintaining belief in shamans (*dukun*) for fortune-telling, forbidding husbands from slaughtering animals while their wives were pregnant, encouraging families with pregnant women to prepare *rujak* as an offering to ancestral spirits, instructing mothers to recite the *shahada* incorrectly during childbirth, and advising that newborn infants be placed beneath a raised wooden platform (*bale*).
- 3) He made significant contributions to the advancement of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence and the Ash'ari creed.
- 4) He authored numerous works across various branches of Islamic scholarship.
- 5) With his authority and position as a mufti, Habib Usman appealed to the Dutch East Indies government not to interfere in the religious affairs of the Muslim community, and not to prohibit Muslims from pursuing Islamic education in the various *majelis ta'lim* across Batavia. It was on this basis that the constitutional regulation (*Regeeringsreglement*)—a law guaranteeing religious freedom for the peoples of the Dutch East Indies—was enacted. This means that Habib Usman bin Yahya demanded that the Dutch colonial government provide assurances and protection for the religious practices of the indigenous population.
- 6) Habib Usman bin Yahya was a pioneer in the establishment of the Religious Court during the colonial era in 1881. This court was responsible for adjudicating matters related to Islamic law, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other personal-status issues. His book *Al-Qawānīn al-Syar'iyyah li Ahl al-Majālis al-Hukmiyyah* discusses various aspects of Islamic jurisprudence. It was written to meet the needs of judges and *penghulu* in resolving legal cases. This book became the first authoritative reference for Religious Courts in Java and Madura. It was written in Malay Arabic script.
- 7) Habib Usman was a prominent figure in the development of Islamic education, serving as one of the early foundations for the establishment of Islamic educational institutions. He also expressed his support for the founding of *Jami'at Kheir*—the first modern Islamic educational organization established in Indonesia in 1901 by leading *Habaib*. His support is evident in his work titled *Jam'u al-Nafā'is li Taḥsīn al-Madāris*.
- 8) Habib Usman produced many prominent scholars. Among his disciples who later became leading *ulama* were Habib Ali bin Abdurrahman al-Habsyi of *Kwitang*, KH Mujtaba bin Muhammad (*Jatinegara*), KH Guru Mughni (*Kuningan*), KH Ahmad Marzuki (*Klender*), KH Abdul Majid (*Pekojan*), and KH Thohir (founder of the *Atthahiriyyah* school).

This means that, despite all the controversies surrounding him, as a member of the Bin Yahya lineage he still played a role in the history of the Indonesian nation, at least for the Muslim community around Batavia. Nevertheless, in the context of historical discourse, his actions will remain recorded as part of the complex, multifaceted narrative—both its light and its shadows—that accompanies his legacy.

Controversy Over Vision/Irfani-Based Da'Wah Authority: The Narrative of The Bin Yahya Lineage in The Nusantara During The Java War of 1825 (Comparative Historical Study Analysis with External Sources)

P As previously discussed, most of the narratives concerning the Bin Yahya lineage during the period surrounding the Java War are based primarily on internal accounts—whether from family figures, custodians of sacred sites, or their followers. In addition, several external references have been consulted to obtain a depiction that most closely aligns with their transmitted accounts. In this section, the author attempts to employ a historically grounded comparative analysis to examine the data previously collected. This approach is crucial for maintaining the objectivity of this study amid the controversies that arise in the construction of vision-spiritual/irfani-based da'wah authority through the Bin Yahya narrative, particularly when it intersects with prominent historical figures of the Indonesian past, especially during the Mataram era and thereafter, with specific attention to the period surrounding the Java War of 1825.

In historical analysis, one of the key aspects for determining the validity of data is periodization through the presentation of chronological events. This approach is employed here because the Bin Yahya lineage (hereafter abbreviated as TBY)—specifically the custodians of the tomb of KRT Sumodiningrat in the Semarang version (Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya)—directly use chronological arguments as the basis for questioning the true identity of Prince Diponegoro. The following is a transcript of the conversation with Mr. S. :⁵

In the genealogy of the Bin Yahya lineage, the name Abdul Hamid appears as the son of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya, who was, notably, a son-in-law of Sri Sultan HB II. This implies that Sayyid Abdul Hamid was a grandson of the ruler of Yogyakarta at that time. The thesis advanced by one of the followers of the Bin Yahya lineage—who also serves as the caretaker of the tomb of Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya in Lemper, Semarang—is that this version of Abdul Hamid is a more plausible candidate for the title Pangeran when examined through the lens of his birth year in relation to that of his father.

He presents this chronological reasoning by putting forward two comparative perspectives. First, the version of Ngabdul Hamid as the son of Sri Sultan HB III. HB III was born in 1769, while Ngabdul Hamid was born in 1785. This means the age gap between the two is only sixteen years. This age difference is used as an argument by proponents of the second version, who consider it implausible for a king to father a child at such a young age, especially through a secondary consort (garwo padmi).

