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Refereed article

Beyond *Islam Nusantara* and "Arabization" – Capitalizing "Arabness" in Madura, East Java

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Summary
Representatives of one of the world's largest Muslim organizations, the Indonesian Nahdlatul 'Ulama (NU), propagate an "Islam of the archipelago" (*Islam Nusantara*) that harmonizes Islamic practices and local culture. They paint a picture of a pluralist and inclusive Indonesian Islam that accommodates diverse local cultures, contrasting it with a potentially homogenizing "Arabization" — a term used in reference to the perceived ideological radicalization of Islamic lifestyle. Strikingly, in Madura, a region that is considered a stronghold of the NU, there is an affinity to "Arabness" that is not primarily dedicated to questions of the right interpretation of Islam but rather to local hierarchies, social life, political influence, and economic activities. Madurese engagement with cultural markers that are labelled as "Arab" is relatively ambivalent in nature. On the one hand, the Madurese treat "Arabness" as a symbol of Islamic piety that illustrates a special connection to the Holy Land, access to religious learnedness, and the power of blessings. On the other hand, the Madurese can be critical of Arabic culture and customs, especially Wahabist ideology. In the context of pilgrimage to the holy Muslim sites of Mecca and Medina, Madurese Muslims newly imagine and localize "Arabness". By transferring Arabic cultural markers into economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, Madurese Muslims make "Arabness" meaningful beyond debates about *Islam Nusantara* and Arabization.

Keywords: *Islam Nusantara*, Indonesia, Madura, Arabization, *hajj*, *umroh*, capitalization

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Introduction

Nationally and internationally, there is growing anxiety about a potential "Arabization"[1] of Indonesian Islam (Barlas 2008; Ghoshal 2007; Lasmina 2013; Rachman 2013; Sundaryani 2015; Surdji 2015). Indeed, many Muslims in Indonesia position themselves against such Arabization:

> "Our Islam, that's Indonesian Islam, not Saudi Arabian Islam. If we do not wear a jubbah[2] or turban that does not mean that our Islam is not received." (KH A. Mustofa Bisri in Muyassaroh 2013, translation ML)[3]

The Muslim poet Musthofa Bisri, also known as Gus Mus, defines Indonesian Islam by differentiating it from Saudi Arabian Islam, indicating that not wearing traditional Arabic clothing does not mean that Indonesian Islam is somehow less valid. Gus Mus is a leading figure in Indonesia's biggest Muslim organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and one of the leading advocates for a distinct Indonesian version of Islam, popularly termed *Islam Nusantara* ("Islam of the archipelago") or *Islam Pribumi* ("Islam of the natives"). NU intellectuals define *Islam Nusantara* as the historically grown Islam of the Indonesian archipelago that does not abolish diverse local cultures but rather embraces them and harmonizes them with Islam. They state that the NU is committed to maintaining an *Islam Nusantara* that is tolerant, moderate, and peaceful (Sahal and Aziz 2015). Another prominent proponent of this discourse is the incumbent Minister of Religious Affairs, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, who stated that "*Islam Nusantara* promotes a synthesis of Islamic values and teachings and a variety of indigenous cultures" (Sundaryani 2015 in The Jakarta Post July 9, italics added). The potentially colorful cultural diversity of *Islam Nusantara* is often contrasted with a gloomy vision of *Islam Arab*, or Arabic Islam, which is regarded as radical, discriminatory toward women, and exclusive, while also denouncing local traditions as un-Islamic — or at least as being less valid and less authentic.

Obviously, the need to emphasize the legality of Indonesian Islamic traditions is provoked by other actors' disapproval thereof. These other actors include the traditional rival of the NU — Muhammadiyah, the second-largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, which denounces some local practices as heretical innovations — as well as more radical Muslim groups (van Bruinessen 2013).[4] At

1 Whenever the meaning of the terms "Arabization", "Arab" and "Arabness" is ambiguous, I indicate this by putting the terms in inverted commas.

2 The *jubbah* or *thawb* is an ankle-length garment that is commonly worn on the Arabian Peninsula, in Iraq, in neighboring Arab countries, as well as in South Asia.

3 Original text in Indonesian: "Islam kita itu ya Islam Indonesia bukan Islam Saudi Arabia, bukan berarti kalau tidak pakai jubbah dan sorban Islam kita tidak diterima."

4 The role of radical groups like Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front), Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (The Party of Liberation Indonesia), and Jemaah Islamiyah (Islamic Congregation) cannot be addressed further within the scope of this paper.

the core of the debate lie controversies about the authenticity and legality of what can be regarded as distinctive "local" and "indigenous" Islamic practices and lifestyles. Yet it remains unclear what the representatives of *Islam Nusantara* exactly mean by local and indigenous culture, and what "Arab" encompasses in contrast. This is a rather complex question, as to a certain degree Arab culture and language is inseparable from Islamic religious practice. Reflecting on this, Saifuddin emphasized that the endeavor to promote *Islam Nusantara* is not an attempt at de-Arabization (Noviansyah 2015). Yet in everyday interactions and popular discourses, especially on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, the debate is often reduced to slogans that stigmatize "Arabness". One such example is a widely shared image that showed Indonesians in traditional dress from all over the archipelago, which was entitled "Original Archipelago Clothing. No Arab Look! This is Indonesia" (translation ML).[5] The "original" Indonesian style, which is represented through traditional clothing here, is contrasted with "Arab style" from outside the archipelago.

