

# “Sacrifice” Among Ahmadi Women<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstrak

Dalam tradisi agama, ‘*sacrifice*’ atau pengorbanan diyakini sebagai sebuah pengabdian terhadap Tuhan atau wujud suci. Beberapa teori menegaskan bahwa setiap agama memiliki cara dan fungsi tersendiri dalam melakukan pengorbanan. Untuk itu, pengorbanan tidak mempunyai satu makna yang disepakati. Kajian ini menekankan pada praktek pengorbanan yang dilakukan di kalangan pengikut Ahmadiyah, sebuah sekte kontroversial dalam Islam. Dengan menelisik kelompok perempuan pengikut Ahmadiyah, kajian ini berupaya mengungkap bagaimana para perempuan menggunakan atau memanfaatkan pengorbanan sebagai sebuah ekspresi atau ungkapan keaktifan atau keterlibatan mereka dalam sebuah kelompok. Alih-alih menjadi objek dan atau korban dari kegiatan pengorbanan itu sendiri, melalui pengorbanan yang mereka lakukan, para perempuan nyatanya dapat memainkan peran penting dalam upaya penolakan dan tindakan diskriminasi.

## Abstract

In the world of religion, sacrifice is believed as a form of devotion toward the deities. Some theories suggest that every religion has its own system as well as function of sacrifice. Therefore, sacrifice cannot be perceived to have a singular meaning. This research focuses on the sacrifice practiced by the Ahmadiyah community, which is a controversial sect within Islam. By looking at the Ahmadi women in Indonesia, this study attempts to find out how women use sacrifice as an expression of agency. Instead of being victims or objects of sacrifice, women can, in fact, play a significant role in resisting discrimination against them by their male-dominated organization through sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Ahmadi women, sacrifice, agency, Ahmadiyah

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was presented at the Singapore Graduate Forum of Southeast Asian Students at National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore, held on July 28-29, 2007, as the Asian Graduate Student Fellowships National University of Singapore (NUS).

## Introduction

Most studies of Muslim women's organizations in Indonesia focus on those who affiliate with mainstream Muslim organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdhatul Ulama.<sup>2</sup> Few of them discuss women in minority religious organizations like Ahmadiyah. I would suggest that a study of Ahmadi women would be beneficial since this particular organization has been alienated in many Muslim-dominated countries, including Indonesia, while on the other hand, the number of its adherents grows significantly from time to time<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, series of religious conflicts related to the denunciation of the Jema'at Ahmadiyah Indonesia (the JAI) have positioned Ahmadi women in a conflict situation. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the role of Ahmadi women in resisting discrimination against their organization through the practice of sacrifice.

My personal interest in the Ahmadiyah community is also triggered by the fact that many writings on the Ahmadiyah movement in Indonesia are focused more on the dispute surrounding the Ahmadiyah's doctrines, which have been considered contradictory to mainstream Suni Muslim doctrines, especially in respect to the notion of prophecy.<sup>4</sup> Only a few of them talk about the Ahmadiyah movement through the social or historical perspective.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I intend to present a different side of the Ahmadiyah Movement which has been overlooked i.e. the notable experience of Ahmadi women in Indonesia as part of both a minority and controversial religious group, who perform sacrifice as an expression of agency in their social live. Through the practice of sacrifice, Ahmadi women in fact have become agents who elucidate public misunderstanding of the Ahmadiyah community - accused of being extremely exclusive and deeming non-Ahmadi Muslims as filthy. Those accusations are

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<sup>2</sup>Siti Syamsiatun, *The Origin of Nasyiatul Aisyiyah: Organising for Articulating Religious-based Womanhood in Pre-Independent Indonesia*. Paper presented in the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Canberra 29 June – July 2004. See also Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesia Women Reading the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>The Indonesian Amir of the JAI, Abdul Basith, claimed that there are approximately 200.000 members of the JAI spread amongst 300 branches throughout Indonesia (The Jakarta Post, 16 July 2005)

