

University of Groningen

## The Hajj and the Anthropological Study of Pilgrimage

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*Published in:*  
Hajj

**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:*  
2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Buitelaar, M. (2015). The Hajj and the Anthropological Study of Pilgrimage. In L. Mols, & M. Buitelaar (Eds.), *Hajj: Global Interactions through Pilgrimage* (pp. 9-25). (Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden; Vol. 43). Sidestone press.

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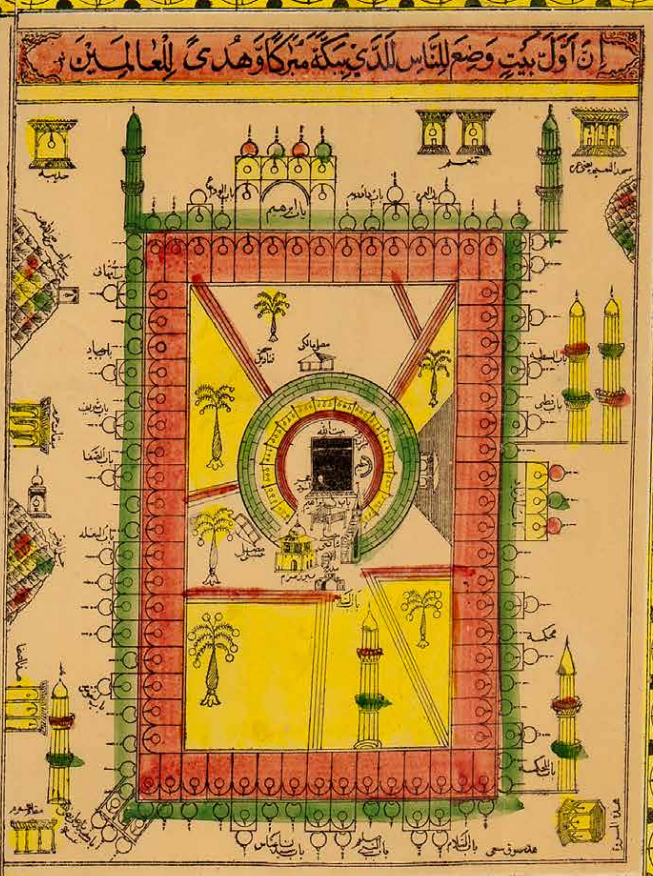
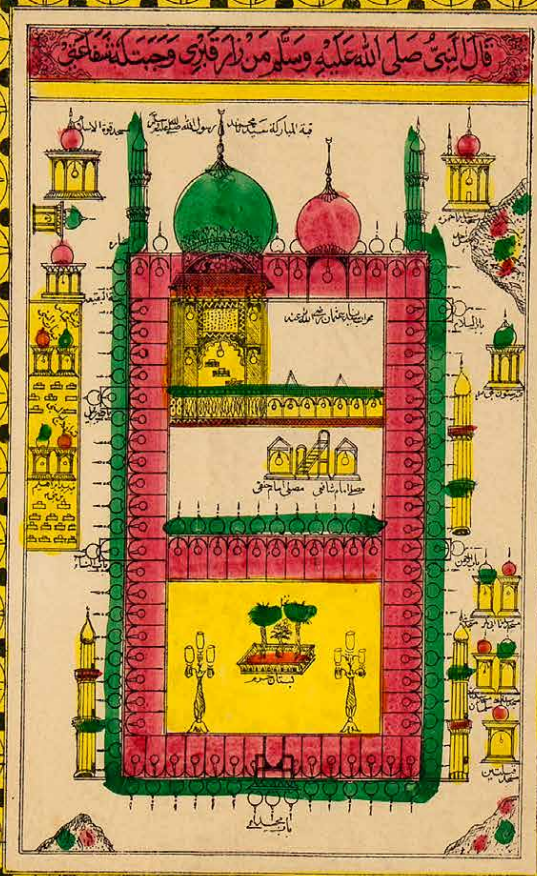
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# Hajj

Global Interactions  
through Pilgrimage



edited by  
*Luitgard Mols & Marjo Buitelaar*

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Luitgard Mols & Marjo Buitelaar (eds) 2015: *Hajj. Global Interactions through Pilgrimage* (Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde 43). Leiden: Sidestone Press.