As in this image, indigenous culture is often portrayed through popularized cultural markers. This representation of "local culture" corresponds to the general tendency of commodifying ethnicity and local customs (*adat*) in Indonesia.[6] As Hew argues, "the commodification of identities has paradoxical outcomes" as "the diversity of appearances does not always mean a plurality of discourses" (2012: 179). Concerning *Islam Nusantara*, it remains an open question as to what extent pluralist Islam in Indonesia is confined to the celebration of popularized ethnic diversity or contrariwise includes pluralism on a discursive level. Furthermore, it remains vague what features of "Arabness" are actually neglected. Apart from an "Arabness" that is inherent in Islamic religiosity, there are localized forms of "Arabness" in Indonesia

5 Original text: "Busana Asli Nusantara. No Arab Look! This is Indonesia."

6 In the Suharto era and afterward, popularized features of ethnicity and *adat* — like colourful traditional dresses, dance, and music — were celebrated as cultural diversity, especially in commercialized forms that were exploitable for touristic purposes. At the same time, legal structures that were regarded as threatening to nation-building efforts were undermined (Ramstedt et al. 2012; van Klinken 2003). Relating to the *Islam Nusantara* discourse it seems to be the popularized, essentialized features of culture that are represented as cultural diversity. It is an intriguing question as to whether this also applies to the minorities that are perceived as "foreign" cultures in Indonesia. Hew (2012) shows how Chinese Muslim preachers stage both being Chinese and being Muslim. Even though their "hybrid performances" appear to essentialize Chinese-ness, focusing on stereotypical, popular Chinese cultural markers, they eventually integrate Chineseness into Indonesian "Pop Islam" (Hew 2012). So, while popular Chineseness might be incorporated into the diversity of *Islam Nusantara*, the Hadhrami's Arabness and Indian culture are not treated in a similar way. Myutel and Sandkühler (2015) show that there are significant differences between the Chinese community, which is discriminated against and therefore under pressure to integrate, and elite Indian communities like the Sindhis in Jakarta, who tend to stay among themselves. While Mandal (2014) shows for Malaysia that Hadhrami Arabness is integrated in urban spaces in Malaysia, so far there does not seem to be a similar trend in Indonesia — and the relationship there with Hadhrami culture remains ambivalent.

that do not fit into the gloomy picture of "Arab" that serves as a counter image to the cultural diversity within *Islam Nusantara*. This concerns the Indonesians of Yemeni descent, the Hadhrami, who are also called Arab but who typically do not propagate "radical" Islam. Moreover, there is an Arab-affinity in some regions in Indonesia that also does not fit into the categorizations of *Islam Nusantara*.

Strikingly it is on the island of Madura, a region that is a stronghold of the NU, where Arab cultural markers are particularly widespread. Various Arabic attributes like clothing style, cosmetics, and language are popular here. Both historical as well as contemporary links between the Arab World and Madura inspire these Madurese adoptions of what is labelled as "Arabness". Madurese piety and the island's famous and influential Qur'anic schools (*pesantren*) have a long tradition of existence. The island's Muslim character, increased transport connectivity with the Middle East, and, importantly, pilgrimage tourism have all intensified the staging of "Arabness". Similar to Indonesia as a whole, the pilgrimage business in Madura is now booming.[7] The desire to participate in the *hajj*[8] (the major pilgrimage) to Mecca is increasingly prevalent in Madura, and the celebrations and rituals that are held in the context of the pilgrimage are extensive, costly, and often themed around Arabic cultural markers. Many Indonesians claim that there is a distinctive affinity with "Arabness" in Madura and Madurese communities in East Java, and that the Madurese occupy key positions in pilgrimage management — serving as intermediaries between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. The pilgrimage appears to be the key feature of mobility between Madura and Saudi Arabia, with the staging of "Arabness" serving to communicate participation in this prestigious web of connectivity and action.

Detached from anxieties about ideological "Arabization", the Madurese case reveals undercurrents of the *Islam Nusantara* discourse. In this paper, I focus on the sociopolitical and economic subtexts within the ambivalent relationship that Madurese Muslims share with "Arabness". I argue that in Madura it has a symbolic character, and goes beyond the questions of Islamic authenticity and originality that are prevalent in the discussions of *Islam Nusantara* and Arabization — thereby challenging them. Consequently, I focus specifically on the following question: How do Madurese Muslims make "Arabness" meaningful at the nexus of local sociopolitical and economic dynamics?

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7 Every year around 200,000 Indonesian Muslims set off for the *hajj*, and interest keeps growing — as indicated by the continual increase in the number of *hajj* registrations. The number of pilgrims is regulated by the Saudi Arabian Ministry for Pilgrimage Affairs. Due to a long waiting period for the *hajj*, many Indonesian Muslims resort to undertaking the minor pilgrimage, the *umroh*, which can be done at any time of the year. The number of Indonesian *umroh* pilgrims grew from approximately 500,000 in 2013 to one million in 2014 (Pelita 2014).

8 The *hajj* is the major pilgrimage to Mecca. It can only be accomplished during the Islamic month of *Dhu al-Hijjah* and is obligatory for Muslims who are financially, physically, and spiritually capable of making the journey.

