

Making ‘Arab’ One’s Own Muslim Pilgrimage Experiences in Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Mobility has always been a central aspect for Islamic cultures in Indonesia. Arab, Persian and Indian traders who landed on the coasts of Java and Sumatra spread the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad throughout the archipelago. The increasingly popular pilgrimage tourism, a more recent form of mobility, brings Indonesia to the Arab world, generating new images about other regions and cultures. By analysing Javanese pilgrims’ retrospective narrations of pilgrimage experiences, I show how the perceptions of an Indonesian self and an Arab other manifest current characteristics of popular urban Muslim culture as well as enforce traditional Javanese values.

As a result of encounters with other Islamic cultures in Mecca, Javanese pilgrims’ self-confidence is reinforced and views on the Arab world are diversified. Furthermore, the *communitas* with fellow Javanese, Indonesian and South-east Asian Muslims that pilgrims experience during the ritual essentially contributes to their identification as distinctively Asian and Indonesian. By claiming the importance of their presence in Mecca and through the mutual cultural exchange between Indonesian and Arab cultures, Javanese pilgrims are making Arab their own.

Keywords

Pilgrimage, *hajj*, Indonesian Islam, self and other, popularization

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Introduction

After a long conversation about pilgrimage experiences, the Javanese *hajj* returnee I am talking to pensively adds to his account that he was wondering why Allah had sent his prophet to this unfertile, hot and harsh region in the Middle East. Was it because people there were in deeper need of the revelation's message than the Indonesians?

Wondering about others makes one aware of one's own peculiarities. By making the pilgrimage to Mecca, Indonesian Muslims obtain new knowledge about the Arab world and reassess existing perceptions of self and other. The pilgrims' travel experiences encourage them to rethink their identity as Indonesian, Javanese and Southeast Asian.

Every year about 200,000 Indonesian Muslims set off on the *hajj* (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2013: 2; Quinn 2008: 64; Tempo 2012; The Telegraph 2011). However, demand is much higher, and as the *hajj* can only be accomplished once a year, during the Islamic month *Dhu al-Hijjah*, and the number of pilgrims is strictly controlled by Saudi Arabia, there are long waiting lists. This is obviously one of the reasons why many Indonesians decide to do the *umroh* (the minor pilgrimage) instead or first, while waiting to join the *hajj* at a later date. Due to increasing wealth, lower air transportation costs and access to mass media, journeys from Indonesia to the holy Muslim sites in Mecca and Medina are becoming increasingly popular; in fact, the pilgrimage business is booming (Feener 2004: 204; Quinn 2008: 64; Syarifah 2009). Besides the economic factors that mark this new movement, cultural and religious aspects appear to be significant. The characteristics of pilgrimage tourism mirror recent trends in the changing Islamic lifestyle in Indonesia, which is said to be becoming more orthodox and pious. Michael Feener (2004: 204) states: "In recent decades, there has been an energetic revitalization movement in Islamic thought and practice in Indonesia that embraces a deepening of Islamic commitment and social betterment."

The combination of capitalist consumer culture and religiosity encapsulates an increased Islamic piety and a shift in moral ideals, whereby Islam is becoming increasingly important among the urban middle class, especially among young female academics (cf. Fealy 2008; Heryanto 2011; Jones 2012). Popular forms of expression such as music, films, literature and fashion shape the image of a 'modern' Islam.¹ This trend is a phenomenon

¹ 'Modern' Islam must not be confused with 'modernist' Islam. Modernism is a stream of thought in Islam that deals with how to react to European modernity and has its roots in the nineteenth century. While one modernist movement seeks to overcome the

of the *Reformasi*² period: "The desire to obtain and imitate Western pop culture and lifestyles, dominant in the Suharto era (1967–1998), has since made way for a renewed surge in the popularity of 'Islamic' goods" (Schlehe et al. 2013: 7) which frequently have an Arab touch, such as the imitation of Arabic writing in advertisements, the use of Arab expressions (e.g. the greeting *assalamu alaikum*) or new headscarf styles. Thus, these trends are occasionally labeled 'Arabisation'. This corresponds with the historical distinction between *Islam Jawa* (Javanese Islam) and *Islam Arab* (Arab Islam) which Indonesians commonly make to differentiate between a mystical Javanese version of Islam and more orthodox teachings in which many Javanese traditions are regarded as heresy. However, the current potentially Arabised forms of Muslim lifestyle are manifold. Obviously for some people, Arab culture is a rather stylish inspiration for fashion, whereas for others its relevance lies in the theological teachings from Arab countries (cf. Van Bruinessen 2013).

Religious as well as cultural and economic influence from the Arab world is historically rooted in Indonesia and naturally the Arab world has always been an important reference point. Given that journeys "situate social actors in liminal border zones that generate creative and complex reinterpretations of experience and negotiations of identity" (Badone / Roseman 2004: 17), the question arises as to how Muslim pilgrimage experiences shape the image of the Arab world in Central Java today and what they mean for Islamic culture, societal order and ideas of morality.

Human mobility, especially tourism and pilgrimage, is a meaningful human action that shapes *ideas* of places, borders and centres, and orientations towards these *ideas* disclose societal values and norms (Frey 2004: 89). In terms of pilgrimage, the relevant components in these negotiations are mobility, centres and encounters with other persons (Badone / Roseman 2004: 5). In connection with this concept of mobility, I refer to the assumption that one's identity is conceptualised by differentiating the self from the other (Baberowski 2008). This practice of 'othering' goes along with orientation towards other places and is related to broader, increasingly

'backwardness' of the Muslim world, others demand a return to the roots of Islam (Conermann 2008: 214–216). Thus, groups that have contrasting ideas (e.g. the *salafiya* and Turkish nationalists) are both referred to as Islamic modernists (Masud 2009: 237–260). Based on approaches involving multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000), Masud and others argue that own concepts of modernity can be found in the Muslim world. These modernities are not linked to premises such as secularism, rationalism and individualism, but combine modernity with religion (Masud et al. 2009: 5, 45, 191).