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Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde N°. 43

ISBN 978-90-8890-285-7

(PDF e-book: ISBN 978-90-8890-286-4)

© 2015 National Museum of Ethnology

Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden

[www.sidestone.com](http://www.sidestone.com)

Published in Cooperation with the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

[www.volkenkunde.nl](http://www.volkenkunde.nl)

Head of Publications Committee: Fanny Wonu Veys

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press

Photograph cover:

Front: National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

Back: top - F. Oort; central - A. Azzouzi ; bottom - F. Oort

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# THE HAJJ AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF PILGRIMAGE<sup>1</sup>

*Marjo Buitelaar*

## **Introduction**

One of the exhibits of the ‘Longing for Mecca’ exhibition at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden concerned an installation of magnets and iron filings entitled *Magnetism* by the Saudi artist Ahmed Mater. The black cuboid magnets were surrounded by tens of thousands of iron particles that formed a swirling nimbus, evoking the image of pilgrims circumambulating the Ka’ba (cf. Mols 2013: 107; Porter 2012: 252–253). Either wittingly or unwittingly, Mater’s installation is a powerful visualisation of the concept of ‘spiritual magnetism’ introduced by the anthropologist James Preston to identify what he considered to be one of the most important characteristics of pilgrimage sites (Preston 1992).

Whether the ‘spiritual magnetism’ of pilgrimage sites is an intrinsic quality of such places or rests in the eyes of the beholder, or, more generally, whether it is valid to assume that particular features are inherent to the institution of pilgrimage at all, has been a key bone of contention in pilgrimage studies. In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of the anthropology of pilgrimage and then discuss some influential anthropological contributions to the study of Hajj in particular. I will conclude by suggesting an approach to Hajj studies that allows for the transcendence of unnecessary dichotomous approaches to the study of pilgrimage in terms of either intrinsic or constructed meanings.

## **The Anthropology of Pilgrimage**

An obvious point of departure for an overview of the anthropological study of pilgrimage is the place of ritual in Emile Durkheim’s theory on religion (Durkheim 1995). Central to Durkheim’s argument is the view that, through religious ritual, society celebrates itself. According to Durkheim, the gathering together and simultaneous participation of people in the same extraordinary ritual action causes what he called a sense of ‘collective effervescence’ in which participants experience a loss of individuality and a sense of merging with others. In this view, ritual thus serves to unify the group. Although very few Muslims

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1 I would like to thank the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for its generous grant for the research project ‘Modern Articulations of Pilgrimage to Mecca’ on which this article is based.



would agree that the meaning of the Hajj can be reduced to ‘celebrating’ the community of Muslims, many present-day pilgrims to Mecca indeed report that the powerful sensation of moving as one body with fellow believers from all over the world creates a strong sense of unity within the *umma*, or Muslim community (cf. Malcolm X 1973).

Particularly relevant in relation to the theme of pilgrimage is Durkheim’s argument that the high energy level associated with such events gets directed onto physical objects or people that then become ‘sacred’. Therefore, according to Durkheim rituals help establish a domain of the sacred which is dichotomously opposed to the domain of the profane, *i.e.* the everyday routines and mundane activities carried out by individuals or groups to secure a living. This characterisation of the sacred as that which is ‘set apart’, rather than ascribing it any substantive content, has formed the basis for much subsequent anthropological theorising about pilgrimage.

It was Arnold van Gennep who took up the theme of that which is ‘set apart’ in ritual in his theory on rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960). He defined ‘rites of passage’ as rites that accompany any change of place, state, social position, or age. Although he focused mostly on ceremonies that accompany individual life crises, Van Gennep also applied his theory to the study of rites that mark seasonal transitions. A key feature of his theory is that rites of passage are concerned with ‘regeneration’ that is brought about by symbolic enactment of death and rebirth. Another key feature of rites of passage is that they are marked by three phases: separation, transition (or *limen*, meaning threshold in Latin), and incorporation.

The first stage, separation, comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from the position they hitherto occupied in the social structure. During the transitional or ‘liminal’ second stage of the rite of passage, the characteristics of the ritual subjects are ambiguous: they pass through a cultural realm that bears little to no resemblance to their past or forthcoming state. The third stage, incorporation, finalises the ritual passage to a new state. It consists of rites in which the ritual subjects are welcomed into their new position in society. The extent to which each of these ritual phases is elaborated depends on the nature of the transition that is marked by the rite of passage. In funeral rites, for instance, rites of separation tend to be the most elaborate. In pregnancy rites or initiation ceremonies the emphasis is usually on transition, while incorporation rites tend to be most fully developed in wedding ceremonies.

