University of Groningen

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Published in:
Muslim Women's Pilgrimage to Mecca and Beyond

DOI:
10.4324/9781003110903

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Buitelaar, M. (2021). Stepping in the footsteps of Hajar to bring home the hajj: dialogical positioning in Asra Nomani's memoir 'Standing Alone'. In M. Buitelaar, M. Stephan-Emmrich, & V. Thimm (Eds.), *Muslim Women's Pilgrimage to Mecca and Beyond: Recconfiguring Gender, Religion, and Mobility* (pp. 180-199). (Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travel and Tourism). Routledge, Taylor and Francis group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003110903

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10 Stepping in the footsteps of Hajar to bring home the hajj

Dialogical positioning in Asra Nomani's memoir *Standing Alone*[1]

Marjo Buitelaar

Introduction

> Being American, I have freedom of movement, thought, and voice. Democracy and these freedoms bring me closer to my faith. I didn't know these realizations would come to me as a result of my pilgrimage, but they did.
>
> (Nomani 2006, 279)

This is how the Indian-American journalist Asra Nomani summarizes the outcome of the pilgrimage to Mecca in 2003 in her hajj memoir *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. In this chapter I analyze Nomani's memoir to explore the negotiations in her hajj stories between her voice as a Muslim and voices representing several of her other social positions as a daughter of Indian migrants to the US. Nomani is one of a small number of Western female pilgrims who have recently published their hajj stories; Zarqa Nawaz (2014), Qanta Ahmed (2008), Jane Straitwell (2006), and Rayda Jacobs (2005), are the others I could find. Jacobs and Straitwell are converts to Islam. Like Nomani, Ahmed and Nawaz are the daughters of migrants to North America from the Indian subcontinent. Unlike Nomani, who wrote an elaborate hajj memoir, Ahmed and Nawaz have included their hajj stories as chapters in memoirs covering other topics as well.

The hajj stories of women like Ahmed, Nawaz and Nomani are particularly informative to study religious and gendered dimensions of the interplay between the mobilities of diasporic Muslim women in the West and the diverse social networks and power structures that they are embedded in. Living in countries where holiday travel is virtually considered a basic human need, weighing travel options confronts people with migration backgrounds in general with dilemmas. Besides popular mainstream tourist destinations, visiting the country of origin is an obvious option. Indeed, many migrant families pay regular return visits to the places they originate from. Since going on hajj is a religious duty that all Muslims who are able

should carry out once in their life, Mecca can be considered as yet another likely travel destination. The social, moral and aesthetic dimensions in the stories of diasporic Muslim pilgrims about the process of weighing travel options and the meanings they attach to their actual hajj experiences therefore provide rich insights into their 'geographies of belonging'; the emotional attachments to various physical, imagined or symbolic places and communities simultaneously that result from positioning oneself and being positioned by others as belonging or not belonging (cf. Salih 2003).

The experience of translocal belongings not only differs across generations and classes, but is also strongly gendered (Yuval-Davis 2006; Glick Schiller 2004; Anthias 2002; Brah 1996). Migrant parents often stimulate their offspring to make the best of what the country of settlement has to offer. In order to realize the family-project of social mobility, the descendants of migrants need to spread their wings and insert themselves in the society of settlement. Since women are often conceived of as the transmitters of cultural rules, however, their specific comportment carries much weight. In many migrant communities the sexuality of female members is strongly controlled to preserve the cultural 'purity' of the group. Similarly, migrant women tend to face more restrictions in their movements than their male counterparts (Dion & Dion 2001; Espín 1999; Das Gupta 1997). In the case of Muslim diaspora communities, such restrictions are often explained in terms of Islamic regulations of gender-segregation (cf. Lutz 1991, 13).

Over the last two decades, a worldwide trend can be perceived among Muslim women to explore what other stories may be told about Islam than what they view as oppressive 'traditional', 'archaic' or 'patriarchal' interpretations. Particularly among women who have experienced or aspire towards upward social mobility, an increased interest in more progressive interpretations of the authoritative texts can be observed (cf. Ennaji, Sadiqi and Vintges 2016; Badran 2009; Nouraie-Simone 2005). Daughters of Muslim migrants to the West who want to expand their freedom of movement find themselves in a particular predicament: the same religiously motivated restrictive gender conceptions that they wish to transform is one of the spearheads in anti-Islam discourses that equally hampers their participation as full citizens in the countries where they live. Case studies in various Western countries have documented how women who are thus located at the intersection of two systems of domination resist being muted by embracing a form of liberal Islam. Formulating female-friendly reinterpretations of Islamic sources and practices, these women simultaneously challenge restrictive Muslim conceptions of gender relations as well as the views of dominant groups in society according to whom they would have to give up their religious identity in order to fully liberate themselves as women (cf. Noor 2018; Jouili 2015; Barlas 2013; Karlsson Minganti 2007; Buitelaar 2006).

