'ARABNESS' AS SOCIAL CAPITAL IN MADURA

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INTRODUCTION

The construction of "Self" and "Other" is a crucial element in the conception of identity. The practice of 'othering' goes along with an orientation towards 'other' places and is related to the broader perceptions of the world. The ideas of other places become increasingly diverse going beyond binary oppositions of 'Orient' and 'Occident' (Schlehe 2013) and "contemporary world-historical processes are disrupting received geographies of core and periphery" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012: 7).

Previous research, done by my colleagues in the research project "Beyond Occidentalism", in the Freiburg Southeast Asian Studies interdisciplinary research group, has shown that in Indonesia it is no longer the 'West' that is the ultimate reference point but a variety of new imagined centres (Schlehe et al. 2013: 19f, Schlehe 2013: 497f). Among others the 'Arab World' appears to be a relevant imagined centre and 'Arabic style' is a trend in some contexts, as for instance in Madura. My research project concerns images of the 'Arab World' in Indonesia, questioning how people in Indonesia position themselves towards the 'Arab World'. Initially I started the research in Central Java. During my investigations I was often told that Madurese people are particularly attracted by the 'Arab World' and I thus decided to include Madura as a comparative research site in my research.

Obviously, the feature "Arab" is connoted with "islami". Of course, the potential orientation towards the 'Arab World' appears to be (to some degree) a self-evident component of Muslim lifestyle. The central concept of orientation in Islam is the "qibla". "Qibla", literally "direction", means the direction of prayer, towards the Kaaba in Mecca. The Hijaz, along with the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, and Cairo, with Al-Azhar University as the leading institution of Islamic scholarship, are important reference points for Muslims around the world. In every prayer, sleeping position and in burial, Muslims position themselves towards the Ka'ba in Mecca (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). Yet, even though the orientation towards the 'Arab World' appears to be inherent in lived Islamic culture, it is argued that recently the influence of Arabic culture intensified in certain contexts in Indonesia, among others among Madurese

people.

When I first thought about doing research in Madura, many friends here in Indonesia said "The *qibla* of the Madurese is the *kyai*". Madura, they explained, is a 100% Muslim. This is not meant in the sense that a 100% of the island's inhabitants are Muslim, but rather in the sense that the religion (Islam) is the strongest orientation for people in Madura. Cak Nun, a cultural and religious public figure (*budayawan*), illustrated this by saying: "Di Madura ayam dan sapi pun, Islam" ("In Madura even the chicken and the cow are Muslim"). Religion is the main source of knowledge and social order. Consequently, it is the world of the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools/ qur'anic schools) and the authority of the *kyai* (Muslim scholars/leaders) that appear to be the people's orientation – or *qibla.* The centrality of religion is among others expressed in a unique affinity with what I term 'Arabness' here.

As a matter of fact, it is striking to see various Arabic attributes in Madura, such as clothing style (like a white *gamis* for men and a black *abaya* for women), cosmetics (almost all women and also some men use dark eyeliner), Arabic expressions (calling the parents *Abha* and *Ummi*) and Arabic writing on street signs and shops.

Of course, there are historical links to the Arab world in Madura and the Madurese piety has a long tradition. However, intensified mobility towards the Middle East is giving new fuel to the staging of Arabness in Madura. Much more people from Madura are travelling to Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East and the journey becomes an inspiration for identity negotiations.

Mobility shapes ideas of places, borders and centres, and orientations towards these ideas disclose societal values and norms (Frey 2004: 89). 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 travel experiences shape the image of the 'Arab World' in Madura and the representation of Arabness. Thus, my analysis of Arabness focuses on persons who have travelled to Arabic countries.

As in all over Indonesia, the pilgrimage business is booming. The longing to do the pilgrimage, the *hajj,* to Mecca is extremely strong in Madura and since waiting lists to join the *hajj* are very long, many people do the minor pilgrimage (the *umroh*) first or instead. Besides pilgrims, it is labor migrants and students who travel to Arabic countries.