The three stages of separation, transition, and incorporation can easily be recognised in the activities that pilgrims undertake preceding, during, and after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (cf. Roff 1995; Saghi 2010). Air travel has made today’s journey to Mecca a much shorter and more convenient trip than it used to be, thus reducing the previously long phases of separation and liminality. Nevertheless, most pilgrims tend to engage in preparatory activities well before the actual date of departure. Such activities in what could be called

the phase of separation of the Hajj ritual consist of settling debt accounts and disputes; begging forgiveness from family and friends for any pain or grief one may have caused; collecting presents, greetings, and requests for special prayers during farewell parties; and attending preparatory Hajj classes organised by local mosques or Hajj-tour travel agencies. While, in a broader sense, the liminal phase starts as soon as the pilgrims have bidden farewell to their loved ones and actually embark on their journey, performing ritual purification rites and changing into special Hajj garments mark the most important transition to the liminal phase of *ihram*, or ritual consecration. Leaving the state of *ihram* after having concluded the obligatory rites that comprise the Hajj proper marks the beginning of the incorporation phase. This phase often culminates in an elaborate homecoming party followed by many more visits from friends who come to congratulate the new *hajjis* and share in the sacredness brought home in the form of water from the Zamzam well in Mecca and dates from Medina.

Considering the ease with which the tripartite symbolic structure of rites of passage can be recognised in pilgrimages, it is surprising that Van Gennep hardly included pilgrimage in his discussion of rites of passage. Yet, he did mention the state of *ihram* within the Hajj ritual as an example of a transitional phase (Van Gennep 1960: 185). It was not until the late 1960s, however, that his theory was developed into a theoretical model of pilgrimage by the anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner focused particularly on the attributes of liminality or liminal *personae*, most specifically on the sense of communion or ‘communitas’ that pilgrims experience during the transitional phase (Turner 1969; 1974). On the basis of his theory on liminality and communitas, he became one of the leading scholars in pilgrimage studies.

A key feature of the Turnerian model is the necessarily ambiguous condition of pilgrims during the liminal phase: they have stepped outside society and entered a new type of space and time where they are freed from the strictures of social structure. As liminal *personae*, they are ‘neither here nor there’; ‘betwixt and between’ the positions assigned to them in secular social structure (Turner 1969: 95). Building on Van Gennep’s argument concerning the symbolic enactment of death and rebirth in rites of passage, Turner remarked that liminality is frequently likened to death or to being in the womb (Turner 1969: 95). Also, liminal persons tend to be represented as having no possessions, clothing, or other attributes of status that would distinguish them from fellow participants in the ritual. Turner furthermore noted that patterns of behaviour that regulate ordinary life and social relations are turned upside down in the liminal phase, for example through abstention from eating or having sexual relations. Sometimes rules are even completely absent.

Central to Turner’s argument is his contention that liminality creates a setting for what he called communitas, which would emerge in the absence of normal social structure. It occurs where distinctions between people fall away and interrelatedness, often in the guise of anonymity of individual participants,

takes central stage. *Communitas* refers to intense forms of comradeship and egalitarianism among liminal persons. Turner noted that this sharing and the equality of all generates an energising power that opens up space to reflect upon the social structure that characterises daily life and to imagine other forms:

Liminality, the optimal setting of *communitas* relations, and *communitas*, a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled [*sic*] and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes, together constitute what one might call anti-structure. *Communitas*, however, is not structure with its signs reversed, minuses verses pluses, but rather the *fons et origo* of all structures and, at the same time, their critique. For its very existence puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities. (Turner 1974: 202)

Being ‘stripped of structural attributes’ would allow liminal personae to experience or at least come close to the realisation of what it essentially means to be a human being. Turner noted, however, that *communitas* soon develops a structure, in which ‘free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae’ (Turner 1969: 132). He therefore distinguished *existential* or spontaneous *communitas* from *normative* *communitas*. Normative *communitas* develops over the course of time, when existential *communitas* is organised into an enduring social system wherein religious specialists gain control over the pilgrimage site and the activities of pilgrims. A third type of *communitas* he identified was *ideological* *communitas*, that is, utopian blueprints for the reform of society based on the experience of existential *communitas* (Turner 1969: 132).

