

## The Expressions of Indonesian Muslims in Performing the ‘*Umrah* Pilgrimage to Mecca

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### Abstract

Minor Islamic pilgrimages (‘*umrah*’) are increasingly being studied as part of commodified pilgrimages in the age of trade and tourism. This relatively modern construction has restricted researchers’ understandings of practices like pilgrimages to the graves of saints. This article compares two imagined Indonesian Muslim religio-cultural communities performing ‘*umrah*’, utilizing a hybrid ethnography method to obtain data. The paper is structured in two sections. Firstly, it discusses how traditionalist Muslims understand ‘*umrah*’ as a means of maintaining the authority of the teachings of Sufi ‘*ulamā*’. The second section explores how another group, guided by Muslim ethics, aligns ‘*umrah*’ journeys with the principles of capitalism within Islam. This comparative presentation demonstrates diverse Muslim experiences, refraining from a homogenous expression of the ‘*umrah*’. Ultimately, this paper advocates for more comprehensive studies of the ‘*umrah*’ pilgrimage in Indonesia, including ones that focus on nuanced expressions of pilgrims and diverse roles played by Islamic religious authorities, moving beyond simplified commercial interpretations.

**Keywords:** ‘*Umrah*, ethical imaginary, multivocal, global Muslim.

## Introduction

For centuries, Masjid al-Ḥarām and Medina, both situated in the Arabian Peninsula, have served as vibrant pilgrimage sites in Islam. The Ḥarām and the Medina mosques have evolved from being trading centers for Arab tribes into global investment powerhouses stimulating the economy and revenue for the Saudi monarchy. Recent expansions of the pilgrimage sites in Mecca and Medina have attracted 2.5 million Muslims worldwide to undertake the obligatory pilgrimage, the *ḥajj*. These sites also facilitate year-round pilgrimages, *‘umrah*, which in 2019 saw more than triple the number of pilgrims compared to *ḥajj* (Saudi Ministry of Ḥajj and ‘Umrah, 2020). By inviting global enterprises to establish accommodation, transportation, and luxury service facilities, Saudi technocrats have turned these sites into a major market for trade and tourism (Bianchi, 2017). As a result, the economic revenue from pilgrimage tourism has significantly boosted the Kingdom’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and gradually diversified the income of this leading oil-producing country.

Scholars have studied the Indonesian *ḥajj* from historical (Ahmed et al., 2006; Burns, 2007; Hurgronje, 2006; Roff, 1985), political (Bianchi, 2004), and Islamization (Laffan, 2003; Van Bruinessen, 1990) perspectives. In contemporary studies of Muslim pilgrimage practices, researchers have included *‘umrah* as part of the pilgrimage to Mecca (Mols & Buitelaar, 2015), examining it from different perspectives including area-based studies (Flaskerud & Natvig, 2018; Luz, 2020; Thimm, 2017), fashion and body perceptions (Thimm, 2018), and gender-based mobility (Buitelaar, Stephan-Emmrich & Thimm, 2021). By incorporating the study of *‘umrah* into the Mecca pilgrimage, this body of research has successfully broadened the understanding of Muslim pilgrimage studies for Western audiences by presenting historical records and

subjective-individual insights into both *ḥajj* and *‘umrah*. However, this focus on the global Islamic community suggests that it represents the most sought-after aspect of contemporary Muslim society, overshadowing the diverse experiences of Muslim societies.

Beyond the widespread global interest in studying pilgrimage practices, there is a growing focus on researching *‘umrah* in Indonesia. This specific area of study has been relatively overlooked compared to more established research areas, such as the larger pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) and local pilgrimages to the shrines of revered Sufi saints (Ind.: *ziyarah wali*; Ar.: *ziyārat al-awliyā’*). Initially, *‘umrah* attracted minimal attention from Indonesian scholars (Ichwan, 2008; Darmadi, 2013; Abdurrahman, 2009), but has since developed into a distinct subject of study for social scientists (Sucipto, 2013), being examined through the concept of religious commodification, which has designated *‘umrah* as part of religious tourism (Dewi, 2017). From a social perspective, several ethnographic studies highlighted the significant impact of trade and consumerism, without diminishing spiritual enlightenment aspects (Almakin, 2016; Almakin, 2017; Mayasari, 2014). Other studies have highlighted the emerging ‘backpacker’ *‘umrah* trend (Pitaya et al., 2021). These studies vividly portray diverse Muslim expressions of *‘umrah* in commodified religious life—as pilgrims, wanderers, and consumers (Maghfirah, 2017). The diverse means and expressions of *‘umrah* journeys reflect that *‘umrah* is not just a religiously-motivated journey to Mecca, let alone the modern construction of *‘umrah*, which has reduced the practice as merely a shorter version of the *ḥajj*. Instead, *‘umrah* has been become a medium to express subjective Islamic aspirations for leisure and Muslim-friendly tourism, as distinct from secular activities (Sucipto, 2013; Thimm, 2017). Furthermore, *‘umrah* also appears to facilitate migration (Lücking, 2017). These instances show that

there are various underlying motivations behind this modern expression of religious mobility. It is essential to note that *‘umrah* has been shaped by religious and non-religious factors, which demand more a nuanced understanding.

As the practice has expanded significantly, there has been a trend of increasing monetization and bureaucratization of *‘umrah*. A study by Abdillah (2017) on the regulation of *‘umrah* outlines the state’s support for pilgrims’ rights, and critically emphasizes the government’s evaluative role. Cahyaningrum’s (2009) examination of fraud involving the 20016 *‘umrah* cohort, highlights the need for the government to take a stronger role in *‘umrah* control and supervision. From this perspective, the global tourist economy and the bureaucratization of Indonesian pilgrimages have regulated and restricted pilgrims; creating a structure that designates *‘umrah* as a voluntary journey.

