

# CULTURAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: CASE STUDY OF THO'UN AND BURDAH KELILING RITUAL

Atiqotul Fitriyah

*Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia,  
UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*  
[atiqotul@uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:atiqotul@uinjkt.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the cultural trauma in *Burdah Keliling* ritual as an oral tradition among Madurese. The cultural trauma linked with the collective memory of Madurese when facing the epidemic disease within 1910—1980 during the Pes epidemic in the Nederlands-Indie. The epidemic disease was known as *Thoun* [*To 'on*]. The epidemic disease was named according to the story in the hadith which tells of the plague that spread during the time of khalifah Umar bin Khattab in Syam. *Thoun* [*To 'on*] became an oral history of Plague among the Madurese. They are believed that *Tho'un* was coming from a bad witch who had black magic and the devil curse. Therefore, they come to the Kiai to fix the plague. Kiai is the priest who had the Madurese trust. the Kiai was suggesting the people for performing *Burdah Keliling* ritual. *Burdah Keliling* ritual is known as reading the qasidah Burdah Imam al Bushiri together with a lot of songs by going around in someplace. After performing the ritual, the plague began to disappear and they believed that the *Burdah Keliling* could drive away the disease. The ritual was carried out and transmitted by the medium to lower classes because of the lack of access to the health facilities and the public mistrust of the colonial. Therefore, the transmission of the *Burdah Keliling* ritual continued in some generations. However, after the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, the health facilities began to develop, people began to become aware of medical health and leave the *Burdah Keliling* ritual. Therefore, the *Burdah Keliling* ritual only exists in some Pesantren in East Java. When COVID-19 status became a pandemic, the Madurese in several regions in East Java carried out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual back. It shows the cultural trauma occurs in Madurese when facing a plague. As members of the collective feel, they have been subjected to the horrendous plague. Therefore, the recalling proses of the collective memory of *Tho'un* and *Burdah Keliling* ritual is a cultural response by the Madurese to face the plague. This study was made use of qualitative research with ethnography methods and oral tradition approaches. The participants selected through the random sampling method. They were interviewed by the random question about the *Burdah Keliling* and *Tho'un* oral history.

**Keyword:** *Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory, Tho'un, Burdah Keliling, Oral Tradition, Plague*

## INTRODUCTION

The history of plague runs along with the history of the world. The history of human life is inseparable from the history of plague which has participated in the process of natural selection. The colonial history during the Dutch East Indies government has a special record about plague. The plague spread and claimed many victims in the archipelago. Apart from the Malaria epidemic in 1733, followed by plague of smallpox, syphilis, typhus, cholera,

pneumonia, and influenza, there were many other diseases brought by Europeans into the archipelago (Luwis 2020:4).

The epidemic spreads and claimed many victims occurred in Madura. The dark period due to the large number of victims who died due to the plague created a special memory for the Madurese community. One of plague that has stuck to the memory of the Madurese community is *Tho'un* plague which known as *To'on*. The name *To'on* was given by the Madurese community based on the name of the plague that occurred during the khalifah Umar bin Khattab. The plague was named *Tho'un* which is well known in many hadiths. The difference in the pronunciation of the Madurese and Arabic people made the pronunciation of *Tho'un* shift to *To'on*. The book *Badzl al-Mā'un fī Fadhl ath-Thā'ūn* written by Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar al-'Asqallany (1448) explained that *Tho'un*'s disease is a plague that can spread very easily and is deadly.

The efforts to deal with the epidemic were not comprehensive due to a lack of medical personnel, health priorities, and the mistrust of indigenous people to the colonial government. The indigenous population believes that this disease is a disorder of supernatural beings (Luwis 2020:146). Therefore, the indigenous people tend to ask the help of *kiai* (religious leaders) to cure the disease. This also happened to the Madurese indigenous community. The community has flocked to ask the *kiai* for help to ward off the plague.

The presence of *kiai* for the Madurese people is very important. It is related to the Madurese way of life *Bhuppa'-Bhabhu'* (father-mother / parents), *ghuru-rato* (teacher / *kiai*-queen / king / leader) (Hefni, 2007:13) which means that mothers, teachers (*kiai*) and queens (leaders) must be respected and obeyed as central figures in their lives. Therefore, when the plague attacked the Madurese, they immediately asked the *kiai* for protection to ward off the plague.