Ahmed, Nawaz and Nomani all take on this challenge in their hajj stories, albeit in different ways. Ahmed performed the pilgrimage whilst

working as a physician in Saudi Arabia. Her memoir is first and foremost a critique on women's oppression in the strict Wahhabi Saudi system. Nawaz spontaneously accepted the invitation by her in-laws to join them on their pilgrimage to Mecca. The chapter on her hajj experience is one in a collection of hilarious sketches of cultural clashes in her everyday life. I have chosen to focus on Nomani's memoir for the purpose of this chapter because in contrast to Ahmed and Nawaz, Nomani explicitly characterizes her pilgrimage as 'a journey into the sacred roots of Islam to try to discover the role of a Muslim woman in the modern global community' (Nomani 2006, ix). In this sense, her reflections on the meanings of the hajj fit in with the trend among Muslim women who seek to 'reclaim' women's equal rights in Islam. Although her memoir contains only few references to scholarly literature on Islam, in passing Nomani does, for example, refer to the works of feminist Muslim scholars like Asma Barlas (2002), Amina Wadud (1999), and Fatima Mernissi and Mary Jo Lakeland (1992).

What makes Nomani's memoir particularly interesting is that in various passages she states that she was uncertain about the outcome of her journey: 'I was a postmodern woman in a religious culture with many premodern dispositions. Could I find a place for myself within my religion?' [3].[2] Rather than an act of obedience or uncritical fulfilment of a religious duty, her pilgrimage took the form of a spiritual quest that she hoped would help her make sense of her multiple belongings.

Many valuable studies into 'lived religion' focus on religion in 'unexpected places' or in seemingly mundane daily activities (cf. Forbes and Mahan 2017; Dessing et al. 2013; McGuire 2008). I would argue that paradoxically, precisely because it takes people *out* of their daily life-worlds, pilgrimage can also be a productive entry point to study everyday life religion. Physical movement entails mental movement; the very practice of mobility inherent to pilgrimage stimulates pilgrims to establish meaningful links between their extraordinary experiences during their journey and their everyday lives (cf. Coleman and Eade 2004, 13).

Exactly because Mecca symbolizes perfection and since hajj counts as the ultimate devotional act, for many Muslims the pilgrimage to Mecca is posited above and outside the imperfections of everyday life where its 'magic' and 'authenticity' can be evoked to seek guidance and strength when dealing with ambiguities, fears and struggles in one's quotidian lifeworld. Therefore, while pilgrims may be moving out of their daily environment, they never leave it fully behind on their journey; they are in constant dialogue with the internalized voices of people who travel with them in their minds. As will come to the fore in sections to follow, to interpret the meaning to Nomani of the various rites that make up the hajj ritual, for example, in her memoir she moves back and forth between various collective voices that inform her daily life.

I will analyze the real and imagined dialogues Nomani engages in during her pilgrimage by unravelling the 'voices' in her stories that speak to and

within her as she moves between the various positions she inhabits in the social networks she belongs to. I will do so by applying Dialogical Self Theory (henceforth DST). DST is a positioning theory that was initiated in the field of personality and clinical psychology by the psychologist Hubert Hermans (cf. Hermans 2001; Hermans and Kempen 1993). Over time, DST has also been taken up by social scientists, cultural theorists and scholars from the humanities (cf. Hermans and Gieser 2012a). DST builds on William James's distinction between 'I' as self-knower and 'me' as self-known; on George Herbert Mead's concept of 'significant others' or influential people in our lives whose stance we can take to look at ourselves; and on concepts from Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization concerning the 'polyphonic novel', such as 'multivoicedness', and 'dialogues' between 'external and internal voices' (Zock 2013,16).

In terms of DST, the self 'inhabits' different positions in different social contexts. The term 'inhabits' here refers to the idea that positioning is more than 'role-taking'; it concerns a creative and embodied act of appropriating social roles in a certain way to make them one's own. Positions are thus always time and space specific. In DST such positions are called 'I-positions', referring to the position of the 'I' as self-knower, who can look at their different self-known 'me's' in other positions. The self can thus be conceived of as a 'dynamic multiplicity of I-positions' (Hermans and Gieser 2012b, 2). The self is dialogical in the sense that there are dialogical exchanges between voices speaking to and from different I-positions, each voice telling a story about its experiences from its own perspective. These dialogues can be internal, consisting of exchanges between one's own voices in different I-positions, or external, as in exchanges between the self and others. Besides exchanges with the voices of significant others in one's personal network, dialogues can also occur with collective voices that represent the dominant views of groups with whom one interacts. In this exchange of knowledge, the voices co-construct a complex, narratively structured self (cf. Hermans and Gieser 2012b).

DST is a particularly adequate tool to study intersectionality in pilgrimage accounts, since the pilgrim as narrator moves back and forth between numerous real and imagined, personal and collective voices that accompany them on their journey. From this analytical perspective, the self-narratives in Nomani's hajj memoir can be studied as a multi-vocal account of the narrator's response to the power dynamics that inform her location in the different socio-cultural domains she participates in simultaneously.

In the remainder of my paper, I will use DST to analyze how by engaging in dialogues with various moral discourses that inform her daily life, Nomani reinterprets the meanings of the hajj in her memoir in order to negotiate her position in the different networks that she belongs to. I will first reflect on the motivations she forwards to undertake hajj. Second, I will ask how she interprets her pilgrimage experiences in terms of providing answers to

existential questions related to her in everyday life as an American single mother with an Indian and Muslim heritage.