Hajj rites, particularly those that comprise the Hajj proper, contain many elements that can be recognised as attributes of liminality: the bidding farewell of beloved ones and the tradition of making up one’s testament before departing on the Hajj have connotations of preparing oneself for death. Also, during the state of *ihram* pilgrims should abstain from sexual relations, discontinue use of make-up or perfumed substances, refrain from clipping nails or cutting hair. They must break away from routines and concerns of daily life as much as possible in order to dedicate themselves fully to worshipping God. Furthermore, the two pieces of seamless white cloth that constitute the *ihram* dress of male pilgrims are of the same kind as those used as Muslim burial shrouds, and male pilgrims often save their *ihram* cloths for their eventual burials. As Pnina Werbner notes in Chapter 2 in this volume, the sequence of Hajj rites that pilgrims perform—which take pilgrims on a reverse trip through Islamic historiography—can be interpreted as symbolising death and rebirth. Werbner convincingly argues that this reversal of the original time sequence of sacred Islamic narratives is part of the process through which pilgrims gradually shed their sins and move backwards from

symbolic death towards purification, eventually becoming as pure and innocent as a newborn baby (cf. pp. 30-31 in this volume).

Evocations of *communitas* can also be recognised in Hajj rites, such as in the aforementioned flow of pilgrims circumambulating the Ka'ba, photographs of which can be seen in many government and business offices as well as in shops and private homes of Muslims. As Gerasimos Makris has noted, this iconic image of white concentric circles of moving humanity represents the pre-existing and, at the same time, emergent *umma*, or global community of believers (Makris 2007: 137). To illustrate the nature of *communitas*, Turner himself quoted Malcolm X, who characterised his Hajj experience as involving 'love, humility, and true brotherhood that was almost a physical feeling wherever I turned... we were truly all the same [brothers] (Turner 1974: 168). Since Mecca is the only city on earth where no non-Muslims are allowed, one can imagine that the notion of a 'purified' *umma* where only Islam reigns can function as a powerful symbol for ideological *communitas* in the discourses of extremist Muslim groups who strive to establish an Islamic caliphate.

Turner's explanatory model has had an enormous impact on the anthropological study of pilgrimage. His argument about *communitas* and his attempt to move beyond functionalist depictions of religion as a representation of society has inspired many researchers. Indeed, the Turnerian paradigm remained dominant throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s, however, more and more studies appeared that questioned its validity. Central to this critique were the model's universalist claims to intrinsic qualities of pilgrimage and its approach to pilgrimage as a static, bounded ritual that is performed in places and times that are isolated from the everyday world outside. Turner's argument about *communitas* was, for example, criticised by Michael Sallnow on the basis of his own study of pilgrimage activities among the Quechua Indians in the Andes (Sallnow 1981; 1987). Also, in his study on changing patterns and the organisation of flows of people, goods, services, and ideas at several sacred sites in West Africa and Papua New Guinea, Richard Werbner criticised the Turnerian fixation on ritual boundaries (Werbner 1989).

The most influential challenge to the Turnerian model was formulated in *Contesting the Sacred*, a volume of collected papers discussing case studies of Christian pilgrimage, edited by John Eade and Sallnow in 1991. In the introduction to the volume, the editors stated that pilgrimage as an institution cannot be understood as a universal or homogeneous phenomenon, but should always be studied as historically and culturally embedded instances. They argued that pilgrimage sites have no intrinsic qualities, but act as 'empty vessels' that reflect visitors' assumptions in sacralised form. As a result, rather than being erased, social boundaries can in fact be reinforced through pilgrimage.

A main point of criticism on the Turnerian paradigm concerned what Eade and Sallnow called the 'idealising discourse' of *communitas*, which fails to take into account the mundane conflicts that are played out in pilgrimage. Arguing for an



approach that investigates how everyday political, economic, and social concerns inform pilgrimages, Eade and Sallnow proposed to study pilgrimage as ‘an arena for competing religious and secular discourses’ (Eade & Sallnow 1991: 15).