One of the efforts to ward off the plague is to perform the ritual of *Burdah Keliling*. *Burdah Keliling* is reading the qasidah *Burdah* Imam al Bushiri together with a lot of songs by going around in someplace. No one knows for sure who is the first creator of *Burdah Keliling* ritual. The information obtained from the Maduresethat the first perform was ordered by *Kiai*<sup>1</sup>. Through the instructions of the *kiai*, the *Burdah Keliling* ritual is carried out by the Madurese community for generations. This was done in an effort to repel the troops in order to avoid the *To'on* disease plague.

*To'on* disease began to disappear by the time and the health facilities which increase in various remote areas. After the independence of Republic of Indonesia, health facilities began to operate in various parts of the region. It also provides a new understanding for the community on the importance of medical knowledge for dealing with disease. This awareness has made the *Burdah Keliling* ritual gradually abandoned by the Madurese. Therefore, *Burdah Keliling* Ritual has only been carried out by pesantren community regularly until now.

When COVID-19 status became a pandemic, the Madurese in several regions in East Java carried out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual back. It shows the cultural trauma occurs in Madurese when facing a plague. The transmission of *Burdah Keliling* ritual has proven how they memory was drive by their cultural trauma about plague.

*Burdah Keliling* ritual was performed as they cultural response to drive away the plague. As members of the collective, they have been subjected to the horrendous plague. Therefore, the recalling proses of the collective memory of *Tho'un* and *Burdah Keliling* ritual is a cultural response by the Madurese to face the plague. It shows the connection between cultural trauma and collective memory in the case of *Tho'un* plague and *Burdah Keliling* are

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Ustaz Aqib, pesantren al Hamidiyah Darul Ulum Pamekasan [Thursday, July 19, 2019]

related strongly. They constructed each other for giving a cultural respond to face the Cultural Trauma which stay forever on their collective memory.

## The Oral History of *Tho'un*

*Tho'un* plague is known as *To'on* by the Madurese people. Apart from being known by *To'on*, the similar epidemics were found in the oral history in several other places as *Black Death*, *Deing Jube'*, *Pagi Sore* (when in the morning they sick, so in the evening they die), and *Pagebluk*. The various terms prove that *Tho'un* is a endemic plague in various regions at certain times. Therefore, people have a special designation in accordance with the conditions of the environment and the terms they recognize.

Despite from the names with their own characteristics, *Tho'un*'s plague becomes a collective memory in people's oral history. Madurese particularly have a memory of *Tho'un* as a disease that comes from the devil curse. The oral history in the community tells the story that "*if someone comes knocking on the door at night, don't open it. This is based on the belief that it is the devil who knocks on the door or the devil who carries Thoun's disease*". In addition, Javanese people also have oral stories that refer to the collective memory of the community when against *Tho'un*. *Tho'un* was known as a plague brought by Nyi Roro Kidul who were looking for sacrifices<sup>2</sup>.

Ibn Hajar Asqolani explained that *Tho'un* according to ancient terms is any disease that is easily spread which causes mass death. *Tho'un* is a plague that afflicts most humans from many different directions from human disease in general. *Tho'un* does not only affect certain communities, but almost all levels of society throughout the world (Asqolani 1448:22–23).

According to the history of the pandemic in the Islamic world, *Tho'un* has been endemic since 1 Hijriah or in the 7<sup>th</sup> century during the Persian empire. (Butar-Butar 2020:12). Meanwhile, the history of the Pandemic in Indonesia was noted by a global and massive epidemic. This data began with the arrival of the Dutch East Indies in the archipelago. The plague is an epidemic with the types of malaria, influenza and bubonic plague. The symptom of a disease which is similar to *Tho'un* is bubonic plague. Based on oral stories, the *Tho'un* plague has symptoms similar to leprosy which are marked by fever and vomiting<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, the bubonic plague is also a deadly skin disease that attacks human immunity.

*Tho'un* was discussed in various books includes discussing the obligations of a Muslim who should try to take precautions from the cause of the plague. If it turns out that after the efforts made do not produce results, a Muslim is encouraged to be patient, sincere and trust in Allah. Imam Bukhori in *Sahih al Bukhari* (2001:130) tells that Sayyidina Umar when he became caliph, he traveled to the city of Sham. Before arriving in the city of Syria, there was a news about an epidemic in the city of Syria. Based on this incident Sayyidina Umar decided to return to Medina and leave the city of Sham. Based on a hadith which tells by Aburrahman bin Auf's that *he had heard Mohammad as the Messenger of Allah say that if there is a people being hit by a plague then you should not enter it, and if you are in, it then do not leave that place*. The hadith shows that an effort needs to be made to avoid all the bad things that are around us.