Meanwhile, the postmodern theory of pilgrimage studies shows the importance of recognizing the diverse meanings embedded within the concept of pilgrimage. In 2004, Coleman and Eade introduced various assumptions and metaphors related to pilgrimages, that are significant in understanding pilgrimage studies. They urged researchers to not only focus on religious perspectives but also to consider the ways in which concepts like locality, mobility, space, place, national, and transnational elements contribute to the understanding of pilgrimages (Coleman, 2004, p. 5). Reader, a leading contemporary pilgrimage researcher (as cited in Albera & Eade, 2017, p. 187), highlights two significant aspects that have fragmented pilgrimage studies in Muslim societies. The first is an elite conceptualization of pilgrimage studies in Muslim societies, as more research has centered on elite institutions, specifically on the history and economy of pilgrimages. This perspective shaped the dominant discussions on Muslim

pilgrimages, distinguishing between perceived ‘official’ pilgrimages and the heterodox practice of grave visitation (*ziyarah kubur/wali*). Second, there is a fragmented approach to studying pilgrimages in the Muslim world, particularly regarding theological issues that underlie the diversity within this area of study (p. 189). Some Muslim groups believe that the *hajj* and ‘*umrah* are the only officially approved forms of pilgrimage, while others argue that there are similarities and continuities between rituals in the *hajj* and ‘*umrah* and *ziyarah wali* as an alternative to or integral part of the *hajj*.<sup>1</sup> To address both issues, this study highlights the metaphors cultivated for ‘*umrah* and aims to capture the nuances and diverse orientations that pilgrims attribute to the inherent meaning of their ‘*umrah* practice.

In the context of Islamic studies, Coleman and Eades’ concept finds resonance in contemporary research, including the work of Arjana (2017). Shopia Arjana is a leading researcher on pilgrimage studies in Islam, exploring the concept of multivocality<sup>2</sup> (Arjana, 2017) to develop multiple narratives and values linked to ‘*umrah*. Although she was not the first to study Islamic pilgrimages in this way (see more on Eade & Piscatory, 1990; Millie & Mayo, 2019, p. 183), her analytical framework acknowledges contemporary developments and the growing influence of capitalism and tourism. Shared experiences and references appear in various metaphors employed

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on this issue, see: (Arjana, 2017; Lucking, 2020; Woodward, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Multivocality is a concept popular within the realm of archaeology, emphasizing the existence of various narratives or simultaneous discussions related to the practices and significance of pilgrimages. In the context of Muslim communities, multivocality emerges when different groups within these communities hold varying interpretations of a particular pilgrimage tradition while upholding the significance of their own journeys. Multivocality acknowledges and respects the rights of different groups to interpret, evolve, and navigate their understanding of the past in diverse ways. Whether these interpretations debate or align with the past or certain sites, all are equally acceptable. (Arjana 2017; Arjana in Formichi, 2021; Darvill, 2021; Lucking, 2014; Luz, 2020).

in *‘umrah* practices (Arjana in Formichi, 2021, p. 197; Luz, 2020, p. 7). More importantly, there is an urgent need to encompass a broader range of multivocal pilgrimage expressions.

Accordingly, this research aligns with the concept of hybrid ethnography. Hybrid ethnography involves the integration of various tools for on-site interaction and online participation and observation (Przybylski 2021). This methodology is appropriate as, during the pandemic, it enabled researchers to expand the ‘field’ to accommodate various dimensions and instruments, adapting to human limitations in mobility while fulfilling research objectives (Krause, et.al., 2021, p. 268). In the world of social distancing, where human interactions are limited, hybrid ethnography facilitates encounters between researcher and informants electronically, which is increasingly acceptable method in the globalized world (Gibson, 2021. P. 6). The data collection process utilizes an integrated fieldwork approach, consisting of offline pre-fieldwork in 2019 and online encounters during 2020-2021 taking advantage of social media and online video applications, such as YouTube and Zoom. Data was obtained from twenty-seven interviews, including pilgrims and staff from Al Ibrah Islamic Boarding School (*pesantren*) and ESQ (Emotional Spiritual Quotient) Travel and Tour offices located in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Data was also obtained from online and on-site observations at national *‘umrah* providers.<sup>3</sup> Online observations offered valuable insights into ‘real-time’ events, complementing the researchers’ live participation but were temporally-bounded (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis & Tacchi, 2015, p. 11). Virtual engagement allowed for immersion similar to offline ethnography (Hine 2015, as cited in Gibson, 2021, p. 6). However, I acknowledge the potential for research bias, as a result of relying on informants to actively provide

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of privacy, name of research participants is kept anonymous with modification of any personal information.

videos and participate in online interviews.<sup>189</sup> In sum, hybrid ethnography involves the collection of data from offline and online encounters. As it is increasingly established in ethnographic methodology, this study also employs this approach.

This paper examines two distinct perspectives on *‘umrah*, each presenting a unique perception and understanding of the practice. The first perspective is rooted in the traditional teachings of past scholars (*‘ulamā’*) concerning the practice of *ziyarah wali*, emphasizing the connection between the *ziyarah* in Medina and the integral role it plays within *‘umrah*. The second section of the paper examines another group that takes a relatively moderate view of Muslim ethics. Unlike the first group, this second perspective views the journey to Mecca and Medina as a means for spiritual development, adopting self-help principles to achieve personal growth and individual well-being.

### **Ethical Imagination of the Traditionalist Pilgrimage to Mecca**

This section explores *‘umrah* undertaken by members of Al Ibrah traditionalist *pesantren* in Yogyakarta, where the leaders adhere to the teachings of Sufi leaders and the importance of time and place to navigate pilgrimages within both local and trans-local contexts. This section argues that these interwoven elements serve as guiding principles for the pilgrimage to Mecca, through which the group defines and expresses a Javanese-Muslim interpretation of *‘umrah*. Central to this practice is a divergence from the perspective of a global Muslim community, which emphasizes unity through the *‘umrah*.

The ambitious Saudi Vision 2030 outlines a modernized vision for pilgrimage practices, encouraging a blend of travel and consumer

activities (Bianchi, 2017). Reader (2008) considers this shift to be a global phenomenon and argues that it has affected pilgrims' interactions with holy sites. Pilgrims may travel repeatedly but spend less time admiring the sacred sites on a spiritual level. The state's policy on mobility has also had an impact; the bureaucratization of mobility means that only specific individuals who meet certain requirements can arrange *ʿumrah* travel. This approach has consequences for those who may not meet the set standard. The Madurese conventional brokerage system is an illustrative example of this. This system, based on the Madurese ethnic group, struggles to comply with the bureaucratic requirements as it traditionally views travel to Mecca as being linked to work (Lucking, 2017).