It should be noted that the 2006 memoir *Standing Alone* is not the last time that Nomani published about the hajj. She is among a growing body of Muslims who, in recent years, have been calling for a boycott of the hajj as long as its management is in the hands of the current Saudi regime. These voices have become louder since Saudi Arabia's involvement in the civil war in Yemen and the murder of the Saudi dissident writer Jamal Ahmad Kashoggi. Nomani called for a boycott of the hajj in 2015, blaming Saudi mismanagement for the hundreds of pilgrims who lost their lives in a stampede during the hajj that year.[3] Also, following the years after the publication of her hajj memoir, Nomani has become a controversial figure in Muslim circles. More conservative Muslims oppose her activism to create a more inclusive atmosphere in mosques. Liberal Muslim critics disagree with the kind of reform of Islam that Nomani calls for as co-founder of the Muslim Reform Movement that was launched in 2015. They claim that her call for banning the headscarf, for instance, confirms existing Islamophobic views in the West.[4] Nomani's public announcement in 2016 that she had voted for Donald Trump did not help much to increase her popularity among those who critiqued president Trump for having a xenophobic stance. While it would be interesting to reread *Standing Alone* and trace how the 'voices' representing her various positions in American society have been developing through dialogues with others since then, this falls beyond the scope of the current chapter, which is restricted to analyzing the memoir itself.

Motivations to perform hajj

Since it is incumbent on every Muslim who is capable to do so to perform hajj at least once in their life, an informative first step to study the meaning of the hajj in the everyday lives of Muslims is to scrutinize how people account for their motivation to perform or 'postpone' the pilgrimage and analyze how this relates to their life-stories and life-worlds (cf. Debevec 2012). In her memoir, Nomani subsequently mentions a number of different reasons for wishing to perform hajj. Each of these refers to dialogues between voices speaking to and from different I-positions.

The first I-position she presents is that of Nomani the journalist, who initially became interested in 'doing' the pilgrimage to Mecca when writing a series of articles for the *Wall Street Journal* about the 'business of pilgrimage' [15]. Attending a speech of the Dalai Lama during a Hindu pilgrimage in January 2001, Nomani was struck by the Buddhist leader's encouragement to enrich oneself by learning about each other's religions, but also to keep one's own tradition. She reports about this moment as follows:

> At that moment, a light went on in me. I had done the Buddhist pilgrimage, I was doing the Hindu pilgrimage. I had never done my own

> pilgrimage – the pilgrimage to Mecca (…) - I formed an intention, at that moment, to do my pilgrimage [6].

Before she had heard the Dalai Lama speak, Nomani had never thought about going on hajj. In terms of DST that 'a light went on in me' means that Nomani starts to reflect on the one-sidedness of her voices as a journalist and 'postmodern' woman and realizes that she has not been paying enough attention to how these I-positions relate to the voices related to her I-position as a Muslim. In this first phase of considering a visit to Mecca, her motivation to find out more about Islam by performing hajj is a very open one; she views it as an opportunity to enrich the voice of her I-position as a 'postmodern woman' who moves freely and frequently around the world [32].

Planning to perform the pilgrimage on her way home to the US Nomani visits a travel agency in Lucknow, India, to buy a ticket to New York with a stopover in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She is shocked when the travel agent informs her that as a woman, she can only get a hajj visa if accompanied by an approved *maḥram*, a male escort who takes responsibility for her:

> For all that is written in the Qur'an about the hajj, no mention is made of chaperones being required.(…) I was thirty-five years old. I had been independent and self-sufficient (…) I'd driven a motorcycle through the Himalayas. I'd interviewed President Bill Clinton (…) Surely I could take care of myself [12–13].

In this excerpt, Nomani expresses how her own experiences as a Muslim woman intersect with her I-position as an independent female journalist who travels the world. It is her experience of unproblematic intersectionality that clashes with a dominant collective Muslim voice according to which women should operate under the guardianship of men. By stating that her independent lifestyle does not contravene Qur'anic guidelines concerning women's mobility, she claims the right to interpret the Qur'an herself.

As we will see, the excerpt is indicative of the kind of internal dialogues Nomani engages in in her memoir to reflect on her ambivalent feelings about Islam. On the one hand, performing hajj allows her to connect in a very concrete way to the values she embraces, thus reinforcing her faith and identification as a Muslim. On the other hand, she is very critical of 'man-made' [78] interpretations and exclusive regulations that deny the equality of all people. She explicitly questions whether she wants to belong to a religious tradition that takes this stance.

Nomani does not succeed in finding a suitable *maḥram* before the hajj season and travels straight back to the US. A year later, in 2002, while based in Karachi for her job, she explores the opportunities to go on hajj once again. This time she has a potential assignment for a story about the hajj from the American outdoor adventure travel magazine *Outside*. After some deliberation, she decides not to apply for a journalist visa but to go

as ‘an ordinary pilgrim’ [15]. Her father offers to join her as her *maḥram*. Again, gender restrictions complicate the situation: she cannot submit her passport at the Saudi consulate in Karachi but will have to apply together with her father, who plans to travel to Mecca from the US and meet his daughter there.

While she is trying to resolve these complications, two events happen that feature as so-called ‘nuclear episodes’ in Nomani’s self-narrative. Nuclear episodes or ‘key events’ are high, low or turning points in the life-story selected by the narrator to reconstruct scenes from their past that constitute climaxes of different chains of acts in the life story. Such past episodes represent subjective memories of particular events at specific times and places which have assumed especially prominent positions in the narrator’s understanding of how they have become who they are at the time of narrating their life-story (McAdams 1993).

