A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OR A JOURNEY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY: THE *HAJI*[1] IN WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena haji yang dipahami sebagai perjalanan spiritual dan sekaligus historis dan sosial, terkait dengan pengalaman individu, framework Muslimah feminis, serta konteks historis dan sosial kontemporer dimana perempuan-perempuan yang menjadi responden ini hidup dan bekerja, yaitu di tengah masyarakat Indonesia. Artikel berupaya menggali pengalaman spiritual sebagai sesuatu yang terstruktur secara sosial maupun metafor dalam memori tiga perempuan, yang dipilih penulis untuk menjadi responden, yang melakukan perjalanan ke Tanah suci Makkah. Penulis mencoba menciptakan bentuk tulisan yang mempertemukan dan mengaburkan batas antara cerita tentang sebuah perjalanan, penyuguhan cerita, dan penulisan akademis, sehingga diharapkan dapat terhindar dari problem penjajahan penulis terhadap wacana. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam tulisan adalah pendekatan yang dapat menempatkan cerita tentang perjalanan haji tersebut menjadi sebuah fenomena historis dan pengalaman dari perspektif teologi feminis pasca kolonial.

Kata Kunci: Spiritualitas, Haji, Pengalaman Perempuan.

I. Introduction

It is an usually busy afternoon in one of the Centers at State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga. As I am spending my time in the library, getting ready to interview one of my informants, I suddenly become involved in a

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[1] The spelling of the term is intentionally used in its Indonesian version, since the paper is contextualizing performance of *haji* by Indonesian women.

discussion she is having with her students. Two of them are interested in my presence there, and foremost in my interest in Islam. In an attempt to answer their questions, I realize that my thoughts come out in a somewhat incoherent way. Indeed: what am I doing there, collecting personal accounts of three UIN activists regarding their respective pilgrimages to Mecca? The women's stories were envisaged as research material for one of my final papers that I was preparing for a course I have attended as doctoral student at the ICRS,[2] I explained, trying to avoid an imminent deeper discussion that would force me to talk about my "homeland," genocidal war the Serbs had recently led against Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as a childhood spent in a Communist, atheist, country. I would have to confess to them here that my interest in Islam was multifariously driven by complex overlapping of irrational guilt[3], orientalist fascination, interest in the five centuries long legacy the Turkish (Islamic) rule in Serbia of which there was almost nothing left in the present-day Serbian historiography guided by ideology of erasing memory, and by curiosity related to hearing the accounts of Islamic feminists, women, in relation to my personal self-positioning as "feminist." Suddenly and unexpectedly, I find myself uttering admiration for Islamic spirituality. I immediately felt ashamed, since I realized that it was a somewhat problematic statement, in that it reflected my orientalist thinking on the one hand, and misleadingly presupposed that I possessed some kind of "knowledge" or "experience" of Islam on the other.

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[2] Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies. It is a recently established doctoral program created in collaboration between the Christian University Duta Wacana, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, and the Gadjah Mada University.

[3] The labeling of my guilt as "irrational" is intentional here, since it would presuppose my support of and adherence to the Serbian nationalist ideology and genocidal politics throughout the 1990s, against both of which I was engaged in both at personal and activist levels. Nevertheless, as long as my passport determines me as "Serbian," I find it impossible to avoid the feeling of guilt related to the recent historical reconstruction of Serbian nationhood as based on ethnic and religious hatred against all othernesses, and institutionalized through active deployment of physical eradication of those (ethnic and religious) othernesses in form of genocide.

When I was asked to write a paper for the latest issue of the PSW journal dedicated to the topic of women and spiritually, at first I felt reluctant to accept the proposal. In what way(s) could my writing possibly contribute to such a topic? I already indicated my atheist background; how could I write about spirituality, provided that I do not adhere to any religion? Gradually, I realized that my thinking was wrong in that it was grounded upon the premise that I regarded spirituality as necessarily located in the practice of religion. I remembered the conversation which I had with one of the abovementioned students, and my statement that, if asked to shortly answer how I perceived Islamic spirituality, I would use the concept of love. Indeed: in my almost two years long stay in Indonesia and in numerous everyday contacts with Muslim women (and men)[4], my experience of Islam was foremost, although not exclusively, shaped through and within the concept of love. In that I mainly "gained insight" into Islam through established contacts with friends and experienced it through our shared day-to-day living, I approached Islam in the only way I found possible—deploying empathy, understood both as a psychological mechanism, and a feminist/anthropological disciplinary tool. It was this realization that encouraged me to write this paper. In that all the displayed accounts below render—through my recounting of them—women's spirituality and practice in Islam, in Indonesia, in Central Java, and from within personalized and differentiated perspectives that Islamic feminist framework(s) offer to each of these women, I found in the intimate story-telling of their respective experiences and perceptions of *haji* a space to reconstruct my own experience of spirituality. Indeed: if "real, genuine atheist" can be defined as "that rare soul who has struggled through to the end of theological and philosophical speculation and has been forced intellectually to conclude, perhaps in anguish, that there is really nothing out there knowing and caring" (Tremmel 197, 105), then I must state that I cannot be any further

[4] The overwhelming majority of my contacts in Indonesia is with women—that is the main reason why "men" are bracketed in the previous statement. In that I have been living in unisex, women-only, boarding-houses, most friendships I have made thus far are with women.

from perceiving myself as such person. After having felt, lived, and perceived how "caring" structures (both empirically and cognitively) lives of people around me, including that of myself, there is nothing in the previously mentioned definition with which I could identify my current, however invariably changing, yet constantly present spirituality.

