

DECONSTRUCTING ANIMAL SACRIFICE (*QURBAN*) IN IDUL ADHA

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Abstrak

Kisah Ibrahim terlihat cukup mampu mengubah sejarah manusia. Hal ini tercermin seperti pada kepercayaan agama Yahudi, Kristen dan Islam. Kisah tersebut telah membentuk tradisi, nilai-nilai etika, dan pandangan tiga agama itu pada relasi sosial, dengan demikian hal tersebut juga telah mengayam realitas kehidupan. Dalam tradisi Islam, kisah Ibrahim diperingati tiap tahunnya pada Hari Raya Idul Adha. Tradisi ini dapat diamati dengan pelaksanaan kurban binatang dengan pembagian dagingnya sebagai pengingat pengorbanan Ibrahim dan Ismail. Namun, pada konteks Idul Adha tahun 2010 yang bersamaan dengan peristiwa musibah banjir di Wasior, Tsunami di Mentawai dan Letusan Merapi di Jawa, pertanyaannya menjadi akankah ritual yang sama tetap dilaksanakan? Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menyuguhkan pembacaan alternatif terhadap praktik penyembelihan binatang pada perayaan Idul Adha. Meminjam dekonstruksi Derrida, penulis menegaskan pluralitas makna yang termaktub di dalam satu teks. Jika pluralitas ini dimungkinkan, maka bentuk-bentuk kurban yang lain di luar penyembelihan binatang menjadi hal yang perlu dipikirkan.

Sesungguhnya, implikasi dari praktik Islam terhadap ritual penyembelihan tidaklah pengaliran darah dan menyenangkan Tuhan dengan mengorbankan nyawa yang lain, namun lebih kepada penghidmatan kepada Tuhan atas keberlangsungan pengorbanan individu seperti harta kepemilikan dan kepunyaan kepada sesama manusia.

Kata kunci: Animal Sacrifice (*qurban*), Idul Adha, Ibrahim,

A. Introduction

The practice of sacrifice was not uncommon before the advent of Islam. For instance, Human sacrifice has been found in many societies both ancient and modern (see Davies, 1984:211-24). Both on the mainland of Greece and in the Greek colonies human sacrifice were practised as a means towards expulsion of evil. It occupied prominent place in the ritual of the mother goddesses of ancient times. Among some communities in Indonesia, the practice of headhunting ritual was part of their past and is still observed symbolically these days (see George, 1996). Aside from who committed to such sacrifices, it can be said that there are some basic similarities among the types of victims and the forms of destruction used, as well as differences in the social and cosmic purposes ascribed to the ritual. Nevertheless, human sacrifice can be seen as a simple extension of the logic underlying other forms of offerings. Whether the purpose is to avert evil, placate gods, achieve communion, or establish the proper reciprocity of heaven and earth, the offering of something has been a common ritual mechanism for securing the well-being of the community and the larger cosmos.¹ Such offerings also serve to redefine a society's system of cosmological boundaries. This then specifies the locus of human sphere, the sphere of gods, the sphere of ancestral dead, the sphere of malevolent demons, and so forth, while at the same time confirming whether the crossing or transgression of the boundaries is possible.

The practice of sacrifice had also been part of Jewish and Gentile religions, and Christianity as well as Islamis tradition. The offering up slain animal for sacred purpose holds a prominent place in the Hebrew Bible and in the cultic context of ancient Israelite religion (Robbins, 1998). Leviticus, especially chapters one to through seven, details the laws of sacrifice. It makes distinctions between categories such as propitiary offerings like

¹ For an analysis of the significance of sacrifice in establishing patriarchal relationships, see Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generation Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

atonement for sins or purification ritual and dedicatory offerings such as gifts for the deity. In the practice of sin offering (*hatta'at*), for example, the rule states that the offering must be the property of the person making the sacrifice. The sacrifice lays his hand on the offering, thus identifying it with himself. This suggests that the sinner's life is forfeit to God, but by a gracious provision, he is permitted to substitute an animal victim in his or her place. Leviticus 17:11 explains that the substitution occurs exactly by the extraction of the animal's blood: "for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life that is in it".