The first of these nuclear episodes is the kidnapping by Muslim extremists of the Jewish American journalist Daniel Pearl, a friend of Nomani who also lives in Karachi. When Pearl is kidnapped, Nomani puts her efforts to organize her hajj on hold to help Pearl’s wife find her husband. By the time it becomes clear that Pearl has been decapitated by his kidnappers, the hajj season has begun and Mecca is far removed from Nomani’s mind. A second crucial nuclear episode in Nomani’s life-story almost coincides with the murder of Pearl. During the weeks of the desperate search for Pearl, Nomani discovers that she is pregnant. Despite earlier promises to marry her, her Pakistani partner breaks off the relationship when Nomani decides to keep the baby.

As a result of the pain and desperation that the murder of Pearl and her partner’s desertion cause her, the issue how to relate to her Muslim heritage gains an enormous sense of urgency for Nomani. In a particular passage in which she describes her ambivalent feelings about her decision to get a child out of wedlock, a dialogue between the two collective voices speaking from and to different I-positions that inform her sense of self most saliently comes to the fore explicitly; the collective American voice of free will and the collective Muslim voice of sharia rulings:

> Despite my intellectual confidence in myself, I felt completely illegitimate. Within me was an American woman who believed in free will and thus knew that I had the right to keep my baby and raise him with my head held high. But the voices of my religion’s tradition also spoke strongly inside of me. I was consumed by the shame of ignoring the rulings of sharia, the “divine Islamic law” [20].

Nomani’s I-position as an American woman is reinforced when she realizes that had she been a Pakistani citizen, according to laws based on Pakistani interpretation of the Islamic code of moral conduct, she might have been imprisoned for being pregnant out of wedlock. Worse still, had she been a

citizen of Saudi Arabia, whose regime prides itself for being the custodian of the holy city of Mecca that she considers visiting, she would even have faced the death penalty. As the following excerpt expresses, the idea of killing a person in the name of Islam for being a single mother, as in her case, or for being a Jew, as in Pearl's case, raises great doubts and feelings of revulsion in her:

> Could I remain in a religion from which so many people sprang spewing hate? Could I find space in my religion for my kind of woman? Could I remain a Muslim? [22]

The birth of her son Shibli a few months later adds a new position to Nomani's position repertoire: I as a mother. This I-position gives her spiritual quest a new direction:

> When I gazed at my son, I knew divine love, I knew heaven, and I knew God. I had been blessed with life springing forth from the midst of death [24].

In terms of DST, at this stage Nomani's new I-position as a mother functions as a 'promotor position', that is, a position that steers her inner dialogues about her worthiness as a Muslim woman in a new direction. Once her belief in divine love is reinforced, the desire to find a place in Islam for 'her kind of woman' becomes Nomani's principal motivation to resume planning her pilgrimage to Mecca.[5]

Although a spiritual quest is not necessarily absent in hajj accounts dating from earlier times, until recently the majority of pilgrims consisted of elderly Muslims who expressed their motivation to go on hajj in terms of an act of repentance, or the need to fulfil their last duty to God (Haq & Jackson 2009; Metcalf 1990). The notions of obedience and repentance are absent in Nomani's story about her desire to perform the pilgrimage. They do not correspond to her conception of God and the spirit of Islam:

> I didn't pretend to be a model Muslim according to Islamic standards for rituals and external appearances. I didn't pray the requisite five prayers a day. I didn't cover my hair. And, yes, with my baby as evidence, I had sex outside marriage. Although I had a firm faith in a divine force, I didn't invoke the name of a God who judges, punishes and rewards. I tried simply to live as a good Muslim with humanitarian values, in the same spirit as a good Christian, Jew, Hindu or Buddhist. I didn't lie, I didn't cheat, I tried not to hurt others [23].

Nomani's lack of interest in living up to dominant Muslim standards about 'external appearances' and her emphasis on humanitarian values shared with people of other religious backgrounds point to religious style that fits

in well with her experiences of constantly moving between networks of people of different backgrounds and different cultural modes of conduct and communication. Her spiritual quest is directed towards exploring how her religious heritage can provide her with anchor points to do so.

At first sight, there seems to be a tension in Nomani's stated lack of interest in rituals and her desire to perform the hajj, by far the most elaborate and demanding Islamic ritual of all. Considering her emphasis on inclusive humanitarian values, for instance, one might wonder what to her is the appeal of visiting Mecca; the iconic picture of millions of Muslims circumambulating the Ka'ba, the cuboid building in the courtyard of Mecca's Grand Mosque, is a strong symbol of the unity of the Muslim community. At the same time, however, it is an exclusive symbol; non-Muslims are prohibited from entering Mecca.

DST reminds us that we can only develop ourselves in dialogical exchanges with others to explore how to appropriate the collective voices of the various groups we belong to or identify with and make them our own. As I will demonstrate in the next section, appropriating the voices that speak to her as she performs the various rites that make up the hajj is exactly what Nomani's spiritual quest consists of.