I begin by problematizing the use of the terms "Arab" and "Arabization", and then describe the relationship between Madura and the Middle East. On this basis, I turn to my insights from four months of qualitative anthropological fieldwork in Madura, which I conducted between April and October 2014.[9] I analyze how the Madurese localize "Arabness" in public as well as private spheres, and what meanings these acts convey — especially with regard to their subsequent transformation into different forms of capital. Drawing on Bourdieu (1979, 1992), I show how the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital of "Arabness" becomes relevant. I conclude by suggesting what this analysis means for: 1) our understanding of debates about *Islam Nusantara* and "Arabization" and 2) Muslim lifeworlds in Madura.

The sanctity and the dubiety of "Arabness"

Strikingly, in both popular and intellectual debates there is little consistency in the use of the terms "Arab" or "Arabization". "Arab" is obviously used primarily in reference to Saudi Arabian Wahabism and other fundamentalist or radical interpretations of Islam. Yet sometimes it is also used in a wider sense, for instance in reference to different Islamic influences from outside Indonesia that are all subsumed under the same label. In fact the Sunni orthodoxy of *santri*-Islam or NU-Islam is sometimes also labelled as Arabic, a nomenclature that is derived from Clifford Geertz's controversially discussed categorization of streams of Islam in Indonesia (1976).[10]

Burhani (2010) emphasizes that the Indonesian idea of "Arab" is not a geographical one, but rather refers to branches of Islam. In former times "Arabization" was not labelled negatively by Indonesian Muslims, as Arabic Islam was perceived to be a purer form of the faith. Obviously, interpretations of "Arabness" in Indonesia are related to ideas about the origin and originality of Islam.[11] Even though the bearers of Islam arriving in Indonesia came originally from China, India, Persia, or Arabia, they are often generalized as "Arabs" — the term being used as synonymous with "Islamic" here. While for a long time "Arab" carried positive and prestigious connotations in the debates over the correct interpretation of Islam, it has now

9 The research stay in Madura was part of the broader fieldwork for my Ph.D. project on "Ideas of the 'Arab World' in Indonesia", in which I conducted research with labor migrants and pilgrims in Central Java and Madura. A significant part of the fieldwork in Madura was conducted jointly with my research partners Khotim Ubaidillah and Kamalatul Khorriyah.

10 In a more recent essay (2001), Geertz renews arguments from his *The Religion of Java* (1976) by stating that the *santri* tradition and its "Arabic culture" will continue — and will increase its social relevance in Indonesia.

11 As indicated by Kahn (2015), promoting one version of Islam as being more original than others because it is more "foundational" is misleading. Since the death of the Prophet Muhammad there has always been more than one interpretation of Islam, and no one strand can be said to be more foundational or authentic than the others.

become a label that is used in reference to fundamentalism and terrorism (Burhani 2010, Slama 2008, Rodemeier 2009).

Today, Indonesian society is increasingly polarized on the question of "Arabness" and the "quest of authenticity", as van Bruinessen (2013: 9) terms it. According to Rodemeier (2009), both the influence of "Arabness" and opposition to it are increasing. She differentiates between the "Arabness" of *santri*-Islam that Geertz mentions in his works and "new Arabic influence", namely Wahabism (2009: 54). Following Geertz, we could thus label *santri*-Islam as "traditional Arabness" in Indonesia and Wahabi Islam as "new Arabic influence". Other authors label the reformist stream of Indonesian Islam, as represented by *Muhammadiyah*, as the "Arab stream" (Woodward 1989) — which increases terminological confusion.

Van Bruinessen (2013) sheds light on this quandary. In his very specific explanation, the author is cautious about the use of the term "Arab" when distinguishing Islamic culture in Indonesia into two main streams: reformist and traditionalist. He identifies the Arabic traditions that influenced reformist streams in Indonesia, namely the Egyptian reformists Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. Furthermore van Bruinessen is clear about what kind of Arabic traditions that the traditionalist stream opposes, namely Wahhabism. The potential "Arabness" of the reformists, represented by the organization *Muhammadiyah*, is oriented toward reformist thinkers in Egypt, while the potential anti-Arabness of the traditionalists, represented by the NU, opposes Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia. This is reflected in the fact that the NU was established in 1926 specifically as reaction to the increasing influence of the Wahabis in the Middle East (van Bruinessen 2013). So "Arab-affinity" and "anti-Arabness" relate to two different Arabic Islamic traditions, and yet the same label (Arab) is used to refer to completely different ideologies.

However, popular as well as intellectual discourses in Indonesia are often not as differentiated as van Bruinessen's analysis is. As mentioned in the introduction, it is especially representatives of the NU that define their self-understanding through the notion of othering "Arabness". The original propagation of concepts like *Islam Pribumi* and *Islam Nusantara* dates back to the 1980s (Slama 2008), yet these debates have recently been reignited. Increased movement toward the Middle East through pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, globalized Islamophobia, and political transitions both in the Arab World as well as in Indonesia have stimulated the debate. Throughout 2015 there were a series of controversies related to the legality of Islamic practices, like one about the validity and legality of Javanese and Indonesian Islamic customs — with it being in part triggered by a public Qur'an reading in Javanese style (Angriani 2015).[12] Its topicality was emphasized when the

12 Syamsul Anwar, a professor at the Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, performed this Javanese-style Qur'an reading during the governmental celebrations for *isra' mi'raj*, commemorating the nighttime journey of the Prophet Muhammad, in May 2015 (Zuhri 2015). NU

NU chose *Islam Nusantara* as a major subject of discussion for their 33rd congress (Muktamer NU ke-33), which was held from August 1 to August 5, 2015, in Jombang, East Java.