As for Christianity, the New Testament brings the problem of sacrifice into association with the Christ event. It is put in the context of salvation history that the Passover commemorates, as when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "Christ was offered as our pascal lamb". In the Islamic tradition, on the other hand, the very idea of human sacrifice has been changed to an outward symbol of a Muslim's readiness to lay down his life, and to sacrifice all his interests and desires in the cause of Truth. The purpose of sacrifice is not fulfilled when a man submits himself completely to the Command of God. In this sense all the manifold rites, consecrations and purifications, offerings and sacred feasts, all the working of asceticism and morality are only the indirect expression of the inner experience of religion - the experience of trust, surrender, yearning and enthusiasm. Sacrifice, whether that of animals, wealth or desires, is the practical proof of man's devotion to his creator.

The feast of sacrifice in the Islamic tradition is observed in Idul Adha. It is an occasion to commemorate the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command. Hence in commemoration of such a great deed, each financially capable household is encouraged to slaughter a ram or other appropriate animal substitute. The feast of sacrifice also marks the culmination of hajj, the pilgrimage ritual, in Mecca. Thousands of animals are sacrificed on that Idul Adha day. It is not just in Mecca, however, that the sacrifice takes place, but throughout the Muslim world. The meat of slaughtered animals is supposed to be distributed immediately

and the rest disposed of. In order to deal with both the excess of meat and the health hazards, the Saudi Arabian government has recently enable the meat to be frozen and shipped to poorer Muslim nations and it has also expended great effort in dealing hygienically with the carcasses.

It is on the question of whether it is possible to develop another interpretation on the practice of the Muslim sacrifice that this essay seeks to explore. Does the story of Ibrahim provide only single meaning that entails sacrifice solely in the form of animal slain? What about in the context of Idul Adha of 2010 which coincided with some catastrophic events such as flood in Wasior, tsunami in Mentawai, and Merapi eruption in Java? I believe many who became victims and refugees of these disasters would value cash than to have *qurban* meat. In such a circumstance, can then the ruling on *qurban* be substituted or altered? This paper intends to read the story of sacrifice not only as a religious text as depicted in the Qur'an, but also as a cultural text. This is because no matter how divinely inspired the text may have been, it is an artifact of human culture. I, however, did not wish to recover the particular time and place of Ibrahim. The story of Ibrahim was transmitted orally and edited repeatedly for hundred years before it ever reached its canonical form. Thus it is indeed difficult to reconstruct his time and place. I do believe that his story does not merely reflect a particular culture and society. It also incorporates a vision of society. People continue to derive their identity, orient their lives, and interpret the meaning of life from the patterns first charted by the story. I understand that I can never recapture the living experience of the culture of the Holy Scripture compiler, but, I think, it is possible to investigate their visions of the world and what role plays by the Ibrahim's story in such visions. Hence, following the aforementioned assumption I would argue in this essay that another alternative reading of the *qurban*, aside from animal slaughter, should be allowed particularly in response to the relief for victims of disaster. Derridean reading of the Ibrahim story of sacrifice indeed will support my thesis.

B. Derrida's Deconstruction

Derrida was famous for deconstruction, the claim that texts subtly undermine their ostensible meanings. Texts (all discourse altogether, from a transient remark to the most pondered philosophy) are open to repeated interpretation. Thus following Derridean reading then a text would never produce a single meaning. Instead texts allow plurality of meanings.

The term deconstruction has been used to describe Derrida's method. The term has two mutually exclusive (and contradictory) meanings: to destroy or construct. Deconstruction does intuitively sound like a form of destruction, of taking apart, perhaps, of undoing some construction. Although the term deconstruction has often times been paralleled with destruction, it is, however, not synonymous with destruction. It is, in my opinion, much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis, which etymologically means to undo. Hence, if anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unambiguous domination of one mode of signifying over another. The purpose of deconstruction therefore is not to destroy but simply to show that within all texts there are conflicting forces to be found which demonstrate the instability of our system of language.

