

**Cultivating Hadhrami Memory: The Politics of *Haul* in a Malay-Speaking Hadhrami Sultanate in Indonesia**

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**Abstract**

This article identifies *haul*, an annual commemoration of the death of charismatic figures, in Indonesia as political. The politicization of *haul* has been accompanied by a proliferation of narratives promoting the history of Hadhrami diaspora while strengthening the relationship between local Hadhramis and the local statesmen. This qualitative research examines the use of *haul* in Pontianak to commemorate selected *syarif* aristocrats. Pontianak, founded in the mid-eighteenth century by a *syarif* statesman, has a long-standing Hadhrami memory. Data for this study were collected through literature review, interviews, observation, and archival research related to Kadriah Sultanate's *haul* events. The findings suggest that *haul* reshapes memories of the Kadriah Sultanate and Hadhrami identity for pragmatic purposes in local politics. By examining this case study of a commemorative religious event in the non-Arab world, it is shown that the local Arab sultanate redefines Hadhrami ethnic identity as nationalist, locally rooted, and heroic. Public *haul* festivals thus become effective tools for *syarif* politicians to exert influence in the religious and political spheres.

**Keywords:** Haul, Hadhrami, Identity Preservation, Local Politics, Kadriah Sultanate.

## Introduction

On March 4th, 2023, tens of thousands of Muslim men and women were seated together at the Kadriah Sultanate (Kesultanan al-Qadrī/Alkadrie/Kadriah) hall in Pontianak, facing the sultan's palace. They had gathered there for an event commemorating the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's "night journey" to Jerusalem (Ar.: *isrā'*; Ind.: *isra*) and his ascent to heaven to meet God (Ar.: *mi' rāj*; Ind.: *miraʿ*) around 1444 A.H. years ago (Ṭabari, 1988, 2008). Most male attendees, who wore white shirts, black caps (*kopiah*), and sarongs, were sitting on one side of the hall while females mostly wore black dresses and were seated on the opposite side, with both sections separated by a divider. From the 'ishā' (evening) prayer onwards, the audience flocked to listen to traditional Arab odes of praise to the Prophet while some spent their time buying snacks, shopping, and chatting with their friends or with residents residing near the sultanate complex. Two large stages dominated the open field: a smaller one which was placed higher above the stairway of the sultan's palace, and another which was located to the side of the smaller stage, facing the male members of the audience.

Sitting cross-legged on the higher stage were the Sultan and those with elevated social status, such as the vice-governor of West Borneo, the mayor of Pontianak, descendants of the Prophet's family (*ḥabā'ib*), regional military commanders, and renowned Muslim preachers. On the other stage were musicians, sporting navy robes and white *kopiah*s, led from a distance by Habib Thoha Aljufrie who wore a yellow robe, sharing the same color scheme as the architecture of the sultan's palace, where he was seated. The audience was not there merely to listen to Arabic odes and songs, an event that took place weekly in the city, nor were they there only to observe the sultan and local leaders, whom they could meet in person daily. Tens of thousands of Muslims sat on the ground at 10 pm through to midnight to see Abdul Somad, an internationally-renowned Malay-speaking Muslim preacher, and hear his sermon commemorating the legacies of the saints and sultans of Pontianak (Paramitha, 2023; Somad, 2023).

This mass religious gathering combined the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's *isra* and *miraj* on the 27th of Rajab, or on February 10th, 2023, along with commemorations marking the anniversary of the deaths of two Kadriah sultans. The Islamic tradition of annually commemorating the anniversary of a death is referred to as a *haul*. Thus, the March 4th gathering commemorated Syarif Abu Bakar Alkadrie, the eighth sultan and late father of the current sultan who passed away on March 30th, 2017, and his late grandfather, Syarif Abdul Hamid II Alkadrie, the sixth sultan, who passed away on March 31st, 1978, while also celebrating the *isra* and *miraj* (Kesultanan Kadriah Pontianak, 2023). Therefore, this event was referred to as a "Haul Akbar" or a Grand *Haul*, and has been held annually by the sultanate to commemorate its sultans and saints. The *haul* tradition has become a global religious phenomenon that intensifies the ways Hadhrami Muslims express their identity and religiosity.

There have been several recent studies on *haul* practices and festivals commemorated within Muslim communities. Sumit K. Mandal (1997; 2002) states that the modernist turn of Hadhrami Arab scholars and the growing connection with the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire through the ratification of pan-Islamism transformed the younger generations of Hadhramis into future-oriented Muslim intellectuals who disregarded the legacies of local leaders (*sāda*; singular: *sayyid*). Ismail Fajrie Alatas argues that the *haul* tradition is a socio-political reaction to modernity and the *sāda* traditionalists' means of re-invoking the legacy of their noble ancestors, hence positioning *haul* as the practice of re-forging and maintaining the collective memories and ethnic domination of the Hadhramis who claim to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (Alatas, 2007, 2014). Amaruli *et al.* (2022) consider the *haul* festivals as an effort to preserve noble Arab memory and promote nationalism in the host country by performing traditional Arab songs alongside the national anthem and incorporating texts, images, and symbols related to the host nation.

In other public celebrations among Malaysian Muslims, Kushimoto Hiroko (2017) notes the way *maulid* (Ar.: *mawlid*) events (celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) stress the significance of love for the Prophet and his lineage which stimulated new interest in the role of *sayyids* and saints. He also argues that performers and those attending events venerating saints originate from urban populations with higher levels of education and a better understanding of the ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ Islam borne by the descendants of the Prophet (Kushimoto, 2013). There are also several studies illustrating *haul* ceremonies of saints and leaders in many regions of Indonesia, such as in Mahmud Yusuf (2019) Umar Faruk Assegaf (2020), Al Furqon (2021) and Suyono & I Wayan Arsana (2022). But none of the abovementioned research focuses on how organizers and performers at the *haul* events exercise their socio-religious influence and political power while reshaping public memories of the “blessed” saints and leaders during these annual ceremonies.

This article argues that the *haul* tradition in Indonesia has a political agenda. Following on from Sandra Barnes’s (1990) study on the profound relations between ritual with power preservation and its practical influence to secure central positions in the political affairs of the ritual performers, this article argues that the politicization of the *haul* ceremony, on one hand, promotes the legacy of prominent Hadhramis in the Muslim public domain while, on the other hand, strengthens the intricate relations between Hadhramis and local political institutions. This annual tradition also establishes their position of authority as the honored descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and respected bearers of righteous and moderate understandings of Islam. Distinct from recent studies on the Hadhrami diaspora, which emphasize the transnational networks of *ḥabā’ib* and graduates of Hadhramaut institutions, this article decentralizes the Hadhrami identity from the Arab world while focusing on the Malay-speaking royal Arab community in Pontianak city of West Borneo.