The topic of the congress — "Strengthening *Islam Nusantara* for Civilization in Indonesia and the World" (translation ML)[13] — suggests that the NU seeks to propagate *Islam Nusantara* as an international model to follow. However the NU representatives could not even agree on a joint proclamation within their own organization, which reports to over 30 million members, as conflicts surfaced throughout the course of the congress.[14] The "Arabization" issue seems to be a very emotional one, dividing Muslims within both the NU and in Indonesia as a whole. In addition to longstanding conflicts between and within different Muslim groups, the contestation over public influence has been increasing since Islamic parties became able to voice their political opinion in the wake of the downfall of the Soeharto dictatorship.[15] Both Muhammadiyah and the NU are trying to gain political influence, as are parties like the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan dan Sejahtera/PKS). Some practices that certain NU spokesmen demonize as "Arab" are regarded as *sunna* by members of Muhammadiyah or the PKS, meaning that these are recommended behavior for Muslims as they are in the tradition of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Moreover the essentialization and demonization of "Arabness" is sometimes — probably partly unintentionally — extended to people of Arabic descent, as Slama (2008) problematizes.

Slama shows how young NU intellectuals oppose what they perceive as the Arabic tradition of Islam. These young intellectuals advocate a native version of Islam (*Islam Pribumi* — the Islam of the natives) and construct it as distinctive from Middle Eastern Islam. This discourse implies self-confidence in idealizing Indonesian culture and religion, while also perceiving what is labelled as "Arab" as foreign and objectionable. This othering of "Arab" becomes precarious, as it also subsumes Arabs within Indonesian society — namely people of Arabic descent.[16] Slama (2008) points out how there is a general suspicion toward Arabs in the country. As some people of Arabic descent in Indonesia are leading figures in domestic radical Islamic organizations, "Arabness" is thus associated with fundamentalist Islam there — young NU intellectuals posit that fundamentalist

intellectuals defended this and renewed their claim for the rightfulness of Indonesian Islamic traditions in a discourse on *Islam Nusantara*.

13 Original text in Indonesian: "Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara untuk Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia."

14 Many NU members boycotted the elections held for new NU leaders, and also rejected the results thereof (Gunawan 2015).

15 Political Islam was suppressed during the Soeharto era. In democratic Indonesia, Islamic parties can newly engage in the political process.

16 For comprehensive studies on Hadhramis, see: Abaza (2004); Gilsenan (2003); Mandal (2009, 2011); and, Slama (2010, 2012, 2014).

Arabic Muslims may be carrying out an Arabization of Indonesia (Abaza 2007: 422, Slama 2008: 4). Thus the anti-Arabization discourse in Indonesia is ethnicizing fundamentalism by labelling it as "Arab", overlooking the varieties of Islamic culture within the community of Arabic descendants in Indonesia and in the Arab World at large. In fact, many practices of the Hadhrami correspond with NU rituals — such as saint veneration and pilgrimage to saints' graves (Heiss and Slama 2010), something that is rejected by salafis.

In conclusion, "Arab" has had different connotations over time and has been used in reference to different phenomena. Among the authors mentioned here, we can identify at least four versions of "Arabness" in Indonesia: *santri*-Islam (Geertz 1976), Wahabism (Geertz 2001, Rodemeier 2009), reformist Islam (Woodward 1989), and people of Arab descent (Slama 2008). Burhani, Slama, and van Bruinessen reveal how problematic the inconsistent and generalizing use of the term "Arab" is — both in academic contexts as well as in its emic use in Indonesia. By keeping the terms "Arab" and "Arabization" in inverted commas whenever their meaning is ambiguous, I hint at the problematic nature, blurred meanings, and multiple connotations that these terms carry.

Furthermore, there is another "new" interest in Arab culture in Indonesia that does not fit in any of the four previously mentioned categories, an "Arabness" that is not only a label for being Islamic, but also for being modern, "in", and cosmopolitan, as it goes along with a whole industry of religious consumption, including pilgrimage travel as a booming business (Lücking 2014: 138). It especially applies to middle-class women who are prone to "faithful consumption" (Jones 2010: 617). This further form of "Arabness" in Indonesia could be termed as the "Pop Arabness" of the urban middle class (Eliyanah & Lücking 2015). This "Pop Arabness" encompasses a fashionable Islamic lifestyle, including dress code, social interactions, leisure activities, and media consumption. Comprehensive studies on Indonesia's urban middle class (e. g. Heryanto 2011) indicate the intertwinement of neoliberal consumer culture and Islamic lifestyle. Additionally, there is a recent trend of "spiritual economy" (Rudnyckyi 2009, 2010), an Islamic business ethic, defining *halal* business in a capitalist market logic. While the concepts of spiritual economy and faithful consumption (Jones 2010) are fitting to the Islamic lifestyle of the urban middle class, here I want to draw the attention to the less material dimensions of Islamic lifestyle.