Similarly, for several other communities, such as the traditional Javanese Muslims, travelling to Mecca creates ambivalent perceptions concerning center and periphery.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the global Muslim discourse that emphasizes the centrality of Mecca, Javanese Muslims regard the Kaʿbah and Java as concurrent epicenters of Islam. *Pesantren*<sup>5</sup> in Java play an active role in

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<sup>4</sup> Some scholars explore the centre-peripheral relation between Mecca and other areas of Muslim. Laffan (2003) mentions that Javanese acceptance of Mecca as the centre does not mean reducing the centrality of local domains. Geertz (1971) argues that such a relation is uprooted in Javanese belief, emphasising the influence of Hindu mystical civilisation, which later influenced Muslims' expression toward spiritual existence (Geertz, 1971, p. 27-30).

<sup>5</sup> I used Dhofier's categorisation of traditional Islam, referring to actors of the values who firmly bound and connected the theological, legal development, and Sufi teachings to the scholars, jurists, and Sufis of the thirteen centuries. *Pesantren* is communities supporting this view of Islam. Therefore, this group considers performing *ḥajj* or *ʿumrah* to Mecca as a religious obligation by connecting this orthodoxy idea and practising *tawassul* (saintly intercession) to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Javanese scholars known, broadly known in Arabic as *aṣḥāb al-Jāwīyyīn* (Southeast Asian Muslim community), who had a fundamental role

providing guidance for Indonesians undertaking *ḥajj* and *‘umrah*. They often engage in economic activities by establishing bodies for *ḥajj* and *‘umrah* services (Kelompok Bimbingan Haji, KBIHU), focused on providing guidance on rituals (*manasik haji/umrah*; Ar.: *manāsik al-ḥajj wa-l-‘umrah*). For *pesantren*-based travel agencies, Mecca was a direction for prayer (*qiblah*), the House of God, and a center for scholarly development, where Javanese clerics played a dominant role in the dissemination of knowledge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, in terms of identity politics, traditionalist Islam hesitates to wholly align its identity and vision with Saudi Arabia, viewing it as an advocate of Islamic fundamentalism that promotes the Arabization of Islam. In contrast to the concept of a unified Islam, traditionalist Islam recognizes the Indonesian archipelago as the locus of moderate Islam (Slama, 2020, p. 283).

One of the founders of *pesantren*-based travel services was Kiai Rosim Rasim (1956- 2019);<sup>6</sup> he established a service in 2002 to expand the tradition of venerating *‘ulamā’* and saints through

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in the establishment and spread of *pesantrens* in the southeast Asian region (Dhofier, 1980, p. 35, 288; Ricklefs, 2007, p. 75; Laffan, 2003, p. 20-35).

<sup>6</sup> Resembling *pesantren* traditions, the Al Ibrah connects the family lineage and religious training to its spiritual linkage. Kiai Rasim was among the immediate students of Kyai Ali Maksum, Krapyak (1915-1989), who was sent to Mecca in 1977 for eleven years. He pursued his degree at Medina University and informally spent his knowledge and spiritual mentoring Syekh Muhammad Al Alawi Al Maliki Al Hasani (1994-2004) in Mecca. During his stay in Saudi, he also dedicated his time to guiding Indonesian *Ḥajj* and *‘umrah* pilgrims (*mutawwif*) annually, an activity he had never left throughout his life. His marriage to a Quranic reciter (*ḥāfiẓah*) and a Mlangi’s descendant, Nyai Anita Yatimah (58 years old), was arranged between two gurus, marking his other religious authority. Kiai Fatih vowed allegiance (*baiat*) to the TQN Sufi order through the circle of Kiai Muhammad Nawawi Berjan, Purworejo, a relative of the Mlangi *pesantren* circle (Nyai Yatimah, 31/05/2021). This utmost spiritual achievement has connected Al Ibrah *Pesantren* to the more established ring in Central Java and Yogyakarta: Krapyak, Mlangi, and Berjan.

*ziyarah wali* and providing *hajj* and *‘umrah* services for pilgrims. Notably, the *pesantren* associated with Rasim’s initiative, is situated in the heart of Yogyakarta, which contradicts the earlier notion that *pesantren* are primarily established in rural, agrarian areas (Dhofier, 1980). Instead, the Al Ibrah *pesantren* focuses its services on city dwellers and educated people. This latter group are frequently targeted in the propagation (*da‘wah*) efforts of the modernist and reformist Muslim middle class. Thus, Rasim established the Al Ibrah travel agency to preserve traditionalist Islam, connecting it to the legacy of the Java-Mecca ulama. The agency’s regular trips to Mecca contribute to a more complex discussion of center-periphery in Muslim pilgrimage practices.

As a branch of the Qadiri-Naqshbandi Sufi order (Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah, TQN), the role of local religious leaders (*kiai*) is central to adapting responses for the growing community (*jamā‘ah*) in a relatively informal setting. Kiai Rasim pledged loyalty (*baiat*; Ar.: *bay‘ah*) to Syeikh Khatib As-Sambasi (1803-1863) via his father-in-law, Kiai Zamruddin Mlangi (d. 1997),<sup>7</sup> in order to transmit the Sufi order (*tarekat*) teachings, encompassing practices like silent and audible remembrance (*dhikr*) and the spiritual stations (*martabat al-laṭā‘if*) to the devoted congregation. For his community, a dream Kiai Rasim once had where he met with venerated Javanese saint Sunan Kalijaga in person is fundamental to his spiritual authority. His wife, Nyai

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<sup>7</sup> The sanad of this link goes from Kiai Rosim Alfath to his father in-law Kiai Zamruddin gained the *sanad* from his father in-law Syeikh Muhammad Nawawi, Berjan Purworejo, to Syeikh Shiddiq Berjan Bin Syeikh Zarkasyi Berjan also Syeikh Munir Berjan bin Syeikh Zarkasyi Berjan Purworejo. Syeikh Zarkasyi Berjan was a santri of Syech Abdul Karim Al-Bantani who gained the spiritual chain of transmission (*sanad*) from the founder of this Sufi order, Syeikh Achmad Khotib bin Abdul Ghoffar Sambas Kalimantan in Mecca during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ustaz Ahmad, 16/06/2021; Zain, 2008, p. 15)

Yatimah, affirmed that this aspiration was conveyed through a dream, indicating specific quantities and times for the weekly recitation of prayers for the Prophet Muhammad (*Salawat al-Fatih*) (Nyai Yatimah, 31/05/2021).