<sup>4</sup>Abdullah Hasan Alhadar, *Ahmadiyah Telanjang Bulat di Panggung Sejarah* (Bandung: al-Ma'arif, 1980); Hamka Haq Al-Badry, *Koreksi Total terhadap Ahmadiyah* (Jakarta: Nurul Iman, 1980); Fawzy Sa'ied Thaha, *Ahmadiyah Dalam Persoalan* (Bandung: al-Ma'arif, 1981); Muslih Fathoni, *Faham Mashdi Syi'ah dan Ahmadiyah dalam Perspektif* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 1994); Suryawan, *Bukan Sekedar Hitam Putih: Penjelasan atas Keberatan yang Sering Diajukan kepada Jema'at Ahmadiyah* (Bogor: Arista Brahmadyasa, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Iskandar Zulkarnain, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKIS Yogyakarta, 2005); Sholihin, "Rekontstruksi Manajemen dan Strategi Dakwah Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia" *Jurnal Studi Islam*, Vol. 05 No. 02 (2005), 39-91.

potentially negated by Ahmadi women's involvement in social activities which have been conducted either organizationally or individually.

Studies on Ahmadi women have been conducted by Gosh and Gualtieri.<sup>6</sup> While Gosh's study emphasizes the experience of Ahmadi women in California in maintaining their identity within western culture, Gualtieri examines the social life of Ahmadi women in Pakistan within their own Ahmadi community. These two cases of Ahmadi women raised by Gosh and Gualtieri show divergent challenges faced by Ahmadi women in two different societies. Although in her work Gosh points out the notion of agency among Ahmadi women within the parameters of religion, the Ahmadi women that Gosh dealt with were not in a state of conflict. On the other hand, even though the Ahmadi women that Gualtieri researched were in the situation where the Ahmadi movement was banned, Gualtieri merely looked at the issue of women's position in their internal community without looking further at their significant contribution as subjects of resistance.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I will investigate the notion of sacrifice among Ahmadi women in Indonesia as a strategy of resistance when their male-dominated organization is oppressed by the state and some Indonesian Muslim organizations.

This paper focuses on Ahmadi women, which included both members and organizational boards of the Lajnah Imaillah Indonesia (LII). To collect information on this specific issue I was engaged in several discussions in 2007 with 29 Ahmadi women in four different locations in Indonesia, i.e. Bogor, Parung, Jakarta and Jogjakarta. Since most of the respondents were working women, it was not possible to conduct one to one interviews. Alternatively, the interviews were held in groups.

### **Ahmadiyah: Long Journey, Bitter Experience**

The Ahmadiyah movement is identically adjacent to a figure namely Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. At the end of the year 1888 Ghulam Ahmad launched an announcement (*Istihrar*) in which he urged people who seek for the truth to pledge allegiance (*bay'at*) to him in order to learn true belief and live in the way of God. The first ceremony of initiation was held in 1889 which afterward declared as the establishment of the Ahmadiyah organization.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Huma Ahmed Ghosh, "Portraits of Believers: Ahmadi Women Performing Faith in the Diaspora" *Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (2004), 73-92; Antonio Gualtieri, *The Ahmadi: Community, Gender and Politics in a Muslim Society* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup>Antonio Gualtieri, *The Ahmadi: Community, Gender and Politics in a Muslim Society* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup>Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continues: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (California: University of California, 1989).

Along its historical course, due to the nonconformity of its doctrines within the generally accepted Islamic doctrines, the Ahmadiyah Movement faced a lot of resistance particularly from its Sunni Muslim counterparts. Diverging from the Sunni Muslims, the Ahmadis hold their founder, Ghulam Ahmad, to be a prophet and the returned Messiah. The Ahmadis also reject the Sunni conception of *jihad* and endorse an unconventional Muslim Christology. As a consequence, the Ahmadis are alienated from their land of origin i.e. Pakistan, as well as from many Muslim-dominated countries, including Indonesia. As they have different fundamental understandings of Islamic principle compared to other Muslim communities, Ghulam Ahmad's followers subsequently identify themselves as Ahmadi Muslims.