The second perspective situates Sayyid Abdul Hamid (born 1785) as the son of KRT Sumodiningrat (born 1765), creating a more reasonable age gap of twenty years. This becomes the basis for the argument that it is more plausible for Abdul Hamid to have been the son of the Semarang version of KRT Sumodiningrat (Habib Hasan bin Toha bin Yahya) than the son of HB III.

In essence, this argument constitutes a challenge to the mainstream historical narrative of Prince Diponegoro, which identifies him as the son of HB III (fathered when the king was only sixteen). Peter Carey, who has spent more than thirty years researching Prince Diponegoro, likewise records that Diponegoro was born on 11 November 1785 (Carey, 2023). For the author, from a biological standpoint, both a sixteen-year-old and a twenty-year-old man have already passed puberty and reached physical maturity, meaning that it is entirely possible for them to father a child through reproduction with a woman. The social norms of that period cannot be compared with those of today, in which marriage at such an age may be deemed inappropriate for various reasons. Yet biologically speaking, it remains entirely possible—provided that a marriage at the age of sixteen did in fact occur.

The same objective approach is then applied to estimate the era or years in which KRT.

Sumodiningrat of the Semarang version (Habib Hasan bin Yahya) lived, who, according to internal sources, was born between 1792 and 1819. Meanwhile, another source states (Arafat, 2023) that KRT Sumodiningrat was born in the 1760s and died in 1812, specifically around June 18–20, during the Geger Sepehi conflict at the Yogyakarta Palace. From this point, it becomes possible to investigate which account is historically valid and which is not, given that there is a six-year discrepancy between the two sets of data. In fact, the argument put forward by internal TBY sources identifies a different figure—Habib Ahmad bin Thoha bin Yahya, regarded as the younger brother of Habib Hasan bin Thoha bin Yahya (the Semarang version of KRT Sumodiningrat)—as the one who died and was buried in Jejeran. In this narrative, Habib Ahmad (while some of his followers refer to him as Habib Husein) is said to have sacrificed himself for his elder brother, Habib Hasan, who subsequently escaped, survived, and eventually settled in Semarang until his death in 1819. Unfortunately, the account again contains chronological inconsistencies, since Habib Luthfi bin Yahya states that Habib Ahmad died in Jejeran in 1811 (Arafat in Carey, 2023). Even if this narrative were accurate, it would be highly implausible for Habib Ahmad to have perished in the Geger Sepehi event, considering that the British–Indian troops did not land in Cilincing until August 1811 (YouTube Account Jatisumonegoro Haul KRT Sumodiningrat (Habib Hasan) bersama Habib Lutfi bin Yahya pada 18 Desember 2021, in Arafat, 2025). In other words, how could he have been killed by Raffles' forces if those troops had not even arrived yet?

Next is the narrative that the father of Habib Hasan (the Semarang version of KRT Sumodiningrat), namely Habib Thoha bin Yahya, was involved in the Malacca War. This account was even reported by the mainstream media outlet *radarsemarang.id* as follows:

“Upon returning from the holy land of Mecca, he had to fight against the colonial forces in Malacca. Habib Thoha was requested by the Sultan of Malacca to expel the Portuguese invaders from the region.”

This information was likely obtained from the commemorative events (haul) of Habib Thoha or Habib Hasan held in Semarang during the 2020–2021 period. Clearly, if the mainstream media published this article, the TBY family agreed with and endorsed the circulated account.

The question then arises: in which year did the Malacca War take place? Dien Majid notes that the war against the Portuguese occurred in 1511, and it was not the Sultan of Malacca who expelled them; rather, it was the Portuguese who ultimately ended the supremacy of the Malacca Sultanate. The narrative claiming that Habib Thoha was requested by the Sultan of Malacca to drive out the Portuguese is therefore problematic, as it does not align with historical facts. Chronologically, biological logic can then be applied to estimate when Habib Hasan was born and the age gap between him and his father. The answer is 1792 (Fatimah, 2019: 9). If, however, Habib Thoha is said to have fought in Malacca in 1511, this would imply a gap of at least 280 years—even assuming 1511 as the reference year for Habib Thoha's birth. If we apply the logic that a person could have been engaged in battle at age twenty, the gap could extend to 300 years. Using the most recent argument, namely the Malacca War version involving the Aceh–Portuguese conflicts (1519–1639) in the Strait of Malacca, with Aceh supported by the VOC and the Ottoman Empire, the gap would still be 153 years. Once again, applying historical logic based on chronological analysis—which is the same method used to question Diponegoro's identity—ultimately refutes this narrative decisively.

From a heuristic perspective, history should be grounded in strong and verifiable evidence (Reiner, 1997), a What has been done by TBY, however, appears to pay limited attention to the primary historical sources available. Instead, their approach relies heavily on a vision-spiritual/irfani framework, which has ultimately generated controversy. The discussion above demonstrates that scientific truth cannot be reached solely through irfani subjectivity, as individual spiritual experiences may vary. Yet, when this matter was raised with field informants, they almost unanimously responded that the main TBY figures did not rely exclusively on irfani pathways; rather, they also applied sharia-based methods in determining burial sites. One example is the Habib Abdullah bin Yahya tomb in Gunungpati, Semarang, where many witnesses confirmed that, in the area designated by Habib Lutfi

bin Yahya, graves were excavated and the corpses were indeed found, with their shrouds still intact.