Specifically, in his *pesantren*, Kiai Rasim conveys Sufi teachings prior to *'umrah* in a relatively open setting. He advises pilgrims to perform several *dzikir* (Ar.: *dhikr*) and prayers to his as part of a routine set of Sufi practices. There are several prayers (*salawat*) that pilgrims recite, such as *salawat Haji*, *salawat al-Fatih*, and any others, prior to departing for *'umrah*. Al Ibrah primarily uses the Mataram Islam framework of time to structure monthly gatherings for recitations of Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī's (d. 1166) hagiography (*Manāqib*), the commemoration of the death of Shaykh Jīlānī and Kiai Rasim, and annual *ziyarah wali* (Kiai Cahya 15/03/21; Kyai Ahsan 17/03/21). In order to adapt to increased democratization of the public sphere, Al Ibrah provides a relatively informal setting of for the *tarekat*. This adjustment acknowledges the diverse social and religious backgrounds of attendees; *pesantren* alumni, less religious individuals, or even lay (*abangan*) attendees. Al Ibrah is a TQN *pesantren* that accommodates the expansion of the *tarekat* due to massive interest from Muslims outside the *pesantren* (van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 114-117). Thus, in the Al Ibrah order of the TQN, individuals who feel a need for spiritual guidance will be given a structured routine so that they can actively engage in these activities.

Furthermore, Al Ibrah is responding to the growing trend of spirituality in Java by strengthening the fundamental elements of Sufi spirituality. Rituals encompass a life cycle focused on venerating three sacred elements. The first is venerating eminent figures, such as Sufi leaders and the Prophet Muhammad. Renowned figures, such as Kiai Rasim and his intellectual/spiritual

teachers, such as Sunan Kalijaga and Shaykh Al Jīlānī, are believed to be essential guides facilitating the community's intercession before the Prophet and God. They are revered as masters of Islamic scholarship and Sufism, establishing their spiritual ties (*sanad*) to the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. This *pesantren* places emphasis on individuals' respect for *awliyā'* or 'friends of God' (Zamhari & Howell, 2012, p. 64). The second element revolves around venerated times and period. Kiai Rasim conveys knowledge about the venerated times (*al-awqāt al-mufaḍḍalah*) to perform acts of worship (*'ibādah*), a facet which was vividly apparent during fieldwork observations. For example, the day of Kiai Rasim's dream of meeting Sunan Kalijaga in person serves as a day dedicated to *salawat* recitation<sup>8</sup>. Other examples include monthly and annual commemorations of the deaths of Kiai Rasim and Syekh Al Jilani and the commemoration of the Prophet's Birthday (*mawlid*). Like the admiration of Sufi masters, the exploration of this sacred elements is both prescriptive and exploratory, linked to historical events mentioned in the Qur'ān or ḥadīth by venerated figures which then become cyclic rituals in the *pesantren*.

In addition to these two aspects, Kiai Rasim expanded the sanctity of pilgrimage sites through the practice of *ziyarah*. Al Ibrah hosts group *ziyarah* mostly to the graves of '*ulamā'*', national leaders and

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<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon reflects Alatas' (2019) discussion on dreaming saints. While such a phenomenon is typical for Sufi practitioners, he offers another way of explaining the understanding of Islamic authority. The dreaming saints explicitly show the connected work between prescriptive and exploratory authority models, which scholars of the Anthropology of Islam apprehended mainly by a mere prescriptive model (p. 82). Considering this argument, the prescribed authority of Kiai Rasim revolved around his scholarship on Sufi mastery. The attempt to connect the authoritative past of the Sunan to guide the future rites has shown that he dedicated his life to growing on this exploratory authority chain of Javanese Ulama.

saints (Chambert-Loir & Guillot, 2007, p. 224). *Pesantren* students perform *ziyarah wali* at least twice a year, as does the *tarekat*. Al Ibrah also hosts *ziyarah wali* for smaller groups to prepare for ‘*umrah* and *hajj*. Nyai Yatimah said these visits usually involve three or four destinations that pay homage to local and regional eminent figures before the group proceeds to Medina and Mecca. The local journey typically commences during *Maulud* (the Prophet’s birth month of al-Rabī‘ al-awwal) and *Rajab* months. It begins at the nearest Sufi saints’ gravesites of Krapyak and Mlangi, where distinguished Kiais such as Kiai Munawwir, Kiai Ali Maksum, and Mbah Nur Iman are buried. The group then continues to the gravesites of Mbah Bergas<sup>9</sup> and Mbah Qulhu<sup>10</sup> in nearby

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<sup>9</sup> There is a Javanese and Islamic version of this figure's story. According to the Javanese version, it is a nickname of a Majapahit descent who run away to Ngino village, Sleman. It is an alternative road for the Borobudur and Mendut pilgrims' lanes. He freed the community from a sudden and horrific pandemic (*pagebluk*), so that people recovered {bregas}. Another story entails from the Islamic version where Mbah Bregas is a student of Sunan Kalijaga from Trowulan. He was sent by Sunan Kalijaga to spread Islam in the central area of Java but stopped his odyssey to Ngino. There is a sequence of stories about the student-guru's spiritual and religious knowledge-gathering, from which Ngino's community maintains several taboos. The traditional ceremonies and celebrations are reminiscent of Mbah Bergas (Mufiani, 2015, p. 21-24)

<sup>10</sup> It is a popular name of KH Anwari Siraj, the greatest scholar in Payaman, Central Java. Mbah Siraj was among Javanese santri of Kiai Khalil Bangkalan (d. 1925) then went to Mecca along with Kiai Hasyim Asyari of Jombang (d. 1947) and Kiai Ahmad Dahlan of Semarang (d. 1923) and so forth, gaining certificates of his knowledge to distinguished scholars and Sufis including early twentieth-century luminaries in the Hijāz and Java such as Sayyid ‘Alawi al-Maliki and Shaykh Mahfuz al-Tarmasi. The relative of Kiai Dalhar Watucongol started to influence the areas of Payaman in 1937 and focused on teaching aged generations. It is narrated among the community that the ‘*ulamā*’ attempted to recite *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* annually and composed by Java poets *Bab Golek Ilmu* and *Syi’ir Erang-erang Sekar Panjang*, containing guidance and advice on the torture of hell and pleasure of heaven. His pesantren was established in 1943. His gurus advised Kiai Rasim to recite *Salawat Qulhu* and *Salawat Haji* in his grave for ample opportunities to embark on the *hajj* and ‘*umrah*. (Agustina, 2020, p. 45-46)

Yogyakarta, in order to seek saintly intercession (*tawassul*) and provide ample opportunities to embark on 'umrah (Handiyo, 23/06/21; Nyai Yatimah, 20/06/21). This very meticulous journey concludes in Kadilangu, Demak, where the deceased Sunan Kalijaga's grave remains a focal point of Central Java's Islamization process.