Internal dispute between Ahmadiyah leading members occurred in about 1941. This internal conflict resulted in the division of the Ahmadiyah movement into two different factions, namely the Qodhiyani and Lahori Ahmadiyah. Mahmud Abbas as a leading member of the Qodhiyani Ahmadiyah accused Muhammad Ali and Kamal al-Din of denying Ghulam Ahmad's prophecy as an attempt to reconcile the Ahmadiyah teachings with the generally accepted principles of Islam. The hostility among those Ahmadiyah leading members was also motivated by conflicting ideas on the nature of community leadership after the demise of Ghulam Ahmad. A lot of internal disputes afterward have estranged the Qodhiyani and Lahori Ahmadiyah, both in the organizational and doctrinal context.<sup>9</sup>

In Indonesia, the Qodhiyani Ahmadiyah was first introduced in 1924 by Maulana Rahmat Ali, an Ahmadiyah *muballigh* from Pakistan, as a response to the demand of some Indonesian students who studied in the Qodhiyani School of Pakistan to preach the Ahmadiyah teachings in Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, according to G.F. Pijfer as it is cited by Zulkarnain (2005), the Lahori Ahmadiyah was brought to Indonesia earlier in 1920 by Prof. Kwadja Kamaluddin, BA, LBB, a Lahori figure from London. As they differ from one another, the Lahori Ahmadiyah in Indonesia (unlike the Qodhiyani Ahmadiyah) is structurally disconnected from the center of the Ahmadiyah Movement (*Anjuman Isha'ati Ahmadiyah*) in Pakistan. Moreover, in Indonesia, the Qodhiyani Ahmadiyah is officially recognized as the Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI), while the Lahori Ahmadiyah is well-known as the Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia (GAI).

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<sup>9</sup>See Friedmann, *Prophecy Continues: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*, 16-22, Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyah Movement: Past and Present* (Amritsar: Department of History Guru Nanak Dev University, 1976).

<sup>10</sup>Iskandar Zulkarnain, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKIS Yogyakarta, 2005).

Due to the conformity of the Lahori Ahmadiyah's doctrines with the generally accepted doctrines in Islam, the GAI has a greater opportunity to be accepted by Indonesian Muslims compared to the JAI. In fact, the JAI is appointed as a deviationist and misleading movement and has been strictly banned by the Ulama Council of Indonesia (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI). Interestingly, despite the ban issued by the MUI and their rejection by some Indonesian groups of Muslims, the JAI experiences more significant development rather than the GAI.<sup>11</sup>

A number of religious conflicts, regarded as rejection by some Indonesian Muslims of the JAI, have occurred in several parts of Indonesia. In 2002, a religious riot against the Jemaat Ahmadiyah occurred in Lombok and Mataram, West and East Nusa Tenggara. It has been pointed out that the riot was motivated by the distribution of provocative pamphlets about the Ahmadiyah movement, resulting from a national seminar conducted in Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta, on the digression of the Ahmadiyah Movement.<sup>12</sup> A similar conflict also happened in Kuningan, West Java at the same time. However, these were not the only conflicts which happened. In 2005 a bigger, even more significant attack against the JAI took place in the National Office of the JAI in Bogor, West Java. This incident, which resulted in the destruction of the JAI's properties, including a mosque and library, was put in action by a group of Muslims calling themselves Gerakan Umat Islam Indonesia, which consisted of members of Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Lembaga Pengkajian Islam Indonesia (LPPI) and several other Muslim organizations.

Although the Indonesian government has never officially restricted the existence of the Ahmadiyah movement, the MUI, as an Ulama council formed by the Government, issued an official fatwa on the banning of the Ahmadiyah Movement in Indonesia in Fatwa MUI No. 11/MUNAS VII/ MUI/ 15/ 2005 as an affirmation of a similar fatwa issued in 1980.<sup>13</sup> This particular fatwa was formulated as a response to the conflict against the Jemaat Ahmadiyah in Bogor in 2005. The response of both local and the national government toward the attacks against the members of the JAI seems to be one-sided. The case of the large eviction of Ahmadis in Lombok and the destruction of the JAI National Center in Parung has never been prosecuted in law. In several cities of Indonesia the local governments finally closed the JAI mosques which also functioned as their organizational activity centers. Furthermore, after the

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<sup>11</sup>See Zulkarnain, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia*, 250.