Prohibition of staying away from places affected by the plague is one of the other efforts. Indonesian people with various traditions have their own way of dealing with the *Tho'un* plague. Some people with Madurese culture performing *Burdah Keliling* ritual as a way to get

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mbah Fauzan. The Priest in Paiton Probolinggo 51 Years in the village of Nanger Sumenep. April 2019

<sup>3</sup> Wawancara dg Hj. Khofifah pengurus pondok pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo. 13 Jui 2019.

rid of the *Tho'un* plague. This ritual of *tolak bala* was carried out by the Madurese community before the 18th century.

### ***Burdah Keliling Ritual***

*Burdah Keliling* is a ritual reading *kasidah Burdah* by going around a certain place or area. No one knows for sure who the first creator of the *Burdah Keliling* ritual. Information obtained from the local community that the first to order the ritual was a Kiai<sup>4</sup>. Through the direction of the kiai, the *Burdah Keliling* ritual has been carried out by the Madurese from generation to generation. This was done as an effort to repel reinforcements in order to avoid the *Tho'un* plague that was endemic to the Madurese community.

*Kasidah Burdah* is a *kasidah* which contains a collection of 160 verses. The *kasidah* was created by Abdullah Muhammad ibn Sa'id al Bushiri, better known as Imam al Bushiri. Imam al Bushiri lived during the Mamluk dynasty between 1212-1296. This *Kasidah* was a very popular prayer in the 13th century. Al Bushiri lived during the power transition from the Ayyubiah dynasty to the Mamluk dynasty. At that time there was political upheaval which caused moral decline. At that time Imam al Bushiri created poetry so that Muslims would remember and imitate the behavior of the prophet Muhammad in controlling lust (Manshur 2006:102).

The popularity of *Burdah* is supported by the historical background of *Burdah* creation. The story of *Burdah* and its miracles is contained in the book *Fawat al Wafayat* written by a Syrian historian named Muhammad ibn Shakir al Kutubi (1363:764). When al Bushiri created these poems, he was in a Hemiplegia disease<sup>5</sup> which attacks half of his limbs. This situation made al Bushiri continue to ask Allah to be forgiven for all his sins by continuing to read the verses he created. Not long after that, al Bushiri fell asleep and dreamed of meeting the prophet Muhammad. In his dream, the prophet Muhammad wiped his face and gave him a blanket (*burdah*). When al Bushiri woke up from his sleep, he suddenly found himself recovering from the paralytic disease. After the incident, al Bushiri went to a doctor who was also a Sufi and told him about the incident he had experienced. After hearing the story, the doctor asked al Bushiri to read the poetry. The healer spread the poem until it was known by Muslims almost all over the world.

Based on this, *Burdah* is widely known by the public. The initial name of the poetry collection was *al Kawakib al Durriyah*, but today it is better known as *Burdah* because of the story of Imam al Bushiri's recovery from his paralysis. *Kasidah Burdah* is known and transmitted orally and in writing by the wider community. During the transmission period the *Burdah Kasidah* was translated into various languages around the world. Apart from being transmitted orally, the *Burdah* was also written in the form of a manuscript. In the 19th century until now the *Burdah* began to be printed and spread widely (Stetkevych 1992:71).

The miracle of *Burdah's* *kasidah* made the public use it as a talisman or *wasilah* to get intercession through these verses. There are many practices spiritually, psychologically, as well as talisman / medium as medicine which use the *burdah* *kasidah* as a property to heal something. Some of them wrote several verses of *Burdah's* *kasidah* and then mixed it in rose water or saffron water with the aim of curing a certain disease. (Stetkevych 2006:150).

This is also done by people in Indonesia. Most Indonesian people make *Burdah* as one of the *wasilah*<sup>6</sup> who connects humans with God through the prophet Muhammad to ask for protection and help from all bad things. Some regions have made the *Burdah* as one of the

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Ustaz Aqib, board of the Darul Ulum Pamekasan al Hamidiyah pesantren [Thursday, 19 July 2019]

<sup>5</sup> Hemiplegia is a disease that attacks half of the limb so that they cannot feel anything (Paralysis / Stroke)

<sup>6</sup> Wasilah is an intermediary that connects the servant with his Lord.

compulsory readings in Islamic boarding schools that are read every Friday night. Some of them also make it a compliment that is sung at certain times. Several Islamic boarding schools in West Java, *Burdah* were used as study material by kiai and students (Manshur 2006:106).