Some persons argue that "Arab" is regarded as equivalent with Islam in Madura and thus the *qibla* is the "Arab World" in general. Yet, especially persons who travelled to Arabic countries, such as pilgrims, labor migrants and students, differentiate between Islam and Arabic culture and customs which they view rather critical. **So, how can we grasp the affinity with Arabness in Madura and to what**

extent is it part of an orientation towards the 'Arab World'?

I seek to discuss this question by analyzing the relations towards the 'Arab World' of three different mobile groups. I first give an introduction to current **pilgrimage** practices, secondly recent developments in **labor migration** and thirdly the perception of **students' journeys** to Arabic countries.

I shall then describe how all of these mobile groups are attributed **"blessings" from abroad** as essential feature of "Arabness" and discuss how this is transferred into **social capital**. I conclude by reflecting on the ambivalence between the affinity with Arabic style and the travelers' view on **Arabic culture and customs**.

1. Pilgrimage

The longing to make the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is very strong in Madura. Waiting lists to join the *hajj* have become extremely long; *hajj* candidates have to wait for 10 up to 17 years from registration to departure. This long waiting period indicates that there are more people interested in participating in the *hajj* than the quota for Indonesia allocates. While certain rituals of the *hajj* 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 limited to a certain quota. In order to meet the increasing demand, travel agencies offer the small pilgrimage to Mecca (*umroh*).

Persons who return from the *hajj* are honored in Madura. Returnees hold a new social status and are called "Pak Haji"/"Ibu Haja" or "Abha" and "Ummi". They wear special accessories that mark their status such as a white *peci/kopiya/songkok*. Moreover, departure and return come along with special rituals. Before the departure and after the return the pilgrims hold *slametan* meals and many people pick them up from the *Asrama Haji* in Surabaya, so that there is a huge parade of cars and motorcycles celebrating the *hajj* returnees. While the pilgrims are in Mecca their families host *tahlilan* prayers every night and often cook for the neighbors and relatives, up to 100 people, who attend these prayers. After the return the pilgrims are visited by friends and relatives, who want to obtain the blessing from Mecca. It is said that after the *hajj* "the angles" from the holy land sit for 40 days on the shoulders of the pilgrims. The practice of visiting Mecca returnees is called *asajère* in Madurese language, which means *ziarah* in Indonesian. So visiting Mecca returnees is also a form of pilgrimage. The visitors hug the Mecca returnees to get blessing from their bodies, they are offered holy *zamzam* water, raisins and dates from Saudi Arabia and the *hajji/hajja* prays for the visitors, who are usually also offered a meal. In return the visitors give rice or money to the Mecca returnee. The expenses for these rituals in the villages are said to be almost as expensive as the *hajj* itself (4000 USD). Similar practices can be observed for the minor pilgrimage, the *umroh* and sometimes even *umroh* returnees are called "Haji".

2. Labour Migration

The deep longing to do the *hajj* is, for some people, a motivation to become a labour migrant since labour migration is regarded as an option to avoid the long waiting period for the *hajj*.

Differently from Java, in Madura it is informal networks that dominate in labour migration and it is not only women who become TKW/TKI. Many women are accompanied by their husbands, who try to find an employment as well or just stay in Saudi Arabia to "protect their wives", as I was told. Many persons do not migrate through the official government channels but use informal Madurese networks which are regarded as more reliable than the government channels.

Especially during the pilgrimage season Madurese sign up to work as so called "volunteers" at the holy mosques and in hotels. So pilgrims from Java recount that they met many Madurese at the pilgrimage sites, hotels and street stalls, joking that "*hajj* time" is "business time" for the Madurese. This counts especially for Madurese persons who already became permanent residents in Saudi Arabia.

It is said that Madurese people cope better with their Arabic employees and the Madurese networks are rather influential in Saudi Arabia. Besides *hajj* business and labour migration the Madurese networks arrange trading from Arabic countries to Indonesia. There is for example a conglomerate of traders, called "Arab Wings" sending second hand products from Saudi Arabia to Madura and their base in Banyuwates, Sampang, is a meeting point for persons involved in these networks.