Many people have agreed that some deconstruction was necessary. The totalitarian projects of western metaphysics, the ethical, aesthetic, epistemological projects of post-enlightenment science, the imperialism of European countries as they carved out their empires throughout the colonised world, the great patriarchal domination over women – all of these structures and institutions, people agree, need to be taken down to their foundations in order to expose their contradictory logic. But now, the argument goes, we need some reconstruction. We need to put things together again in some new, more democratic order. However this consoling sense of reconstruction is anathema to any rigorous sense of deconstruction. Deconstruction actually names the impossibility of setting up “perfect” or “ideal” structures. That which cannot be presented for conception or perception takes its determination from things like the future and from the

radical alterity of the other (which in its permanent absence guarantees the particularity of all of us finite particulars). No law could be set up to take that into its consideration – that is the very condition of the law. Deconstruction does indicate a certain amount of what Derrida calls “desedimentation,” which would imply undoing the work of sedimentation, the consolidation that occurs with systems of thought. But this is not simply with the aim of destroying the systems or ensembles in question. Rather, deconstruction implies reconstituting them according to the conditions (previously hidden or made mysterious) of their institution. In giving an account of his use of the word *deconstruction* Derrida (1981) states that the undoing, decomposing, and desedimenting of structures, in a certain sense more historical than the structuralist movement it called into question, was not a negative operation. Rather than destroying it was also necessary to understand how an ‘ensemble’ was constituted and to reconstruct it to this end. Hence deconstruction names something rather more powerful than simply undoing. It names the conditions according to which it is possible for events to occur and for institutions to be constituted. So deconstruction is never the closing down of one institution in order to set up another in its place. Rather it is the persistent opening up of institutions to their own alterity, towards which they are hopefully forced to adapt. Deconstruction names the conditions upon which it is possible for things to change. If there is a strategy, or a method to deconstruction then it would involve opening boundaries up to an alterity – almost literally making a negative space – that welcomes the surprise of future events. It makes or allows things to happen.

As for the question meaning, Derrida believes that meaning can never be wholly closed off because it is purely an effect of language, produced by chains of free-floating signifiers with no secure point of reference. Hence, Derrida’s deconstruction intends to question the “hermeneutical or exegetical method which would seek out a finish signified beneath surface” (Derrida, 1981:63), and which falsely assume that meaning can be ultimately mastered. This Derrida’s deconstruction initially is an attempt to illuminate the historical and linguistic assumptions which underpin the formation and

cultural legitimacy of certain dominant Ideas. He securitizes the construction of these ideas by questioning their underlying legitimacy. One the social legitimacy is cast into doubt, then the idea begins to unravel or become deconstructed.

C. What is Sacrifice?

The concept of sacrifice as a distinct form of human-divine interaction and exchange has been a major topic in ritual studies. Earlier anthropologist such as Edward Taylor (1871) perceived sacrifice as a gift made to a deity as if he were a man, a tribute. William Robertson Smith in his *Lectures on the Religions of the Semites* (1890), inspired by the discovery of totemism, depicted sacrifice as a communal meal where gods are present. James G. Frazer understood sacrifice as driving out or exorcism of an evil. Three-quarters of a century later, Evans-Pritchard followed the same apotropaic term in describing sacrifice. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss made an important contribution by distinguishing sacrifice from other forms of ritual offerings through the principle of sanctification. Both believe that sacrifice mediates the arrival of or departure of the divine. According to Hubert and Mauss, “sacrifice is a procedure which consists in establishing a communication between the sacred and the profane worlds, by the intermediary of a victim, that is, a consecrated thing which is destroyed in the course of the ceremony” (1964:97). In every sacrifice an object passes from the common into the religious domain. This is how sacrifice is declared sacred. The subject who sacrifices communicates with the divine. Sacrifice modifies the condition of the person who performs it. Ultimately, sacrifice serves to balance the always possible disequilibrium between the sacred and the profane. Thus Hubert and Mauss drew on older theories of ritual in order to emphasize that within sacrifice both communion and expulsion of the sacred spirit are primordial.