This argument may be acceptable within the realm of individual spirituality; however, if it is used as part of the evidentiary basis for constructing historiography, it becomes problematic. The figure referred to as Abdullah bin Yahya—portrayed in the narrative as the biological brother of Hasan bin Thoha and the son of Habib Thoha bin Yahya—ultimately occupies a contentious place within the historical timeline. Chronologically, his existence overlaps with KRT Sumodiningrat, who has been extensively examined as a verifiable historical figure during the Geger Sepahi period. Historically, the Semarang Jejeran version of KRT Sumodiningrat has been validated through various artifacts, royal manuscripts, and palace documents, which serve as primary historical sources. In contrast, the figure in the TBY narrative is only documented in the thesis of Siti Fatimah, which remains problematic because it relies solely on internal TBY sources.

The narrative then shifts to Sayyid Abdul Hamid bin Yahya, portrayed as the son of Habib Hasan bin Yahya—or at the very least, consistently recognized by other informants as the bearer of the title Pangeran Diponegoro. Chronologically, this remains plausible, particularly when traced alongside the accounts of Habib Umar bin Yahya, who was a contemporary of Kyai Ahmad Rifai (founder of the Rifaiyah order), born in Kalisalak, Limpung, Batang in 1786 and deceased in Tondano in 1870 (Mustolehudin et al., 2021). Within the cemetery area, there is also the tomb of Kyai Ibrahim, believed to be one of the ancestors of Kalisalak and, according to Mr. B., the teacher of both Kyai Ahmad Rifai and Habib Umar bin Yahya. Among the various Bin Yahya sites with narratives from the same period, this site has generated relatively little controversy or public dispute. This is largely because there is no attempt to replace or reinterpret other figures at this location. Kyai Ibrahim's position remains intact and is even elevated, as he is recognized as the teacher of these prominent figures.

However, there is no valid evidence regarding Diponegoro's presence at this site. Similar narratives frequently emerge claiming his association, yet they remain unsubstantiated by data. To date, the data compiled and organized by Peter Carey is the most comprehensive and widely considered valid by many scholars. Unfortunately, one informant commented on this by saying, "Peter Carey kui wong ngendi? Wong Inggris opo iyo luwih ngerti babakan Diponegoro timbang wong kene/ Where is Peter Carey from? Is he English, and does he truly have a deeper understanding of Diponegoro compared to the local Indonesian perspective?". A comment that offers no substantive argumentation.

As a result, the TBY narratives during the Java War era (both pre- and post-war) still need to substantiate themselves with data, alongside historical logic. However, does this mean that all Bin Yahya figures in these narratives are problematic? Certainly not. Post-Java War figures such as Raden Saleh Bustaman have been verified as part of the Trah Bin Yahya lineage, as the name Bustaman itself is a Javanese name commonly used within the Trah Bin Yahya. Similarly, Usman Bin Yahya aligns with the TBY narrative on several occasions (as documented in videos) as the Mufti of Batavia, and indeed, he was the only one in that role. The controversy surrounding him arises solely from his issuance of a fatwa in *Manhajul Istiqâmah fid Dîn bis Salâmah*, which deemed the rebellion against the Dutch colonial government in Cilegon, Banten as disruptive to public order and contrary to Islamic teachings. Apart from this, as a historical figure, he undeniably existed and lived during his era.

CONCLUSION

Vision-spiritual or irfani-based dakwah authority has, in practice, generated controversy when used as a foundation for historical writing. This is evident in the field regarding the Trah Bin Yahya narratives during the Java War of 1825. Data investigations indicate that many Trah Bin Yahya narratives originate from internal testimonies, such as tomb custodians and oral traditions, rather than primary historical documents. When tested through comparative historical analysis—including the

chronology of births, timing of events, and political context—several narratives do not align with verifiable historical data. Examples include claims that the title of Prince Diponegoro was held by Sayyid Abdul Hamid bin Yahya, or assertions of Habib Thoha bin Yahya's involvement in the Malacca War, which are inconsistent with historical chronology, particularly concerning KRT Sumodiningrat as one of the central figures in these narratives.

Nevertheless, factually, not all Trah Bin Yahya figures present issues in their historical records. Figures such as Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman and Habib Usman bin Yahya are clearly documented in historical sources and played significant roles in the development of culture, art, and Islamic education. Even in cases of controversy surrounding Habib Usman bin Yahya, such accounts can be viewed from multiple perspectives, and his existence as a historical figure is undeniable. Controversy arises when an irfani-based approach is used as the foundation for historical interpretation, as this method is inherently subjective and cannot be scientifically verified. The author concludes by emphasizing the importance of constructing history based on empirical evidence to ensure accuracy and clarity in historiography.

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