<sup>12</sup>Bashori A Hakim, "Konflik Sosial Bernuansa Agama: Kasus Konflik Intern Umat Beragama di Lombok Timur Nusa Tenggara Barat", *Jurnal Multikultural & Multireligius*, II, 9 (2003), 143-168.

<sup>13</sup> *Fatwa MUI No. 11/MUNAS VII/ MUI/ 15/ 2005*.

attack on the JAI center in Parung, the JAI lost the freedom to hold their annual national meeting (Jalsa Salanah) which is intended to improve the spiritual live of the members as well as strengthening their sense of unity.

Grievance and discontent toward the Indonesian government has triggered some Ahmadis in East Nusa Tenggara to seek political asylum from the Australian government. They claimed that the Indonesian government had failed to protect their right to religious freedom and peaceful lives as well.<sup>14</sup> As individuals affiliated with a minority religious group, the Ahmadi members are, somehow, vulnerable to some kinds of discrimination in their social lives.

In view of the fact that the JAI has faced violence and discrimination either by the government or by society, my study will focus on women belonging to this particular organization. Since the organizational boards of the JAI are dominated by men, people may assume that women play a less significant role in their organization compared to men. In this particular research I am trying to prove that Ahmadi women are able to act not simply behind the men, but they can independently make significant contributions to their organization through their active engagement in the practice of sacrifice.

### **Ahmadi Women: Facing Double Challenges**

Scrutinizing Ahmadi women in Indonesia is pivotal in the sense that these women face double challenges, both as women, and as members of an oppressed religious community at the same time. In most cases, women in relation to religious institutions, including in the Jema'at Ahmadiyah, are traditionally barred from all formal congregational roles.<sup>15</sup> Although Ahmadi women are given a certain amount of freedom to achieve their personal careers, they still have to deal with religious regulations which place them in a secondary position compared to the men. As also happens in some other Muslim communities, the Ahmadiyah Organizational boards are ruled primarily by Ahmadi men. Ahmadi women can only play their formal organizational role in the Ahmadiyah womens wing, namely the Lajnah Imaillah Indonesia (LII). In terms of male and female interaction, the Ahmadiyah regulate strict segregation between men and women, especially in institutional activities. However, the Ahmadi women in fact become social actors who are able to negotiate with the situation where their religious community is repressed.

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<sup>14</sup>Zen Abidien & Khafid Supriyanto, Upaya Kaum Terusir, *Majalah Tempo* (2006), 40.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Shaheeda Lateef, Muslim Women in India, in Herbert L Bodman and Nayareh Tohidi, *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), .252, Sarah Lila Mehta, "Narrowin the Divide: Deconstructing Muslim Women's Choice: *Between Religion and Gender Justice in India*" (Washington DC: Ethic and Public Policy Center, 2004), 2.

Being part of a religious minority community for Ahmadi women is a matter of life choice. Based on their personal experiences, Ahmadi women can be classified into those who are born into Ahmadi families, those who become Ahmadis after their marriage with Ahmadi men and those who voluntarily become Ahmadi based on their own choice. As members of a controversial religious group these women are in some ways susceptible to prejudice. In some cases, women who were not originally born into Ahmadi families often experienced refusal and isolation from their own families and societies when they finally decided to pledge allegiance to the JAI. As it is told by Fatima, who was married with an Ahmadi man, she had to leave her own family because of her contentious decision to be an Ahmadi.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Isma and Najwa who originally came from NU families experienced firm confrontation from their families when they announced their conviction to the Ahmadiyah doctrines.<sup>17</sup> Another instance of repression can be also faced by those who originated from an Ahmadi family. Alia and Ani confessed that they have dealt with cynical treatment from their neighbors and friends after their acknowledgment of their status as Ahmadis.<sup>18</sup> However, for these women, they do not have any reason to hide their identity, although they realize the risks they might face if people know their Ahmadiyah identity. This is because they believe that as Ahmadis they have a certain responsibility to spread the truth. Nevertheless, these women turned out to be important agents who illuminated misleading public judgment towards the JAI. As the Ahmadiyah have been accused of having *Tazkirah* as their holy book for example, these women can certainly show to their families and friends that they read the same holy book as other Muslims in common, i.e. the Holy Qur'an. Moreover, by demonstrating good behavior they are capable of negotiating with the enmity and challenges which make them and this allows them to finally be reaccepted by their families and communities.