As Schlehe (2012) points out, Bourdieu's (1979) materialistic model of political economy of religion fails to explain the spiritual needs, meaningful orientations, subjective and sensible embodied experiences, and forms of communication with other levels of existence. I share Schlehe's commitment to an Anthropology of Religion that accommodates varied experiences and the everyday interrelations of meanings, and that seeks to show the plurality of religious lifeworlds and their embeddedness in local and global socioeconomic, historical, and political contexts.

Thus, I have a broad understanding of Bourdieu's forms of capital here and do not view capital first and foremost in its material implications. Rather, I focus on the less materialistic aspects of capitalizations — namely the symbolic, social, and cultural capital that "Arabness" entails within the dynamics of Madurese lifeworlds. This will no doubt complicate our understanding of "Arabness" in Indonesia even more. It is my aim to raise the awareness of this complexity and question the simplifications and polarizations in the current debates about *Islam Nusantara* and "Arabization".

"Arabness" in Madura now and then

During my investigations into *hajj* and *umroh*[17] pilgrimages, I was repeatedly informed by pilgrims, travel agents, and government officials in Central Java that the Madurese were crucial agents in the pilgrimage business — as they occupy key positions in pilgrimage management and control channels to police and government officials in Saudi Arabia. Moreover they were brave and knew how to handle the Arab people. "In fact, they are a bit like the Arabs" I was told, and when I announced that I planned to do research on Madura, my interlocutors in Java were appalled, warning me about the harsh and violent culture of the island. Stereotypes about the Madurese persist (de Jonge 1995), and as I investigated Javanese prejudices further I found that these stereotypes — concerning not only the harshness and violence of the culture but also local piety — are often strikingly linked to what is labelled as "Arabness" or "being Arabic", attributes that were contrasted with Javanese softness and politeness.

Madura, like Aceh, Lombok, or Makassar is one of the regions in Indonesia that is referred to as the "Terrace of Medina" or the "Terrace of Mecca", indicating a special relationship with the holy sites in Mecca and Medina and the dominance and importance of Islamic religiosity. The Madurese are known as predominantly pious Muslims and the island is regarded as a stronghold of the Muslim mass organization NU. It is said, both in popular and academic discourses, that the Qur'anic schools, the *pesantren*, are the most important institutions for the Madurese and that the *pesantren's* leaders, the *kyai*, have been their main figures of orientation for decades (Mansurnoor 1990: XVIII; Rozaki 2004: 3).[18]

17 *Umroh* is the minor pilgrimage that is not required, only recommended.

18 While Madura shares similarities with other Indonesian regions here, especially with Lombok where the religious leaders called *tuan guru* are similar to the *kyai* in Madura and Java (see Kingsley 2010), Madura exhibits peculiarities that make it an especially interesting case. The Madurese are the fourth-largest ethnic group in Indonesia and are famous for their domestic as well as international migration. Throughout East Java they occupy key positions in Islamic organizations, and during the course of the current pilgrimage boom they have emerged as key intermediaries between Indonesia and the Middle East.

Besides being regarded as an enclave of orthodox Islam, Madura is associated with violence (namely the *carok* tradition of blood vengeance), with cow breeding and bull races, with salt and tobacco production, as well as with infertile soil, poverty, and, as a result of this, labor migration (see Wiyata 2002). Even though the island of Madura lies only five kilometers off the coast of the megacity Surabaya, it is a rural area that is regarded as underdeveloped and isolated (Rifai et al. 2013). The bridge between Surabaya and Madura that was opened in 2009 did not enhance industrialization and modernization as expected. The economic situation can be difficult, and many Madurese leave the dry, infertile island, abandoning work on tobacco farms or salt fields to seek employment in Java, Kalimantan, or even abroad (Husson 1977; Nooteboom 2015). As such, the island is dependent on remittances from Madurese migrants.

While on the one hand many Madurese migrate (*merantau*) and get to know the wider world, on the other the image of them being isolated, backward, and clinging to local customs (*adat*) sticks. Some scholars argue that the *kyai* try to keep influence from Java to a minimum, so that it does not undermine their own authority.[19] It is said that the *kyai* are much more respected than officially elected political authorities are, and that their word far outweighs national and regional laws. What is said and decided in Jakarta has little relevance for the people in Madura; during the Suharto era, the influence of the *pesantren*, the NU, and the *kyai* remained rather untouched, representing a parallel structure to the official political system. Since the advent of democratization and decentralization, though, the political sphere in Madura has become contested. Bureaucrats and government officials have been trying to assert their legitimacy by putting forward religious laws, while the *kyai* continue to maintain prominence in the political arena (Rozaki 2004: 15; Wiyata 2013: 194). In three of the four regencies (*kabupaten*), the regent (*bupati*) is a *kyai*; the case of the dynasty of Kyai Fuad Amin in Bangkalan is probably the most popular example, and not only because of recent reports about allegations of corruption.