The research model proposed in *Contesting the Sacred* was dominant throughout the 1990s, a decade that was marked by an enormous increase in the number of studies that focused on pilgrimage centres as sites of contestations. In most of these studies, a place-centred approach was replaced by a more person-centred approach that took the combination of place, (networks of) persons, and authoritative religious texts as its point of analysis. For example, in her study of pilgrimage to the Church of the Madonna of the Annunciation on the Greek island of Tinos, Jill Dubisch demonstrated that the actual pilgrimage shrine should not be seen as a bounded and well-defined space, as Turner would have it. Rather, it functioned as the centre of a wide network of relationships extending over a vast geographical area (Dubisch 1995). This and the numerous other publications on specific case studies of pilgrimage that appeared in the years following *Contesting the Sacred* generally confirmed the book’s main theme: pilgrimage is an unruly process, the regularities of which cannot be contained within a universalist structural analysis such as proposed by Turner.

In case studies of Muslim pilgrimage, research on pilgrim sites as arenas for competition among groups or persons who are differently embedded in social relations in the mundane sphere can mostly be found in studies of *Ziyaras*, *i.e.* pilgrimages to local saints’ shrines (cf. Mernissi 1977; Fox 1989; Tapper 1990; Flakerud 2014). A rare example in Hajj studies is an exposé by Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi on what they called ‘The Hajj “Rodeo”’. The authors analysed different meaning registers among pilgrims in Mecca, most notably Shi’a contestation of Saudi control over the *Haramain*, *i.e.* the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and the performance of Hajj rites (Fischer & Abedi 1990: 150–221). Another example is the excellent work of Robert Bianchi from 2004. Bianchi’s chapter in this volume is in line with his main focus on Hajj politics in different Muslim-majority states. Some of his other publications, however, also contain references to contestations between pilgrim groups from different countries over practices and meanings during the Hajj proceedings.

As the field of anthropological pilgrimage studies expanded and matured, researchers increasingly felt constricted by having to work on either side of the *communitas* versus contestation controversy. In two separate articles, John Eade and Simon Coleman each reflected on the development of pilgrimage studies in the 1990s and acknowledged that, in their efforts to deconstruct universalist narratives and instead study pilgrimage as an arena for competition, researchers ran the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater by bringing to the fore contestation and rejecting the *communitas* model altogether (Eade 2000; Coleman 2002). Coleman noted, for instance, that the importance of contestation might be overestimated (Coleman 2002: 359). Discrepant discourses may be juxtaposed, rather than leading to (overt) struggle. While rival constituencies

may sometimes contend for ideological hegemony at pilgrimage sites, at other times different pilgrim groups do not seek confrontation, choosing instead to ignore each other as they perform their own rites. Also, even within contestation there may be instances of *communitas*, as when differences between pilgrim groups are overruled when more serious external antagonism occurs.

More importantly, an approach of considering pilgrimage sites as ‘empty vessels’ that are devoid of intrinsic meaning tends to ignore that certain behavioural parallels between different pilgrimage traditions can be observed across time and culture (Eade 2000). Another objection to the ‘empty vessel’ metaphor is that it suggests that pilgrimage can be interpreted exclusively in terms of representation and the reinforcement of ideas and ignores the effects of the performative power of embodied pilgrimage practices (Coleman 2002: 359). In the introduction to the jointly edited volume *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, Coleman and Eade argued for an approach that takes into account both the specific behavioural patterns that may be observed in pilgrimage and the embeddedness of pilgrimage in the everyday social world of pilgrims (Coleman & Eade 2004). As the subtitle of their book indicates, they proposed a new focus on the mobility implied by pilgrimage. More concretely, they suggested the study of the interrelations between physical, spiritual, mental, and social movements of pilgrims.

In sum, there has been a shift from studying the institution of pilgrimage as a bounded category of action to approaching pilgrimage as an entry or example to study different kinds of movement related to various aspects of the socio-cultural life worlds of travellers. This approach has opened up new avenues and research questions, particularly concerning the impact of globalisation on pilgrimage (cf. Hermkens, Jansen & Notermans 2009; Hyndman-Rizk 2012). In line with Turner’s oft-quoted remark that ‘a pilgrim is always half a tourist’ (Turner & Turner 1968: 20), an increased interest in the crossroads between pilgrimage and leisure travel is particularly notable (cf. Badone & Roseman 2004; Stausberg 2011; Timothy & Olsen 2006).