### **Lajnah Imaillah as Ahmadiyah Women Wing**

To some extent, as found by Gosh (2004) and Gualtieri (2004), in the sense of gender equality the Ahmadis cannot be homologized with the majority of fundamentalist Muslims due to their openness in giving women certain freedom in public spheres.<sup>19</sup> This is also proven by the fact that most of the

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<sup>16</sup>Interview: 22 April 2007.

<sup>17</sup>Interview: 13 & 27 April 2007.

<sup>18</sup>Interview: 22 & 27 April 2007.

<sup>19</sup>Huma Ahmed Ghosh, "Portraits of Believers: Ahmadi Women Performing Faith in the Diaspora" *Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (2004), 73-92; Antonio Gualtieri, *The Ahmadis: Community, Gender and Politics in a Muslim Society* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

Ahmadi women that I engaged with in my study are working women. In fact some of them hold important positions in their workplaces, although they still have to maintain strict segregation between men and women within their Ahmadiyah community. In order to empower women within the Ahmadiyah community, by the initiative of the Second Successor of the Messiah (*Khalifah al-Masih 2*) Hadhrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad, the Lajnah Imaillah was established in 1922 (Lajnah Imaillah USA; n.d.).<sup>20</sup> He suggested that the dynamic participation of Ahmadi women in establishing a strong community was as essential as that of Ahmadi men. Since the Lajnah Imaillah is found in every branch of the Jema'at Ahmadiyah around the world, and also bound by the rule of Khalifah al Masih, this particular womens organization can be viewed as a transnational womens network.

For Ahmadi women in Indonesia, the LI does not merely function as *Majlis Ta'lim* where Indonesian Muslim women usually gather together to learn about Islam. The LI actively conducts social activities which address not only for the Ahmadi adherents but also for Indonesian society in general. However, due to the controversy of the Ahmadiyah movement in Indonesia, the activities of LI are less exposed compared to that of the Aisyiyah of Muhammadiyah and the Muslimat of Nahdhatul Ulama. Accordingly, the LI is less popular than any other muslim womens organization. The Ahmadi women that I discussed with confessed that their involvement in the LI significantly influences their everyday live. They have created this particular organization as a place where they can share ideas, build self-confidence and tighten solidarity among members. Evidently, on many occasions these women appeared to be more confident in expressing their ideas even though they came from various educational as well as socio-economic levels.

In relation to the JAI as its prominent organization, the LI contributes significantly to promoting the mission of the JAI. Factually, the LI has established organizational networks with many women organizations as well as governmental institutions, like the Indonesian Ministry of Women Empowerment, which enabled them to gain support when the JAI was attacked and oppressed. As a result, the LI has never stopped their organizational activities although it lost its central office after the Parung incident. In addition, their active contribution to social activities also potentially changes public prejudice against the JAI and verifies that the Ahmadis can live side by side with other Muslims instead of being exclusive.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Lajnah Imaillah Constitution*, n.d. Retrieved from al-Islam Online, 19 July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Interview: 13 April 2007.