² *Reformasi* refers to the period of democratic reforms since 1999 after the end of the Suharto era.

diverse perceptions of the world that go beyond binary oppositions of Orient and Occident (Schlehe 2013). Jean and John L. Comaroff argue that “contemporary world-historical processes are disrupting received geographies of core and periphery” (Comaroff / Comaroff 2012: 7). In Indonesia it is no longer the West that is the ultimate reference point for social and moral order, but a variety of new imagined centres. Among others, the Arab world appears to be a relevant imagined centre, especially in the urban context of popular consumer culture (Schlehe et al. 2013: 7ff.; Schlehe 2013: 497ff.). That said, apart from current manifestations of urban Islamic lifestyles in Indonesia, the Arab world has, of course, historical and theological significance.

The Hijaz, along with the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, and Cairo, where Al-Azhar University is the leading institution of Islamic scholarship, are important reference points for Muslims around the world. For prayer, sleep and burial, Muslims position themselves towards the Ka’ba in Mecca, and “the journey [to Mecca] moves on the invisible lines which believers create” via this orientation (Metcalf 1990: 100). While the Middle East is regarded as the “centre of Islam”, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are regarded as the “Islamic periphery” (Woodward 2011: 64). Obligatory for every Muslim who is capable of making the journey, the pilgrimage to Mecca emphasises its centrality. Thus, any discussion about global flows and orientation towards centres must take into consideration that Mecca is perhaps the most important centre for Muslims. It is inherent to Islamic theology that the journey towards Mecca is regarded as source of new inspiration.

In Islam, travel has very positive connotations, as it is regarded as means of coming closer to God; travel and learning are part and parcel of this idea (Aziz 2001: 151–160; Timothy / Iverson 2006: 186–205). As such, the idea of learning something new is inherent in Islamic conceptions of travel, which becomes a source of religious imagination and shapes societal ideas of morality (Eickelman / Piscatori 1990). The *hajj* as a central ritual in Islam is particularly relevant in this realm. The historian Barbara Metcalf has shown how *hajj* accounts in South Asia tell us about people’s self-conceptions and “how they think of Islam, the places they go to, and the people they meet” (Metcalf 1990: 101).

The paper highlights historical and contemporary manifestations of ideas of what is meant by Arab in Indonesia. The current trends in pilgrimage tourism are described with a focus on popularisation and collectivity. Based on the narration of Javanese pilgrims’ experiences and my observations, I analyse the pilgrims’ perceptions of self and other and in conclusion discuss how the pilgrimage journey and the ideas of the Arab world become sources of identity negotiation.

The data that serves as the basis for the analysis was gathered in four months of fieldwork in Yogyakarta, Solo and Magelang, Central Java in January to March and October 2013.³ During that time I interviewed *hajj* and *umroh* returnees and observed travel preparations as well as the return from the *hajj*. Besides the pilgrims' retrospective accounts, the perspectives of their families as well as the role of travel agencies, travel guides and Muslim scholars are taken into consideration.⁴

Islamic centres and the Indonesian context

While in a global context Indonesia is regarded as Islamic periphery, the numerous centres of Islam within the country challenge the idea of the exclusive centrality of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. Since the bearers of Islam were not only of Arabic descent, but also Indian, Persian and Chinese, multi-centrality is a natural concept within Indonesian Islam (Woodward 1989: 54). The legend of the *wali songo* (the 'nine saints'), who are said to have spread the message of Allah throughout Java from the fifteenth century onwards, fosters the idea that the message was disseminated by a multi-ethnic mixture of Islamic mystics from various places. The *wali songo* were involved in the victory of the Sultanate of Demak over the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit in the early sixteenth century and played an important role in the Muslim kingdom of Mataram (1587–1755). Since the dynasties of today's royal families in Solo and Yogyakarta trace their lineage back to Mataram, the historical legends remain vivid and the *wali songo*'s graves throughout Java are the most popular destinations for local pilgrimage.

Regarding the orientation of the worldview of Islam in Java, the nine saints play an ambivalent role. One of the stories about Sunan Kalijaga, who was one of the nine saints, illustrates this ambivalence:

Myths concerning the construction of the Demak mosque mention Sunan Kalijaga as having fixed the *kiblat* or direction of prayer and by so doing oriented Java towards Mecca and Islam. It is said that after the mosque

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⁴ The qualitative research consisted of 24 half-structured interviews and numerous informal conversations.

was constructed it refused to orient itself towards Mecca and spun in circles. Sunan Kalijaga is said to have fixed the direction of the *kiblat* by holding one hand to the center pillar of the mosque and by reaching out with the other and touching the Kabah in Mecca. This myth bends Java towards Mecca and universalist Islam. While Sunan Kalijaga used the *wayang*⁵ and other elements of *Kebudayaan Jawa*⁶ as tools for *Dakwah*⁷, he is also said to have played a central role in the wars that led to the conquest and destruction of Majapahit, the last of the Hindu Javanese states (Woodward 2011: 180, italics in original).

Thus, on the one hand, the *wali songo* are regarded as the bearers of Islam, orienting Indonesia towards Mecca physically and spiritually, while on the other hand, they maintain Javanese culture. Although part of the Arab influence in Indonesia, they simultaneously established centres of Islam in Java. According to Laffan, the influence of the Javanese kings in colonial and pre-colonial times gave rise to local equivalents of the *hajj*. The reason for this was probably the remoteness of the Hijaz: to “assert the centrality of their own domains” the kings inverted the classical Islamic paradigm to do the *hajj* (Laffan 2003: 35). Besides the graves of the *wali songo*, Indonesian – mainly Javanese – ‘equivalents’ of Mecca are the royal cemetery in Imogiri, the famous mosque in Demak and Mount Bawakarang in Makassar (Laffan 2003: 35). According to Marc Woodward, Javanese Muslims maintain that “seven pilgrimages to Imogiri can be substituted for one to Mecca” (Woodward 1989: 195). It was the most famous Sultan of Mataram, Sultang Agung (1613–1645), who founded the cemetery and made it the Mecca of Java. A legend about Sultan Agung recounts that he prepared his own gravesite at Imogiri by taking a lump of earth from the prophet’s grave in Mecca and putting it on his future gravesite at Imogiri (Schlehe 1998: 56). The royal families of Solo and Yogyakarta emphasise their descent from Sultan Agung, and the cemetery in Imogiri remains an important pilgrimage site.