II. A methodology and theoretical framework quest: Towards a post-colonialized historiography

> Muslim doctrine explicitly enjoins or encourages certain forms of travel. One is the express obligation to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Another, *hijra*, is the obligation to migrate from lands where the practice of Islam is constrained to those where in principle no such constraints exist. Visits to local or regional shrines (*ziyaras*) and travel in search of knowledge (*rihla*) provide further examples of religiously inspired travel. Yet other forms of travel unrecognized in the doctrine can have equal or even greater significance. For example, Muslims have often mixed travel for trade purposes with religiously motivated travel.[5]

Having entitled this paper "a spiritual journey or a journey through spirituality" might be misleading in that the usage of "term" spirituality" could imply a theological dimension that this paper admittedly will not acquire, since I do not regard myself in any way qualified to theorize Islamic theology, doctrine, or practice. This paper, rather, proposes to find an access point to exploring the phenomenon of *haji*—understood both as a spiritual and a social journey—in relation to personal accounts of the three women who performed it, Islamic feminist theoretical framework(s), and the contemporary historical and social context within which these women live and work, that is, the Indonesian society. I decided to use an approach that would show how these accounts can be treated as "historical" phenomena and experiences from within perspective of post-colonial

[5] Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 5. Quoted from Miriam Cooke, *Multiple Critique. Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies*, in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. 2002. [eds.] Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, p. 148.

feminist theology. Instead of (pro)posing a set of questions and to them related answers, this paper is envisaged as an attempt to explore, as well as indirectly experience, Islamic spirituality as structured—both socially and metaphorically—in memories of the three women's journeys to Mecca. The paper might be understood as an effort to create a hybridized writing form that would blur the boundaries between travelogue, story-telling, and academic writing thus, in turn, enabling me to avoid colonizing the discourse with my own self-positioning on the one hand, and allowing me to take part in my informant's journeys in a quest for reconstructing my own spirituality on the other. At the expense of keeping my voice overly audible throughout the writing, I was making a conscious effort to negotiate between "recording" and "colonizing" the voices of the others that any research, sensitized as it might be, engenders.

The concept of "history" that I had in mind here was a rather intimate one, reproduced in the following quotation:

> The future is not a grand finale, a classless society, or even a kingdom of God, but more immediate, concrete, and touchable. It may be the pooling of communal resources, of living better than the last year, or of seeing grandchildren grow up healthy and strong. It is *a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract*, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned, and a trust that is born out of necessity and well-worn wisdom[6].

Admittedly, the topic of the paper raised a set of issues, such the socio-historical context within which it is structured, as indicated above. In pondering the ways in which to access and study the phenomenon of *haji* in contemporary Indonesian society through applying a historical approach, I felt that the concepts, practices and realities of *haji*, which is often referred to as the "fifth pillar" of Islam, the historical, contemporary, institutional and experiential varieties of Islam in Indonesia, the "contemporaneity" and "historicalness" of Indonesian society, as well as the *haji* historiography in Indonesia are all overwhelmingly abstract and unknown to me. As a Ph.D. student foreign both to Indonesian societies, religions, cultures, historio-

[6] Kwok Pui-lan. 2002. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (2002: 31); italics added.

graphies and histories, as well as to the Western academic discourses and knowledge-production ideologies contextualizing my stay in Indonesia, I felt that I could not endeavour to create a novel theoretical model, let alone a "comprehensive" one, that would convincingly explicate the historicalness of the phenomenon of *haji* in Indonesia since I lack both in experiential and epistemological resources that would enable me to do so.

The leading worry in my mind while trying to think the ways in which to write this paper was how such writing could be meaningful and purposeful from the perspective of Indonesian *haji* performers in general, and the women whose accounts I shortly offer in particular, as it is their histories and religious experience that my writing would claim. Admittedly, in choosing to explore spirituality as surfacing in the practice of *haji*, my concern was to how to focus on experiences of women, whose voices (or even existence[7]) are rarely, if ever expressed in the *haji* discourses[8]. I found that Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book (1999) in which she theorizes research methodologies which could be adopted by a researcher making an attempt to write "from the vantage point of the colonized" was particularly useful in my quest for an inclusive access point to conducting this particular research in that it indicated a possible direction that an outside researcher, such as myself, could follow, reminding me that any prospective research I undertake in my present research context ought to be taken from a postcolonial framework. In her words, "[m]any of the issues raised by

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[7] The exception is M. Abdurrahman's essay on middle-class women performing hajj in post-New Order Indonesia. However, the author fails to refer to women's experiences through voicing them, but rather voices their experiences from within his gendered position. See Abdurrahman, Moeslim. 1996. "Ritual Divided: Hajj Tours in Capitalist Era Indonesia." [ed.] Mark Woodward, *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought*, pp. 117-32.