One of the rituals that uses the *Burdah* is the *Burdah Keliling*. The people believe that the ritual of *Burdah Keliling* can be a *wasilah* to ask that the plague and all the badness that befell humans can be destroyed and lifted up by God. The implementation of the *Burdah Keliling* ritual is believed to be able to drive out the *Tho'un* plague by the Madurese. Therefore, when the COVID-19 epidemic spread and had a pandemic status, people flocked to carry out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual in hopes of being spared from the plague.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research using ethnographic method. The approach used is an oral tradition approach using ethnographic descriptive techniques. Descriptive techniques are expected to describe and explain matters related to the *Burdah Keliling*, Cultural Trauma, and collective memory about the *Tho'un* plague. Data mining using descriptive techniques will be deepened using ethnographic methods. Ethnography is a job to describe a culture (Spradley, 1997:3). Ethnography requires a long observational process. Researchers are present and involved directly in the daily lives of respondents.

Collecting data in this study using direct observation techniques, interviews, questionnaires, and literature study. Direct observation (participant observer) is carried out by involving oneself in life at the Salafiyah Syafiiyah pesantren as well as in the *Burdah Keliling* ritual activities. This is done to see the ritual as a whole and observe each ritual process yourself. Research that involves oneself directly is a research model that is quite effective in the study of oral traditions (Pudentia, 2015:446). This is because to understand a situation the researcher must be fully involved in the ritual process.

Interviews in a research aim to collect information about human life in a society (Sudikan, 2001:62). The interview is a form of verbal communication, a dialogue that the interviewer conducts to the interviewee to obtain information. In addition, the questionnaire is tested using a distributed questionnaire and google form. The questionnaire technique is a way to collect data using a draft question in the form of a questionnaire. Distribution of questionnaires is used so that respondents freely express their opinions and understandings regarding the questions given (Hasan 2001:17). The questionnaires in this study were written questions that were given to respondents to be answered. In addition to field observations, interviews, and filling out questionnaires, researchers also conducted literature studies. This method is used to find and collect literature related to and support research. The information obtained is useful for deepening concepts and theories in order to make it easier for researchers to analyze.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### ***Tho'un* as Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory of Madurese**

The uproar over covid-19 recalling the collective memory of plague among Madurese. Without complying with the COVID-19 health protocol, the Madurese people carry out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual to drive away from the plague. It stems from their memory experience of the plague they have faced in ancient times. This links collective memory to the formation of collective identity and brings it close to myth and ideology (Sontag 2003:85).

Collective memory emerges when those without firsthand experience of an event identify thyself with those who have such experience, defining both actors as sharing

membership in the same social group (Halbwachs 1992). Covid-19 as a pandemic revive the collective memory of plague among Madurese. When Covid-19 became a pandemic, Madurese have flocked to carry out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual to drive away from the plague. This cultural response shows the collective memory of the Madurese people when they were hit by the *Tho'un* plague.

The oral History of *Tho'un* known as narrative and was a formative collective memory among Madurese. There are so many dead people during the *Tho'un* Plague. These memories become a collective memory of awfulness years among Madurese. These events construct the memory of Madurese to fight the plague by performing *Burdah Keliling* ritual.

The Plague called *Tho'un* was a horrendous memory among Madurese. They have been subjected to a horrendous plague that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness. The plague marking their memory forever and construct a cultural trauma (Alexander, J. C. et al, 2004:160). Those memory collected among generations troughs oral history and ritual transmission. Therefore *Tho'un*'s memory was a cultural trauma among Madurese. Through the collective memory among Madurese, the cultural trauma associated with the plague were revived. All the anticipations made to drive out the plague and ask for God's protection. One such anticipation is to carry out *Burdah Keliling* ritual.

### **Burdah Keliling and Recalling Memory Process**

The presence of an epidemic in an area is closely related to the implementation of the ritual of rejecting reinforcements. This is a reflection of the cultural elements of a society. This cultural element is a religious system in a community group (Koentjaraningrat 1990:375). One form of the cultural system in the form of a ritual to reject reinforcements is the *Burdah Keliling*.

The implementation of the *Burdah Keliling* ritual in several places by the Madurese is a cultural response in the face of an epidemic. This cultural response does not just come without any memories of the past that encourage people to carry out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual. The process of recalling past events is obtained from collective memories that have been shared by a group of people. The collective memory is structured in the memory between the nucleus in a community group and is integrated through cultural memory in the form of a ritual.