These legends and rituals are regarded as testimonies of so-called *Islam Jawa*, a rather syncretistic, mystical form of Islam. The theological teachings of *Islam Jawa* are strongly influenced by the northern Indian ideas of Sufism and are sometimes contrasted with *Islam Arab*.⁸ The distinction

⁵ Javanese shadow play.

⁶ Javanese culture.

⁷ Proselytisation.

⁸ Islam was brought to Indonesia mainly by traders who came from, among other places, the southern Indian region of Kerala and practised Islam in the Arab tradition. This version of Islam was established in the coastal regions of Indonesia (called *pasiran*) in the fourteenth century. The interior of Indonesia was influenced by an Indo-Persian type of Islam from

between *Islam Jawa* and *Islam Arab* is an emic one: in this case Arab⁹ is not a regional reference, but a stream of Islam in Indonesia that was influenced by Muslims from various places.

Moreover, the term Arab was coined by the Dutch, who called the Hadrami (Yemeni) communities that settled in Java Arabs. They "asserted their Arabness, and identified with a world beyond their immediate surroundings" (Laffan 2003: 3). Thus, the idea of Arab is multilayered and associated with the various Islamic influences in the archipelago. Few Indonesians had travelled to Arabia because until the end of the twentieth century only elites could afford to do the *hajj* (Laffan 2003: 35; Putuhena 2007: 267).

Nowadays the *hajj* as well as *umroh* have become mass events. The literature on *hajj*, which focuses mainly on its management, logistic and legal questions (Astori 2006, Idmah 2012) and health issues (e.g. Gaffar et al. 2013), mirrors this. While academic interest in the cultural impacts of today's pilgrimage tourism is just emerging in Indonesia (cf. Kusuma 2014), literary travel accounts have a long tradition in the country. The most famous is Danarto's novel *Orang Jawa Naik Haji* (published in English as *A Javanese pilgrim in Mecca*), which portrays the Javanese pilgrimage experiences in humorous self-mockery (Danarto 1984, 1989). More recent travel accounts are posted on blogs and social media platforms on the internet. Apart from these personal accounts, travel guides are a growing genre. Guidebooks like *Catatan Perjalanan Haji Seorang Muslimah (Notes of a Muslimah's Hajj Journey)* provide practical information, in this case especially for women. The advice covers emotional, hygienic, spiritual and organisational matters (Meutia 2009). Almost every travel agency publishes its own travel guides and prayer handbooks.

Besides pilgrims, most travellers to the Arab world are students and labourers. Their travel experiences are rather different. While migrant workers and students live in Arab countries for several years, pilgrims go for

Deccan, northern India, in the sixteenth century (Woodward 1989: 54ff.). Modernist Islam arrived in Indonesia at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ricklefs 2008: 120). There has been an ongoing debate between the more orthodox, modernist tradition of Islam, sometimes referred to as *Islam Arab*, and the mystic Indo-Persian tradition of Islam, also known as *Islam Jawa* (ibid.: 121). Yet, the two big Islamic organisations in Indonesia (*Nahdatul Ulama*, which is associated with *Islam Jawa* and *Muhammadiyah*, associated with modernist Islam) both belong to the *shafi'i* school of law. Muslim scholars in the Middle East, in contrast, belong mainly to the *hanbali* or *hanafi* schools of law or *wahabi* streams.

⁹ 'Arab' is an expression, which Indonesians use as an attribute (Arab/Arabic) and as a noun (Arabia). In order to grasp the complex meanings of Indonesians' references to the Arab world and Arabness, in the following I use this emic term in the way I observed during my research.

just a few weeks in a guided group and in the context of a special ritual. Thus, the nature of pilgrimage is often compared with tourism. Religion motivates people to travel to holy sites that are at the same time tourist attractions (Henderson 2011: 542). Whereas the eurocentric view of pilgrimage is a serious and meaningful form of travel, tourism carries the connotation of fun, hedonism and commercialisation. Though, as Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman point out, an analytical distinction between the sacred and the profane is of little help in explaining current forms of travel, which are a mixture of pilgrimage and tourism (Badone / Roseman 2004: 2). For example, the journeys to Ground Zero or a Star Trek convention may be as meaningful for the participants as the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela or Lourdes (ibid.: 17). According to Edith and Victor Turner, “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist” (Turner / Turner 1973: 20). In the following I use the term ‘pilgrimage tourism’ to denote the combination of spiritual and worldly characteristics of the journey. It is the mixture of spiritual fruition, social relevance, economic ability, fun and refreshment as well as curiosity in other places that draws people to Mecca.

Pilgrimage tourism in Yogyakarta

In the city of Yogyakarta modern air-conditioned offices of travel agencies and fancy advertisements inform customers about various travel options to Mecca and other destinations in the Middle East. Proudly, travel agents describe how well their businesses are doing and that the number of customers keeps increasing. Besides better economic conditions, a new type of savings system is available which is said to have helped boost the pilgrimage business. This savings system for ONH (*ongkos perjalanan haji* = travel expenses for the *haji*) was established in 2009 and allows Indonesians to register for the *haji* before they have enough savings to pay for the trip. Bank employees and travel agents report that since 2009 business has boomed, and waiting lists to join the *haji* have grown extremely long; for instance, in central Java *haji* candidates have to wait between 10 and 15 years from registration to departure. This long waiting period indicates that there are more people interested in participating in the *haji* than the quota for Indonesia allocates.¹⁰ In order to meet the growing demand, travel agencies

¹⁰ In 1978 the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) agreed to a limit on pilgrims doing the *haji* of one per thousand Muslim residents each year. This is equal to about 211,000 for all of Indonesia. In 2013 the quota was cut by 20 per cent due to construction works in Mecca (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2013: 2).