### **Towards an Anthropology of Hajj**

Considering the increased academic interest in pilgrimage on the one hand, and the centrality of Mecca in the Islamic tradition and its growing popularity as a religious travel destination on the other, one would expect the Hajj to be widely represented in the expanding body of pilgrimage studies. This, however, is hardly the case. An obvious starting point for a summary overview of the anthropology of the Hajj is the book *Muslim Travellers*, published in 1990 by Dale Eickelman and James Piscatory. The main question addressed in the book was ‘What does travel contribute to “being Muslim”?’ As the title suggests, the authors studied the Hajj and the Umra in relation to other forms of religious and cultural travel, such as general migration and travel to local shrines. Moreover,

most contributions in the volume focus on the political and economic motives at play in religious journeys of Muslim travellers. This focus also characterises subsequent articles on the Hajj, most of which written by anthropologists who studied the Hajj as a component of ethnographic research about other subjects. Rather than analysing the activities the pilgrims engage in while in Mecca, such publications necessarily take the contextual approach suggested by Coleman and Eade and focus on the embeddedness of pilgrimage in the everyday social and cultural life worlds from which pilgrims depart and to which they return.

With a few exceptions, including the aforementioned studies of Pnina Werbner and Fischer and Abedi, in such publications the focus is not so much on the performance and religious meanings of the Hajj itself, but on the impact of Hajj performance on broader societal issues. Raymond Scupin—the only author whose article mentioned here preceded *Muslim Travellers*—published an article about the social significance of the Hajj for Thai Muslims (Scupin 1982). Juan Eduardo Campo focuses on contestations between different Muslim groups over the role of the Hajj in the formation of modern Islam in Egypt (Campo 1991). Furthermore, in an oft-cited article, Carol Delaney studies the Hajj journey as a template for the summertime return trips taken by Turkish migrants in Germany to their origin country (Delaney 1999).

A considerable number of articles focus on the impact of the Hajj on West African societies (cf. Thayer 1992; Yamba 1995; Cooper 1999; Kenny 2007). Others, such as Joan Henderson, include Hajj in their analysis of Muslim tourism, often addressing the issue of the ‘authenticity’ of the Mecca experience (cf. Timothy & Iverson 2006; Collins & Murphy 2010; Henderson 2011). A recent trend are Hajj publications by authors who study the meaning of the Hajj for Muslims living in the West. What characterises studies of Western Muslims is a strong interest in the religious meanings of the Hajj and the ways in which religious styles relate to the social identifications and daily lives of people who have performed the Hajj. Contrary to most other publications mentioned here, such works tend not to be ‘spin-offs’ from research on other issues, but the result of research that has Muslim pilgrimage as its central focus. The present volume contains contributions in this field by Pnina Werbner and by Seán McLoughlin, both of whom have published substantially on the meaning of pilgrimage and other transnational activities for Pakistani Muslims in Great Britain (cf. Werbner 2001, 2002, 2003; McLoughlin 2009a,b, 2010, 2013). So far, the only monograph based on ethnographic fieldwork among European pilgrims in Mecca is *Paris-Mecque. Sociologie du Pèlerinage* by Omar Saghi, who joined a group of pilgrims of North African descent on their Hajj journey (Saghi 2010). In addition to the more extensive studies by McLoughlin, Saghi, and Werbner there is a fine article by Farooq Haq and John Jackson based on a short-term research project in which the expectations and experiences of Pakistani and Pakistani-Australian pilgrims of their visits to Mecca and Medina are compared (Haq & Jackson 2009).

While the impact of identity politics and simultaneous embeddedness in multiple cultural contexts on religiosity is quite obviously an important issue for Muslims living in the West, I would argue that religiosity, social identifications, and self-identity should be studied as interrelated issues in all Hajj research if we wish to understand the meaning of the Hajj for present-day Muslims. As Samuli Schielke has convincingly argued, in the current era of intensified globalisation, people's experiences are informed by various cultural discourses simultaneously (Schielke 2008). Such discourses shape the 'sensibilities', *i.e.* the moral and aesthetic dimensions of the experiences and emotions, in people's lives. Also, worldwide trends of improved transportation and economic circumstances that began in the late nineteenth century and have increased in the last few decades have brought travel within reach of ever more Muslims (cf. Gelvin & Green 2014). This has resulted in the emergence of new categories of pilgrims, many of whom make repetitive journeys to Mecca rather than performing the Hajj just once. An acquaintance of mine in Sidi Slimane, Morocco, for example, was offered a Hajj package tour by his company as a bonus for outstanding performance. Also, according to Abdulkader Tayob, Mecca is a popular honeymoon destination for South African Muslim newlyweds (Tayob, Personal Communication, 2014). In short, a certain routinisation and commodification of pilgrimage can be observed.