In the midst of the power gambling seen over the last few years, the question over the right interpretation of Islam and Islamic lifestyle has been politicized. For instance, Pamekasan regency introduced a law on local regulations of Sharia. Strikingly, the implementation of Sharia law was — as in many regions in Indonesia — put forward by secular parties. Other researchers and interviewees said that the introduction of *PerDa Sharia* was the result of election campaigns in which non-*kyai* politicians were seeking to use the capital of religious symbols, and thus pushed local Sharia law (Ubaidillah 2010).[20]

19 Personal communication with social scientists at Universitas Trunujoyo Madura, October 2014.

20 The introduction of *PerDa Sharia* (or *Gerbang Salam* = *Gerakan Pembangunan Masyarakat Islami*) in Pamekasan is regarded as an elite project that has little impact on ordinary people's daily lives

The *kyai* evoke historical and contemporary ties to the Holy Land in these negotiations. For instance Syaikhona Kholil — or Kyai Kholil, one of the most famous *kyai* from Madura and a reputed teacher of Indonesia's leading Muslim figures — is celebrated more than ever and his gravesite in Bangkalan remains a popular pilgrimage site (Ma'arif 2015: 150; Rozaki 2004: 129). Kyai Kholil was born in 1820 in Bangkalan, Madura, and his descent has been traced back to Sunan Gunung Jati and thus to Yemeni origin. Moreover Kyai Kholil studied in Mecca for many years and maintained the connection to the Holy Land in spiritual journeys. Depictions of him show him in a white turban and "Arabic" dress, attire that is often adopted by his present day descendants and admirers.

Another example of the strengthening of the connection to the Middle East is that Madurese *kyai* send their children (both sons and sometimes even daughters), as well as gifted students who are potential future *kyai*, to befriended sheikhs (religious teachers) in Saudi Arabia and Yemen — also inviting these sheikhs for annual visits to Madura. In addition, many *kyai* families own travel agencies for *hajj* and *umroh* pilgrimages to Mecca. The historical significance of Islamic culture in Madura and connections to the Middle East have been boosted by the nationwide pilgrimage boom.

Elite staging of "Arabness"

As an increasing number of Indonesians wish to participate in the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina and indeed have the financial resources to do so, there is a growing market for related travel agencies. In Madura many are owned by the religious elite, like the families who run a *pesantren*. Obviously, many *kyai* use their connections to the Arab World to access the economic capital of the pilgrimage boom. They publicly display their piety and their connection to the Arab World. In this regard, the staging of "Arabness" symbolizes their religious knowledge and spiritual skills. This cultural capital legitimizes them as guides for trips to Saudi Arabia and, as they are engaged in the pilgrimage business, is transformed into economic capital.

The staging of "Arabness" applies to clothing style, and also to the use of Arabic language in everyday interactions. Moreover "Arabness" is staged during large events such as *sholawetan*[21] music festivals and the so-called *khaol* celebrations,[22]

(Ubaidillah 2010). The regulations, applied among other things to alcoholic beverages and Muslim clothing, are, in contrast to the local regulations on Sharia law in Aceh, rather loose; also, there is no institutionalized enforcement of Sharia law.

21 These songs are frequently dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad, *sholawat nabi*, asking God to give blessings to the Prophet. A charismatic singer is accompanied by a choir and by Middle Eastern and North African instruments such as the *gambus*, tambourine, *darbūka* drums, flutes, and lutes.

as well as during festive events hosted when delegations who fulfilled the *hajj* via a certain *pesantren's* travel agency return home. Famous religious figures and musicians, like the singer Sheikh Habib Abdul Qadir, an Indonesian of Arabic descent, are special guests during these events. At all these occasions I observed 1) the glamorous lifestyle of the *kyai* families and their fashionable appearance. This was intertwined with 2) a staging of "Arabness" regarding clothing style, such as the prevalent use of turbans and *kufiyah* cloth as well as white *jubbahs* — and occasionally even black *abayas* (full-body veils) with a face-covering *chador*. Moreover, the Arabic language and Middle Eastern musical instruments are very commonly heard. The perceived "Arab" music style (male singers and drums) and the presence of people like Sheikh Habib Adul Qadir or befriended sheikhs from Yemen and Saudi Arabia give these events a touch of "Arabness". Through the staging of their cultural capital, religious elites celebrate their connection to the Holy Land and communicate their authority and their access to the power of blessings that anything coming from the Holy Land, like distinctive clothing, involves.

However, even though "Arabness" carries very positive connotations here, at the same time there are reservations about Saudi Arabia and Wahabism — and in fact the "Arabness" of the Madurese religious elite conflicts with Wahabi legal thought. For instance it is very common to pray at the gravesites of Muslim saints, a practice that Wahabis denounce as a heretical innovation and a form of polytheism. As of recently, Saudi Arabia is planning to close the gravesite of the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca in order to avoid it being worshipped at; Muslims from Indonesia have protested against this, as visiting the Prophet's grave marks an important stage during their visit to Mecca and Medina.

The sheikhs in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, who are the Arabic counterparts of Madurese religious elites, are opponents of Wahabism as well — instead cultivating Sufi rituals. Furthermore the music, such as the popular Islamic *sholawetan* singing that is labelled "Arabic", conflicts with Wahabi principles about music and singing. For example women sing in these groups, which is a quite striking fact given that in many Islamic schools of thought female singing is regarded as *haram*.[23] What first looks like an adoption of "Arabness" is actually far away from the absorption of

22 *Khaol* celebrations are connected to pilgrimages to the gravesites of local saints (Doorn-Harder 2015). This is a practice often attributed to communities of Arabic descent, yet in East Java and especially Madura it is common among the *pesantren* community.