[8] To support my claim, I went through a (limited) number of books which (historically and otherwise, in detail or in passing) explore the phenomenon of *haji*, from orientalist, colonial, or postcolonial perspectives. The list included the following titles: V. Matheson and A.C. Miller, *Perceptions of the* Haj: *Five Malay Texts* (1984); Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950* (1993); Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia* (2003); Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII* (2005 [2004]).

indigenous researchers are addressed in the research literature in relation to both insider and outsider research. Most research methodologies assume that the researcher is an outsider able to observe without being implicated in the scene. This is related to positivism and notions of objectivity and neutrality,"[9] she adds (1999, 137).

If written from a postcolonial framework and feminist perspective, as well as my personal and academic feminist position(s),[10] I feel that my writing on *haji* in contemporary Indonesian context through voicing women's personal experiences of *haji*, even if not conducted from an indigenous position, may claim some legitimacy in that it proposes to offer a more inclusive and respectful approach in conducting a research as an outsider[11]. However, my concentrating on women and their, to borrow, Kwok Pui-lan's phrase, "historical memories" of *haji*, might prove to be rather problematic in that the focus of study and a "feminist research position" alone do not take into account the cultural, religious, historical, educational, and other inherently political differences among the women

[9] Tuhiwai Smith's reference to "objectivity and neutrality" and their rejection as a normative approach in studying religion revoke Rita Gross' insightful theorizing the importance of practicing empathy to the academic study of religion: "Like neutrality, objectivity in the study of religion is more complex than it appears. Because religion is so controversial and engenders such passion, calls for objectivity—approaching a subject without a point of view—are frequent. But all scholars speak and write from a particular point of view whether or not they claim objectivity for themselves. [...] Instead, scholars need to practice intense methodological self-awareness and introspection, combined with honest self-disclosure. Once one recognizes one's own standpoint, one can then argue on its behalf, making the case openly that this specific standpoint is more adequate than the alternatives" (Gross 1996, 14-15). However, it should be kept in mind that Gross' feminist position is not a decolonizing one, since she openly writes from within the perspective of an unreconstructured Western (white, middle-class) feminist. Nevertheless, I strongly agree with her that recognition of one's standpoint is a pre-requisite to a more inclusive research.

[10] The plural form of the term is to indicate that I do not hold a singular feminist position; rather, I rely on frameworks and approaches of variously positioned feminists theoreticians, as well as activists.

[11] Tuhiwai Smith further proposes that "[f]eminist research and other more critical approaches have made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research" (1999, 137). I feel that the same could be applied to the (critical) "outsider methodology," such as that used by anthropologists.

whose experiences I explore and my (outsider) self. In addition, I do not believe in a monolithic or universal "women's experience" irrespective of numerous socially, religiously and culturally constructed and experienced particularities—that were so often professed by the early Western feminists, but rebuffed and reconstructed in later discourses. I do believe, however, that what could strengthen my access point to exploring *haji* from a non-colonizing perspective is my personal socio-cultural background[12].

Again, I found confirmation (as well as a sort of intellectual refuge) in Kwok Pui-lan's reflections on postcolonial condition. The passage in question, which I will shortly reproduce, had both soothing and invigorating effect on me, since it was talking about the place that my passport designates as my "home," but that has too little to do with the country I had experienced as "homeland" for most part of my life, until it had disintegrated taking along with it every social structure I had ever known of, but foremost innumerous human lives. The passage said: "[I]n early 1999, the joint forces from NATO and the United States were bombing Kosovo to save ethnic Albanians from persecution by the Serbs. Politicians appealed to popular support by referring time and again to the systE.tic raping of Albanian women when they were living in Kosovo as well as when they were forced to flee the country. Whether it is right or wrong to bomb Kosovo is a separate question; this recent event shows the luring power of the script "white men saving brown (Other) women from brown (Other) men."[13] In these words, written by a Christian feminist theologian

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[12] I find it necessary to clarify here why I consider personal positioning in academic writing to be of importance. Thus I will recall the words of Shulamit Reinhartz which, on the one hand, well express my reflections on the issue, and show that self-positioning has a history of theorizing in feminist (and other self-critical) discourses: "Many feminists have written that "finding one's voice" is a crucial process of their research and writing []. During this phase the researcher understands a phenomenon *and* finds a way of communicating that understanding" (Reinhartz 1992, 16).

[13] Kwok Pui-lan. 2002. *Unbinding Our Feet: Saving Brown Women and Feminist Religious Discourse*. In *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. 2002. [eds.] Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, pp. 64-65. I am grateful to (Ibu) Elaine Swartzentruber for providing me with this, as well as the book by Kwok Pui-lan. 2002. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*.

of Chinese origin who theorizes from a postcolonial theoretical framework, I felt that there was this grey zone of "neither-nor" realities and experiences in which I could find myself a spiritual home: I am neither an Albanian (or a Bosnian or Croatian, for that matter) woman; nor a Serbian or American man. I never supported (though was oppressed by) the politics of Serbian nationalism, but also never had to face fear, rape, torture or death in Serbian genocidal campaigns. Elsewhere, Kwok Pui-lan's conceptualization of "a fE.le diasporic subject as a multiply located, always doubly displaced, and having to negotiate an ambivalent past, while holding on to fragments of memories, cultures, and histories in order to dream of a different future,"[14] captured my attention in that I find that her sensitive, inclusive framework, positioning, and concepts open a space for women and scholars-in-becoming such as myself, who work in an environment both academically and socially, religiously, and culturally different from the ones to which they are indigenous.