While in Java, labour migrants have the status of a "laborer" (*buruh*), in Madura persons who return from Saudi Arabia are regarded as "*haji*", even though they might not have done the *hajj*. Every labour migrant is also regarded as pilgrim and they actually often use an *umroh* pilgrimage visa to enter Saudi Arabia. The labour migrants themselves emphasize this and stress their "Arabness" by using Arabic language and sometimes wear Arabic clothes, such as a black *Abaya*. Thus, their journey to Saudi Arabia is not only a source for economic success but also an access to the social capital of Arabness.

3. Studying

A third group that is traveling to Arabic countries is students. Many *pesantren* in Madura have links to the famous universities in the Middle East and access to scholarships. Moreover, there are links to Sheihks in Saudi Arabia and Yemen who teach students in a *pesantren*-like concept.

It is gifted *santri* and the children of *kyai* who get the chance to go abroad to study.

Studying at Al-Azhar or Um-Al-Qura is of course much more prestigious than studying at IAIN or elsewhere. Even though critical informants point out that studying at these famous places does not necessarily mean that they know more about Islam. Yet, as "Alumni al-Azhar" or "Alumni Mecca" they are regarded as

gifted religious leaders. One informant put it radically: „*Orang yang pulang dari Makkah, diangap hebat. Terserah, dia ngapain di sana. Orang yang selama satu bulan itikaf di masjid istiqlal di Jakarta belum diangap apa-apa…*"

4. Blessings from Abroad

The travel experiences of these three groups are quite disparate. Yet, they have in common that they are all regarded as "Mecca returnees".

In Madura there is the concept of "Going West", in Madurese language "Ka Bère". To go "ka bère" is a rather flexible term for everybody who is going to Mecca or somewhere close to Mecca and the notion of honor for these people is similar, regardless if they migrated to other Arabic countries or studied there. Even persons who migrated to Malaysia, are regarded as returnees from "the west" sometimes.

Honoring returnees from abroad is probably connected to the conception of travel in Islam, as travel is regarded as means of coming closer to God and closer to truth (Aziz 2001: 151ff-160, Timothy & Iverson 2006: 186-205). As such, the idea of gaining new knowledge, new wisdom and blessing is inherent in Islamic conceptions of travel (Eickelman & Piscatori 1990).

Thus, the journey abroad, to "bère"/the "West/ the "Arab World" or "the holy land" is in general regarded as a source of blessing. *Barokah* (blessing) is an essential feature of societal leadership. It is associated with wealth and wisdom.

Persons who return from abroad are regarded as filled with *barokah* and moreover experience. Besides honoring Mecca returnees there is also the tendency of expecting them to share their *barokah* and newly gained wisdom.

5. Arabness as Social Capital

In order to understand why the relation towards the Arab World becomes a social capital, a source of societal authority in Madura, it is important to recall that it has been the *kyai* who are the most influential societal figures in Madura and that the *pesantren* were for a long time the main sources of knowledge. To receive knowledge and *barokah* is very important for people in Madura and this probably explains why the *kyai*, who have a lot of *barokah*, are said to be the *qibla* for Madurese people.

Persons become *kyai* through descent and many *kyai* families still have a relation to the *wali* or other important figures in Indonesian Islam, such as Shaikhona Kholil, whose relation to the Arab World and Arabic descent are the source of his charisma (Rozaki 2009).

Meanwhile the connection to the Arab World and 'Arabness', as a symbol for religiosity, became also important in local politics. While the religious and political world remained separated during the Soeharto era, lately the *kyai* entered the political arena (Rozaki 2004: 15; Wiyata 2013: 194). In three of the four *kabupaten*

(regencies) the *bupati* (regent) is a *kyai*. Moreover, Pamekasan was the first *kabupaten* in Madura to introduce local regulations (PerDa) on Sharia law.