Stepping in the footsteps of Hajar

Once Nomani has decided to keep her child, she does a Google search for 'Islam and single mother'. One of the few hits she gets is the story about a woman she had not heard of before: Hajar. Moreover, she discovers that Hajar's story is 'somehow (...) intertwined with the hajj' [26]. As in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where she is known as Hagar, Hajar in the Islamic tradition is the concubine of Ibrahim (Abraham). When she bears him Ishmael, Ibrahim's childless first wife Sarah becomes jealous. As tensions rise in the household, God commands Ibrahim to take Hajar and her baby Ishmael to Mecca. Putting all her trust in God, Hajar agrees and accepts her fate when Ibrahim leaves her and Ishmael behind in the desert and returns home to Sara (Stowasser 1994, 45–49).

Once she learns about Hajar's plight Nomani becomes even more eager to go on the hajj. In 2003, a few months after Shibli is born, Nomani performs her pilgrimage in the company of her baby son, her parents and her niece and nephew. As coming to the fore in the following passages from her memoir, rather than 'stepping in the footsteps' of the prophet Muhammad or Ibrahim, for Nomani it is stepping in the footsteps of Hajar that is of utmost significance:

> The devotion to the physical structure of the Ka'bah struck me as contradictory to Islam's teachings prohibiting idolatry. (...) There is a place in this sacred city that is even more important to me than the Ka'bah. It is a path between two hills where the most remarkable woman once ran in desperation, searching for water for her son. She is Hajar (...) one

of the forgotten heroines of Islam. Her life is overshadowed by the story of a man, Abraham [59–60].

> Clinging to faith in both God and herself, Hajar was the image of strength. Four thousand years ago, she was standing alone in Mecca. (…) [She, MB] struggled, like every mother, to give her child a good life. She was subjected to one of the most difficult trials God sent down to earth [63].

> It's a vital point of the pilgrimage to go the one and a quarter miles between Safa and Marwah in the footsteps of Hajar. The run is called sa'y and represents the struggle we all endure over faith and life [65].

The rite of *sa'y* that Nomani mentions here immediately follows the sevenfold circumambulation of the Ka'ba in the centre of the courtyard of the Grand Mosque of Mecca. It is performed in a corridor alongside the mosque square that connects the hillocks Safa and Marwa. By running, as in the case of men, or walking, as women do, pilgrims commemorate Hajar's ordeal and her trust that God would save her and her baby Ishmael as they wandered through the desert after having been abandoned by Ibrahim. Hajar is believed to have discovered the well Zamzam upon returning to the spot where she had left Ishmael after a seventh round of searching for water and saw water welling up under her son's heel (Peters 1994, 5). The source of Zamzam is also known as 'The Well of Ishmael', much to the indignation of Nomani, who remarks: 'The source of Zamzam is even called the Well of Ishmael, with no mention of Hajar' [63].

Referencing to Ishmael rather than to Hajar is in line with a focus on male Muslim role models in authoritative interpretations of religious texts. Most scholarly commentaries on the hajj prioritize the stories of the prophets Ibrahim and Muhammad over those relating of Hajar (Bianchi 2004, 29). An exception is the modernist thinker Ali Shari'ati (2014), who highlights Hajar's position as 'promotor of Ibrahim's tradition' and presents her as the model of hope and of trust in God (Shari'ati 2014, 47). While Nomani does not mention Shari'ati in her reflections on Hajar, she does refer to him later in her memoir when discussing Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad [183]. It therefore is likely that she is familiar with the picture that Shari'ati's draws of Hajar. Indeed, she seems to build on it, adding her own touch. Although Shari'ati mentions Hajar's character as a mother, rather than singling out her femininity, he discusses her virtues predominantly in terms of her being an exemplary human being. While Nomani also points out the universal virtues that Hajar represents, in her description the strong bond of motherhood and Hajar's position as a single mother in the Muslim community dominate. Similarly, Nomani's emphasis on Hajar as a single mother is in variation with what Pnina Werbner (2003, 107) notes about the members of the global Sufi Naqsbandi with whom she worked; like Nomani, they also highlighted Hajar as one of the two most important identification

figures, the other being Ibrahim. Their key identification with Hajar, however, concentrates on the ordeal she faced in wandering through the desert with her son, not on her being a single mother, as Nomani highlights.

It is not difficult to understand why Nomani reinterprets the story of Hajar thus; her image of Hajar helps her to muster strength for dealing with the sudden change of course her own life has taken since Shibli was born. In the following excerpt we see her deriving courage to raise her son alone by identifying with Hajar as she performs the *sa'y*:

> It was past 3.00 A.M. as we ascended the stairs to the third story, marking the path where Hajar ran. I stared as Shibli and felt a profound empathy toward Hajar as I stepped into the space where she had run. (…) I was in the place where the mother of Islam once ran between the two hills of Safa and Marwah, desperately trying to find water for her crying baby. Of all the stories in in the Qur'an, this one is the most significant to women in Islam. (…) What is so important to me about her story is that this woman didn't crumble when the father of her baby took her to the desert to leave her there alone with her son. She had the courage to decide to raise her son by herself and to experience the wonderful love between a mother and a child. Her life story had special meaning to me, abandoned by my baby's father. She gave me courage in my decision to raise my son alone. She didn't even have water, I had Wal-Mart. Her story is timeless and universal and gives strength to all women and men who make lonely choices in life and who face alienation for those choices [63].