More importantly, however, apart from self-situating, the paper proposes to explore the memories of *haji/umrah*[15] performed by three Indonesian Muslim feminists[16]. In recording their voices, attitudes and experiences, I suggest that the paper should be regarded as a modest contribution to historical resources for studying (Islamic) spirituality in general, and spirituality in relation to self-positioning within Islamic feminism in particular, within contemporary Indonesian context. In addition, the voices of the three Indonesian feminists could contribute to those studies that concentrate on historical as well as contemporary variety of Islamic traditions, interpretations, and practices. Finally, by engaging is social activism, engendering public discourses on Islam, lecturing, reinterpreting the Qur'an and the al-Hadis, proposing amendments of

[14] Kwok Pui-lan. 2002. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, p. 46.

[15] A "shortened version" of *haji*, usually performed outside the *haji* season, and leaving out some of the rituals performed in the *haji*.

[16] Their respective "feminisms" are not only ideological and academic, but structured through their activism as well. As will be indicated in the following section, all three women work at the Pusat Studi Wanita at the State Islamic University "Sunan Kalijaga" in Yogyakarta.

(gender) discriminative laws—in general, by making active attempts to institutionalize spaces in which gender equality within Islam would become a reality, these women are involved in the historical process of reshaping not only their personal histories and present-day lives, but indicating the ways in which the past (as embedded in tradition, culture, and religion through the practice of everyday life) can be reclaimed in order to reshape the future.

III. *Haji* in Stories

The following memories are presented in form of personal accounts told by the interviewed women, as these accounts were written down (and sometimes translated or otherwise altered) by me. Although the paper does not focus on exploring gender differences in various *haji* rituals, nor does it explore theological interpretations of *haji*, such details were left visible in the accounts, if/when they surface.

In conducting the interviews, I relied on the method of semistructured interview, since I regarded that this "qualitative data-gathering technique"[17] was best suited for my research. The three women are both lecturers at the State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta. Their social status is middle-, or upper middle-class, all are married with children, and are between 37 and 46 years old. R. has already earned her Ph.D. degree, while E. and I. are currently enrolled in doctoral programs at UIN and ICRS respectively. All three attended pesantren schools in childhood. I have attempted to make interviews be experienced as informal as possible, indicating at the beginning that I was interested in hearing their personal experiences, attitudes towards, and knowledge of *haji/umroh*, when and with whom they performed it, as well as their opinion on practice and policies related to the concept/institution of *mahram/muhrim*[18].

[17] The technique is explained in detailed in Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (1992) pp. 18-45.

[18] The "official guardian" required for women performing *haji*. For a more elaborate explanation of the concept of and discourses on *muhram*, see the following section. However, it should be indicated here that according to conservative interpretations, the role of guardianship is traditionally assigned to husband or male relative.

R. D. (ethnic Javanese) performed *haji* in 2005, with her husband. She begins her account by stating that the institution of *muhrim*, or official guardian for women, is not only highly debatable in present-day Indonesian context, but represents a prolonged point of dispute between the Indonesian and Saudi Arabian governments in terms of policies regulating the requirements for this institution. Whereas Indonesian governmental policy presently follows the Saudi Arabian regulations regarding the guardianship of women performing *haji/umroh*, it does so only nominally. In R.'s telling, the Saudi Arabian regulations require for a woman to present the name of her *muhrim* printed in her passport along with her visa. However, although the Saudi Arabian policy on the issue is that the guardian should be either the woman's husband or a close male relative, in Indonesian context things work differently. She adds that the issue has been addressed by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia, and that the consensus has been reached on issuing a fatwa in which the concept of *muhrim* is understood as collectively assigned, giving the right to Indonesian state to act as women's *muhrim*. In turn, the state transfers the right to the Ministry of Religious Affairs which, as thus legally appoint body, has the right to choose/appoint *muhrim* for female pilgrims to Mecca. R. also remembers that women made appeals to the government to legalize the female guardianship, but the issue is not being currently discussed.

R. performed *haji* with her husband, and went there in a tour organized by a KBIH.[19] The reasons they choose to go via KBIH and not the Ministry of Religious Affairs is that they both found the latter to be "too general" in preparation and organization of the pilgrimage trip. KBIH, in her opinion, offers better services and more intensive training related to performing the *haji*. Since she was schooled in pesantren, she felt that those trainings were not as important to her as they were crucial for her husband, who attended a Protestant school, which did not provide him with comprehensive knowledge in Islam. R. also feels that the classes offered by KBIHs are of

[19] Kelompok Bimbingan Ibadah Haji—non-governmental but officially licensed organizations offering *haji/haji plus* and *umroh* trips.

better quality than the governmental ones because the prices are higher too.