offer the small pilgrimage to Mecca (*umroh*) along with a package of tours to other places in the Middle East. Whereas the *haji*, as one of the five pillars of Islam, is a holy obligation for Muslims who can afford to make the journey (Qur'an: Sura 3, 97), the *umroh* is a voluntary addition.¹¹ While certain rituals of the *haji* can only be undertaken between the 8th and 12th of the holy month of *Dhu al-Hijjah*, the *umroh* can be done at any time of the year and is not subject to a quota. Travel agencies offer ten-day *umroh* tours which include preparatory courses, spiritual guidance, equipment (e.g. uniform clothing, suitcases and ID badges), flights, accommodation and meals. At the time of my inquiry the offers for ten-day *umroh* tours ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 US dollars per person. Given an annual per-capita income in Indonesia of 3,475 US dollars (Worldbank 2014), this is an expensive undertaking for most people. Yet, a rising middle class can afford this and even more expensive tour packages known as 'umroh-plus' journeys that include side trips to other destinations such as Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Palestine, Sri Lanka or Brunei. The aim is to "explore the Islamic culture in other places". A brand new trend is the 'umroh-plus Europe' tours. The commercialisation of the pilgrimage is a concern for many people, as the recently published volume with the provocative title *Ketika Makkah menjadi seperti Las Vegas* (When Mecca becomes like Las Vegas) (Kusuma 2014) reveals. Many interviewees stated that Mecca equals 'Western' metropolises, especially because of the Abraj Al Bait Towers. One of these towers, the Mecca Royal Clock Tower Hotel, is the third-highest skyscraper in the world and equals London's Big Ben. Many people regard this as megalomania and criticise the presence of foreign investors, international chains and commerce in the immediate surroundings of the holy mosque, Masjid al-Haram.

***Umroh* and the popularisation of Indonesian Islam**

Observations and interviews suggest that the *umroh* (minor pilgrimage) is indeed a popularised, commercialised form of pilgrimage tourism and to a

¹¹ The *haji* is connected to the feast of sacrifice, commemorating Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Important rituals during the *haji* are "the stoning of three pillars where Ibrahim (Abraham) is said to have been tempted by the devil not to sacrifice his son, and a visit to the plain of Arafat, where the pilgrims stand in repentance before the spot where the Prophet Muhammad is said to have preached his farewell message of peace and harmony to all people" (Waines 2003: 92). The *haji* usually includes the *umroh*, a ritual where pilgrims run between the hills Safa and Marwa in emulation of Hajar's (Ibrahim's wife) desperate search for water for her son (ibid.: 92).

fair degree a fun activity. Modern mass media document the *umroh* of celebrities and sometime accompany them on the journey – capturing brief footage along the way to be aired on TV's popular gossip variety shows. Moreover *umroh* is often the first prize in competitions, drawings and lotteries.

Travel agents explain that the *umroh* is mainly undertaken by members of the urban middle class. 'Umroh-plus' especially has become an attractive new travel alternative, as upper middle-class customers are bored of going to Malaysia or Singapore; instead they want to go shopping in Dubai. In conclusion, they state that even though the main aim is *ziarah* (pilgrimage) and prayer, the journey also involves a certain amount of tourism. It is mainly critics of the pilgrimage business who differentiate between hedonist, commercial tourism and 'pure', spiritual pilgrimage. Islamic scholars and *haji* pilgrims criticise the fact that *umroh* travellers mainly go for commercial reasons and denounce the *umroh* as *jalan jalan* (making a trip). Asking travellers about their activities during their stay in Saudi Arabia, it was evident that shopping is a significant part of the trip. One *ustad* (Islamic expert/scholar/teacher) joked: "If I lose a group member I will not look for him in the mosque, but in the mall."¹²

Indonesian pilgrims were already known for their shopping habits. Some people claim that banks are luring Muslims by offering them credit for the *haji*, which – according to critics – contradicts the Islamic obligation to undertake the trip only if one is financially able to do so and raises questions about the prohibition on interest (*riba*).¹³ However, what may be denounced as commercial hedonist activity by orthodox religious leaders is obviously a crucial part of pilgrimage for many *umroh* travellers. Interviewees who had made the *umroh* themselves emphasised the spiritual significance of the journey and did not see a contradiction between this and hedonist activities. On a personal level, the *umroh* has various meanings. Obviously, it identifies travellers as educated, (economically) successful, cosmopolitan, pious Muslims. Especially for urban middle-class women *umroh* appears to be a meaningful activity. In a preparatory course for *umroh* I sat with a group of middle-class women who were all widowed and had decided to do the *umroh* together. For them, doing the *umroh* was part of their increased piety and a way of coping with the loss of their husbands. That the trip to the 'holy land'

¹² Original in Indonesian: "Kalau saya kehilangan jema'ah saya tidak akan mencari masjid, saya cari di pusat perbelanjaan." Interview with *umroh* guide, 12 March 2013, translation ML.

¹³ Savings and credit systems are a delicate topic in Islam, since Islamic law forbids the payment of interest (Arabic: *riba*). For further explanations on *riba* see Abdullah 1996; Siddiqi 2005.

included some shopping was regarded as a natural component of the search for inner peace and self-confidence in solidarity with other widows.

This confirms the argument that in many cases pilgrimage is inseparable from the entertainment and commercialisation associated with tourism, as outlined above (Badone / Roseman 2004: 4). For many Indonesian Muslims fun, fashion and entertainment on the one hand and piety on the other are not contradictory. The *umroh* trend is characterised by economic and popular features of Indonesian Islam. Commerce, pop culture and the self-perception as cosmopolitan travellers go hand in hand with increasing piety. Returning to the introductory argument that these popular features of a modern Indonesian Islam have an Arab element, I argue that this alleged Arabness is merely a statement of being cosmopolitan rather than being Arab. Arab style is a medium to represent economic success, access to information about religion and other cultures and travel experiences. Incidentally, this kind of Arab style is very Indonesianised.