This research is qualitative in nature. The study examines the particular case of a *haul* in Pontianak, which is used to commemorate selected local aristocratic figures of Arab descent, and reshape past memories of the



Kadriah Sultanate and Hadhrami Arab identity in a way that serves pragmatic local political interests. Data was gathered from a literature review, interviews, observations, and an archival review of data related to the sultanate's *haul* events. Interlocutors consisted of the current sultan, *ḥabā'ib*, political leaders, senate members, a professor, a local culturist, and members of Rabithah Alawiyah. Undertaking participant observation also provided a chance to engage in casual contact with informants, in their homes, mosques, or cafés, and discuss their views on the sultanate's feasts and religious gatherings. Digital observation and online data collection were also undertaken to understand the framing of the sultanate and its members' image in new media. This article argues that these annual events enable romantic recollections of Hadhrami legacies during the *haul* of the Alkadrie sultans and the City Foundation Day, which enable the Malay-speaking Indonesian *syarifs* to maintain their symbolic power as respected figures and rightful leaders of Pontianak and exploit that political symbolism to gain popularity, religious authority, and political legitimacy.

### **Haul Tradition: Identity and Memory Revisited**

This study focuses on a series of festivals and events that involve the *haul* celebration. The term *haul* refers to the Arabic term *al-ḥawl* which means “a year” or an annual event, indicating a yearly celebration. Some scholars argue that the *haul* ceremony in Indonesia originated from Hadhramaut, a province in Yemen, hence, descendants of the people of Hadhramaut are called Hadhrami (Alatas, 2007; Amaruli et al., 2022). While the term's original meaning suggests a commemoration event for Hadhrami saints and preachers, it is not limited to only this context but has also been adopted to commemorate the anniversary of the death of non-Hadhrami Muslim scholars and charismatic leaders, such as Anregurutta Muhammad As'ad in Wajo (Hasanuddin & Irfan, 2018; PP As'adiyah Sengkang, 2015), Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) in Jombang (Abadi et al., 2017), and Tuan Guru Muhammad Zaini Abdul Ghani Al-Banjari, also known as Abah Guru Sekumpul in Martapura (Wulandari et al., 2023; Yusuf, 2019). Umar Assegaf in his Ph.D. dissertation argues that many members of traditionalist Muslim groups conduct their everyday lives and

express their religiosity through the examples of previous saints, stories and information on which are acquired through undertaking pilgrimages to their tombs (*ziarah*) (Assegaf, 2020), venerating their religious paths, attending public sermons, and reciting the hagiography (*manāqib*) of the late saints and charismatic leaders (See also Rijal, 2017, 2020).

Performed annually under the lead of a *ḥabīb* or a local sheikh, the *haul* festival serves a regular gathering for Muslim communities, beginning with the public recitation and chanting of one or more memorial texts (Rijal, 2023). Each text takes around an hour to be recited and is accompanied by a tambourine performance by followers of the *ḥabīb* or local sheikh. Each memorial text contains prayers and blessings addressed to the Prophet, his family and descendants, before proceeding to prayers directed to Muslim saints (*awliyā*'), scholars ('*ulamā*'), jurists (*ḥukamā*'), and martyrs (*shuhadā*'). Some articulatory texts are related to the hagiography of Hadhrami saints, in which literary genre broadly illustrates virtues, deeds, and merits of the holy person. Afsaruddin argues that *manāqib* offer moral examples and noble deeds of the persons who “constitute their subject or on the superior merits of a particular group.” (Afsaruddin, 2002, 2006) In short, the designated recitations of *haul* rituals are intended to indoctrinate the audiences regarding the nobility and superiority of the blessed figures or saints, whether this is recited in Arabic, a local language, or even in multiple languages (Taufik, 2024).

Each *haul* ritual consists of several segments that usually begin with the recitation of Quranic verses or performing obligatory prayers and culminates with a communal prayer led by an esteemed preacher or the kissing of saints' hands as a sign of respect. In the past, the geographical position of a *sayyid*, followed by respected Muslim scholars (*mashāyikh*), becomes central because those figures, be they living or deceased, are considered pillars of the community and souls in a “soul-less” city (Alatas, 2007). Nowadays, the *haul* ritual itself may be performed outside the hometown or resting place of the saint, such as the fourteenth *haul* of Gus Dur in 2024 that was held in Yogyakarta and Jakarta, alongside the usual

event in Jombang as Gus Dur's place of birth and burial.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic also inspired similar practices of long-distance *haul* rituals through the use of digital platforms. The 33rd *haul* ritual for KH Abu Chaer Nasori of Tegal, Central Java, and "Grand Tahlil" was performed online via YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook following a long delay from April to August 2020 (NF, 2020). These events suggest that *haul* rituals are not restricted to the precise time of death of saints or the exact geographical location of their tomb, but instead are performed as a tribute and collective commemoration for the blessed figure. Similar cases have also occurred in the Grand *Haul* of the Kadriah Sultanate, when the religious feasts were not led by the *syarifs* sultans themselves but instead by popular religious figures, as detailed in the discussion below.

### **Contested Identity: Malay and Hadhrami Identities Revisited**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in the Dutch East Indies, discussions on ethnicity resulted in the formulation of "new" genealogical works of the Hadhramis, Malays, and Buginese such as *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis dan Sakalian Raja-Rajanya* (Lineage of the Malays and Buginese, including their Kings) and *Tuhfat an-Nāfis* [The Precious Gifts] (see both editions in Ahmad, 1926, 1982). Dutch colonials and some local elites acted as standard-bearers and upholders of cultural homogeneity and purity, chastising the mixed ethnicity—called as *muwallad* and *peranakan*—for their imperfect language, mixed culture, poverty, and lack of education. The local sultans and kings were part of those elites reproducing and institutionalizing their cultural identity while eradicating the impurities of the hybrid society. As many sultanates and kingdoms formulated and sought to preserve homogenous identities, Pontianak presented a strange case with hybrid Hadhrami descendants consisting of tradesman-cum-pirates announcing the founding of the Kadriah Sultanate (Shārif Qāsim b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Habīb Husayn Alqadrī, 1811;

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<sup>1</sup>I received an invitation to attend the *haul* of Gus Dur at Yogyakarta on January 19th, 2024. This unorthodox haul practice was organized by the Gusdurian Yogya, a national Gus Dur-inspired non-government organization (NGO) focusing on peacemaking and interfaith harmony. The *haul* invitation was mentioned in Gusdurian Yogya's official letter no. 0180/A/SEK-PAN/HGD-XIV/II/2024 in which the *haul* was titled: "Discussing Democracy: What Villages Can Do?" [Rasan-Rasan Demokrasi: Desa Bisa Apa?].

