

## Hoax in Islamic History

Machasin

Department of History of Islamic Culture, Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences, UIN  
Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta  
machasin@uin-suka.ac.id



Knowledge, we may define it with a tripartite definition of belief-truth-justification, i.e., knowledge is a justified true belief.<sup>1</sup> Hoax, on the contrary, gives information that is not based on truth in order to deceive people. By a hoax, one may believe that a narration about a certain candidate of presidential election, for example, is not a proper choice since h/she has a flaw in his/her integrity is true. Accordingly, one who is taken by the narration will not vote for this candidate. Meanwhile, the rapid development of information and communication technology enables the fast and massive propagation of information misused by some people to distribute hoaxes for their own purposes: political, economic, or religious etc. One may scapegoat this development in human invention for the massive propagation of disinformation. It is conceived as if our era of developed information and communication technology has de into existence hoaxes spreading to every instances of human life. Nevertheless, in reality there is nothing new in the propagation of hoaxes and their use for gaining purposes. What is new is the massiveness of the propagation and the creativity in their fashioning.

This presentation is going to reopen some stories of hoax that have been propagated in Islamic history since the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad up to the very famous political-religious examination (*miḥna*) conducted by orders of the seventh Caliph of Banī ‘Abbas caliphate, al-Ma’mūn (reigned 198-218 AH/813-833 CE). The discussion deals only with hoaxes related to internal Islamic community affairs, since there are many works treating those launched from outside to Islam and its peoples.

As an opening, the discussion will take the admonishment of the Qur’an to anyone who invents lie against God and refuses to believe. The point is that inventing a lie is improper for humanity. Nevertheless, there are some situations where lying is allowed and even suggested, like when telling the truth may lead to a damage.

Then the talk will take two kinds of hoaxes narrated in the Qur’an: those happened in the people of past and those in the lifetime of the Prophet. Of the first, the discussion will take the story of Adam where Devil deceived him by telling the tree of eternity (*shajarat al-khuld*) and the eternal kingdom. The discussion will outspread to questioning why Adam was so naïve to accept the word of his very malicious enemy. The story of Yūsuf and his brothers of different mother will follow, where both sides exchanged hoaxes. Of the second, this presentation will take the story of those hypocrites who said that they believed in God while concealing their unbelief and the story of the accusation of improper relation against Ā’isha, the wife of the Prophet. This last story is important in giving guidance for Muslims as how to take a proper attitude toward the coming of a hoax.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dan O’Brien, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, reprint ed. 2012), p.11.

Afterwards, comes the discussion of the saying of the Prophet that it is allowed to spread untrue information for winning in a war (*al-ḥarb khid'a*). The forging of hadīth ascribed to the Prophet will be discussed then and the narrations invented for supporting or destroying certain political parties or religious groups (*firqa*) and thoughts (*māzhab*).