One of the LI organizational missions is to educate its members in order to forfeit themselves to their religion. This is consistent with the Promise of LI (*Janji LI*) which states that the Ahmadi women are benevolent to sacrifice their selves, wealth, time, energies and families for the sake of religion. Interestingly, this consequential commitment in fact has encouraged Ahmadi women to do more for their society. Riva who was born into an Ahmadi family has devoted herself to build a kindergarten for unfortunate children and run a reading course for illiterate women in her *kampung*. She believes that she dedicated her money, her energy and her time to the societies empowerment because she has been bound by the *Janji LI*. Hence she found herself responsible for the development of Islam wherever she step her feet.<sup>22</sup>

### **Sacrifice among Ahmadi Women**

In a most general sense, the notion of sacrifice is believed to be a form of devotion toward the deities. It is suggested that every religion has its own system as well as function of sacrifice.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, sacrifice cannot be viewed as having a singular definition. By looking at sacrifice through economic analysis Iannaccone (1992) and Berman (2000) suggest that sacrifice is a form of rational consequence of an individual's involvement in a certain religious institution.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, an individual's affiliation to religious sects is closely related to the possibly gained cost and benefit. These two scholars also conclude that a religious sect that requires sacrifice for its members is likely to grow stronger than otherwise.

By looking at the Jema'at Ahmadiyah as a sect within Islam, we might see how sacrifice significantly influences its community development. Unlike the mainstream Muslim majority, the Jema'at Ahmadiyah has its own concept of sacrifice. The term sacrifice itself is commonly used among Ahmadis as one of the most essential teachings. The founding father of the Ahmadiyah, Harzat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1973), stated that the life of Islam, the life of Mussalmans and the manifestation of God are dependent upon sacrifice by

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<sup>22</sup>Interview: 7 April 2007.

<sup>23</sup>Th. P. Van Baaren, "Theoretical Speculations of Sacrifice" *Numen*, Vol. 11 No. 1 (1964), 1-12.; Victor Turner, "Sacrifice as Quintessential Process, Prophylaxis or Abandonment?", *History of Religion*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (1977), 189-215; Francis X Clooney, "Jamini's Contribution to the Theory of Sacrifice as the Experience of Transcendence", *History of Religions*, Vol. 25 No. 3 (1986), 199-212; Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-riding in Cults, Communes and Other Collectives", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 100 No. 2 (1992), 271-291; Eli Berman, "Sect, Subsidy and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 115 No. 3 (2000), 905-953.

<sup>24</sup>Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-riding in Cults, Communes and Other Collectives", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 100 No. 2 (1992), 271-291; Eli Berman, "Sect, Subsidy and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 115 No. 3 (2000), 905-953.

humans. He further said that those who pledged allegiance (*bay'at*) to him are consequently ready to devote their lives, leisure and properties for the sake of religion at the same time. In terms of wealth sacrifice, in general there are three primary contributions regulated for the Ahmadi<sup>25</sup>:

1. *Chandah Aam*, 1/16 from the total incomes earned by every Ahmadi.
2. *Chandah wasiyat*, voluntary gifts by an Ahmadi from 1/10th to 1/3rd of their properties and belongings.
3. *Tahrik e-jadid*, a commitment to contribute 1/5 or a specific amount of wealth for a one year period. (Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia; 1953)

In the Indonesian context, the generally used term for sacrifice among the Ahmadiyah community is "*pengorbanan*"<sup>26</sup>. More specifically for Ahmadi women, the *pengorbanan* is not seen merely as a ritual practice but rather a life need that ought to be fulfilled. In fact, the practice of sacrifice has become one of the rational reasons why women have decided to devote their selves to the Ahmadiyah faith. As it is admitted by Nur who was interested in the faith of Ahmadiyah because of the conception of sacrifice (*pengorbanan*) that she did not find in other Muslim communities.

When I found the Ahmadiyah, I realized that I could work for God. This is what I was looking for. I witnessed an extreme sacrifice that I have never seen before when these women (ahmadi) took off their fineries in a meeting in order to build a woman's activity center.<sup>27</sup>

Ani also stated that although she was born in an Ahmadi family, her parents gave her freedom to choose her own faith. After her participation in several Islamic movements, she decided to stay with her Ahmadi faith because she found that the *pengorbanan* in other Muslim communities is not restricted as it is in the JAI. She felt that she experienced a more meaningful life with the *pengorbanan*.<sup>28</sup> Thus, these women found the *pengorbanan* is essential for their lives.