Somers Heidhues, 1998). Ben Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* argued that this sultanate did not maintain the purity of its bloodline through endogamic marriages, hence, the first sultan soon “lost his ‘Arabness’ if not his Islam, and remained subordinated to the rising Dutch and English empires in Southeast Asia” (Anderson, 2016). This claim of the ‘lost legacy of Arabness’, however, was not true, as the Kadriah Sultanate went on to exist for more than quarter of a millennium and its hybrid identity as a Malay-Hadrami royal family prevailed for decades after the first publication of Anderson’s book.

From the beginning, the differences between “Malay” and “Arab” identity have been especially ambiguous; in both cases, belonging to the same language and religion has frequently been more important to a person’s identification within the group than ethnicity or bloodlines. Mobini-Kesheh remarked on this case that the earliest “Arab” traders and preachers in the Indian Ocean “cannot be identified with certainty as Hadrami,” (Mobini-Kesheh, 1999, p. 21) which encouraged academics to question whether there are historically any “pure-blooded Hadhramis” in relation to the early modern Muslim networks in Southeast Asia. Feener (2009) suggests that such highly mobile and polyglot figures whose Arab paternal lineage of the *sayyids* or *syarīfs* had been mixed extensively with maternal ancestry from various ethnic groups around the Indian Ocean world acted as a crossroads for fluid pluralism, transnational trade, and an ethno-religious melting pot (2004, pp. 363–367). The sense of belonging to some dominant community has its roots in modern times as the shaping of nativity, ethnicity, and nationality has been largely determined by European elites and colonial policy, governing the “customary law” and restraining those hybrid and locally-born Hadhramis within the sub-categorical label of “Foreign Orientals” and limiting their mobility for both intra- and interregional journeys (Anderson, 2016).

In the transnational trade world of maritime Southeast Asia, immigrant adventurers shared traits such as foreignness, political brilliance, and marriages with local governing elites (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1987, p. 38). However, the unique feature of *aqhāh* [plural form of *quhḥ*] Hadhramis—those born in Yemen—was in their elite religious status as well as their

apparent sociocultural stature. This made it possible for a hybrid and locally-born *sayyid* and *syarīf* of talent and networks to establish politically significant institutions and establish themselves as leaders, not only of the diaspora but also of locals. This hybrid state creation is apparent in the eighteenth century, for instance, in Siak, Jambi, Pontianak, Pasir, and Johor, where heterogeneous leaders emerged in what Kathirithamby-Wells referred to as “stranger-kings”, whose charisma and hybridity bridged the outsider-insider dichotomy (Kathirithamby-Wells, 2009).

### **Pontianak Arabs and Changing Self-Image**

Pontianak boasts a rich Hadhrami heritage. Founded in 1771, the city was named after a female ghost (*kuntilanak*) that was defeated by a part-Hadhrami leader, Syarif ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qadrī (d. 1808 CE), son of Ḥabīb Ḥusayn Al-Qadrī of Tarim, Hadhramaut (Alqadrī, 1935, fol. 1; Compare with Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo, 1984, pp. 11–12). Sharīf ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān led his followers as merchants and ocean warriors, but some claimed that they were in fact pirates (Ota, 2010, 2015, 2018). To enhance this highly-mobile group’s strategic position in transnational trade competitiveness, they needed to establish a market center at a strategic location in Borneo, complete with huts, a palace, and a mosque (Goor, 1985). ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān managed the market, selling local goods, while also governing native inhabitants and migrants in the region.

Thus, the sultanate was founded and became a means of institutionalizing political authority, establishing local leadership of mixed-blooded diaspora, ensuring social cohesion of different racial groups, and dominating ties between local and transnational marketplaces. While the Kadriah Sultanate was a Hadhrami-led sultanate, Pontianak was a “Malay state” in the sense that Malay art, language, customs, symbols, and narratives were maintained over time, even though traditional local governance structures, religious courts, and social hierarchies no longer remained (Chambert-loir, 1994a, 1994b, 2011). The *sāda* somehow still retain an exceptional status in the community, particularly regarding social stature and claims to the sociocultural narratives and heritage of

the city and its people. For instance, in line with broader trends of popular pilgrimages and religious landscapes, citizens of Pontianak perform pilgrimages to the Hadhrami sultanate cemetery of “Batulayang”, which serves as the cemetery of the founding father of Pontianak and his descendants, located around 11 kilometers northwest of the sultan's palace (Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Kalimantan, 2017). At that cemetery, Indonesian Muslims (Nugraha, 2022) and ethnic Hadhramis pay homage to their ancestors and chant prayers (*tahlīl*). Even non-Muslim Chinese residents of Pontianak take part in this tradition as a form of paying respect to the past custodians and ancestors of the region. To borrow from Moyaert, this sort of shared ritual, or “interrituality”, has become the embodiment of intercultural and interreligious relations among pilgrims, which naturally guides them towards higher-order reflections on and development of hybridized theology and hermeneutics (Moyaert, 2011, 2019; See also Schilbrack, 2019).

In the early seventeenth century, the Indonesian archipelago lacked centralized authority. Since their arrival in the region, Dutch traders had been dragged into sea trade politics by the stranger-kings with whom they did business (Woodward, 2017). Intense market rivalry and inter-ethnic conflicts were the two main features of this sea trade politics, as numerous new Malay-speaking states emerged, all of them pouring attention and resources into the international spice network (Clarence-Smith, 1997). Deep ties were forged between royal members of the Malay sultanates with the traders, such as the Dutch VOC, with the sultanates seeing these foreign spice customers as compelling business partners with several political benefits: first, a source of wealth for the sultans and harbor-princes; second, the ability to use trade as a political tool to compete with their rivals; and third, a source of power to subdue local citizens and establish control over their local area (Goor, 1985).

By utilizing this political strategy throughout the archipelago, Hadhrami tradesmen founded a trade empire with the economic, political, and socio-religious tools they possessed. Dutch historians described Abdurrahman Alkadrie during his prime as “the most unusual man that Borneo ever produced” (Veth, 1856). He was described as an ethnic Arab

who behaved like a “true” king, as he took an active role in every decision of his council and received foreign visitors. Abdurrahman did not permit others to meddle in decisions when he had the deciding vote. He was also generous to a fault. He was described as noble, adventurous, proud, pious, a good general, and a great warrior who had a fondness for weapons (Goor, 1985; Somers Heidhues, 1998). Despite his apparent kindness, the sultan was reputed to be cautious and always on the lookout for attempts to poison him (Goor, 1985, p. 200) and other traitorous acts. This included wariness of his eldest son Syarif Kasim Alkadrie, who was initially installed as Duke of Mempawah Regency (*Panembahan Mempawah*), but who later forged political and business ties with the Dutch government, igniting a conflict between the sultan and his son (Shārif Qāsīm b. ‘Abdur Rahmān b. Habīb Husayn Alqadrī, 1811; Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000; Veth, 1856).