One of my interlocutors, a fashionable young Muslim woman who owned a headscarf shop, explained that they were adopting ideas from the Arab World and adjusting them to Indonesian tastes. She stated: "While Arab Islam is black and white, Indonesian Islam is colourful."¹⁴

This localisation of supposedly Arab style is a mixture of what Indonesians imagine to be Arab and Indonesian – it's colourful, loud, 'in' and commercial.

In conclusion, *umroh* pilgrimage is part of a changing Islamic culture in Indonesia and can be seen in correlation with recent trends in Islamic lifestyle. It is especially important for the identity enrichment of the urban middle class, particularly for women: it is rather individualistic, commercialised and fashionable. Moreover, it is a sign of social status and reveals that others are excluded from this cosmopolitan enactment. Nevertheless, the popular features of Islamic lifestyle do not mean that the religion is commoditised, as the example of the widowed female pilgrims illustrates. Moreover, the whole pilgrimage business provokes controversial discussions concerning Islamic law, such as the above-mentioned discussion about *riba*.

Collective *hajj* experiences

Compared to the *umroh*, the *hajj* seems to be a much more collective experience and has long-lasting effects on the social status and responsibility

¹⁴ Original in Indonesian: "Kalau Islam Arab, dia kan hitam putih, sementara Islam Indonesia warna warni", interview with *umroh* returnee, 17 January 2013, translation ML.

of the *hajji* or *hajja* (the respective titles of male or female *hajj* pilgrims) (Syarifah 2009: 66). Rather than representing the modern, cosmopolitan middle-class Muslim culture, it enforces Javanese traditions and solidarity within a Javanese, Indonesian and Southeast Asian Muslim community.

The interviewed *hajj* returnees recount and show that they were – and still are – spiritually touched by the journey. They recount how overwhelming it feels to actually see the Ka’ba, to circumambulate the place that is their lifelong spiritual goal, to be in places where the prophet himself was. Many people say that seeing the Ka’ba and thinking of what they felt in Mecca made them cry.

Apart from the sensation of feeling extremely close to Allah, it was a special feeling to be united with Muslims from all over the world, and that while on *hajj* cultural and confessional differences seemed to be unimportant. One *hajj* returnee recounted:

The differences vanished, zero...zero. Null, there were no differences at all. Even towards Shi’a people, those from Iran sometimes for example ya, the groups from Iran. [...] The differences disappeared, different characteristics and even the principles didn’t matter, even principles like Shi’a, they vanished. So, there, we’re brothers and sisters. There are no differences at all.¹⁵

When the pilgrims did the first circumambulation (*tasawuf*) of the Ka’ba, shouting the ritual phrases (*talbija*) “*Labbaika-llahumma labbaik*” (“Here I am Allah, here I am”), it was an especially overwhelming moment. Thus, it is the experience of collectivity, the feeling of global Muslim solidarity, which fascinates the pilgrims and has an impact on the self-confidence of Indonesian Islam – even though this might not have been anticipated by the pilgrims beforehand.

We can speak of the experience of *communitas* in the Turnerian sense here (Turner 1967, 2005).¹⁶ Equality is a crucial part of the conceptualisation of the *hajj*:

¹⁵ Original in Indonesian: “Perbedaannya hilang, zero... zero. Nol nggak ada perbedaan sama sekali. Bahkan kepada orang Syiah yang itu kadang-kadang Iran misalnya ya, jamaah dari Iran. [...] Hilang perbedaan-perbedaan yang sifatnya itu tidak prinsip bahkan sampai yang prinsip kayak Syiah itu hilang. Jadi disitu adanya saudara. Jadi nggak ada perbedaan, sama sekali nggak ada.” Interview with *hajj* returnee, 24 February 2013, translation ML.

¹⁶ Victor Turner (1967) extended Arnold van Gennep’s theory of three stages during *rites de passage* (Van Gennep 1909). According to Turner, there is a phase of liminality during the ritual. In the state of liminality the hierarchies and structures that usually define daily life are blurred, and the participants in the ritual experience a communion of equals, which Turner terms *communitas* (Turner 2005: 96).

The pilgrim enters the sanctuary of the Ka'ba in Mecca in a state of ritual purity (*ihram*) clad in two plain white pieces of cloth, indicating the equality of all believers before Allah. The unity and universality of the community is reflected in the pilgrims' gathering together from every corner of the globe (Waines 2003: 92).

After the phase of liminality and *communitas*, the returnees hold a new social status and return to life's structure (Turner 2005: 96ff.). In Indonesia this new status is indicated by the title *hajji* for a male participant, and *hajja* for a female one. The *hajji* and *hajja* I met, recounted how the *hajj* had changed their lives; they saw themselves as being responsible for becoming a more enlightened person. Coming home is a crucial part of the *hajj*. As Nancy Frey argues, the pilgrimage experience continues to influence pilgrims' daily lives after their return home (Frey 2004: 90).

Especially in rural areas, *hajji* – more than *hajja* – are expected to share their newly acquired spirituality and sometimes teach the Qur'an at evening gatherings. These new responsibilities are not limited to the religious or spiritual realm, though. Families and friends of *hajj* returnees explained that *hajji* would usually be seated in the front at public gatherings. Moreover, people who were capable of undertaking the *hajj* are believed to be wealthy and thus expected to share their material wealth. This can vary from being expected to pay more for a bus ride to arranging festivities and gatherings. Some *hajj* returnees change their name after the *hajj* and wear special accessories, such as a white *peci*¹⁷, which marks their status. The travel experience and self-perception are important for the enactment of the new role:

Contemporary Indonesian pilgrims, each with his or her own perspective, return from *hajj* to their local mosques and neighborhoods with an enriched sense of their participation in the worldwide Muslim community as well as of their own identity as Indonesian Muslims (Feener 2004: 205).