23 Female singing, and the raising of female voice in general, is a controversially discussed issue in Islamic schools of thought. After Yusuf al-Qardawi, a leading but quite controversial Islamic scholar and televangelist, issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) that permits the singing of females, there was once again a debate within Islamic religious circles — "where playing music and singing were perceived for long as forbidden by the Shariah law" (al-Schibeeb 2010 in Al Arabiya News, September 18).

ideologies from the Arabian Peninsula, and the majority of Madurese Muslims are in fact highly critical of Wahabism.[24]

So how does the religious elite in Madura fit in with the NU concept of *Islam Nusantara*? In their case, outward cultural markers are not connected to radical religious teachings. "Arabness" only becomes meaningful in the local context, where the religious elite is the major point of orientation for the population. In the context of the contested public sphere, "Arabness" plays a rather symbolical role and is a source for the legitimization of claims to leadership. This is because it displays religious learnedness and experience, as well as a connection to the Holy Land and access to the power of blessings. So besides being transformed into economic capital, the cultural capital of "Arabness" is also transformed into symbolic capital; it is also highly prestigious, as we see in the religious elites' constant endeavors to maintain their influence and in other actors' struggles to access this capital. One such example is the secular parties that have promoted Sharia law in Pamekasan.

Moreover, in its manifestations as glamorous and exclusive, "Arabness" symbolizes material wealth, a cosmopolitan lifestyle, and the modernity of the religious elite. Here, "Arabness" symbolizes a social status and communicates class differences, beyond any religious orientation. So in the case of the political and religious elite in Madura, "Arabness" becomes meaningful in the context of existing and contested local hierarchies.

On a different level, the staging of "Arabness" that we find among the political elite and in the *pesantren* world is also prevalent among ordinary people — as my observations of rituals in the context of the *hajj* took in. For these individuals it is economic capital, financial resources, that is transformed into cultural capital. These financial resources are invested in the pilgrimage, from which the participant returns spiritually enlightened — having gained profound experience and knowledge. To provide a concrete example, I will tell the story of Mrs. (Ibu) and Mr. (Pak) Sukis,[25] a senior couple from a rural area in Pamekasan regency who completed the *hajj* in October 2014.

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24 While the vast majority of the Madurese oppose Wahabism, small Muslim factions are interested in it. It is probably their interest in Wahabism and cooperation with Wahabi counterparts that troubles NU representatives in Madura — thus provoking their emphasis on the rejection of Wahabism. In August 2014 this resulted in a huge anti-Wahabi demonstration by hundreds of pupils from Qur'anic schools, who were mobilized by the *kyai* in opposition to the visit of Wahabi scholars. Thus, the local religious elites' rejection of Wahabism must also be seen in the context of power struggles. The recent conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in Sampang does not seem to be related to this, however. Most of my informants, including government officials, Muslims scholars, and social scientists, explained that the Sampang conflict is rather a family feud disguised behind religious labelings.

25 Names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

"Arabness" and local rituals in the context of the *Hajj*

I got to know Ibu and Pak Sukis, who work as teachers in local schools and belong to the wealthier families in their village, only a few days before their departure to Mecca, when my hosts in a nearby village invited me to join them in attending the couple's farewell gathering. During this event, I learned that Ibu and Pak Sukis had been receiving guests every evening for the past couple of weeks. All relatives, neighbors, and colleagues were paying them a last visit, praying for them, sometimes giving them their wishes written on small pieces of paper, and asking Ibu and Pak Sukis to pray for them in Mecca or to carry their photograph to the Holy Land, hoping that one day they would travel there themselves.

Ibu Suki's daughter informed me that the farewell gathering would cost almost as much as the pilgrimage itself, not to mention the costs for the feast after the return from Mecca, the new clothes for the pilgrimage, and of course the 500 *oleh-oleh* (souvenirs) that they had already bought to give to guests after their return from Mecca — scarfs and prayer chains mainly, "originally Arab, probably made in China" she joked. The guests were contributing to these costs by bringing small gifts, such as sugar and rice. Besides buying new clothing and saying goodbye to everyone, Ibu and Pak Sukis had prepared themselves physically and spiritually. The spiritual preparation included *hajj* trainings provided by the government as well as pilgrimages (*ziarah*) to the graves of local saints.

On the day of departure, Ibu and Pak Sukis were dressed in the uniform batik dress that all pilgrims from Indonesia wear — being also equipped with identity badges and hand luggage. After the Friday prayer, neighbors and relatives gathered in front of the house, dressed elegantly, hugging Ibu and Pak Sukis, who were close to tears. The imam from the nearby mosque spoke a last prayer that ended with a *sholawetan* song, and when everyone joined in to sing Ibu and Pak Sukis slowly moved to a decorated car. A convoy of 30 cars, some of them specially hired for the purpose, accompanied Ibu and Pak Sukis to the city center of Pamekasan, which was overrun with the chaos of groups arriving from all over the district of Pamekasan who wanted to accompany their relatives and neighbors. There had been a festival-like atmosphere the last couple of days in Pamekasan, as up to 14 coaches departed every day to the pilgrims' dormitory (*asrama hajji*) in Surabaya, where pilgrims from all over East Java assembled the night before their flight to Saudi Arabia.