Generally speaking, R. finds the lack of female guides to be an obstacle for women performing *haji*. Men usually do not have sensitivity for women's issues[20]. Some KBIHs offer female guides who accompany the required male guides, but that increases the cost of the tour. She feels that female guidance alone is still regarded as insufficient due to the prevalence of conservative understandings of the concept and institution of *imam*, which precludes women from leading the prayer and assign the role to man[21]. R. also indicates that KBIHs are rather politicized bodies, and that the political affiliation affects the ritual[22].

Reflecting on her expectations prior to *haji*, she remembers that in spite of the fact that she was looking for God in his house, she could not find him. R. imagined that around the Al Haram mosque in Mecca would be libraries for studying Islam. Instead, she found that the environs of the mosque were packed with fancy hotels, commercial centers and shopping malls. Upon witnessing this, R. lost her expectations as to being closer to God in the holiest of all the places. In addition, Medina was another

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[20] Re-reading the abovementioned Abdurrahman's article, based on his observation of women in hajj-tours in which he was hired as guide, R.'s "lack of sensitivity for women's issues" are revealed in Abdurrahman's invading of women's lives and privacy, as well as his judgment of women's piousness according to whether or not they "take special drugs in the privacy of their hotel to postpone their periods" (Abdurrahman 1996: 127).

[21] Illustrative of such prevailing "conservative understandings of the concept of *ulama*" is Abdurrahman's following rhetorical question: "They [middle-class women] *even* question why, in the middle-class hajj, where there are so many women artists and models recruited by travel agents, no female religious leaders and recruited" (1996, 126), italics added. Abdurrahman's feelings are expressed in his usage of the term "even," which is an adverb that functions to emphasize" an extreme or highly unlikely condition". I wonder, however, if it's not Abdurrahman's extreme unawareness of the social, cultural, and religious realities (I am referring to existence of female *ulama* in Indonesia), or better yet, his extreme reluctance in accepting those realities from his personal and/or ideological position that are actually being expressed here.

[22] R. provided examples of how the timings of performing certain rituals depended on the political affiliation of her chosen KBIH. Since, however, this paper does not focus on the ritualistic aspects of *haji*, these details were omitted here.

disappointment. Instead of religious atmosphere she expected to find there, she realized that the place was overcrowded and Saudi Arabians whom she found to be rude, arrogant, and unfriendly. She remembered thinking that if it were not for performing *haji*, she would have never wanted to visit that country. R. felt that the Saudi Arabian country was extremely misogynic—in the shops selling cosmetic products for women (such as 'The Body Shop'), the salespersons were all men. Knowing that the Prophet was not at all misogynic made R.'s disappointment is all the greater. She also felt disappointed with the social environment in general, and felt that her freedom of movement was impeded. R. wonders how one can survive in a society imposing such restrictions on women.

R. feels that her *haji* was more historical than spiritual. She feels that she carries her spirituality in her heart, and can experience it to the fullest at home. However, R. remembers that touching Kabah, which she had been facing her entire life when performing prayers, helped her in finding palpable, historical evidence for her faith, just as it helped her to visit the place where the Prophet lived and was buried in Medina. She felt her religion was real, historical, and regards that knowledge as the main benefit of the trip which, she adds, did not increase her spirituality.

As for the spiritual "reward" of *haji*: R. states that her opinion differs from the one professed through the KBIH, according to which the more one prays in Kabah the better, since the prayer in Kabah is a thousand times stronger than the regular one. She does not agree with this widespread, mainstream view, just as it bothered her that the guides failed to clarify the spiritual goals of the rituals which, thus, turned into a quantifiable experience. R. was additionally unpleasantly surprised to find that there was no collective solidarity among people in Mecca; everybody was focused on performing the formal side of the rituals, thus pushing each other around.

It was interesting for her to notice that her husband perceived and experienced *haji* differently. He stressed that the journey made him feel reborn. She recollects that he changed after the trip, and that he became more observantly religious. In R.'s opinion, for him the trip was a mile-stone. For R., matters were different. Having traveled extensively, she

learned that the spirituality can be found in other worship places—in a mosque in Turkey, as well as in Notre-Dame in Paris.

R. also briefly reflected on the consumerism involved in performing *haji* which, in her opinion, is against the very principles of Islam. However, she does not blame people for buying "souvenirs" to being home from the trip, since she is aware of the social pressure and such expectations of the pilgrims. She recalls how her husband purchased gallons of the miraculous, healing water (*zam-zam*), and went through a great trouble to organize its transportation to Indonesia. R. thinks that the only special quality of that water is the high percentage of minerals.. Her husband, on the other hand, believes in the miraculous healing properties of the water. At certain point, their daughter fell sick and her husband gave her the water to drink. When she got recovered, he indicated that as the proof of the miraculous property of the water. R. insisted that it was his prayer that helped their daughter recover, and not the water itself.

The main "aftermath" of the *haji* is that R.'s social awareness and sensitivity increased. She feels that her need to keep engaging in building social solidarity is the most precious quality she brought back from the trip. Since she feels that she has performed all five pillars of Islam, she acquired firm confidence in her faith, which empowers her to act in this world on behalf of deprived, taking notice of their needs.