From an etic point of view, stepping in the footsteps of Hajar for the *sa'y* and re-enacting her search for water is a 'bodily technique' (Mahmood 2005) that gives Nomani a sense of direct access to the life-world of this female Islamic role model, providing her consolation and courage. Nomani's experience illustrates the power of the hajj as a 'sensational form' (Birgit Meyer 2015): it addresses all the senses simultaneously, triggering both 'scripted' emotions and meanings, that is, those that pilgrims expect to experience on the basis of the religious narrative that is enacted, and 'unscripted' emotions and meanings, those that are related to their personal issues and circumstances.

Stepping in the footsteps of Hajar also empowers Nomani in the sense of allowing her to locate herself in the authoritative narratives in Islam and claim space for women like herself, no matter what other Muslims might think of her:

> Men and women don't define what it means to be a good Muslim. It is defined by the core universal values of what it means to be a good person. I went through that struggle. And that is how I became legitimate. The sincerity of Hajar's heart allowed her to find her Zamzam. She

> had to tap the best of herself to find the water. She was alone. She was desperate. God knew her sincerity and answered her prayers. She didn't need any intermediaries. (...) I was far from the earth where Hajar ran in desperation, looking for water, but I felt close to her spirit. With the heavens above me, it was as if I could feel the pulse of not only Hajar but every mother since the beginning of time [68].

This is a particular interesting excerpt to zoom in on to gain insight in how religious beliefs and practices are informed by and, in turn, inform people's efforts to deal with the complexities and imperfections or 'messiness' of daily life. Through dialogical exchanges with various voices that inform her sense of self, Nomani's new I-position as a mother shifts from being a 'promotor' position that pushed the 'plot' of her life story in a certain direction, to a so-called 'third position', that is, a position that reconciles two or more conflicting I-positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010, 154). As came to the fore in the question 'Could I find space in my religion for my kind of woman?' that guides her hajj journey, Nomani struggles how to combine her positions as an independent American woman with her position as a Muslim.

In the excerpt above she reconciles them in two steps: first, she actively 'orchestrates' the voices that address her at the intersection of her multiple positions – she denies the collective Muslim voice denouncing her as a single mother the right to speak. To her, it is not to fellow Muslims to judge whether one is a true Muslim. What does count is being a good person according to what she considers universal core values. The statement that no 'intermediaries' are needed suggests that in Nomani's view, whether one is a good Muslim is a matter between a (non-judgemental) God and one's own good intentions as a human being rather than specifically as a Muslim [129]. Others have no power over one's actions; the self is accountable only to God. Second, by detour of God's support of the single mother Hajar, Nomani concludes that having accepted 'the divine gift of life' that grew within her, like Hajar she has also become a legitimate single mother.

Nomani's identification with Hajar comes to the fore quite literally in a specific episode in her memoir where she models her own embodied experiences in Mecca as a mother on the story of Hajar's search for water for Ishmael. She describes how for a moment she panics when her baby son Shibli is crying from hunger while she is circumambulating the Ka'ba:

> I cut the top of my chemise and ripped it open with my bare hands. I drew Shibli to me. His desperate lips found the milk within me, flowing to him like holy water onto his parched lips. I felt as if I was connected to Shibli with the eternal bond that linked Hajar to Ishmael. It was the life force of creation that touched everyone and everything around us, before us, and after us. To me, it was what we call God. (...) I was nursing my son at the holy mosque of Mecca, overlooking the sacred

> Ka'bah. This was nature's law expressing itself, more powerfully than man's law. I drank the sacred water called Zamzam. From me, it flowed into Shibli. I recognized then the great lineage I had in Islam. I was a daughter of Hajar. I looked up to the sky with one thought: blessed are the daughters of Hajar [70].

This excerpt illustrates how positioning herself first and foremost as a mother helps Nomani to resolve the tension between her I-position as an independent woman and her I-position as a Muslim. On a more general level, the excerpt demonstrates how, in narratives about intersecting identifications, narrators draw on role models that represent the collective voices of the various groups they belong to. The words and images they use to describe their experiences are thus embedded in field-specific repertoires of practices, social capital, characters and discourses that characterize the various modalities of the identity categories through which they are constituted (De Peuter 1998). Simultaneously, they actively co-construct these collective voices by innovating rules and conventions as they apply them. Using collective voices within her own specific context, Nomani intones them and places them in relation to other voices, thus reshaping them as she uses them (cf. Shotter and Billig 1998, 24).

There are, however, limitations to the freedom to improvise upon discourses and add new interpretations to the already existing meanings of words. If a person's self-representations are to be understood by others, they must be oriented towards the specific conceptual horizon of those addressed. In turn, the anticipated 'answers' of those one identifies with are significant to one's experience of self (Bakhtin 1981, 280). In order to be able to conceive of herself as a good Muslim, Nomani therefore needs to be accepted by other Muslims as a legitimate interlocutor.