While this phenomenon is a reproduction and reinforcement of Javanese traditions, the experience of *communitas* during the *hajj* blurs existing ideas of identity and belonging. Current forms of pilgrimage in Indonesia strengthen a feeling of equality and, thus, the experience of *communitas*. It seems that in Indonesia the whole management of the trip makes it a collective experience. *Hajjis* proudly recount how easy it was to recognise other Indonesians in Mecca because of their uniform clothing – Indonesian travellers wear the same traditional batik-style clothing, white *ihrom* and the same

¹⁷ The *peci* is a cap worn by men; it is usually black and similar to a Turkish *fez* (Van Dijk 2002: 58; 61). It is regarded as symbol of Muslim identity (Van Wichelen 2007: 61) as well as national identity (Van Dijk 2002: 64). The first president of Indonesia (Sukarno) propagated the use of the fez-shaped black cap, which has become a national symbol (Van Dijk 2002: 63).

leisure clothes, which make them visible as the biggest group of pilgrims. This dominant presence obviously fosters the self-confidence of Indonesian pilgrims. Furthermore, apart from experiencing *communitas* with fellow Javanese/Indonesian pilgrims, there seems to be a sense of Southeast Asian *communitas* as well as global Muslim *communitas*. This is particularly striking, since the identification as Southeast Asian is a recent development (Schlehe 2013: 497).¹⁸

However, in their retrospective narratives the pilgrims' distinguish between different qualities in their identification with fellow pilgrims. The *communitas* with fellow Javanese, Indonesians or Southeast Asians appeared to be more important to the pilgrims than the global Muslim *communitas*. It is also this experience that makes the pilgrims more knowledgeable. As Michael Francis Laffan states in his historical analysis of the *hajj*, "Pilgrims return to their societies with a fresh view of the world [...] the act of travel itself is of crucial importance in constructing one's homeward vision" (Laffan 2003: 33). According to Laffan, it is the awareness of cultural differences that makes the *hajj* an ambivalent experience "in the sense that it fostered seemingly contradictory ideas of both local and Islamic identities – indeed two different levels of what Victor Turner called *communitas*" (Laffan 2003: 33, italics in original). Encounters *with* and perceptions *of* others obviously evoke different feelings of *communitas*, alignment and solidarity.

The Arab 'other' and the Indonesian 'self' in retrospective travel accounts

While many *hajj* or *umroh* returnees started conversations by romanticising about the unity with Muslims from all over the world, my inquiry into the differences between the pilgrims at Mecca evoked long narrations about how different the Javanese pilgrims felt from other Muslims they encountered. When I asked "What are Muslims from other countries like?", I almost always received the answer "They are good" and that during the *hajj* everything is good. If I admired the unity of fellow believers and said, "So there were few differences?", this was strictly denied. "Of course there were differences!" It seems that after the ritual, participants in the ritual fall back into the structure of differentiation between social statuses and different

¹⁸ Schlehe shows that there is little interest in the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and only little identification with Asia (Schlehe 2013: 497; 512). Morality and values are where the identification as Asian becomes significant (ibid.: 512).

groups, just as Victor Turner posited. This differentiation appeared to become more concrete through travel experiences.

The first statements about the Arab culture were rather ambivalent. On the one hand, pilgrims were impressed by the economic wealth and technological progress of Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, they were shocked by the strict separation between men and women and the selfishness and arrogance of a society that is extremely wealthy. Many interviewees recounted that traffic in Mecca was worse than traffic in Jakarta and that there were many accidents. However, nobody cared about a scratch on a car because everybody had enough money anyway and did not worry about other people. The Saudis did not even have to work hard for their wealth; it seemed as if many of them were not working at all, as the work was done by migrant workers from abroad.

In preparatory courses for the *umroh* I observed how pilgrims were informed about the culture and customs of the Arab people (*adat istiadat bangsa Arab*). The trainer explained that people in Saudi Arabia would speak in a harsh (*keras*) voice most of the time and that this was – unlike in Indonesia – not necessarily a sign of anger, but just the normal way of talking. There was less emphasis on politeness and everybody just talked as he wished. Arabs were accustomed to using the left hand to pass things to another person and they would often touch the head of others – traits that are both uncommon in Indonesia. Women were clothed in black and the men in white. The Arabs would stop all activities when they heard the call to prayer and immediately proceed to the mosque. This introduction to Arab culture as presented in the preparatory course was most likely the basis for some of the answers I received to my questions. A very common statement was that the Arabs are *keras* (harsh/hard/violent). My interview partners emphasised how polite and soft the Javanese culture was and that they were not used to the harsher culture in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the pilgrims pointed out that Indonesians were, unlike Arabs, very good at bargaining. In contrast, the Arabs did not know how to bargain at all. When an Arab trader named a price there was little chance of getting the item for less, and sometimes the trader even chased hagglers away from his stand. This would never happen in Indonesia, where the customer is king. Many interviewees criticised that Arabs felt superior in a racist way, stating for instance:

What is called *Ashobiah* is important for the Arabs. It means the blood bonds, the genetic element. To be Arab or non-Arab, that's genetic. As an example of *Ashobiah*: an Indonesian wins a competition in Qur'an Reading or a competition in Qur'an interpretation. However, Indonesians are not allowed to become an imam in the sacred mosque (Masjid al-

Haram), the imam has to be an Arab. However, in a competition it's always the Indonesians who win, the champions are always from here.¹⁹

The diplomatic and hesitant statements about differences between the Indonesian and Arab cultures became much more critical when the conversation touched on global political issues and women's rights in Saudi Arabia, particularly in regards to the situation of Indonesian female migrant workers. Reports about the ill-treatment of domestic workers and human rights violations evoked critical views of Saudi Arabian society. Female pilgrims recounted that women could never go anywhere alone, but always had to be accompanied by other females or, preferably, by men. Arab women were not as independent as Indonesian women and Arab men were interested in polygamy. One of the youngest pilgrims I talked to, an unmarried woman, recounted that she was asked several times in Indonesian if she wanted to become a 'second wife'. "I thought, 'Are you crazy?'" was her laughing comment about these incidents.