The practices mentioned above illustrate how local pilgrimages can vary and relate to an understanding of individuals' characteristics. Grave visitations adapt to the diverse needs and motivations of participants (Van Bruinessen, 1990; Quinn in Fealy & White, 2008; Alatas, 2019). In the case of Al Ibrah, the visitations serve to elucidate the spiritual blessing (*barakah*) of 'umrah, aiming to enhance the pilgrims' physical and spiritual readiness for the pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca. This practice establishes a connection between authoritative figures and distinct locations, forming a circuit of *ziyarah*. As Laffan (2003) argues, visits to graves contribute to the creation of a religious geography (p. 24). This understanding also highlights the group's attempt to express a consecutive order of nobility and spirituality. In the case of visiting the gravesites of Mbah Bergas and Mbah Qulhu, the Al Ibrah trip transcends distinctions between Javanese Hindu and Muslim figures, focusing more on the ethical disposition of pilgrims by venerating eminent figures and recognizing the influence of local *awliyā*' (Millie, 2008, p. 109; Arjana, 2017, p. 16).

The pilgrimage to Sunan Kalijaga's grave serves as a reflection of the power of nobility and spirituality. The practice of *tawassul* aims to shape local conceptions of venerated figures by seeking affirmation of prescriptive tenets of Islamic belief. Nyai Yatimah often says:

*“Kita berislam itu bukan tiba-tiba, tapi karena jasa-jasa guru kita di Jawa sini. Pergi ke Mekkah itu kan ‘sowan’ ke Kanjeng Nabi, sebagai pembawa Islam. Sebelum sowan ke Kanjeng kan kita perlu juga ‘sowan’ kepada mereka yang berjasa bagi keberislaman kita.”*

(We embrace Islam in a conditional situation, it was the kindness of our distinguished teachers here in Java. Going to Mecca is to visit the mighty Prophet, the bearer of Islam. Before we go to his grave, we need to obtain permission from those who have worked in the services of our Islam(ness)."  
(Nyai Yatimah, 31/06/2021)

For this group of Javanese pilgrims, the practice of *ziyarah wali* is even more spiritually noticeable, along with the supplication of *tawassul* and specific prayers (such as *salawat*, *tahlil*). The physical movement from one grave to another is accompanied by a spiritual connection to the local nobility and spiritual authority (Millie, 2008, p. 34). This enables the Al Ibrah pilgrims to feel ethically appropriate. Without this spiritual grounding, they would find it challenging to spiritually connect while visiting the grave of Prophet Muhammad in Medina and ultimately performing ‘*umrah*, the pilgrimage to the Ka‘bah.

While the Javanese concepts of hierarchy and ethics are apparent during local pilgrimages, the Al Ibrah pilgrims orient the three sacred elements to Islamic or Arabic culture during their visit to Mecca. First, the agency offers distinct ‘*umrah* packages, focusing on the two sacred months of *Maulud (al-Rabī‘ al-awwal)* and *Rajab*. Kiai Rasim emphasized the sanctity of Rajab due to its association with the miraculous night journey of *al-Isrā’* and *al-Mi‘rāj*, that symbolizes the Prophet Muhammad’s spiritual ascension. After ‘asking for permission’ (*sowan*), the group proceeds to perform *ziyarah* at the Prophet’s gravesite after the

performing rites at the Ka'bah. Kiai Rasim asks the pilgrims taking part in the *Maulud* session to spend longer in Medina for the *Arba'īn*, the tradition of collectively praying 40 times in the Prophet's Mosque. Kyai Hasyim encouraged the congregation to maximize their worship in this month, including following the example of the Prophet by performing 'umrah. During this pilgrimage, pilgrims may perform other valuable acts of worship such as fasting and giving alms. Each of the rituals, times and visitations aim to adhere to the practice conveyed by the spiritual guide.

Performing 'umrah in the month of *Rajab* is quite common in Arabic culture. During the Ottoman period (1516 – 1918), the Arab Peninsula was central for Sunni and Sufi development and was an influential factor in the Islamization process in many regions, including the East Indies archipelago (Dhofier, 1980). At that time, *Rajab* was recognized as the 'umrah festival. Meccan women, men and children began festival days by visiting the mausoleum on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the month. Women had a key role in the *ziyarah* to the mausoleums of the wife and the mother of Prophet Muhammad and during the rituals for the monthly commemorations of their deaths. The festival peaked on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the month, according to ancient Meccan tradition, which coincided with the date of the Prophet's *al-Isrā' wa-l-mi'rāj*, (Hugronje, 1880, pp. 63, 244). Al Ibrah also honored this revered timing by spending the last Friday of *Rajab* at the Medina Mosque. As the month of *Sha'bān* begins, Al Ibrah pilgrims, adhering to the traditional orthodox program, continue their journey to Mecca to celebrate the peak of 'umrah festival by entering the state of *Ihram* and performing the circumambulation of the Ka'aba. This practice represented an Islamic extension of pre-Islamic customs, from which Al Ibrah has transformed 'umrah into a modern self-contained retreat and vacation experience.