Following Abdurrahman’s reign in the eighteenth century, Sultan Muhammad and Sultan Abdul Hamid II ruled the Pontianak Kadriah Sultanate during the early-to-mid twentieth century and became key figures in the struggle against Dutch and Japanese colonial governments. Muhammad was the crown prince before his late father, Sultan Syarif Yusuf b. Hamid b. Usman b. Abdurrahman Alkadrie, passed away in early 1895. Sultan Muhammad reigned over 49 years, becoming the longest-serving among nine sultans of Kadriah Sultanate. During his reign, Muhammad wed ten empresses and six concubines, fulfilling his obsession with obtaining male heirs as his political successors. Nonetheless, Muhammad seemed to trust none of his heirs to run the bureaucratic system independently, and so he eventually signed a political agreement with the Dutch colonial government in April 1912 (Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). The agreement stated that the Kadriah Sultanate would submit to the secular Dutch constitution and legal system, resulting in the annulment of Islamic legal norms and the Sharia Court. The agreement also stipulated that the Dutch governor would contribute to selecting the sultanate’s personnel and staff and would pay their salaries as Dutch colonial administration indigenous officers (Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). Some historians noted that Muhammad took to wearing imperial European attire on many formal

occasions, in addition to traditional Malay or Arab dress (Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo, 1984; Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). The sultan's reported preference for pseudo-European fashion contrasted with the clothing of royal family members around his time, as documented by official archive sources:



**Picture 1.** The transformation of the Kadriah sultans' formal dress from the 1800s to 1900s. **Sources:** Raden Saleh (1853; left), Leiden University (1887; center), and Disbudpar Pontianak (2014; right).

Picture 1 suggests that there was a change in the formal dress of the sultan and royal family members. Both Sultan Hamid I and one of his sons were depicted as wearing a headscarf or *keffiyeh* in formal photos. A portrait of the Sultan, sketched and painted in 1853 by the prominent Javanese *sayyid* painter Raden Saleh (Raden Saleh, 1853a, For the finished and colored outlook of the painting, see 1853b), depicted an aged Indonesian Arab male wearing traditional Arab attire, matching the clothing worn by his son in Jedda, as documented by the Orientalist scholar Snouck Hurgronje (1887). The only point of fashion difference between Sultan Hamid I and his son was Hamid's royal necklace showing the crescent of the Kadriah Sultanate, signifying the nobility of the bearer as an Alkadrie Prince (*Pangeran*) of Pontianak. Meanwhile, Sultan Muhammad is depicted as lavishly and ornately adorned in black and white European-style garb, complete with medals and an European-styled tall dark headscarf with gold ornaments and a hat with white feathers (Disbudpar Pontianak, 2014).



That portrait of Sultan Muhammad was likely taken in the early 1900s, during the initial period of his reign. Advances in photography and printing have led to photographs of Sultan Muhammad being distributed and republished on a mass scale in the modern-day Pontianak. The sultan's decades-long reign, his flamboyant European appearance in public events, and the mass dissemination of his portraits created the perfect conditions to popularize the sultan among the general public. But this image transformation brought serious consequences (Amoroso, 1996; Reese, 2018): first, as this was the oldest accessible portrait of the Kadriah Sultan in the public domain, Muhammad the Sixth was mistaken for his great grandfather Abdurrahman, the first Sultan; second, as more residents in Pontianak came to view Muhammad's official attire as archaic and traditional, they began to collectively lose what Barnes referred to as the "outer knowledge", the past Arab memory introduced and carried by the first five sultans. Instead, they started creating new images of the *syarif* sultan and the monarchy, reflected in both the everyday appearance of the later four sultans and their grandiose political or religious events. The lavish European image of the Kadriah Sultan has been preserved for later generations and is currently maintained by the recent sultan, Syarif Melvin Alkadrie, for official portraits and formal/political events, for instance, the Grand *Hauls*, city anniversary, and public elections.

### **The Political Dynamics of The Stranger-Kings of Pontianak**

This section discusses four Indonesian-born Hadhrami figures whose life stories and mythical narratives are commemorated by the Muslim community in Pontianak: Sultan Syarif Abdurrahman (1730-1807), Sultan Muhammad (1872-1944), Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1913-1978), and Sultan Abubakar Alkadrie (1944-2017). After the establishment of Pontianak and the Kadriah Sultanate in 1771, marked by Abdurrahman's victory over the Dyak empire in Sanggau with the help of the Buginese Riau Sultan, Raja Haji, Abdurrahman was anointed as First Sultan of Pontianak and all its territories (Ahmad, 1982, pp. 156–60; Goor, 1985). Shortly after Abdurrahman's ascent, Dutch envoys reached Pontianak and contacted the new sultanate in July 1778. The commissioners in 'Abd al-Rahmān's

palace described him as a well-proportioned individual with tanned European looks, a striking nose, and a short beard. The Sultan was seated on a newly refurbished throne, surrounded by the crown prince and dignitaries on his left, and more than twenty women from his household in regalia. When the Dutch delegation arrived, Abdurrahman seated them on chairs on his right while participating in a communal feast (*selametan*), attended by over a thousand people (Ahmad, 1982). Many forms of entertainment and amusement were introduced during the formative period of the sultanate, such as the *joget* and *tandak* forms of Malay dance and the Javanese-style orchestra (*gamelan*) and puppet show (*wayang*). An 18th-century historical source provided a clearer picture of the First Sultan's ritual feast, and, even though the event was not specifically called *haul*, it was described in terms to how a *haul* ceremony is performed in modern times:

Sultan Syarif 'Abd al-Rahmān assembled all the Sayyids, *hajis*, and *lebai* [Sino-muslim] in the palace to recite the confession of faith and read the Koran so that the merit acquired might be given to the soul of his late cousin, Yang Dipertuan Muda Daeng Kamboja. He also distributed alms and held a ritual feast according to the custom when a close relative died (Ahmad, 1982, p. 158).