The above discussion seems to suggest the stress on the communionlike nature of sacrifice which is clearest when the rites involve first the sacralization and then the killing of a living animal. The notion of

communion implies that at the critical moment in the rite there is a union of the human and divine world: the offerer, the recipient, and the offering itself are understood to become together in some way, however briefly. The purpose of this form of cosmic union is usually explained as a matter of renewing the universe and reordering the human-divine relations that sustain it. However, there are also other purposes of sacrifice that should be noted. For example, in the ritual killing of an animal as part of a religious practice, sacrifice not only serves a means of appeasing a god or changing the course of nature, but also provides a social or economic function where the edible portions of the animal were distributed among those attending the sacrifice for consumption. Seeing it from this many purpose of sacrifice it then can be assume that animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all cultures, including the Islamic tradition.

An animal sacrifice in Arabic is called *dzabiah* or *udhiyah* or *qurban* which means sacrifice as a ritual. In the Islamic context, an animal sacrifice referred to as *dzabiah* is offered only in Idul Adha. It should be executed during the period from after the *Ied* prayer on the Day of Nahr (Idul Adha) until the last day of Tashriq (the 13th day of *Zulhijjah* in the Islamic calendar). The sacrifice observed on this occasion is an Islamic prescription for the affluent to share their good fortune with the needy in the community. Thus Idul Adha is the occasion where affluent Muslims all over the world perform the example given by Prophet Ibrahim by sacrificing animal. The meat is then divided into three equal parts. One part is retained by the person who performs the sacrifice. The second is given to his relatives. The third part is distributed to the poor. According to the Islamic tradition, sacrifice is encouraged by the Qur'anic text that states "therefore to the Lord turn in Prayer and Sacrifice" (Q. 108:2). However, sacrifice has nothing to do with blood and gore as asserted by the following verse: "It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him" (Q. 22:37). The sacrifice is done to help the poor and in remembrance of Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail at God's command. The sacrificial animal may be a lamb, a sheep, a goat, a camel or a cow. The animal must be

healthy and conscious. Based on the above Qur'anic reference, as well as supports from the prophetic tradition, the hadith,² many scholars regards *dzabiha* or *qurban* as a confirmed sunnah, *sunnah mu'akkadah*, if not an obligatory one, *wajib*. Scholars such as Abu Hanifah and Imam al-Syafi'i agreed that sacrificing the animal and giving its meat in charity is better than giving its value in charity on the ground that the Prophet himself used to make the sacrifice. Yet the Muslims believe that Muhammad did not do anything but that which is best and most befitting.

D. Ibrahim and Ismail Story

As I have highlighted earlier, Idul Adha is the day when Muslims remember sacrifice. The sacrifice of a father and son in carrying out the command of God. The event where Ibrahim, *Khalilullah* (Friend of God)³ was tested by a command to sacrifice his son, Ismail. This event was enshrined in the following Qur'anic narrative:

“My Lord! Vouchsafe me of the righteous. So We gave him tidings of a gentle son. And when (his son) was old enough to walk with him, (Abraham) said: O my dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice thee. So look, what thinkest thou? He said: O my father! Do that which thou art commanded. Allah willing, thou shalt find me of the stead fast. Then, when they had both surrendered (to Allah), and he had flung him down upon his face, We called unto him: O Ibrahim! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision. Lo! thus do We reward the good. Lo! that verily was a clear test. Then We ransomed him with a tremendous victim. And We left for him among the later folk (the salutation): Peace be unto Abraham. Thus do We reward the good. Lo! he is one of our believing slaves. And We gave him tidings of the birth of Isaac, a Prophet of

² The supports from the prophetic tradition include the hadith that states "Whoever slaughtered his sacrifice before he prays, let him slaughter another one in its place, and whoever did not slaughter a sacrifice, let him do so in the name of Allah" (Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, no: 4818-21) and: "Whoever can afford to offer a sacrifice but does not do so, let him not approach our place or prayer" (Musnad Ahmad and Ibn Majah).