In this way, the Javanese *ziyarah* route extends to its farthest destination, and the conception of hierarchy of spirituality and exploration of ethical disposition persist during this mobility. Following the spiritual hierarchy logic, the Al Ibrah pilgrims maximize their prayers and rituals in the Haram Mosque. The set of *tasawwul* and *sowan* from previous circuits serve as foundational elements, providing pilgrims with a base of good deeds and enabling them to utilize other spiritual benefits in Mecca. Some younger pilgrims perform the ‘*umrah* rituals four to seven times. The pilgrims also engage in congregational activities, including the weekly recitation of *Salawat al-Fatih*. According to Hadyo, one of the agency’s founders, ‘*umrah* is not an opportunity to learn about religion, rather an opportunity to earn spiritual rewards. He further elaborates:

*“Di sini (Al Ibrah) semua ibadah. Jangan sampai salah memahami bahwa beribadah di Masjidil Haram itu niatnya untuk belajar agama sehingga jamaah mendengarkan nasehat dan ceramah dari para ustad atau pemimpin. Umrah adalah serangkaian ibadah laku, jadi banyak-banyakin melakukan amalan apa saja: bisa shalat atau bisa ‘umrah berkali-kali. Tidak ada waktu menganggur, karena inilah waktu untuk memanen ibadah kita, pemimpin jamaah tugasnya ya memimpin ibadah.”* (Hadyo, 23/06/21)

*"Here (Al Ibrah), everything is seen as an act of worship. It is important not to misunderstand that visiting the Haram Mosque during the pilgrimage is solely for studying religion. Pilgrims must heed the advice and sermons given by the ustādhs or ‘umrah leaders. ‘Umrah involves a series of spiritual actions,*

*encompassing various forms of worship and practices, whether it is prayers or performing ‘umrah rituals repeatedly. There is no time for idleness, as this period is dedicated to harvest the rewards of our worship, so leaders’ responsibility is to guide and to give exemplary of spiritual practices”* (translation and emphasis by author).

Hadyo’s statement confirms that the ethical principles within Javanese culture, emphasizing a spiritual hierarchy, are deeply tied to the quality of modesty (*tawāḍu‘*). Within this ethical framework, Al Ibrah pilgrims undertake a blessed pilgrimage. This act is essential for individuals to recognize the hierarchy of eminent figures, local and those across regional boundaries. In that sense, Al Ibrah leaders encourage pilgrims to intensify their worship so they might obtain *syafaat* (Ar.: *shafā‘ah*; salvation through prophetic intercession), where pilgrims can seek assistance for either worldly or spiritually matters. In sum, the pilgrimage route supposes two facets of individual behaviors: humility and the pursuit of the highest level of spirituality through worship embodying the essence of *tawassul* and *sowan*.

Kiai Rasim and Al Ibrah leaders guide pilgrims through the three sacred elements aimed at obtaining future happiness. The Al Ibrah leaders elaborate on the significance of three aspects: time, place, and revered figures, to orient pilgrims. They present these locations as paths that were once trodden by countless individuals most beloved by God and His Prophet—the Sufi masters. For this concept of esoteric pilgrimage, the narratives of the past are ever-present. The role of more recent Muslim generations is to honor these figures, respect the sacred sites, and join in their prayers. This is the essence of pilgrimage for Kiai Rasim. Thus, visiting the Ka‘bah includes following the path of the knowledgeable Sufi masters

through *ziyārat al-awliyā*’, who offered intercessory prayers to the Prophet so that later generations may experience a blessed pilgrimage. The role of today's generation is to further disseminate and uphold this concept of esoteric pilgrimage.

### **‘Umrah in the Imagination of the Ideal Global Ummah**

The preceding section explored a traditional *pesantren*’s uses of the three sacred elements, linking ‘*umrah* to Mecca to the established tradition of local pilgrimages. In contrast, this section examines the role of an Indonesian professional training institutions, focusing on spiritualized personal development ‘*umrah* journeys. As one of six Emotional Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) corporate divisions, ESQ Tours and Travel is worth examining as it represents middle-class Muslims' expectations around aligning Islamic values with individual traits adaptable to global market demands. The significance of this travel agency lies in two key aspects: firstly, the challenges posed by the global landscape for middle-class Muslims in Indonesia, and secondly, the agency's endeavor to offer spiritual training conducive to nurturing individual qualities through the pilgrimage experience. Viewed from the perspective of multivocal pilgrimage sites, the agency has crafted historical prophetic narratives to serve as sources for individuals to internalize traits aligned with the demands of the current market industry.

ESQ training was founded in Indonesia by Ary Gynandjar Agustian, a professional entrepreneur and trainer. This training enterprise was an intermittent program designed for employees in a steel factory to encourage Islamic ethics, focusing on pursuing self-actualization and individual well-being (Rudnykcyj, 2009, p. 188). In practical terms, the training consisted of spiritual sessions

involving emotionally evocative practices focusing on Islamic spiritual enhancement, but also integrating other secular methods, such as Japanese new-age approaches and Western self-help psychology.<sup>11</sup> Rudnyckyj (2009) refers to this strategy as Market Islam, referring to its attempt to merge Muslim religious practices with the capitalist ethics apparent in Muslim middle-class working life. As this approach has proven effective in cultivating the necessary attitudes for a broader market, the clientele for this training has expanded from high-ranking professionals in Indonesian corporations and banks to include vocational high school students (ESQ World). In this program, the role of coach-performers is central, supported by three modalities that enhance clients' consciousness: advanced visual multimedia, effective emotional communication, and Japanese new-age auditory experiences. The reinterpretation of fundamental Islamic values forms an integral part of this approach, aimed at transforming individuals' characteristics, through which participants gain the ability to internalize modern and ethical dispositions that align with contemporary capitalist markets and global society.