Ritual is a force that binds a group of people into a collective consciousness. Durkheim argued that when people gather in a ritual, the ritual will build a feeling of togetherness between those people (1993:303). Therefore, rituals in religious life occupy a deep enough space to create religious emotions. Ritual is also a communicative means of the common character of a particular society. therefore, rituals require collective participation where people can come together to enhance collective experience and memory.

In addition, Ritual is a medium for remembering, because ritual itself is memory in action (Schechner 2013:45). Every ritual performance always involves actions, songs, sounds, rhythms that create collective experiences. This collective experience creates collective memory for a certain group of people. Collective memory serves as a belt to bind a community. Collective memory needs to be repeated and carried out to bring it into the life of contemporary society. Therefore, collective memory requires a ritual in the process of remembering. Through rituals, people in certain communities can better connect more deeply with each other.

The *Burdah Keliling* ritual is a memory aid that can restore the memory of the Madurese community about the plague. The process of recalling is experienced reflectively by people when they are faced with a similar situation. The presence of the COVID-19 plague brings back memories of the *Tho'un* plague that occurred in the past. This memory continues to be sharpened by the existence of the *Burdah Keliling* ritual. therefore, people have flocked to carry

out the *Burdah Keliling* ritual in various regions in the hope of driving out the plague that was ravaging.

## CONCLUSION

Recalling memory began when they have a similar cultural trauma which happened again although in different era. It shows the connection between Cultural Trauma and Memory Collective in the case of *Thoun* plague and *Burdah Keliling* are related strongly. They constructed each other for giving a cultural respond to face the Cultural Trauma which stay forever on their collective memory.

Ritual as cultural marker have linked collective memory dan cultural trauma of plague. The relationship between cultural trauma and collective memory is very strongly linked to determine the cultural response of the community in facing certain situations to create a sense of security because they have received protection from God.

## REFERENCES

Alexander, J. C., Eyerman, R., Giesen, B., Smelser, N. J., & Sztompka, P. 2004. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. California: University of California Press.

Asqolani, Ibnu Hajar al. 1448. *Badzl Al-Mā'un Fī Fadhl Ath-Thā'un*. edited by Ahmad 'Isham 'Abd al- Qadir Katib. Riyadh: Dar al Ashima.

Bukhari, Muhammad bin Ismail al. 2001. *Shahih Al Bukhori*. Dar Thouq an Najah.

Butar-Butar, Arwin Juli Rakhmadi. 2020. *Kepustakaan Medis-Pandemik Di Dunia Islam*. Medan: OIF UMSU.

Durkheim, Emile. 1993. *Division of Labour in Society*. London: Macmillan.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hasan, Iqbal. 2001. *Pokok-Pokok Materi Statistik 1 (Statistik Deskriptif)*. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.

Hefni, Moh. 2007. "BHUPPA'-BHĀBHU'-GHURU-RATO (Studi Konstruktivisme-Strukturalis Tentang Hierarkhi Kepatuhan Dalam Budaya Masyarakat Madura) | Moh. Hefni | KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture." *KARSA* XI, No 1 A.

Koentjaraningrat. 1990. *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*. Yogyakarta: Rineka Cipta.

Kutubi, Muhammad ibn Shakir al. 1363. *Fawat Ak Wafayat*. Beirut: Dar al Sadir.

Luwis, Syefri. 2020. *Epidemi Penyakit Pes Di Malang 1911-1916*. Temanggung: Kendi Publisher.

Manshur, Fadlil Munawwar. 2006. "Resepsi Kasidah Burdah Al Bushiri Dalam Masyarakat Pesantren." *Humaniora* Volume 18.

MPSS, Pudentia. 2015. "Pengelolaan Tradisi Lisan Sebagai Warisan Budaya." in *Seminar Internasional LISAN IX*. Jakarta: Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan.

Schechner, Richard. 2013. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London Dan New York. Routledge.

Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Representing the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Strauss.

Spradley, James P. 1997. *Metode Etnografi*. Yogyakarta: PT. Tiara Wacana Yogyakarta.

Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. 1992. *The Mantle Odes*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. 2006. "From Teks to Talisman: Al Bushiri Qasidat Al Burdah (Mantle Ode) and the Supplicatory Ode." *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXXVII. 2.

Sudikan, Setya Yuwana. 2001. "Ragam Metode Pengumpulan Data, Mengulas Kembali: Pengamatan, Wawancara, Analisis Life History, Analisis Foklor." in *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif: Aktualisasi Metodologis ke Arah Ragam Varian Kontemporer*, edited by B. Bungin. Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada.