³ The term *khalilullah*, which literally means Friend of God, is an epithet that has parallel references in the Biblical tradition. These references include 2 Chronicle 20:7, Isaiah 41:8 and James 2:23.

the righteous. And We blessed him and Isaac. And of their seed are some who do good, and some who plainly wrong themselves” (Qur’an, 37:100-113).⁴

In this Qur’anic story, God had highlighted the severity of the test He made Ibrahim go through. It is the test that pushed the very limit of man’s mental, physical and emotional strength as well as his faith. In acknowledging Ibrahim’s sincerity in wanting to fulfill His Lord’s commandment, God accepted his offering by commanding Ibrahim to sacrifice a ram in place of Ismail. Due to his resoluteness and commitment towards upholding His Lord’s commandment, God, in the Islamic interpretation, had included Ibrahim among His Prophets known as “*Ulul ‘Azmi*”.⁵

Much in this telling of the narrative is similar to the Biblical account.⁶ For example, there are parallel stories of the test, the calling out of the last minute saying that he had fulfilled the test, the ransom by substitution of another victim, albeit it does not specify that it was a ram,⁷ and the blessing to Ibrahim and to Isaac and the mention of their seed. But much is different. Most notably, unlike the Biblical version, Ibrahim tells his son what is to take place, and the son responds in the way that he does in some of the Jewish commentary, for example in Josephus. There is no mention of the place, nor of the accoutrements of sacrifice such as the fire, the wood and the knife which are elaborated in the Biblical stories. The Qur’an explains the position of the son and the fact that Ibrahim flings him down on his face or

⁴ These Qur’anic quotations are taken from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall’s *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, and compared with Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s *The Holy Qur’an*.

⁵ Literally, *Ulul ‘azmi* means the chiefs, or people who have stout or strong hearts. The meaning in Islamic context is the five prophets who are accorded the highest reverence for their perseverance and unusually strong commitment to God in the face of great suffering. These five are Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad. For the Qur’anic reference of the term see Q. 46:35. Each of the aforementioned prophet has many stories told in the Quran.

⁶ For the Biblical story of the Abraham’s sacrifice see Genesis 22:1-19.

⁷ It should be noted that even though the Qur’an does not specify it is a ram, this is elaborated in both story and art. Unlike the Biblical account, however, the ram is depicted being brought by the angel *Jibril* (Gabriel). Consult Schapiro (1979) for the differences between Muslim and Jewish-Christian illustrations of the Abraham story.

in some versions his forehead. Yet this, so Firestone argues, is a position that deviates from the way an animal would be sacrificed (1990:119). The Qur'an also elucidates the seed of Ibrahim. However, the blessing is not that they will become a great nation, rather it is a statement that some seed will be good while other will not. Perhaps this is an allusion to the Parable of the Sower in Gospel of Matthew.⁸ It is clear from the Qur'anic story that Ibrahim is a model of the righteous man, one who totally surrenders to God. And so, too, is his son.

It is worth noting that the meaning of the story is not contested within the three monotheistic religious traditions. Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree that Ibrahim's great faith was proved by his obedience to God which was shown by his willingness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. However, there are conflicting stories about when the sacrifice story and practice incorporated into the *haji* ritual. Yet the Qur'an did not supply detailed background to the story. One, for instance, may ask which son is the intended victim – Ismail or Ishaq? Where did the sacrifice occur – in Syria, Jerusalem, or Mecca? And when did the sacrifice take place; was it before or after the building of the *Ka'bah*, the huge stone shrine in Mecca toward which Muslims pray, was it before or after Ismail's marriage, which would have made him more than a boy who was old enough to walk with Ibrahim, or was it occur before and after the institution of the pilgrimage? Indeed these are difficult questions to be addressed and may be of interest to scholars. Ordinary Muslims no doubt take whatever version is narrated to their community.