Besides this, Saudi Arabia was criticised for its cooperation with the United States of America and for its role in the Arab League. Countries such as Palestine and Turkey were, in contrast, praised for their role in world affairs and – in Turkey's case – as an example of a well-functioning democracy in a Muslim country.

These accounts show that the view of Saudi Arabia and the Arab world is fairly critical and differentiated. In general, Javanese pilgrims differentiate between the holy land (*tanah suci*), their overwhelming spiritual experiences during the *hajj* and the way of life and politics in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. While the statements about 'the Arabs' were rather ambivalent, self-perception was dominated by pride, self-confidence and feelings of moral superiority. Indignant about the violence and selfishness he had observed, one of my informants stated that "Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country, but there aren't Muslims living there". Furthermore, he explained:

The Arabs are harsher. It's not me who is saying that the Arabs are crazy like that, it's the holy books. The holy books say that *al-Arabium*, the Arabs, are people that really like to argue and are hypocrites. It's the holy books that state that. That's why all the prophets were sent there, because

¹⁹ Original in Indonesian: "Yang penting bagi orang Arab, namanya 'Ashobiah', artinya ikatan darah, jadi genetik. Jadi 'Arab', 'non-Arab' itu genetik. Contoh ni betapa Ashobiahnya: Kalau lomba membaca Al Qur'an, lomba mentafsirkan Al Qur'an, juaranya orang Indonesia, tetapi orang Indonesia tidak boleh menjadi imam di Masjid-il-Haram, harus orang Arab, padahal kalau dilombakan Indonesia menang, juaranya orang sini terus." Interview with *hajj* returnee, 24 February 2013, translation ML.

they need that there. Here we do not need a prophet, you know. Because we are just good.²⁰

This self-perception of being morally superior confirms the observation that Judith Schlehe made with regard to images of the West in Indonesia: "Comparing themselves to the West or the outside world, many Indonesians, (...) display feelings of inferiority and self-criticism in social, political and economic respects – but feelings of superiority in the moral, religious and spiritual domain." (Schlehe 2013: 512). Self-confident pilgrims argued that even the Arabs value Indonesians because of their softness and politeness, in contrast to people from Africa, and that they would start to accept the Indonesian way of practising Islam. In earlier times there might have been a sense of inferiority as regards the Arab way of Islamic prayer and theological teachings. However, this has changed; some *hajj* travellers and their guides explain that it is legitimate to stick to the rules and customs of Javanese Islam and the *shafi'i* school of Islamic law, and they deemed it important to represent this in the holy land. The *wahabi* and *salafi* teachings from the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East do not accord with Indonesian culture. There was solidarity with fellow Javanese, Indonesian and Southeast Asian pilgrims, though the identification as Indonesian turned out to be the predominant label.

Identification with other Asians mainly concerned issues of hygiene, politeness, clothing style, language and food and Islamic school of thought. Yet, identification with other Asians was not as strong as the identification with fellow Indonesians and Javanese. Even though Javanese identity seemed to be important for my informants, they mainly referred to the difference between Arab and Indonesia (not between Arab and Java).

As pointed out above, more overwhelming than the global Muslim *communitas* was the fascination of meeting so many fellow Indonesians. As the country with the biggest Muslim population, Indonesia has the highest quota for visiting Mecca (Tempo 2012), a fact backed up by being told continually that Indonesians were the overwhelming majority in the city. Apart from the pilgrims there were many Indonesian migrants working at the pilgrimage sites, and (illegal) traders from Madura and Java were selling Indonesian street food. The availability of Indonesian food and other Indo-

²⁰ Original in Indonesian: "Arab itu lebih keras. Yang bilang orang Arab gila itu bukan saya, tapi kitab suci. Jadi kitab suci itu bilang kalau 'Al-arabiun', orang Arab itu, orang yang benar-benar suka menentang dan munafik, itu yang bilang gitu kitab suci lho. Soalnya nabi-nabi kan diturunkan di sana karena mereka membutuhkan itu, kalau di sini nggak butuh nabi kok. Karena baik-baik." Interview with *hajj* returnee, 01 March 2013, translation ML.

nesian products filled the travellers with pride. The owner of the headscarf shop, mentioned above, remarked that Indonesian headscarf fashion was admired by Arab Muslims and that she was thinking about exporting some of her products. The impact of Indonesians in Saudi Arabia was widely seen to be increasing, as many Arabs were learning Indonesian and often addressed pilgrims with Indonesian greetings.

Yet, even though Javanese pilgrims' self-confidence was strengthened through the journey, many *hajji* and *hajja* recounted that they had abandoned Javanese rituals after having performed the *hajj* and were trying to lead a more pious Islamic way of life. This includes their dress (headscarf style), use of calendars (referring more to the Islamic calendar than the Javanese one) and abandoning the custom of praying at the graves of important personalities and religious figures. At the same time, others become fonder of these distinctively Javanese practices. George Quinn observes that the pilgrimage to the tombs of local saints in Java and Madura is sometimes regarded as part of the totality of the *hajj* experience. According to the *shafi'i* school of law, visiting the graves of saints is recommended and it is often argued that the prophet himself advised his followers to do so (ibid.: 64ff.). According to Quinn, "the steady rise in the number of pilgrims undertaking the *hajj* to the Holy Land seems to be having a flow-on effect into local pilgrimage" (Quinn 2008: 67). Yet, it seems to be mainly people who cannot afford to do the *umroh* or *hajj* who make local pilgrimage.

So, opinions about the legitimacy of these practices appear to be in flux. Interview partners who had not done the *hajj* were fairly critical of the current boom. These individuals positioned themselves as faithful adherents of *Islam Jawa* and regarded current pilgrimage trends as a rise of *Islam Arab*. When I visited Imogiri (the royal cemetery of Central Java) the *juru kunci* (caretaker) of the cemetery spoke very highly of Mecca, yet he smiled and argued that while not all important Javanese politicians had done the pilgrimage to Mecca, none of them had missed the visit to Imogiri, which was "a part of Mecca in Java", in keeping the legend about Sultan Agung mentioned above. Another interview partner, who is the son of a traditional healer, was of the opinion that none of the *wali songo* or any important Javanese king had done the *hajj* to Mecca, and that there were other sites in Java that are a substitute for the *hajj* to Mecca, thus implying that Javanese Muslims were not required to go to Saudi Arabia for that ritual. In the past, Javanese Muslims were disinterested about going there or fulfilled their duty in meditation.