Despite her view that it is God and not men and women who defines what it is that makes a good Muslim, seeking recognition from other Muslims is not absent from Nomani's hajj memoir. Her spiritual quest concerns both an exploration of her connection to God and an exploration of her connection to the umma, the community of Muslims. This comes to the fore, for instance, in an episode that describes the arrival of Nomani and her family at Jeddah Airport, from which they will travel to Mecca by bus. In the arrival's hall they find themselves immersed in a white sea of pilgrims wearing special hajj clothes that indicate their state of *iḥrām* or consecration. Overlooking the crowd, her father remarks: 'This is ummah'. Nomani then contemplates: 'I had long wondered if I could find a sense of community in my Muslim ummah' [36].

Throughout the memoir, positive and negative evaluations of Nomani's sense of belonging to the umma can be found. Positive evaluations are often related to personal encounters with other pilgrims that made her feel respected and valued. Almost without exception, these stories concern people's warm response to her baby Shibli. Nomani is touched, for example,

by the kindness of a woman who offers to hold Shibli so that Nomani can do her prayers:

> (…) the Turkish woman purred with a sound that Shibli appreciated. I was struck by the friendliness with which pilgrims, even male pilgrims greeted us. There were few formalities and barriers. As I left I had a warm feeling of acceptance and freedom [81].

Nomani also elaborates on an encounter with a Nigerian woman when visiting the grave of Khadija, the first wife of the prophet Muhammad:

> "Bebe! Bebe!" A woman with the air of nobility shouted to Shibli (…) She sat on a bench and reached out, enfolding Shibli's delicate fingers into her dark hands. (…) She took Shibli into her arms and nuzzled him against her bosom. Laying him back into my arms, she ran to catch her bus. (…) We had an ordinary encounter that lasted only a few minutes, but meeting her was meaningful to me. In embracing Shibli and me, she epitomized, like Khadijah and Mary and Muhammad and Jesus, the true spirit of religion: love and kindness without preconceptions and judgments [86].

The focus in Nomani's negative evaluations about the umma concerns issues where it becomes exclusive and denies the equality of all people. In an anecdote about the bus that takes her hajj group from Jeddah to Mecca, for example, noting the sign 'Muslims Only' over the lane that the bus takes she comments: 'This made me sick to my stomach. (…) I didn't believe in closing the doors of any community to others' [48]. She also questions the atmosphere of Western consumerism that appears to characterize the Meccan cityscape and its divergent effects on rich and poor pilgrims. Reflecting, for instance, on the fate of poor pilgrims who cannot afford to stay in a hotel and sleep on the floor of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, she writes: 'Part of me wanted to be one of them. I wanted to sleep in the Ka'bah rather than in room 708 of the Mecca Sheraton. I wanted to know this level of surrender' [77].

Nomani's reflections on the umma pertain first and foremost to instances in which gender equality is being denied or reinforced. Questioning the rule that unlike men, women are prohibited from running when performing the *sa'y*, for example, she remarks that what might have started as an allowance to give women a physical break, had turned into a rigid rule. To her this illustrates how women's roles have been redefined by men throughout history [65]. She also criticizes the Saudi regime for imposing its Wahhabi interpretation of Islam by prohibiting women access to the space where the Prophet's tomb can be seen in the mosque in Medina: 'Shutting out women from the place of the prophet's burial seemed to be a betrayal of the presence of the feminine up until the last moment of the prophet's life' [107].

However, observing that women and men are not segregated when circumambulating the Ka'ba or performing their prayers there has a profound positive impact on Nomani:

> There were no formal boundaries between men and women, between boys and girls. Families prayed together. Men and women who happened to pray beside a stranger, as many of us did, tried to pray beside someone of the same gender, but it didn't always work out that way and nobody ruled mixed-gender prayer lines indecent. (…) There were no curtains, walls, or partitions dividing men and women from each other, just common sense. In contrast to my mosque in Morgantown, this arrangement made me feel respected and valued [71].

It is this practice of praying in mixed-gender lines that ultimately 'plants the seed for actions' [71] in Nomani to bring back home the lessons learned from the pilgrimage:

> Surely, it seemed, if gender equality was good enough for Mecca it was good enough for far-flung places like my hometown of Morgantown [91].

Encouraged by what she has learned during her pilgrimage about the strength of Muslim women in the formative years of Islam and their rights as full citizens in the early umma, soon after her return to the US, Nomani begins to attend Friday mosques sermons at the local mosque in her hometown and launches a campaign 'reclaiming women's rights in Muslim communities' [71]. Together with her mother she refuses to perform the prayers in the women's section of the mosque, demanding a place in the main prayer hall instead. She then rallies fellow female mosque supporters for her cause by distributing a brochure with the title 'The Daughters of Hajar: American Muslim Women Speak' [244]. Mobilizing several prominent other US Muslim feminists and receiving support letters from numerous others, she organizes a march to the Morgan mosque for a mixed 'pray-in' [209].

She also starts taking notes during Friday lectures by lay preachers who advocate hatred against non-Muslims and she begins to study the work of Muslim scholars who offer alternative interpretations of texts that the lay preachers refer to in order to legitimize hatred and discriminatory behaviour towards fellow human beings. Her newly acquired knowledge encourages her to speak out during the Friday prayer sessions and challenge the preachers' views. Eventually she is denied access to the mosque on account of what is qualified as speaking shamelessly about her having a child outside marriage and violating Islamic rules by demanding a place for women in the same space where men pray. In the eyes of the all-male mosque board, this is proof that she is not a true Muslim. She then files a complaint against her expulsion and wins the case. This victory, together with the

fast growing network of Muslims who share her views and support her campaigns to advocate for women's rights in Islam, strengthens her sense of belonging to at least a specific community of Muslims. Ultimately, then, she can answer the question whether there is room in the Islamic tradition for women like her in the affirmative:

> I went to the holiest cities of my religion a broken woman. Through the process of transformation that was my hajj, I was now a woman with a deep sense of place and purpose [266].