Most Muslims today assume that Ismail was the intended sacrifice, though he is rarely mentioned in the Qur'an. Yet the discussion on whether it was Ismail or Ishaq the intended victim was not completely escape the

⁸ Parable of the Sower is a parable of Jesus found in three Synoptic Gospels. In this story, a sower dropped seed on the path, on rocky ground, and among thorns, and the seed was lost; but when seed fell on good earth, it grew, yielding thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. For the detailed accounts of this parable see Mathew 13:1-23, cf. Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15.

attention of earlier Muslim scholars. Al-Maraghi notes that there is a disagreement in the scholarship about which of Ibrahim's two sons it was that he commanded to sacrifice. Some say it was Ishaq, while others say it was Ismail (1985, v.23:76-8). Al-Maraghi carries on to list scholars who have sided with one or the other. In addition to al-Maraghi's discussion, Firestone based on his research of the prophetic tradition says that when "all the traditions are collated we find a surprisingly close count. One hundred thirty authoritative statements consider Isaac to be the intended victim; one hundred thirty-three consider it to have been Ishmael" (1990:135).

I believe the difference of opinion has to do mainly with the source of a particular tradition. Even though all the stories were collected by medieval Muslim scholars, many of them obviously pre-dated the Muslim era. It is very probable that the stories that focus on Sarah and Ishaq are pre-Islamic, while those focused on Hagar and Ismail are Muslim (Crow, 1986). However, this does not mean that everywhere in the Muslim world Ismail has supplanted Ishaq in the popular imagination. Firestone, for instance, has noted that some Moroccans still believed it was Ishaq (1990:151). Ironically, the process of unification progresses as the diverse traditions become better known through the spread of literacy and education.

E. Reinterpreting the Story

There is no doubt that Ibrahim has become the exemplary model, the quintessential model of a man of faith, particularly for the three Abrahamic religions. Muhammad himself clearly drew upon this model to pattern some of Islamic ritual such as in the pilgrimage to Mecca and *qurban* rite. However, the implications of Ibrahim story and model are worked out in somewhat different ways in various Muslim communities (cf. Bowen, 1992). In Morocco, for instance, the myth of Ibrahim for Muslims in this country is humanity's archetypal interaction with God, an awesome act involving awesome players (Combs-Schilling, 1989:248). There an innovation has been introduced into the ritual. About three hundred years ago the monarch of the "Alawi dynasty began the practice of having the blood-descendant

king sacrifice a ram on behalf of the community of believers as a whole” (ibid:222). By means of this dramatic innovation, which for some is considered blasphemy, the “monarchs became the sacrificial link between God and nation, the means by which God could see the collectivity’s faith and grand his favor. Through the performance, the Moroccan monarchs inserted themselves into the single most powerful canonical ritual in Islam and into the mythic foundations upon which it rests” (ibid). When the king slit s the throat of the ram on behalf of the people, he becomes mediator between the people and, through Muhammad and Ibrahim, ultimately, God. Conversely, he becomes the vehicle that channels creative power to earth. He places himself in the line that begins with Ibrahim, goes through Muhammad, and then passes down to each head of household. The king then becomes both the symbolic representative of the community and its link to transcendence. In this way the performance of sacrifice serves to function as “the most powerful ritual support of the Moroccan monarchy” (ibid:223).