As a primary consumer base for ESQ, the Indonesian Muslim middle class embodies several characteristics that enable its transition into an upper class in urban metropolitan cities. Hasan's (2009)

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<sup>11</sup> The training programme used the fundamental Islamic values of *tauhid*, *rukun iman* and *rukun Islam* and reinterpret into management and psychological terms. It oriented to develop self-awareness by discovering (Islamic) values that focus on individuals' heart. This interpretation of spirituality, applied during the training, focused on self-help strategies. The training combines various tools, like Japanese music for promoting calmness, alongside technology and the internet, to improve self-awareness and personal growth. The ESQ designed this service consecutively to implement fundamental Islamic values so participants gain examples of positive attitudes like trustworthiness, responsibility, discipline, and caring behaviours (Rudnyckyj, 2009, p. 122; Observation, 30/10/2021).

analysis of the emergence of the Muslim middle class found that since the 1970s they have benefited from education infrastructure. This has granted them an influential position in the public sectors of education, economics and other social fields. Although many in this group were educated in secular educational institutions and were reluctant to engage in traditional religious institutions, they actively reflect Islamic aspirations and present Islam as a solution to the multi-dimensional chaos of the early democratic era in 1997 (Hasan, 2009, p. 236). Hefner (2012) added that this layer of Indonesian society were consumers of popular Islamic books in the early 2000s and accepted emerging global values, such as the virtues of business success, career development, and family life (p. 93-94). The Muslim middle class were also dominant users of the internet and technology in the early 2000s enabling them to lead the public discourse which helped to elevate their social class and religious status. Since 2000, ESQ corporations have targeted this class, focusing services on facilitating the internalization of fundamental religious values potentially enabling them to play a role in the global-Western market.<sup>12</sup> ESQ programs, therefore, fulfilled dual expectations of the Muslim middle-class in urban cities: fostering spiritual alignment with religious values while addressing their desire to actively participate in global society.

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<sup>12</sup> Rudnyckyj explains the national and global context of religion in the early 2000s. The global contemporary market emphasized more the continuing importance of civic and religious associations. The two features aim to expand state welfare programs to empower individuals with social welfare services. The 1997 global economic crisis in Indonesia led to inflation, prompting consideration of integrating religious ethics into economic practices (Rudnyckyj, 2009, p. 96). Back then, a growing Sufistic inclination toward religious life emerged which has Islamised Indonesian discourse of emotion (Hefner, 2012; Hoesterey, 2009; Howell, 2008, 2012). Besides Sufi-influenced life coaching programs, enterprise like ESQ focuses its service on merging neoliberal market with Islamic ethics, shaping local models of subjectivity.

ESQ Tours and Travel facilitates Halal Tourism to the world's largest cities and provides *hajj* and *'umrah* travel services. Established in 2000, this agency offers hundreds of packages to Muslim-friendly destinations for two purposes: experiencing global interactions in retreats and revitalizing Islamic ethics and values. Destinations include short visits to Mecca, ranging from regular *'umrah* programs to Ramadhan *'umrah* travel with side trips to European cities. ESQ Tours and Travel provides upscale branded packages from USD 2500 to USD 5000 for a nine- to twelve-day trip. Interestingly, these pilgrimage packages attract various Muslims groups seeking facilities and hospitality. In addition to top-class accommodation and transportation facilities, ESQ Tours and Travel tailors its training approach in pre-departure sessions. The agency promotes the rhetorical reinterpretation of prophetic history to convey meanings (*pemaknaan*), which is the most popular element of these pre-departure sessions. During the *pemaknaan*, the ESQ founder, Ary Gynandjar, and numerous male ESQ coaches discuss the life of the Prophet (*al-sīrah al-nabawiyah*); involving dramatic and poetic elements infused within the geographical landscape of history.<sup>13</sup> More than just storytelling, this *pemaknaan* is imbued with several tearful personal recollections of the Prophet and his disciples that mirror challenges in contemporary life. For instance, Rashad, a trainer, explores delves into the symbolism of *'umrah* as a daily practice, from the state of *ihram*, purification of the heart and mind, followed by a commitment to oneself to accept destiny

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<sup>13</sup>This rhetoric of *pemaknaan* drew from ideas of individual growth training sessions which were popular in various countries in the world, dating back to the early 2000s (Hefner, 2012, p. 98). Among the epic examples of rhetoric, preaching is designed after the hillwalking to the Hira Cave in the al-Nur Mountain where the Prophet Muhammad had been receiving his first revelation. Pilgrims imitate such excitement and confront fear of failure in hiking to understand that a way to face the global life is through un-ended self-positive and endurance qualities. Another example was the *pemaknaan* in Mount Uhud, the site where the early Muslim community was defeated by Meccan non-believers. The worshippers learn that guidance of the God and His prophet is the only way to face a successful life (Observation, 30/10/2021).

and express strong and sincere devotion to Allah. This involves understanding that *sa'ī* (seven times walk between Shafa and Marwa hills located in Haram Mosque, Mecca) and *ṭawāf* (seven times circumambulation around Kaaba in counterclockwise rotation) are encompassed within the attitude of submitting to divine will, which is beneficial for a collaborative work life (Online Observation, 30/12/2021). Hence, ESQ Tours and Travel offers a definitive *ʿumrah* journey by tailoring its training approach where prophetic history is bundled with the geographical landscapes, enabling aspiring pilgrims to embrace an imaginative transformation that fosters a positive attitude .

The ESQ *ʿumrah* product presents tangible material for further analysis of commodified religion. In the tourism era, *ʿumrah* has been transformed into an objective commodity, diverging from the previous understanding of traditionally motivated journeys with a central guiding role for religious leaders and institutions. This transformation results in an experience that is emotionally and spiritually more impressive and enhancing. Religious leaders still feature in some sessions to render a basic understanding of Islamic values. However, to some extent, the role of *muṭawwif*, *ʿumrah* spiritual leaders, is reduced to being local travel guides. Hasan (2009, p. 230, 242) would have regarded ESQ's objectification of Islamic values in the *ʿumrah* packages as assisting aspiring pilgrims to discover the normative order for urban life. Particularly, ESQ seeks to systemize Islamic teachings in *pemaknaan* sessions, enhancing the value of *ʿumrah* as a marketable product. The role of spiritual lifestyle coaches in the *pemaknaan* session amplifies Islamic symbols and historical narratives, transmitting these symbols and narratives to wider audiences. For pilgrims, this message is received and consumed in fully evocative and tearful dramaturgy.