For Riva who has spent her life time empowering the society through education, in addition to the rational consequence of bay'at, *pengorbanan* is also considered as a valuable opportunity for women to have the same roles as men in the society. This is because the *pengorbanan* is obligatory for both men and women. Thus *pengorbanan* motivates women not only to be active as wives

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<sup>25</sup>Jema'at Ahmadiyah Indonesia, *Anggaran Dasar & Anggaran Rumah Tangga Jema'at Ahmadiyah Indonesia* (Bogor: Jema'at Ahmadiyah Indonesia).

<sup>26</sup>*Pengorbanan* is an Indonesian translation of sacrifice.

<sup>27</sup>Interview: 22 April 2007.

<sup>28</sup>Interview: 27 April 2007.

and mothers but also as agents of social change. Neither her husband nor her children have objected to her measures to use most parts of their house to run the school or to use her children's savings in order to support the needs of her school. This is because they realize that Riva has an obligation not only as a mother and a wife but also as an Ahmadi muslimah.<sup>29</sup>

*Pengorbanan* is also performed collectively by Ahmadi women through the activities of the LII. Beside the time these women spend learning Islam together, they also actively conduct social activities. Social activities held by the LII have not only been addressed for the Ahmadis but also for all society who might need assistance. For instance, according to the 2005 Annual Report, the LII donated charity to the victims of Tsunami in Aceh of Rp. 3.500.000.000 and sent 100 doctors to the field.<sup>30</sup> In addition, more than 1000 LII members have been registered as potential eye donors which resulted in the notification of the LII as the organization which possessed the greatest number of eye donors in Indonesia. The LII also regularly supports some schools, health care activities and public facilities throughout Indonesia. Of course the collective *pengorbanan* is not simply limited to charitable activities. The Ahmadi women through the establishment of the LII are also encouraged to spend their lifetime to seek knowledge and spread it to others including to their own families. Therefore, every single thing they do in this world is by means of sacrifice. As it is stated by the *Sadr* (leader) of the LII:<sup>31</sup>

An Ahmadi woman has several functions that should be performed proportionally. As a mother she is striven to dedicate the best next generation for the Jema'at. As a wife, she is expected to give a peaceful life for her husband. As a member of the JAI she should contribute her life, time, wealth and energy to the organization, primarily to the LII. As an Indonesian citizen, she may not let her self ignorant to her environment. She ought to do what she can do for the society.

### **Sacrifice as an Expression of Agency**

For Ahmadis *pengorbanan* is considered an expression of piety. In other words the nucleus objective of *pengorbanan* is to maintain the communion with God as it is referred to in the teaching of Prophet Muhammad and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. More specifically, as it is edified by Ghulam Ahmad, the *pengorbanan* itself is also purposeful for the Ahmadiyah community's

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<sup>29</sup>Interview: 7 April 2007.

<sup>30</sup>Interview: 13 April 2007.

<sup>31</sup>Interview: 13 April 2007.

empowerment and with its main desired achievement, which is to spread the truth widely.<sup>32</sup> However, by no means?, in fact the practice of *pengorbanan* among Indonesian Ahmadis creates a sort of defensive strategy to negotiate with their oppressed situation. Therefore, in this sense I would agree with Turner (1977) who says that theological significance is not the only objective of sacrifice rather it is regarded ‘*an act of great moment for their lives as members of a community, as part of a developing and changing web of social relationship*’.<sup>33</sup>

Why Ahmadi women? If the practice of *pengorbanan* by Ahmadi men also influences significantly the strategy of resistance against violence and prejudice by other Muslim counterparts as it does by women, why do I put so much emphasis on women’s roles in the *pengorbanan*? I would argue that people might think that women within a male dominated religious institution like Ahmadiyah may only be back stage actors. Their role in the Jema’at might be assumed to be simply as followers and not as the subject of action. Factually, through *pengorbanan* these women created their public spheres which negate the presumption that because there has been a strict segregation between men and women in the Jema’at, they are incapable of taking part in the public spheres. Furthermore, since in Indonesian society men are considered to have a close relationship to political tendency, women’s practice of *pengorbanan* is more easily accepted by the society compared to that of men. This is consistent with what has been suggested by Lindenmeyr (1993) that, in terms of social activities, women supposedly involve love and sacrifice. On the contrary, men often put reason and reform behind charity.<sup>34</sup>