According to an Alkadrie interlocutor, the mass gathering at the palace to recite the Qurān and the *mawlid* texts, particularly *Mawlid al-Barzanjī*, were traditional customs that were maintained for generations until the late 1900s. The interregnum period of the sultanate, the interlocutor argued, had an effect on this tradition, resulting in a decline in the number of religious feasts held in the palace complex until the rise of the Eight Sultan, Syarif Abubakar Alkadrie, the grandson of Sultan Muhammad, as interim sultan in 2002 (Surat Kesepakatan Bertiga, 2002), which years later was followed by the appointment of his oldest son, Syarif Mahmud Melvin Alkadrie, as the crown prince or *Pangeran Ratu Agung Sri Mahkota Maharaja* (Pontinesia, 2015). As the last two Alkadrie sultans are direct descendants of Sultan Muhammad, the longest-reigning sultan in history, there have been routine commemorations of Sultan Muhammad's leadership and greatness. This contrasted with the seventh sultan, Syarif

Thaha Alkadrie (d. 1984), who ruled the Kadriah Sultanate between August-October 1945.-There have been no annual commemorations-of his death, nor efforts to preserve his legacies. Instead, Sultan Thaha has received the nickname, *Sultan Empatpuluh Hari* [The Forty Day Sultan] by members of the sultanate. The emergence of new *Haul Akbars* attributed to the four sultans is political in nature, especially as charismatic figures like Sultan Muhammad and Sultan Abdul Hamid II have become the focal points of these annual religious feasts.

As a descendant of the Prophet and the longest-reigning sultan, myths about Sultan Muhammad's special attributes abounded, such as claims that he was immune to colonial weapons and fire. In interviews, some of his relatives said that the sultan's immunity made it difficult for Japanese occupiers to kill him (S. T. T. Alkadrie, personal communication, December 27, 2023) and, as a result, the sultan and his heirs were instead arrested in 1944 on treason charges (Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo, 1984; Koakimoto, 1944). But, it turned out that Sultan Muhammad's fingernails and toenails were an Achilles heel of sorts, enabling Japanese soldiers to murder him, his two princes and hundreds of associates in a massacre referred to as 'the Mandor Tragedy'. (Koakimoto, 1944).

Education, modern agriculture, and social movements saw great advancement during Sultan Muhammad's reign. The sultan founded an exclusive school, the Alkadrie Academy (*Perguruan Alkadriah*) that focused on providing an education in Islam, Qurān memorization, and Arabic language for members of the royal court and as a means of countering Dutch Catholic and Protestant missionary activity in the sultanate (Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). Sheikhs at the *Perguruan Alkadriah* consisted of Indonesian-Arabs who graduated from Egypt, Mecca, Aceh, and West Sumatra (S. I. Alqadrie, personal communication, December 27, 2023; Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo, 1984). The end of the colonial program of forced farming enabled the Kadriah Sultanate and its subjects to innovate and expand the potential of natural commodities. In the early twentieth century, a Banjar farmer named Haji Yusuf Saigon successfully cultivated Vietnamese rubber tree seeds in the sultanate complex. Seeing the business potential for this, Bugis farmers followed

suit and developed coconut plantations, while Chinese farmers and tradesmen established a vast agribusiness sector of rubber, copra, and pepper. These agricultural innovations improved the socio-economic and political bargaining position of the Kadriah Sultanate in transnational trade, making it renowned among many independent traders, seafarers and distant empires and sultanates (Alqadrie, 1987; Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). Since the 1920s, the sultan also permitted the establishment of nationalist organizations and allowed his crown princes to participate in nationalist politics. Some Alkadrie youth joined the Great Indonesia Party (*Partai Indonesia Raya, Perindra*), the Muhammadiyah movement, and the Union of Sons of Borneo (*Persatuan Anak Borneo, PAB*) (Alqadrie & Sastrowardoyo, 1984; Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000). Some organizations, such as PAB, were driven by ethnic politics, while others were focused on the idea of communal sentiment and national independence, following the reformist zeitgeist of pan-Islamism in India and Egypt (Clarence-Smith, 1997; Freitag, 2009).

Following Sultan Muhammad's reign, Abdul Hamid II was inaugurated as the seventh Sultan of Pontianak in 1945. Sultan Hamid II was not present during the events in Pontianak from the end of the 1920s until the mid-1940s, including the murder of his father, Sultan Muhammad and several of the crown princes, as he was receiving a Dutch military education in Borneo, Java, and the Netherlands. Detained by the Japanese colonial administration in Batavia from 1942 until 1945 over his allegiance to Dutch military since 1937, Abdul Hamid II initially heard about the Mandor Tragedy following his liberation from prison, before he returned home in September 1945 with the assistance of the Dutch General of the Civil Administration, H.J. van Hook (Pemerintah Kota Pontianak, 2000; See also Van Niel, 1984). Abdul Hamid II was inaugurated as Sultan on October 29th, 1945. He was later held responsible for the formation of United States of Indonesia (*Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS*) and participated in the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Agreement in 1949 as the RIS Minister of Internal Affairs. He explained that "as a minister, I was entrusted with the tasks of preparing the parliament building and designing a national emblem. Once I was captured and detained, I have since had no other duties" (Persadja, 1953). For political reasons, Sultan Hamid II's role in

designing the national emblem of the Republic of Indonesia, the ‘Garuda Pancasila’, was not acknowledged until the Reform Era.

Unsatisfied with his position in the RIS, Sultan Hamid II sought to achieve higher office, particularly eyeing the position of Defense Minister. In 1948 he reportedly contacted Raymond P. Westerling, a notorious Dutch captain whose military unit was responsible for the massacres of approximately 3,000 to 40,000 people in South Sulawesi. Sultan Hamid II and Westerling were also behind an assassination plot against an RIS Cabinet meeting in January 1950, which was attended by Minister of Defense Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, General Secretary Ali Budiardjo, and Sultan Hamid II himself. The Sultan admitted that the assassination was intended to force President Soekarno to grant the position of Defense Minister immediately to him. However, after reconsidering the threat to national stability, the Sultan disrupted the plot by ending the RIS Cabinet Meeting 30 minutes earlier than scheduled to ensure that those present could move to safety. As a result of the plot and Hamid’s close ties to Westerling, the Indonesian Supreme Court in 1953 sentenced Hamid to jail. Sultan Hamid II’s imprisonment until 1963 and his death in 1978 served as the beginning of a decline and lull for the Pontianak Kadriah Sultanate from 1978 until 2004.