I. R. (ethnic Javanese) performed *umroh* in 1996, only ten days after getting married. The trip was organized and paid by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as an award for the title of the Best Graduate Student at national level[23]. I. remembers that the other award went to her fellow-student, who was a man. The trip took place during the month of Ramadan.

I. started from stressing out the spiritual aspects of her trip. Being Muslim, I. believes in the existence of Kabah and the cities mentioned in the Qur'an, such as Mecca and Medina, where the Prophet professed the religion. The knowledge she gained about these sites came not only from

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[23] This national program included approximately thirty awards that went to the "best mother" (ibu teladan), the best students from pesantren, the best reciter of the Qur'an, etc.

the Qur'an, but was foremost taught to her by her family and the wider community when she was a child. I. thinks of herself as a "rational" rather than "theological" person. Before embarking on the *umroh*, I. remembers how she thought that the trip would make her spirituality stronger, since she would get the chance to see all the places she had been hearing and reading about—as well as believing in—ever since her childhood. She thought that seeing all these places as historical facts, rather than mythical sites, would strengthen her spirituality.

However, her perception of the effects the trip has on one's spirituality differ from the widespread views that indicators of *haji mabrur*[24], or a "successful" *haji*, can be determined according to changed behavioral or dressing patterns[25]. I. does not believe in these "indicators," and is certain that the person who has performed *haji* or *umroh* would know what the changes are in his/her heart. Thus, she defines *haji mabrur* as the awareness of the historical aspect of one's belief, which then becomes more than the mere faith.

It was strange for I. to watch people crying or shouting while touching *kiswah*.[26] When she saw the *kiswah*, she perceived it as something historical, and even thought that the cloth might not have been there before, but introduced at some point, and that the concrete cloth might be of a recent date. She also remembers that when circumambulating the Kabah for the first time, she forgot to pray, even though she was supposed to, because all she was thinking was the stone in front of her eyes. It was the historical site of the Prophet, she recalls thinking, and not the Prophet himself. I. experienced the process of circumambulation of Kabah as the moment when her "timeless" spirituality came into time through encountering the historicalness of her religion. The whole trip, in fact, enabled her to

[24] For an explanation of the "haji mabrur" concept, see the following section.

[25] Among such "indicators" are wearing *jilbab* for women, or *peci* for men; becoming more observant in praying or attending religious gatherings; becoming "peaceful and wise," as well as respectful and withdrawn in speech, refraining from insulting others, etc.

[26] The cloth covering Kabah.

connect with the memory of the past, the Prophet, his companions, their struggle.

I. also did not think that she would witness or experience any miracles there. She remembers a story a friend told her that took place during his *haji* trip. The friend experienced a miracle, I. recalls, in that his luggage, that had previously disappeared, was miraculously encountered in front of his room just as he was about to leave the hotel. I. thinks that the problem lies in the definition of "miracle." For her, the concept of miracle is more rational—if we do our best, we'll get the best, and that is what miracle is for her. I. believes that if she is good to people, God will be good to her, and protect her. For her mother, however, miracle is differently defined. I. remembers that when she was a child, she was hit by a teak-wood window-frame her brothers were playing with. Although the heavy wood hit her head strongly, she was not injured. Her mother thought it was a miracle that I. did not die that time. She got hit on her head once more, at an adult age, but again was uninjured. Some people believe that her family is protected because they are linked with the pesantren[27]. Rather than dwelling on the topic further, she repeats that for her the miracle is to do and think well.

I. recalls that her expectations before performing the *umroh* were to make connection between memories of historical religious past with the reality she would see before her eyes. However, sometimes she thinks she is excessively rational in her belief which, for her, is something that happens between each believer and her/his God. It is not measurable, but abstract. After seeing one's religion as historical, one's spirituality will increase. Likewise, one's the faith in God will be reflected in relationship with other people—if one's relationship with God is good, his/her relationship with other people will also be good.

As for the concept and institution of *mahram/mahrum* in relation to her *umroh*, I. remembers her story. Since the award was valid only for her, her husband could not accompany her on the trip. I. was introduced to

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[27] I.'s father ran a pesantren, and so do both her brothers.

her *muhrim* a few days before the trip, as he was assigned to her by the organizers of the program. As I got married ten days before the trip, she still did not feel accustomed to her new role of a married woman, and felt uncomfortable to confess to her *mahrum* that she was married. In addition, she felt that such confession might distance him from her, and she feared that it would have negative consequences in performing their assigned roles correctly. However, she would soon learn that the concept did not correspond to the practice, since it was merely the question of formality. The only time I. was asked to present herself together with her official guardian was before the immigration authorities at the airport in Saudi Arabia. The practice of the concept is, in her opinion, quite loose, since in reality women do not have to spend time in the company of their *muhrim* while performing rituals.