Therefore, while for some people the pilgrimage to Mecca is associated with spurning Javanese traditions, in other settings these traditions seem to be reinforced in spite of (or maybe even because of) the current *hajj/umroh*

trend. Moreover, the current forms of 'Islamisation' do not seem to be 'Arabisation'. There is a high awareness of 'Javanese-ness', 'Indonesianness' and 'Asianness' among pilgrims in Central Java, and the abandonment of allegedly Javanese traditions does not necessarily mean the adoption of Arab traditions, but a negotiation between various reference points.

Making Arab one's own

At first sight, it seems as if popular Islamic culture in Indonesia, in this case pilgrimage tourism, is oriented towards Islamic cultures in the Middle East. A closer look shows that fashionable markers of what is imagined to be Arab are in fact very characteristic of a modern, cosmopolitan Indonesian Islam. Moreover, views of Arab are 1) not only geographic, 2) multilayered and 3) rather critical and differentiated with respect to other Islamic cultures. As an important reference point, Arab is negotiated in recent developments in Indonesian Islam(s).

Apart from the differences in travel experiences, there is the common tendency for *umroh* and *hajj* pilgrims from Central Java to make Arab their own, in the sense that they claim Mecca as being partly theirs and cultivate the pilgrimage as an important aspect of an Indonesian Islamic way of life along with an Indonesian influenced Arab style. Claiming Mecca as being partly theirs is probably natural for every Muslim, and as Barbara Metcalf states for *hajj* accounts in India: "To go to Mecca is to go home." (Metcalf 1990: 100). Every Muslim, from every country, has a right to be at the Ka'ba, a place of enduring orientation. In Indonesia this connection with Mecca is part of both the history of Islam and current developments in Islamic culture. As mentioned above, legends recount the spiritual ties with Mecca and the Mecca of Java. Nowadays it's not only the presence of Mecca in Java but also the presence of Javanese (Indonesian) Muslims in Mecca which shapes the relationship with Arab.

With great self-confidence, *hajj* and *umroh* travellers, travel agents and guides explain that the presence of Indonesian Islam at the holy sites of Mecca and Medina is legitimate. They proudly state that Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, sends the highest number of pilgrims and is, thus, the dominant group during the *hajj*.²¹ Besides this, they refer to the many Indonesian migrant labourers who work in important mosques and other places and Madurese traders who have lived

²¹ This self-confidence might of course be particularly Javanese; the picture could be different in other parts of Indonesia.

for generations in Saudi Arabia. The pilgrimage experience expresses various features of Indonesian Islam, such as popularisation, increasing piety, collectivity and social stratification.

All of my informants maintained that they are keen to return to Mecca and are interested in other places in Arabia. This emphasises that there is indeed a strong *orientation towards*, or *interest in*, the Arab world (in its manifold imaginations) in Indonesia. In this respect, the term Arab, referring to the region of Islam's origin, is much more than a geographical location, and it does not mean that this orientation is an adaptation of Arab customs, but rather an intensified contention with Islamic cultures in other parts of the world. The encounter with other Islamic cultures increases awareness of differences and a reified self-confidence as well as a debate about ideas of centre and periphery. Consequently, Arab as a reference point does not mean that Arab as such is idolised; rather it is an idea towards which Javanese Muslims adopt a position and which they negotiate.

Generally speaking, the research results confirm, as argued by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992), that increased mobility and the dynamics of globalisation do not always lead to de-territorialisation and cosmopolitanisation. Since transnational cultural flows and hybrid exchange mechanisms are blurring existing categories such as culture and place and challenging the assumption of a cultural homogenisation (Appadurai 2000; Gupta / Ferguson 1992; Hannerz 1996), it is unlikely that the so-called Arabisation of Indonesia is a blind adoption of Arab culture. Besides increased mobility and blurred boundaries, the ideas of cultural boundaries in peoples' minds persist. As Gupta and Ferguson argue:

The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient (Gupta / Ferguson 1992: 10, emphasis in original).

The idea of what is called Arab in Indonesia remains an important reference point for Javanese pilgrims' self-confidence, but it is by no means a homogeneous image. Interest in spirituality, increasing piety and contemporary, Arab-style Muslim pop culture must not be confused with ideological Arabisation of Indonesian Islam.

Moreover, it is not only elements from one part of the world being localised in another, but a hybrid exchange in various directions – be it Indonesian headscarf fashion imported to shopping malls in Dubai or greetings in Arabic in everyday slang in Yogyakarta. Apart from this exchange, there seems to be a differentiation from 'the others'. Applying Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* at the global level, we see that experiencing the global *communitas*, the sense of equality, unity and globality,

is limited to the period of the ritual and that differences are reasserted – even more strongly and more specifically – once the ritual has ended. This is significant at the global and local levels, where the returnees have a new social status. Encounters with Muslims from all over the world and especially impressions of the Saudi Arabian culture increase knowledge about the region and diversify images of the Arab world as well as the self-identification as Javanese, Indonesian and (Southeast) Asian. These social contacts make Javanese pilgrims aware of cultural differences and foster self-confidence about the Javanese practice of Islam – even though this might differ from the 'traditional' forms of what is said to be *Islam Jawa*. Taking past and present references to and connectedness with Arab into consideration, the line between *Islam Jawa* and *Islam Arab* is not as clear-cut as appears at first sight. The *communitas* with fellow Javanese, Indonesian and Southeast Asian Muslims that pilgrims experience during the pilgrimage is an essential contribution to a new self-confidence. By claiming the importance of their presence in Mecca and through the mutual cultural exchange between Indonesian and Arab culture, Javanese pilgrims are making Arab their own.

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