These developments show that piety is becoming increasingly important for the Madurese society. Obviously, the Madurese appropriation of Arabness is rather symbolic, staging piety and an access to *barokah* which legitimate the claim of power.

The introduction of PerDa Sharia (or *Gerbang Salam = Gerakan Pembangunan Masyarakat Islami*) in Pamekasan is for instance regarded as an elite project which has little impact on "ordinary" peoples' daily life (Ubaidillah 2010). The regulations initially concerned the prohibition of alcohol beverages, suggestions on Muslim clothing and a general demand to fulfill Islamic duties such as alms giving (*zakat*) and qur'an reading. Yet, the regulations are, different from local regulations on Sharia law in Aceh, rather loose and there is no institutionalized sharia law enforcement. Other researchers and interviewees said that the introduction of PerDa Sharia is the result of election campaigns promoting the image of Madura as *serambi Madinah* (terrace of Medina). Since the *kyai* had joined the political arena, non-*kyai* politicians were seeking to use the capital of religious symbolic as well and thus pushed local sharia law (Ubaidillah 2010).

Besides authority the connection to the 'Arab World' is also a source of economic success. This amalgamation of economy and religion goes back to Shaikhona Kholil whose journey to 'the holy land' opened up trading opportunities for the local community (Rozaki 2009). Many *kyai* become guides for the *hajj* and sometimes own travel agencies for the *umroh* pilgrimage. Moreover, there seem to be funds from Arabic charity foundations for mosque buildings and the labour migrants' remittances contribute to the economic growth.

Yet, being a source of social and political as well as economic capital, "Arabness" does not necessarily represent an ideological orientation towards the Middle Eastern or Saudi Arabian tradition of Islam.

6. Critical Views on Arabic Culture and Customs

Asking societal leaders and especially the persons who did travel to the Arab World, such as pilgrims, labour migrants and students, they comment rather critical on Arabic culture and customs. Despite the affinity with Arabic language and style, there is an ambivalent attitude towards Arabic culture. Mecca returnees state that the Arabs are harsh and impolite, many TKW complain about hard work and ill-treatment, and students criticize Arab's feeling of superiority in religious realms. All in all, Madurese who travelled to Arabic countries are critical about the gender segregation and racism they observed in Saudi Arabia. Through the journey the ideas of the "Arab World" become more concrete and more differentiated. 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 journey sharpens the awareness of differences between Arabic and Madurese Islam even though an outward Arabic style (*gaya*) is appropriated. Concerning theological teachings most Madurese *kyai* appear to be critical about wahabism and some *kyai* argued that they would only send students to Um-Al-Qura University if they were already steady in the Madurese Islamic tradition.

Since the journeys to Saudi Arabia are a source to generate economic as well as social capital, the appropriation of Arabness, the Arabic style, is a symbol for both – economic success and authority. It is a social capital that is serving to strengthen traditional hierarchies as well as contemporary contestations over influence and power.

This appropriation of "Arabness" or "*gaya Arab*" goes along with a unique pride of Madurese culture. Not at least it is the Madurese networks to the Arab World that fill the Madurese with pride. Among the Indonesian *jemaah haji* for instance, they feel that they have the best links to the Arab world and sometimes they joke that it would be easier for them to cope with Arabic people because they were a bit similar, also harsh and brave.

Shaikhona Kholil, the famous *kyai* of Bangkalan, is said to have been to first Indonesian Imam in the holy mosque, *masjid al-harram*. Maybe it is this notion of having an access to the holy sites in Mecca and Medina and claiming them as being partly controlled by Madurese that causes this feeling of pride. Arabness is thus, an essential element of identity building in Madura. It has become characteristic, a *ciri khas* Madura, it is a Madurese version of Arabness, which is modified from its "original" in the Middle East.

The Madurese play with Arabness and know how to make use of it. In an ambivalent love-hate relationship there are creative representations of Arabness. Yet, even though Arabness is merely a symbol, it is not detached from ideas and worldviews. The different ways of appropriating Arab lastly become an arena of negotiation about the right interpretation of Islam, ideas of morality and views of the world.

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