Moreover, the *pemaknaan* frequently encourages the development of an altruistic personality. After providing its services for two decades, ESQ training has expanded its vision to a global scale. ESQ training alumni have spread across the world and embrace global education, including traveling to and from major cities for leisure and trade. However, ESQ's CEO Agustian remains attentive to the current situation, and understands the paradox of being global society. Agustian says major cities around the world, such as Jakarta, are busy pursuing economic success in trade and business, pushing their citizenry to develop an all-consuming desire to conquer the world. But, globalized human beings, at the same time, desperately crave peace, longing for the past and locality.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing this imbalance, ESQ coaches outline that individuals should not settle for just having an impact on their own self-development. Often, coaches encourage reinterpretation of the characteristics of the *khalifah fi-l-ard* (the vicegerent of God on earth), not only in religious terms, but also as being responsive to the current global crises, such as pandemic. Notably, during a virtual tour to Medina, coach Ahsan highlighted this paradox of

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<sup>14</sup> I also participated in one of the Hajj and 'Umrah Academy and saw a video vlog where the grand coach, Ary Gynandjar was once at Liverpool, UK. Telling the paradox of being part of a global society, Ary Gynandjar was seeing an inclination of the current modern society. He was further said that the contemporary paradox remains between a willingness to be part of a global society and longing for a sense of past and locality, and utter:

*“When people live in busy bustling of cosmopolite cities, such as Jakarta, the desire for being peaceful and being tranquil emerges. In contrast, being in a peaceful site such as here in a clement and calm lake in Liverpool is a dream of each of us. But in fact, the difference between boredom and challenge is a wishy-washy situation. There is no situation called ideal. The normative, calmness and peaceful matter arises from here (pointing to his bosom and then to his head) in our hearth and mind. The purpose of our life was not to gain the peace, but emerge on our service and help, we need to serve others!”* (Online Observation in a Hajj Academy Way 165, 26 January 2022).

globalized humanity, emphasizing that life's greatest orientation lies in aiding underprivileged individuals (Participant observation, 21/10/2021). To do so, the ESQ Corporate engaged popular celebrities to present *'umrah* as an altruistic product for disadvantaged pious Muslims in urban areas. In this case, the corporation devised social experiments where celebrities and the CEO donate *'umrah* packages to individuals in need. Videos of the handovers feature dramatic and tearful scenes, displaying the struggles of an underprivileged yet pious family and ending with offering them a free *'umrah* package. This further shows that as a spiritual economic phenomenon, ESQ continues to respond to the competitive streak of the contemporary globalized world. *'Umrah* pilgrimage packages are used as a means to address the paradox of modern life, wherein ESQ, through promoting altruism, encourages both increased personal productivity and a sense of piety and responsibility towards others.

The active piety encouraged within this spiritual development program simplifies a paradox inherent in spiritual groups functioning as intermediaries in a marketplace. It might be said that this spiritual development program does not encourage independence in evaluating religious authority, but focuses on spreading 'worldly modalities' to respond to the challenges of everyday life in a globalized society, such as encouragement to be selfless (Howell, in Fealy & White, 2008, p. 59, 60). A more recent study on pilgrimage practices in the market era by Arjana (2020) attests that this pattern is still a prevalent phenomenon. The author focuses on the 'bliss clique', a group that doesn't affiliate with specific religious institutions but aims to support spirituality. This group normally focuses on appealing activities presented in symbols and images that stand out for the purpose of packaging those activities in the marketplace (p. 9). This attempt, according to Arjana, has transformed the pilgrimage into a mere marketplace

product. (Arjana, 2020, p. 12). Pilgrimage sites and historical narratives presented through theatrical reinterpretation during the retreat serve as an affective force that held up in relation to personal perceptions and experiences (Niedźwiedź, 2017, p. 72). Essentially, the effort to reinterpret both the narrative and geographical pilgrimage landscapes intertwines with one's experiences of both the pilgrimage itself and the surrounding world. While ESQ acknowledges the challenges of the current global world as paradoxical, their emphasis on the Prophet's life narrative is geared towards facing these challenges, notably emphasizing the importance of helping and caring for others. As emotional and spiritual enhancement remain central to ESQ's conception of mobility, travel experiences expose influential experiences of the prophetic narrative. These experiences foster several ethical dispositions, enhancing the potential for success in a competitive marketplace environment.

### **Summary**

The expressions of the *'umrah* pilgrimage by these two different groups in Indonesia show clear differences. Both groups aim to enhance spirituality and transform pilgrimage, using the prophetic tradition as a source to amplify the significance of pilgrimage for the pilgrims' life. However, the articulation differs between these two groups. The first group, Al Ibrah *pesantren*, takes a traditionalist perspective on Islam, inspired by the knowledge, religiosity and spirituality of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Javanese *'ulamā'*. Al Ibrah emphasizes three sacred elements in its performance of *'umrah*: local and trans-local Sufi figures, who provide guidance on specific pilgrimage routes at certain sacred times. This traditionalist group emphasizes that the Sufi prophetic tradition is alive and well. Through this perspective, pilgrims are encouraged to cultivate inward qualities, including *tawāḍu'* and freedom to their intentions

for pilgrimage, whether for worldly or otherworldly purposes. The ESQ group, meanwhile, prefers to view the past as textual sources that have already transpired. Adopting a Market Islam perspective, they put forward coach-preachers to convey ethical values and characteristics tailored to market needs. ESQ coaches revive the wisdom of the past through *pemaknaan*, the rhetorical reinterpretation of prophetic history. *Pemaknaan* is technique of cultivating spirituality as part of the geographical landscape of pilgrimage, often conveyed through technology-based tools, self-reflective Japanese music, and self-help management strategies. Within this set of mechanisms, the corporation encourages *'umrah* that emphasizes the selfless altruistic traits of individuals, intending to contribute to resolving perceived global paradoxes.

In sum, the ESQ group can be seen as pilgrims who legitimize Saudi Arabia's approach to the pilgrimage marketplace, contrasting with the traditionalists who seek to preserve the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sufi approach as a form of imagination combined with the value of modesty amid the consumeristic and touristic environment of the pilgrimage to Mecca. From this vantage point, the two cases display that Indonesian Muslim expressions of *'umrah* are diverse, shaped by religious imagination and preferences in understanding what constitutes their journey to the heartland of Islam. These differing imaginations and preferences underlie their perceptions of pilgrimage sites and influence their dispositions while interacting in Medina and Mecca. Beyond Western scholars' arguments on Muslim pilgrimage studies, which often emphasize the idea of the unity of Islam (Buitelaars & Mols, 2015; Flaskeruid & Natvig, 2018), this paper agrees with those who argue that each group has their own orientation and expectations regarding *'umrah*. Both case studies of Indonesian Muslim expression discussed here validate this assertion.

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