After the Parung incident in 2005, the issue of the digression of the Jema’at Ahmadiyah became an actual topic of discussion in many religious talks which potentially resulted in the provocation of enmity against the Ahmadis. Conversely, some non-Ahmadis who had good relationships with the Ahmadis and benefited by the *pengorbanan* evidently became defenders. Evidence of this is related by Ani who was often accused of promoting the teaching of Ahmadiyah in her private school by Kyais in mosques surrounding her environment.

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<sup>32</sup> Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Victory of Islam*, 1973, Retrieved in 25 June 2007, from Al-Islam Online.

<sup>33</sup> Victor Turner, “Sacrifice as Quintessential Process, Prophylaxis or Abandonment?”, *History of Religion*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (1977), 201

<sup>34</sup> Adele Lindenmeyr, “Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity 1762-1914”, *Sign*, Vol. 18 No.03 (1993), 562-591.

"I was often told by the parents of my students that the Kyai in mosque A and B warned people about my private school. The Kyai always said that I had a sort of hidden objective behind my goodness to run this charitable school. Decidedly, some listeners clarified that it was not like that. They said that their children were not taught any Ahmadi doctrine in my school. They were able to prove that in fact my school has given their children an opportunity to gain an affordable education".<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, after the attack on the JAI center in Parung, Ani has consistently run her private school and has not experienced a decrease in student numbers as a consequence. She proves that her Ahmadi identity has never prevented her from doing good deeds to other people even to non-Ahmadis. Hence she shows that the Ahmadis are not as exclusive as it is claimed.

On a larger scale, *pengorbanan* allows Ahmadi women to create organizational networks with both governmental and non-governmental organizations, even after the issuance of the MUI fatwa on the banning of Ahmadiyah. For instance, in April 2007 the LII received an honorable award from the local government of Bogor for their active participation in eye donation. Basically, the active involvement of Indonesian Ahmadis in eye donation is supported by the letter of the Khalifah al-Masih III, Mirza Tahir Ahmad, to the leader of the LII on the permissibility of eye donation according to the Islamic Law in 1985.<sup>36</sup>

The two above cases are only small instances of how Ahmadi women play their role in negotiating with discriminative situations against their male-dominated organization through *pengorbanan*. These women might not realize that the virtue of *pengorbanan*, which is mainly regarded as a religious ritual, has in fact been transformed into an expression of agency, which means that through *pengorbanan* these women are able to form their own capacity to act and place themselves equally as men in the society as well as maintaining their religious identity. Considering that Ahmadi women do not account for male domination in their community as their main problem instead of their minority identity, I would argue that the notion of agency itself should be analyzed differently in accordance with the different context of culture and society. In this sense, I would view the *pengorbanan* as a modality of actions as it is suggested by Mahmood (2005) that "It is best not to propose a theory of

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<sup>35</sup>Interview: 21 April 2007.

<sup>36</sup>Ali Mukhayat, *Sejarah Pertablighan Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia 1925-1994* (Tasikmalaya: Penerbit EBK, 2000).

agency but to analyze agency in terms of the different modalities it takes and the grammar of concept it particular affect, meaning, and forms resides".<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, for Ahmadi women sacrifice is not simply regarded as a ritual practice but also constitutes meaningfulness in their lives. Unintentionally, the practice of sacrifice for these women creates a space to express their agency. Factually, despite the gender segregation restrictions in their religious community, through sacrifice these women have been able to gain certain freedoms in public spheres. Moreover, sacrifice among Ahmadi women has also resulted in social implications which have significantly affected their oppressed religious minority group i.e. acceptance by the society.

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<sup>37</sup>Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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