Combs-Schilling also illustrates that in Moroccan wedding ceremony, the bride has come to symbolize the ram sacrifices in lieu of the son – that is, an equivalence has been established between the son, the ram, and the bride. Even though the gender difference is notable, the hierarchical structure is maintained. As a man, even a king, must submit to God, and son to his father, so should a woman to her husband. In any case, the idea that the girl could be punished unto death for her transgression serves as a powerful sword held over her head. Through the spilling of the women’s blood at first intercourse, the man controls the powers of life and death; through intercourse he will produce children that will continue the “earthly community of Muslims through the regeneration of men’s patrilines on earth” (ibid:205). Procreation, Combs-Schilling claims, is for the glory of God. Before sacrificing, and at the moment of ejaculation during sexual intercourse, a man should call out the name of God, the *bismillah*. She argues that sacrifice by the knife is mimetic to sexual intercourse, with the male taking the role of the actor in each case. In turn, by modeling itself on

the actions that bring about life in this world, sacrifice becomes a symbolic pathway to eternal life.

Combs-Schilling has given an interesting account on the meaning of blood sacrifice in Moroccan Islam and its relation to the story of Ibrahim. Indeed some Muslims may have difficulty in accepting such Moroccan interpretation of sacrifice. Nevertheless, my point in presenting Combs-Schilling account is to highlight that there exist the tradition of reinterpreting the Ibrahim sacrifice to fit local discourse or certain purposes.

As my reading in this essay is an attempt to open or to produce rather than to protect, I therefore did not subscribe to the absolute authority of the text. Thus the story of Ibrahim should not produce a single meaning which is a fix prescription of animal sacrifice. To me, reading the story of Ibrahim should inspire an alternative interpretation which will benefit those who fall victim of several disasters in this country. With this attempt, however, I did not intend to reject the authority of the syari'a scholarship. Rather, following Derrida (1982:215), it is an effort to reinscribe text where then producing more meanings is possible. However, because a deconstructive reading does entail a critical gesture, I do admit that my reading does challenge the authority of the text. But my engagement with such a critical reading is only to provide a ground for a more applicable and effective way of doing sacrifice in a certain circumstance.

Within the context of Idul Adha of 2010 where its observation was at the same time of many people in Wasior, Mentawai and Yogyakarta became refugees, I believe it was not meat they were expecting. Had they had a choice between receiving meat and cash, I would argue that they will accept the latter. Receiving the *qurban* meat would not ease their difficulty, albeit it is quite important in informing the people that the festive season was there. To have cash indeed will be much more convenience than to receive raw meat. Hence the insistent on having *qurban* in the form of animal slaughter as prescribe by the shari'a ruling may not be suitable here. After all, I believe that syari'ah is predicated on the benefits of the individual and that of the community, and its laws are designed so as to protect these benefits

and facilitate improvement and perfection of the conditions of human life on earth. For this reason then the *qurban* can be presented in a different format. The theory of *Maqasid al-Syari'ah*, or the goals and objectives of Islamic law may be handy for supporting the course.⁹

The theory of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* highlights that the greatest of all the objectives of the Syari'ah is to facilitate benefits (*masalih*) and the means that secure them and that the realisation of benefit also included the prevention of evil. To comprehend such objective from every obligation of the syari'a, *taklif*, consideration into both the text and the underlying 'illah and rationale of the text is needed. Al-Syatibi (1994), the chief exponent of the *maqasid*, has spoken affirmatively of the need to observe and respect the explicit injunctions, but then he added that adherence to the obvious text should not be so rigid as to alienate the rationale and purpose of the text from its words and sentences. Rigidity of this kind, al-Syatibi added, was itself contrary to the objective (*maqsud*) of the Lawgiver, just as would be the case with regard to neglecting the clear text itself. When the text, whether a command or a prohibition, is read in conjunction with its objective and rationale, this is a firm approach, one which bears greater harmony with the intention of the Lawgiver. Al-Syatibi elaborated that the *maqasid* that are known from a comprehensive reading of the text are of two types, primary (*asliyyah*) and secondary (*tab'iyyah*). The former are the essential *maqasid* or *daruriyyat* which the *mukallaf* must observe and protect regardless of