E. M. (ethnic Maduresе) performed *haji* twice. The first time she performed *haji* was in 1993, before she got married, while still living with her parents. In her cultural tradition, it is considered that the parents are required to have their children perform *haji* before they marry and start their own families[28]. The other parental responsibilities are to provide for the children's education, as well as to find a suitable husband/wife for them. E. indicates that the custom of taking children to *haji* is valid both for male and female children. However, if there are financial limitations, the male children are given the priority. E. feels that the Madurese, either rich or poor, obsess about performing *haji*, and that the pilgrimage is structured almost as the main goal in one's life. Parents believe that by taking their children to *haji* they not only fulfill the spiritual needs, but also secure their, as well as their children's, social status. There are elaborate rituals and customs related to the pre- and post-*haji* period; for instance, one is required to spend 40 days prior to and the same period of time posterior to performing *haji* at home.

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[28] Both R. and I. stated in retrospect that their cultural tradition (Javanese) was different from Madurese in that the priority is given to education. In addition, the custom of taking children to *haji* is not practices among the Javanese.

E. remembers that her first *haji* experience was much influenced by the fact that she performed it along with her family members and relatives. Since, however, at the time she was already working as lecturer at the State Islamic University "Sunan Kalijaga" in Yogyakarta, she perceived that many of the customs she was required to follow contradicted her personal views and knowledge on Islam she obtained through her education. She would protest at times, expressing her reluctance to participate and blindly follow certain rituals, even try to silently disobey by keeping herself at the group's rear, but to no avail—in her culture, children are required to show obedience to their parents by, among other things, not contradicting their parents' will. For instance, she remembers that she felt she should not follow blindly the performance of the formal sides of the ritual.[29] However, since she did not wish to disappoint her parents, she did her best to find a compromise between behaving in the way that was expected of her and performing the rituals according to her personal understanding.

In retrospect, she feels that she thought of her first *haji* more in social than spiritual, or religious, terms, since she performed it as a "social" journey with her family rather than the journey "from her heart". E. also remembers that she never achieved the high spiritual peak while performing the formal sides of ritual in her first journey, since she had to direct her entire energy to focus on performing those formalities in a correct way, being compelled to follow her parents' expectations. She achieved spiritual moments in quiet moments of self-isolation in mosque, when she had the opportunity to contemplate on God in solitude. E. did try to explain her attitudes to her parents, but did not want to cause conflict with them and never insisted they accepted her views. In addition, in her culture the spirituality of parents is considered to be at a higher level than that of children, and her open contestation of such views would be regarded as highly inappropriate.

What she finds peculiar about her 1993 *haji* was that her younger cousin-brother was assigned to her as her official *mahrum*. She remembers that he was younger than her, and that the reality was that the women in

[29] Which, similarly to R., E. also perceived as excessively and unnecessarily insisting on quantifiable acts.

her group were taking care of him, washing his clothes, looking after his meals, and not the other way around.

The second time E. performed *haji* was with her husband, in 2007. She regards that her second *haji* was performed "in between spirituality and rationality." E. and her husband chose a non-KBIH organized tour since they both feel that KBIH tours are overtly controlling, in term of organization, performance of rituals, preparations for the *haji*, and the like. E. believes that the second time she got to perform the *haji* was when she really enjoyed it, since she had enough time to contemplate on rational aspects of rituals, whereas the first time she was compelled to blindly follow her mother. The second time was when she got the opportunity to enjoy high spirituality through questioning. E. was glad to discover that rationality and spirituality did not have to be mutually excluding; rather, she feels they complement each other in one's mature and self-reflective experience of faith.

IV. References to the future

In her attempt to describe what she perceives as *Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies*[30], Miriam Cooke (2002) coined the term "multiple critique" which she intended to have a dual underlying hypothesis: "First, women who have been consistently marked as victims and who have only recently started to speak for themselves may be able to situate themselves transnationally[31] because of the global nature of the institutions with which they have had to contend. Second, women who have learned as feminists to form principled and strategic alliances which allow them to balance their religious, specifically Islamic loyalties with national, local, class, ethnic, or any other allegiances may be able to invent a contestatory, but also enabling, discourse within the global context that will not be easily coopted. They may thus initiate new forms of conversations across what previously thought to be unbridgeable chasms" (Cooke 2002, 149). Further elaborating the

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[30] Published in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. 2002. [eds.] Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 142-160.

[31] Cooke elaborates the concept of "transnationalism of Islam" in the previous section of the paper, pp. 147-149.

concept, she claims that "[m]ultuple critique allows those who position themselves as Islamic feminists to speak effectively to, with, and against several audiences. [...] Having created themselves as *subjects of their own histories*[32], they are relocating the knowledges that used to be produced about them. They are pointing to what fills those spaces left empty by official history" (Cooke 2002, 158).

What was interesting to me to discern in the above presented accounts were the ways in which this "multiple critique" is deployed in the relation to personal (historical) recontextualization of spiritualities of the three women. In that the term "history" implies continuity, the *haji* journeys of the women—in my reading—provided numerous disruptive points in their hitherto imagined histories in that the journeys enabled them to reconstruct their interpretations and experiences of faith within, as well as against, their respective cultural, social, ethnic, national, as well as transnational, Islamic backgrounds. None of the stories resembles the other, and each reveals that such moments were differently contextualized in each of the stories[33]. Yet, what I perceive as underlying motif in these stories are the mechanisms in which the women faced and managed the internal disruption. Although abrupt when experienced, in neither one of the stories did it surface in

[32] Italics added.