In conclusion: bringing home the pilgrimage by stepping in Hajar's footsteps

In this chapter I have discussed how Asra Nomani 'orchestrates' the voices that speak to and from her various I-positions in the memoir about her pilgrimage to Mecca. Nomani's memoir demonstrates that although pilgrimage takes people away from their quotidian life-worlds, the views and practices of pilgrims can only be understood against the background of their everyday lives. This comes to the fore most cogently in Nomani's decision to visit Mecca to tackle existential questions that had gained enormous urgency as a result of two key events that upset her life: the murder of her friend and fellow journalist Daniel Pearl and her unplanned, extramarital pregnancy. Upon return home, she feels empowered by her hajj experiences to liberate herself from fear of reprisal by fellow Muslims for getting a baby out of wedlock. 'Bringing home the pilgrimage' as part five of her memoir is called, she starts a campaign to 'reclaim' women's rights in Islam. Most literally this takes the form of rallying other female members of the mosque in her home town to claim women's access to the main prayer hall and of openly challenging the oppressive views of the mosque preachers.

Nomani's hajj self-narratives illustrate in a very direct way that religious beliefs and practices are shaped by and, in turn, inform people's efforts to deal with the complexities and imperfections of daily life. Despite Saudi strategies to control the religious activities of pilgrims at the various sites that make up the hajj, for instance, Nomani's strong identification with Hajar's ordeal and trust in God that is commemorated in the *sa'y* illustrates that, in their 'tactical use' or appropriation of Meccan space, pilgrims themselves invest it with their own embodied memories (cf. de Certeau 1984). In this way, normative conceptions of Islamic values are reconstituted through hajj-performance, resulting in plurality and creativity.

Nomani establishes direct dialogical links in the stories of her hajj experiences between Mecca and her quotidian life-world. Her personal interpretations of the rites that make up the hajj indicate that the specific 'quest for valued ideals' that pilgrimage embodies for different pilgrims (cf. Morinis 1992, 4) is geared towards the particular modalities of empowerment they

strive for in their everyday lives. Being raised in the US by Indian migrant parents who encouraged their daughter's social mobility, Nomani experiences a tension between the independence and freedom of movement she enjoys as a female journalist, and restrictive Muslim conceptions on gender relations that prohibit her to perform the hajj without a male guardian and that condemn her for raising a child on her own. Enacting the story of Hajar in the hajj ritual presents Nomani with a role model to claim full membership of the umma as a single mother. Bringing the pilgrimage home in her subsequent endeavours to claim the right of women to perform the prayers in the same space as men in her home town mosque demonstrates that pilgrims adapt the normative meanings of religious beliefs and practices to their own life-world and, vice versa, employ their understanding of these normative interpretations to create order and meaning in the complexities of everyday existence.

My aim in this chapter was to demonstrate that since pilgrims move back and forth in dialogues with different, real and imagined, personal and collective voices that accompany them on their journey, pilgrimage accounts provide rich insights in how their multiple identifications intersect and co-constitute each other. Using DST I have studied intersectionality in Nomani's stories by analyzing her memoir as a multi-vocal account of the narrator's responses to the power dynamics that inform her location in the different socio-cultural domains she participates in simultaneously. Zooming in on dialogical exchanges between the various collective voices that inform her sense of self I have mapped how Nomani improvises upon and moves between different 'moral registers' (Schielke and Debevec 2012) that inform her different I-positions as she seeks to claim freedom of movement, thought and voice as a Muslim woman. The focus in DST on the temporal and spatial situatedness of the various voices in self-narratives thus brings to the fore the struggles, negotiations and ambivalences that lie at the heart of living at the crossroads of different sets of power relations which determine one's position in society.

Notes

1 I would like to thank the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for their generous grant (360-25-150) for the research project 'Modern Articulations of Pilgrimage to Mecca' on which this chapter is based.

2 Henceforth numbers in square brackets refer to page numbers in Nomani's memoir *Standing Alone*.

3 cf. https://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/29/opinions/nomani-hajj-stampede/index.html, most recently accessed 04 05 2020. I'd like to thank the anonymous reviewer of this volume for drawing my attention to Nomani's call for a boycott.

4 cf. https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-asra-nomani-2/, most recently accessed 04 05 2020.

5 Nomani is not unique in her motivation to perform the hajj as part of a spiritual quest that results from absolute low or high moments in life. So far, results from

my current research concerning the hajj stories of Dutch Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish descent indicate that similar to Nomani, pilgrims in their 30s or 40s often mention a life crisis as the immediate cause for their desire to perform the hajj (cf. Buitelaar 2018a). Other reasons that often get mentioned concern spiritual development, an interest in religious heritage travel or the need for a time-out (Buitelaar 2018b).

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