Recent trends in Hajj performance point to the development of forms of religiosity in which implicit ideologies of individualism and self-realisation through modern consumerism are rerouted towards religious consumption patterns (cf. Aziz 2001; Buitelaar & Saad 2010; Haenni 2011). In this respect, contemporary pilgrimage to Mecca reflects a broader trend of increased religious and heritage tourism (cf. Stausberg 2011; Timothy & Olsen 2006). Such trends, however, do not go uncontested. Contestations often take the form of moral claims concerning 'pure religion' versus 'profanation' of the 'sacred'. During the 2013 symposium that was organised at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden in relation to the Hajj exhibition, for example, a discussion arose between Famile Arslan, one of the speakers who shared her own Hajj experiences, and a person in the audience. The latter questioned the increasing popularity among adolescent Dutch Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish descent to perform the Umra and Hajj for what she suspected were wrong motivations, *e.g.* status elevation rather than piety. Arslan defended the position that others are not in a position to judge the religious intentions of pilgrims. Also, even in cases where the desire to go to Mecca might not be based exclusively on wishing to 'complete one's religion' (as performing this religious duty is often described), Arslan actually encourages young Dutch Muslims not to postpone the Hajj until old age. She explained that she does so for two reasons: first of all, the Hajj is very demanding, so a good physical condition helps a lot. Secondly, Arslan emphasised that the overwhelming experience of the Hajj will help young



Muslims in the Netherlands relate to their religious heritage and will inspire them to develop a religious lifestyle.

The viewpoints of both Arslan and the woman in the audience touch upon the importance of Mecca and the Hajj in the construction of religious identity among Muslims in the West. Especially since 9/11, a supposed opposition between Islam and Western civilisation dominates popular discourses in which Muslims are pitted against Westerners. As a result, Muslim religiosity ties in ever more closely with identity issues. Again, while identity issues may be more pressing for members of Muslim minority groups, particularly for those living in the West, such issues are certainly not confined to these categories. Similarly, while current discussions about the meaning of the Hajj in the modern world are closely related to political developments that have occurred over recent decades, such discussions have their roots in debates on Islamic reform that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Therefore, if the anthropology of the Hajj is to develop further, it should not be restricted to the kind of spin-off articles and the more-thorough research into the meaning of the Hajj for Muslims in the West that have been described here. In order to gain more comprehensive anthropological insights into the practice and meaning of the Hajj in the modern world, I would suggest developing systematic comparative research projects among both Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries and those living in minority contexts. To grasp the religious meanings of the Hajj for present-day Muslims, besides addressing the socio-economic and political issues involved, I propose studying the Hajj in the context of everyday 'lived religion' (cf. Bianchi 2013; McGuire 2008; Schielke & Debevec 2012). Concretely, this implies addressing the following questions:

- 1) How are aspirations and motivations of Muslims to embark upon pilgrimage or to postpone the sacred journey related to other needs and pursuits in their daily lives?
- 2) How do pilgrims co-produce and experience the 'sensational' power of the Hajj? More specifically: What Hajj-related practices do they perform, and how do the mental and sensory experiences and feelings thus invoked reflect conceptions of religiosity, social identifications, and self-identity?
- 3) How do people categorise their own Hajj experiences and the practices of others in terms of 'sacred/mundane' and 'Islamic/non-Islamic', and how do such qualifications relate to the multiple social and personal positions from which they tell their stories?

By integrating a focus on behavioural parallels that may be observed in pilgrimage with a focus on the embeddedness of pilgrimage in the everyday social world of pilgrims, the application of this set of three interrelated, analytical questions contributes to developing new avenues that transcend the *communitas-versus-contestation* controversy in the anthropology of pilgrimage. The first question renders insights into the ways in which the desires and ambitions of pilgrims

(and non-pilgrims) are shaped by various discourses that inform the everyday lives of Muslims. The second question focuses on the Hajj as a rite of passage and analyses its sensational power to invoke feelings of *communitas* and transformation. To return to the issue of the spiritual magnetism of pilgrimage sites, a focus on the Hajj as lived religion departs from the view that pilgrims themselves co-constitute the spiritual magnetism of the various sites where Hajj rites are performed by investing it with their own embodied memories and emotions. The third question addresses the ways in which they thus establish plurality and creativity via the reconstitution of normative conceptions of the 'sacred' and 'mundane' through Hajj performance.