During this interregnum, no male member of the Alkadrie dynasty took charge of the sultanate, leaving the throne empty and Malay-Hadhrami legacy and culture neglected. The decline of tradition triggered concerns among the Alkadrie youth following the fall of Soeharto in 1998 and the intensifying effects of globalization. In response, younger members of the Alkadrie dynasty founded the “Youth Association of the Kadriah Palace Pontianak Sultanate” (*Kerabat Muda Istana Kadriah Kesultanan Pontianak*). The new group was established by Syarifah Khadijah (A. Alkadrie, 2004) and the members of this association shared a vision of preserving the traditions, norms, symbols, and rites of their Malay-Hadhrami ancestors. Recognizing the need for a new sultan as a moral leader, members of the Kadriah Sultanate embraced Syarif Abubakar as the eighth sultan. His coronation ceremony was held in January 2004 and

witnessed by other sultans from the “Association of Indonesian Archipelagic Sultanates” (*Persatuan Kesultanan Nusantara*).

Compared to the other seven sultans of Pontianak, there are no studies on the personal and institutional dynamics of Sultan Abubakar Alkadrie’s reign. After his death in 2017, local political elites described Sultan Abubakar as a moderate, culturally-grounded, nurturing, and involved leader, who cared about his surroundings and was well-loved by the people of Pontianak (Ramadhani, 2017; Sudirmansyah, 2017; Syahroni, 2017). However, according to an interview with Syarif Toto Thaha, a senior Alkadrie politician and the eldest son of the sixth sultan, Syarif Thaha Alkadrie, Sultan Abubakar violated the terms of his coronation by refusing to rotate the position of sultan every five years with his Alkadrie relatives (S. T. T. Alkadrie, personal communication, December 27, 2023). This internal conflict and battle for the throne escalated into what was perceived as a violent act (see Jessica Helena Wuysang, 2015). Instead of adhering to the agreed rotation, Sultan Abubakar promoted his eldest son, Syarif Melvin, as crown prince (*Putera Mahkota*) and his younger son as *Pangeran Mas Perdana Agung* (Ramadhani, 2017).

### ***Haul Akbar* and the Reforging of Local Memories**

The renewed practice of *haul* was introduced as part of the early activism of the *Kerabat Muda* during the reign of Sultan Abubakar in the early 2000s. Public commemorations on the legacy of Alkadrie saints and sultans became an effective means to preserve the sultanate tradition and its historical significance. Although though there have been nine kings of the Kadriah Sultanate since its founding some 253 years ago, the sultanate initially organized only one annual event – the *haul* of city founder Syarif Abdurrahman and Sultan Muhammad (S. T. T. Alkadrie, personal communication, December 27, 2023). Previous *haul* ceremonies were modest and solemn, as they were undertaken internally among Alkadrie family members. During this initial period, few from outside the family would have bothered to attend the event, there were no ornamented stage performances or giant loudspeakers set up at the palace, and no media recorded the event or broadcast the *haul* ceremony

online. Some informants even differed on whether the renewed practice of *haul* began in the 1990s when Syarif Abubakar and Syarif Toto served as legislative members of West Borneo,<sup>2</sup> or whether it began in the early twenty-first century alongside the resurgence of the Kadriah Sultanate and the cultural and political activism of its younger generation. Nonetheless, the sultanate's *haul* ritual underwent a significant transformation, becoming a public religious ceremony, which was more festive, flamboyant, and widely embraced during Sultan Melvin's reign. The more private *haul* ceremony was cancelled and the sultanate now makes use of social media and digital news centers to promote its activities, such as religious and cultural commemorations, festivals, feasts, and venerations. The Kadriah Sultanate hall now serves as a venue for public religious festivals that are related to the sultanate's annual events. Aside from annual commemoration events for the first and fifth sultans, the Sultanate has organized *haul* ceremonies for two other sultans, Sultan Abubakar and Sultan Abdul Hamid II, as well as for the saint Habib Husein, who was the father of Abdurrahman, the founder of Pontianak city. Notably, Sultan Abubakar is Sultan Melvin's father and Sultan Abdul Hamid II is the sibling of Melvin's grandfather (Syahroni, 2019).

Sultan Melvin initiated two new *haul* events in March 2018: a *haul* for Sultan Abubakar held on March 31st and one for Abdul Hamid II on 30 March. The *haul* for Sultan Abubakar was held in the palace and attended by local politicians who were running for the legislative and executive council positions. Sultan Melvin provided some opening remarks, which was followed by a sermon on *mawlid* by an Alkadrie preacher, Habib Muhammad bin Abdurrahman. The event culminated with a communal prayer and a customary feast, the *saprahan*, where participants sit cross-

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<sup>2</sup> Based on an interview with Toto Alkadrie, he argues that Kesultanan Kadriah performs commemorations only for Sultan Abdurrahman and Sultan Muhammad. The limited amount of "haul" ceremonies, according to him, is a result of the fewer grants provided by the local government and almsgiving of the Alkadrie court members. S. T. T. Alkadrie, personal communication, December 27, 2023; For one case when Sultan Abubakar in 2016, a year before he passed away, organized a great *haul* ceremony of Syarif Abdurrahman and Santri Day [*Hari Santri dan Haul Sultan Abdurrahman*], see Mahbib, 2016.

legged on the floor and eat from a long rectangular yellow cloth with cuisines and side dishes prepared on-site (Pradana, 2018).

In the same year, the sultanate organized two new events: a *Haul Akbar* and “Grand Pilgrimage” (*Ziarah Agung*), which featured Abdul Somad and Habib Thoha Hasan Aljufrie as top-billed guests (Aljufrie, 2018). At noon, the members of the royal court and residents undertook a pilgrimage to the Batulayang sultanate cemetery, which houses the tombs of the founding fathers of Pontianak city and their descendants. Batulayang is located around 11 kilometers northwest of the Kadriah Sultanate (Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Kalimantan, 2017). Both Muslims and non-Muslims from Pontianak and other regions visit the resting place of Pontianak’s founders, pay homage, and perform *taṣliya* and *taḥlīl* chants, asking for God’s blessing, and recite the Islamic statement of faith, ‘there is no God but God’ (*lā ilāha illa Allāh*) (Padwick, 1997; See also Rippin, 2012).

During the evening *haul* ceremony, melodic tambourine performances accompanied Habib Thoha’s recitation of the *mawlid* text composed by contemporary Yemeni scholar Habib Umar Hafiz entitled *Ash-Sharāb aṭ-Ṭahūr* (Pure Divine Wine). This book’s title parallels the allegory of the eighteenth-century legend Ghulām Khāki (Saghaee, 2022). *Ash-Sharāb aṭ-Ṭahūr* contains verses of blessing and prayers addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, his family, companions, followers, and descendants (Ḥafīz, n.d.). As the large crowd gathered at the palace hall expresses their devotion to Islam, this is intensified with the recurring phrase “O Allah call down Your blessing on the Prophet and *upon his family*” which, according to Constance Padwick, spiritually connects Muhammad’s descendants in the prayer of blessing (See the referenced incantations in Ḥafīz, n.d., pp. 46–47; Padwick, 1997). This also reflects the audiences’ admiration for the Alkadrie saints and sultans who are believed to be direct descendants of the Prophet and beloved by God.