[33] I perceive that in E.'s account such disruption occurred in her negotiating personal views, knowledge and preferred ways of performing *haji* rituals with the expectations of her family. In R.'s story, I saw that disruption took place in her encountering the "national" and "transnational" dimensions of her religion in comparing her cultural particularism with the Saudi Arabian, as well in the moments when she was comparing her experience and perceptions of the *haji* with that of her husband's. In I.'s situation, the disruptive moment was caused by her juxtaposing the previously gained (through academic as well as culturally transmitted) knowledge of *muhrim* and the practice of concept as she experienced it. Needless to say, there were other moments in these accounts in which such disruptions were structured. In R.'s case, another such moment occurred when she witnessed the presence and widespread "indulgence" in consumerism in Mecca; in retrospect, E. found that disruption structured upon inversion of the concept of *muhrim* in practice during her first *haji*; I. discovered that by reflecting on how she failed to inform her prospective *muhrim* that she was married, unable to self-integrate the new role of married woman in a short period of time.

the steep and total exclusion of voices of others.[34] This, in turn, provided a space within which a novel "historical imagination" of a concrete future, which they are shaping through activism, lecturing, and recontextualization of the Qur'an and al-Hadis, can be engendered.

In addition, I find that the process of composing this paper revealed another set of problems related to my self-positioning to the subject of study. First of all, I find my deployment of semi-structured interview as my research method to be suspicious, in that I perceive now that my interviews were more structured than not, as I directed my informants' attention to their *muhrim*[35]-related experiences, although they may have not chosen to discuss that in relation to their respective *haji* experiences. Second, throughout this paper I refer to M. Abdurrahman's essay in a way that implies my rejection of his "misogynic" attitudes. In so doing, not only do I continuously exclude the author's voice, but disregard the fact that he is perceived as liberal and progressive by the UIN's activists[36]. Moreover, I imposed my personal attitude of rejecting any possible allegiance between Islamic feminists and Moeslim Abdurrahman from within my (unreconstructured)

[34] This claim might not appear to be fully applicable to all cases, since R. openly rejects the misogyny of the Saudi Arabian society, or her husband's belief in the miraculous properties of zam-zam. Once again, I am reminding of the ways in which "multiple critique" can be understood as an open-ended process, in that it brings in R.'s present-day position in relation to her journey, thus revealing fine ways in which her spirituality is being constantly re-contextualized through her shifting self-positioning. In other cases, I have also felt that the mechanism for facing disruption was subtle renegotiation in self-positioning, inclusive of the voices of other.

[35] Indeed: among the most vivid discourses contextualizing gender and Islam in Southeast Asia in general, and in Indonesia in particular, the concept and institution of *muhrim* does not appear. See *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia: A Contemporary Sourcebook*. 2006. [edited and compiled by] Greg Fealy and Virginia Hooker. My initial intention was to present the article by Abdul Mustaquim, in which he reconstructs the concept of *mahram* by deploying hermeneutical and gender-analysis approach in a critical reinterpretation of al-Hadis in order to make it both gender-inclusive and to contextualize within the contemporary moment. See H. Abdul Mustaqim, *Rekonstruksi konsep mahram (Sebuah Pembacaan Hermeneutics)*. 2003. However, in so doing, I imposed my personal agenda and disregarded the importance given to issues such as polygamy, or inter-religious marriage, in contemporary Indonesian Islamic feminist discourses.

[36] I gained this information from I., R. and E. in an informal conversation.

non-Islamic feminist position. In so doing, I acted in a colonizing fashion, from within the position of my European "otherness," equating and, essentially, silencing the vibrant differences between the contexts in which Indonesian Islamic feminists' and my Serbian otherness are shaped.

V. Conclusion

It is difficult for me to think of a way to conclude this article provided the overtone of finality connoted by the term "conclusion." Indeed, what I have strived to achieve here can be understood as the exact opposite of finality in that my reflections related to the narrated experiences and their possible (re)interpretation(s) are foremost directed towards the future and contextualized within day-to-day "professional" and "private" lives of these women, in which their respective *haji* experiences and *haji*-related reflections are being constantly, though variously, revived through reattribution of ever-shifting self-interpretations. I have made an attempt to leave the process of my recounting the three women's stories as open to the reader as possible. The attempt was intentional, being grounded in my belief that academic writing should be envisaged on clearly articulated ideological premises, the ones underlying this article blurring the boundaries between scholarship and activism not only in deploying interactive research methods, but also in choosing and articulating its topic as well as theoretical framework broad enough to contain such overlaps and disjunctures.

Instead of concluding this article, I would like to express a hope that my attempt was not entirely futile. On the one hand, it recorded "historical imagination" emerging from both factional and fictional "spiritual journeys" undertaken by three Islamic feminists that in a more sensitive reading than mine could reveal more important issues than those I have attempted to address. On the other hand, it provided me with the opportunity not only to be more self-critical in claiming certain positions, but also to learn from the three accounts that a decolonized condition requires not only constant and subtle renegotiation of positions and loyalties both at inter- and intra-subjective levels, but also presupposes honest inclusion of one's biases and subaltern voices—that of latent, though shifting spiritualities included.

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