To illustrate what an approach to the Hajj as 'lived religion' might look like, I will present a joint research project that Richard van Leeuwen of the University of Amsterdam and I (representing the University of Groningen) have recently embarked upon, thanks to a research grant provided by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). In this project we study personal stories about modern pilgrimage to Mecca. By addressing the questions formulated above, the research team will analyse how references in these stories to religiosity, social identifications, and self-identity reflect the ways in which the *habitus*—that is, the embodied dispositions that form a matrix for perceptions, appreciations, and actions of narrators of Hajj stories—is informed by various cultural discourses simultaneously.

The project's focus is on Hajj accounts produced in two crucial phases of modern transformation. One sub-project studies Mecca travelogues written between 1850 and 1945, when new modern circumstances and Muslim reformist thought changed the practice and experience of the Hajj. Van Leeuwen's contribution to this volume about the Hajj account of Rashid Rida is a preliminary result of this sub-project. Insights into the impact of the changes that occurred during this early modern era will help to contextualise Hajj trends in today's phase of Islamic revivalism and polarisation of the debate about the compatibility of perceived Islamic and Western values. To study present-day Hajj stories, a second ethnographic sub-project investigates the socio-cultural embeddedness of the Hajj in contemporary Morocco, while a third examines how Hajj accounts of Moroccan-Dutch pilgrims reflect trans-local senses of belonging.

Simultaneously, the University of Groningen is preparing a Hajj project in Indonesia to study how Indonesian views on the Hajj are negotiated in everyday social relations and micro-practices. In addition to the general research questions this project shares with the NWO project, one sub-project will study how practices and stories about the pilgrimage to Mecca are related to local pilgrimage activities on Central Java, such as visiting the Semar Cave and the *wali sanga*, or 'nine saints', who brought Islam to the island. A second sub-project will compare the Hajj stories derived from interviews with ordinary pilgrims with Hajj travelogues written by well-known Indonesian politicians and

celebrities (*e.g.* former President Suharto). For the third sub-project, a researcher will join a group of pilgrims embarking on the Umra to study the activities in which they engage in preparation for, during, and after the pilgrimage. Inspired by McLoughlin's study on the Hajj business in the United Kingdom, a fourth sub-project will study the organisation and practices of (state-organised) Indonesian travel agencies that offer Hajj and Umra tour packages as well as the various types of consumers to whom they cater. A fifth subproject will study the historical role of Indonesia-based Hadhrami Arabs in the organisation of the Hajj.

### **In Conclusion**

In the first section of this chapter, I demonstrated that many of the characteristics of a rite of passage are evidenced in the Hajj, such as references to liminality, *communitas*, and the transformation through symbolic death and rebirth by means of which pilgrims acquire a new social and religious position. However, the overview of Hajj studies provided in the second section illustrated that the meanings and structural family resemblances that the Hajj shares with other kinds of religious travel cannot be interpreted exclusively in terms of intrinsic meanings of the institution of pilgrimage. Rather, these studies illustrate that specific instances of Hajj performances must be understood within their wider historical and cultural contexts, each of them testifying to the Hajj as a changing tradition.

Concretely, I have pointed to a growing trend of routinisation and commodification of the Hajj and the emergence of new categories of pilgrims as a result of improved transportation and economic circumstances. Particularly in the present era of intensified globalisation, the life worlds of Muslims are informed by various cultural discourses that affect the moral and aesthetic dimensions of their desires and experiences. Therefore, the 'spiritual magnetism' of Mecca can take on different meanings for different categories of Muslims and even for different individual Muslims during different stages of their lives. Also, a variety of conceptions of 'sacred' and 'mundane' aspects of the Hajj may be constituted, blurred, and contested in concrete pilgrimage practices.

In order to study the personal Hajj experiences of present-day Muslims, I proposed in the last part of this chapter an approach to Hajj research that integrates the study of religious styles, social identifications, and conceptions of self. The overall aim of this approach is to document modern articulations of pilgrimage to Mecca. Within the field of Islam studies, this approach will contribute to the production of anthropological insights into the dynamics of Islam as a living tradition. The contribution to the field of pilgrimage studies is equally important; because of the near-unique compulsory character of the Hajj, this approach will shed light on the family resemblances among different

instances of pilgrimage and on the particularities of the Hajj as a core ritual practice in the Islamic tradition.

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