⁹ The concept of *maqasid al-syari'ah* did not receive much attention in the early stages of the development of Islamic legal thought. The textualist tradition of the first three centuries did not take much interest in this concept and it was not until the time of al-Ghazali and then al-Syatibi that significant developments were made in the formulation of the theory of *maqasid*. In the early fourth century that the term '*maqasid*' was used in some of the juristic writings of Imam al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi and recurrent references to it appeared in the works of Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni who was probably the first to classify the *maqasid al-syari'ah* into the three categories of essential, complementary and desirable which has gained general acceptance ever since. Juwayni's ideas were then developed further by his student, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali who wrote at length on public interest (*maslahah*) and ratiocination (*ta'lil*) in his works, *Shifa' al-Ghalil* and *al-Mustasfa*. Al-Ghazali was generally critical of *maslahah* as a proof but validated it if it promoted the *maqasid* of the *syari'ah*.

personal predilections, whereas the supplementary *maqasid -hajiyyat-* are those which leave the *mukallaf* with some flexibility and choice. As for the category of *maqasid* themselves, the *Syari'ah* pursued five objectives, namely those of faith, life, intellect, lineage and property which were to be protected as a matter of absolute priority.

As highlighted at the outset, the obligations of the *Syari'ah (al-takalif)* were predicated on securing benefits for the people. This because God is Himself in no need of benefit nor is He in need of the obedience of His servants. He is above all this and cannot be harmed by the disobedience of transgressors, nor benefit from the obedience of the righteous. The *Syari'ah* is, in other words, concerned, from the beginning to the end, with the benefits of God's creatures. Seeing from this context then it can be said that there is a ground for altering the animal sacrifice in Idul Adha. If other forms sacrifice are much more applicable to support the faith, life, intellect, lineage and property of those who were fallen the victim of disasters in several parts of this country, why then rigidly follow the text prescription. After all the '*illah* (effective cause) of *qurban* is to celebrate the spirit of solidarity and sharing with those who are in need. In correspond to their need at the time of the disastrous events, it is definitely not the sacrificed meat. The '*illah* of the *qurban* therefore must be contextualized with the current circumstances of the people who will receive the *qurban* itself. If sacrifice has to be executed then it might be wise to have it in form of stuffs for humanitarian relief.

If Ibrahim is valued by the three monotheistic traditions as the figure who was willing to sacrifice his own son for the sake of obedience, so is the case with us. We are urged to sacrifice any valuable possession that we have for the purpose of the humanitarian support. This is at least what human beings can do the address the wrath of the nature. Our sacrifice then may be in the shape of food and water, cloth, scholarship, incentive to rebuild the life and housing, and many other types of support. After all, the purpose of sacrifice is not fulfilled when a man submits himself completely to the Command of God. In this sense all the manifold rites, consecrations and purifications, offerings and sacred feasts, all the working of asceticism and

morality are only the indirect expression of the inner experience of religion - the experience of trust, surrender, yearning and enthusiasm. Sacrifice, whether that of animals, wealth or desires, is the practical proof of man's devotion to his creator.

F. Postscriptum

The story of Ibrahim is not just a story about something that happened (or might have happened) long time ago. But it was powerful enough to change the course of human history. It is central to the nervous system of Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. Insofar as it has shaped the three religious traditions, their ethical values, and their views of social relations, it has shaped the realities we live in.

In the Islamic tradition, the story of Ibrahim is commemorated on every Idul Adha festive season. This yearly tradition is observed by way of sacrificing of animal to honor Ibrahim and Isma'il's great self sacrifice. It also must be perceived in relation with time and place circumstances under which the story is revealed and how people were trying to make a personal sacrifice by sharing their limited means of survival with the poorer members of their community. I have shown in this essay some interpretations that have been drawn from the story. This, as Derrida would argue, suggests that there should be a plurality of meanings in a text. If the plurality is allowed, then it is possible to have another form of sacrifice which is not necessarily involving blood and gore. After all, the underlying implication of Islam's attitude toward ritual slaughter is not that of blood atonement, or seeking favor with God through another's death, but rather, the act of thanking God for one's sustenance and the personal sacrifice of sharing one's possessions and valuable belonging with one's fellow humans.

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