The trend of festivalizing *haul* ceremonies is gaining popularity in the sultanate. Haul festivals add a unique atmosphere to Pontianak, as crowds flock to public spaces to hear traditional Arab songs, chant religious



blessings, and listen to sermons by popular preachers. Inviting national preachers to this local religious festival immediately results in larger crowds, especially as the positive reception of these preachers aligns with the reinforcement of their religious authority. This may be the reason why *haul* organizers invited Abdul Somad to the first *haul* in 2018. During Syarif Abdurrahman's *haul*, Abdul Somad highlighted nobility of Abdurrahman and the traders in spreading Islam among the indigenous people of Borneo while also establishing an Islamic state in a non-Arabic-speaking region (Asy Syarobut Thohur, 2018).



**Picture 2.** The main stage of the 2023 *Haul Akbar* at the Kadriah Sultanate Palace. **Source:** *Kalbar Online* (2023).

Attendees at the *Haul Akbar* as seen in Picture 2 included Habib Thoha Aljufrie (left, wearing a yellow robe), a local Bā 'Alawī preacher who graduated from Darul Mustofa Tarim; Sultan Syarif Melvin Alkadrie (center), the current sultan dressed in a black robe and black *kopiah* with gold trimmings that echoed the fashion style of his great grandfather Sultan Muhammad; Abdul Somad (center, in a light brown shirt with black *kopiah* and half-length sarong); along with Vice-Governor of West Borneo

Ria Norsan (right, wearing a white *kopiah*) and Pontianak Mayor Edi Rusdi Kamtono (right, in white shirt and sarong with black *kopiah*),. Most attendees were in awe of Abdul Somad's sermon. West Borneo Governor Sutarmidji said that "*wherever ustadz Abdul Somad provides a sermon here in West Borneo, I will always attend,*" highlighting the organizers' successful efforts to make this religious festival entertaining while also establishing the popularity, authority, and glory of the Kadriah Sultanate. The high level of enthusiasm among civil servants and public figures for the sultanate's *haul* events can be understood in the context of Abdul Somad's sermon on the importance of *hauls* to commemorate the lives of sultans, saints, and noble figures:

What can we offer *Maulana* Sultan Abubakar Alkadrie and *Maulana* Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who have struggled to uphold the sharia of Allah? These pillars of the sultanate bear witness to how they established Islamic civilization. They are *dhurriyya*, with the blood of our Prophet Muhammad pbuh. flowing through them ... if not for this *haul*, I would not have met Habib Thaha, *Maulana* Sultan [Melvin], or the other *habaib* and *alim ulama* [religious scholars]. That's why, when there is a *haul*, everyone should gather (Abdul Somad, 2023).

Following the success of the 2018 *haul*, the sultanate organized other *haul* festivals twice annually from 2019 to 2023. Some *haul* festivals commemorated the lives of the Alkadrie sultans, particularly the *haul* of Sultan Abdurrahman combined with Sultan Muhammad in the Islamic month of Rajab, and the *haul* of Sultan Abdul Hamid II combined with Sultan Abubakar in March. A similar religious festival has been organized in the sultanate complex annually on October 23 to celebrate Pontianak City Foundation Day, with the event billed as "The Grand *Mawlid* for Pontianak City Foundation Day" ("*Mawlid Agung Hari Jadi Kota Pontianak*") (Asy Syarobut Thohur, 2022, 2023). Public *haul* and *mawlid* festivals have arguably become an effective means to reshape the collective memory of Pontianak's residents, familiarizing them with the reimagined legacies of the four sultans and their descendants. This has led to a lack of awareness among people regarding the historical events related to the Malay-Hadhrami sultans. Sultan Melvin remarks that the Kadriah Sultanate intends to organize *haul* ceremonies regularly,

recognizing the significance of these religious and cultural festivals in revitalizing the Alkadrie dynasty's presence in local theological, sociocultural, and political realms (S. S. M. Alkadrie, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

### **Politicizing *Haul* Sultan Melvin and His Political Vision**

From the beginning of his reign in 2017, Sultan Melvin has adopted a distinct political approach compared to his predecessors. As an example, Sultan Melvin's opening speech for the *haul* event in honor of his father and grandfather in March 2023 noted that people had begun referring to the two sultans by a new honorary title, "Maulana Sultan". *Maulana* or *mawlānā* is a title used to refer to respected Muslim scholars and religious leaders, particularly those who pursued religious education in traditional Islamic seminaries. The sultan's approach in re-introducing his ancestors as *Maulana Sultans* is emblematic of his strategy to highlight the religious and political authority of the two Alkadrie sultans (Donoso, 2023). Consequently, it may not be long before Sultan Melvin himself is referred to with the honorary title "mawlānā," as suggested in Somad's sermon. Sultan Melvin also highlighted Sultan Abdul Hamid II's heroism and nationalism at the *haul* in his opening remarks at the 2023 Haul Akbar festival:

If we refer to them by [the title of] Maulana Sultan, indeed the sultans are rightful claimants of that, because they led the Sultanate of Pontianak. The people's love for them not only came from Pontianak but worldwide. Everyone is already familiar with Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his struggle in designing the state symbol, the *Garuda Pancasila*. But refinements to the structure of the *Garuda* were made by Sultan Abdul Hamid II himself. In addition to adding the slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), [he also formulated] the five principles [of Pancasila]. Islamic values and other morals are all included [in Pancasila]. He [Abdul Hamid II] did not only design. He also gave Islamic meaning to *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and the five principles [of Pancasila] (Sultan Melvin, 2023).

Sultan Melvin underscores the global recognition and love for his father and grandfather, indicating their popularity extends beyond the citizens

of Pontianak to the world. The inclusion of the reimagined history of *Garuda Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, as well as the raising of the national flag during the *haul* ceremony suggest an attempt to position the Kadriah Sultanate as being a highly dedicated, religious, nationalist sultanate. Through political symbolism, the sultan links the Alkadrie dynasty to the national symbol *Garuda Pancasila*, the five principles of *Pancasila*, and the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The sultan's opening remarks during each haul ceremony emphasized the role of Alkadrie figures in shaping the nation, which is a significant element in Indonesia's multi-ethnic political landscape. As a result of transforming the sultanate's identity to become nationalist-religious in its outlook and with deep local roots, members of the sultanate have expanded their involvement in regional and national politics. In addition to running as national regional representatives council (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*, DPD) members, the Kadriah Sultanate during Melvin's reign began bestowing honorary titles on popular politicians such as Prabowo Subianto, Salim Segaf Aljufri, and Herzaky Mahendra Putra (Eno, 2023; Erdianto & Meiliana, 2019; Humas Fraksi PKS, 2022). Accordingly, those politicians have become part of the Kadriah Sultanate, helping to promote the culture and tradition of the sultanate while also strengthening the Alkadrie dynasty's legitimacy and pride. In a similar vein, Sultan Melvin and his relatives are actively promoting their identity more broadly, such as when Melvin visited Habib Luthfi bin Yahya, Indonesia's most prominent Sufi master and a charismatic Muslim figure in Java (Alatas, 2021), at the end of 2023 to "pay a visit to *abah* (father, referring affectionately to Habib Luthfi) ... and discuss matters at length" (S. S. M. Alkadrie, 2023) This gesture highlighted Melvin's distinct religious identity that resonates with a broader audience, not only the people of Borneo island or the citizens of Pontianak.

Based on interviews, some respondents mentioned that the increasing number of *hauls* organized by the sultanate was directly linked to the increasing number of culture preservation grants from the local government. In election campaigns, politicians and legislative candidates in Pontianak and many other local elections seek to exploit *putra daerah* (literally 'sons of the region') sentiment, express their appreciation of

local heritage, and emphasize Islamic symbols and narratives to assert local identities and obtain voters' sympathies. Ethnic politics is intricate and varied, resulting in individual identities which are hybrid in nature (Miichi, 2014), especially in regions where exogamic practices and transnational migrations are common. In the 2024 General Election, "native" sentiment in Pontianak was emphasized at the expense of religious identity. Likewise, the marketing and mobilizing of ethnocentric religiosity and the sentiment of *putra daerah* are characterized as forms of 'soft' non-violent politics.



Picture 3. Syarif Melvin participates in the 2024 General Election

Source: Syarif Melvin (2024) through direct communication in WhatsApp and Januardi (@januardibangde, 2023) from TikTok.

In Pontianak's local elections, all candidates aiming to promote their local ethnic or religious identity sought to align themselves with Sultan Melvin (Ichwan et al., 2020), who registered as a candidate for the DPD. As part of their campaign efforts, they often included Sultan Melvin's photo on

their promotional materials, emphasizing both his imperial heritage as well as his modern touch, as can be seen in in Picture 3. Melvin's own campaign slogan of 'upholding justice and fighting despotism' echoed part of a Quranic verse: *jā'a al-ḥaqqu wa zahaqa al-bāṭil* (the truth has arrived, and falsehood perished) (Q. Al-Isrā' (17): 81). Considering the sultan's focus on moderation as both a Bā 'Alawī and a local-born individual, along with his commitment to fairness, the preservation of cultural heritage, and public participation in religious events (as highlighted in Prasojo, 2023), his candidacy as a regional representative in the 2024 General Election introduced both religious and ethno-nationalist dimensions into the regional political landscape. The portrayal of syarif politicians as moderate and religious may also intersect with ethnic politics, particularly in the context of West Borneo.

It came as no surprise that Sultan Melvin obtained almost 400.000 votes in the General Election, mostly from Pontianak and its neighboring regions of Mempawah and Kubu Raya (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Provinsi Kalimantan Barat, 2024). This was enough to place Melvin third behind the current incumbent and a national athlete, but enabled him to obtain a seat in the DPD, defeating various other rivals including the former two-time Governor of West Borneo, Cornelius, and 15 other candidates of different ethno-religious (Dyaknese, Malay, Javanese, Batak) and political backgrounds. Melvin, who has no practical experience in politics, managed to achieve a razor-thin triumph over other experienced candidates, such as Maria Goreti (a former national senator) and Christiandy Sanjaya (a former vice-governor), as a result of three factors: first, a demographic boon from Muslim-dominated regions such as Pontianak, Ketapang, Kubu Raya, and Mempawah that served as the sultan's main support base; second, the absence of other Bā 'Alawī candidates in the DPD election that could have reduced his electoral advantage; third, Melvin's image as a moderate Muslim sultan and a prospective political leader, which was highlighted in his official portrait that frequently featured at campaign rallies and religious feasts. While identity and ethnic politics were arguably critical to his short term electoral capital, his lack of political experience still posed a significant challenge. The *hauls* organized by the Kadriah sultanate, again, borrowing

from Barnes, played a unique role in legitimizing Melvin and his ancestors' activities, through songs performed at religious feasts and public rituals (Barnes, 1990), creating a sort of “stored electoral capital” that can be exercised for personal and communal interests. Thus, this article argues that Sultan Melvin has been expanding his long-term legitimacy and authority through religious rituals, as can be seen in the case of 2024 General Election. *Hauls* served as an effective means to exercise the sultan's influence in religious and political arenas, while also framing himself and his ancestors as noble and heroic figures.

### **Conclusion**

The syarif sultans were not always heroic and did not always achieve political success. But the commemoration of their life stories in *haul* ceremonies intentionally sought to highlight their religious and nationalist credentials and minimize more controversial legacies. Through an examination of *haul* in the non-Arabic-speaking world, this study reveals that the Malay-Hadhrami sultanate in Pontianak crafted a new image of Hadhramis as a nationalist, moderate, and locally-grounded Arab community. This study also highlighted Sultan Melvin's efforts to enhance his legitimacy and authority through *haul* ceremonies. Traditionally speaking, a *haul* ceremony is an annual commemoration of deceased Muslim saints or sultans, which consists of public chanting and recitation of *mawlid* texts. In more recent times, *haul* have become an effective means for the sultan to exercise political and religious influence, while also legitimizing himself and his ancestors as descendants of the Prophet (*dhurriyya*), the beloved of God (*habīb*), and the bearers of Islamic civilization (*mawlanā*).

The politicization of the Pontianak Kadriah Sultanate's *haul* ceremonies has been accompanied by a proliferation of publications and media promoting the legacy of Pontianak's Hadhrami saints and sultans. The increasing popularity of *haul*s in the sultanate has also strengthened its relationship with local government, by inviting national preachers, stakeholders, neighboring sultans, and popular political figures to attend *haul* events. Furthermore, the sultanate's festivalized *haul* ceremonies

have mobilized *putra daerah* sentiment and reinvented the religious and ethno-nationalist identity of the Alkadrie dynasty in local politics. Future research on Hadhrami studies and *haul* ceremonies could shed further light on how modern descendants of the centuries-old Hadhrami diaspora cultivate religious authority through political symbolism and religious activities.

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