After Ibu and Pak Sukis had left, their children hosted daily prayer gatherings in the village to remember their parents from afar and pray for their wellbeing. Internet and mobile phones allowed them to keep in touch, and were also used for the documentation of events in Saudi Arabia.

When Ibu and Pak Sukis returned from Mecca in November, a great feast with traditional *haddrah* music, a report by Pak Sukis about the experiences in the Holy Land, prayers, and merriment were all enjoyed. Guests continued to visit even after the big feast, seeking to obtain blessings from Mecca — a practice that is called

asajère in Madura and represents another form of local pilgrimage, namely the one to the houses of Mecca returnees.

The ritualization of departure and return ensures that everyone in the local community is aware of people completing the *hajj*. In this way, the rituals mark a transition in the pilgrim's social status. Everyone was aware that Ibu and Pak Sukis took a meaningful journey and potentially returned as better and more enlightened people, having gained experience, spiritual insight, and blessings. So they successfully invested their financial capital and transformed it into cultural capital. After their return, the staging of "Arabness" in chosen clothing and decorations visually symbolized their transformation into a *hajja* and *hajji*, the prestigious title for male/female *hajj* returnees. Moreover they put fragrances on their clothing and offered guests a drink from the holy water that they had brought along with them from the *zamzam* well,[26] together with dates and raisins. Thus, the possession of blessings from the Holy Land as well as the act of sharing them with the community are an event that is a sensual, spiritual and communal experiences for everyone.

Giving a souvenir from Mecca to those who stayed home materializes the constant awareness that one has been to the Holy Land, and indicates reciprocity within the community. Thereby social capital is generated. The relationship to the village and the village community appears to be crucial, as even people who live in the city depart for the *hajj* from their place of birth. They engage with the local community, and elements of reciprocity — like the mutual help for festivities — make the pilgrimage a collective undertaking. Moreover the pilgrimage is entertainment, as the festival atmosphere further indicates.

Another side effect of the *hajj* is that it is an engagement with nationality, as pilgrims from all over Indonesia sport similar batik uniforms, ID badges, and travel bags; also, they experience the journey as being managed by the government. After their return, however, Ibu and Pak Sukis did not wear the Indonesian batik uniform anymore, but rather white dresses and accessories — like the *kufiyah* cloth — from Saudi Arabia. In this regard, "Arab style" serves as a form of distinction from the Indonesian mainstream and as a unique feature of *hajj* returnees. Pilgrims stress individuality after the pilgrimage, stepping out of the communitarian and egalitarian phase during the *hajj* after returning home (Lücking 2014: 141).

The *hajj* boom has been accompanied by a revitalization and even partial reinvention of local rituals like the pilgrimage to the graves of local saints, *sholawetan* and *haddrah* music, the sharing of ritual meals (*slametan*), and prayer

26 It is believed that the *zamzam* well miraculously came into existence in the desert when Hagar, the maid and wife of Ibrahim (Abraham) was in desperate search of water for her son Ishmael. Pilgrims commemorate Hagar's search for water in the *sa'y* ritual during the pilgrimage, walking seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa and drinking water from the *zamzam* well that is located in the compound of the holy mosque in Mecca.

meetings. Local pilgrimages do not only enjoy popularity as part of the totality of the *hajj* experience but are also popular among those who cannot afford to go on *hajj* to Saudi Arabia themselves (see Quinn 2004).

Arabic style, food, accessories, and images thus serve as symbols for newly gained social status, increased spirituality, and for blessings from the Holy Land. Again, similar to the case of the political and religious elite, "Arabness" involves capital. It serves as a medium through which to communicate social differences, while also maintaining social relationships through the reciprocal nature of the rituals in the context of the pilgrimage. As it enables participation in social relationships, it entails social capital. In its function of displaying a person's increased spiritual status, it entails cultural capital — and obviously also the potential to be transferred into symbolic capital. Yet it is neither the journey to the Middle East nor Arabic cultural markers alone that represent a resource to be transferred into social, cultural, or symbolic capital. The transferal of economic capital into cultural, symbolic, and social capital depends also on the local context. "Arabness" only becomes meaningful in the web of social relationships and values on the ground back home.

Conclusion: To be or not to be "Arab"

Research on Indonesian Islam reveals the multiple meanings of "Arabness" and the problematic nature of generalizations and simplifications in terminology, as well as a notion of othering Arab culture. The Madurese case complicates this even further, and challenges that othering of Arab culture — as there is an "Arabness" in the self that does not fit in with the gloomy image of *Islam Arab* that the *Islam Nusantara* discourse conjures up.

In conclusion, "to be or not to be 'Arab'" is not only a contestation over the correct interpretation of Islam or about different religious ideologies, as discussed in the debates related to *Islam Nusantara* or "Arabization". Looking at the Madurese localizations of "Arabness" through the lens of Bourdieu's theory on different forms of capital (1979, 1992), "Arabness" appears to bear the potential to become a resource within economic, cultural, and social dynamics in Madura. As a symbol for piety and learnedness, "Arabness" legitimizes leadership claims and enables participation in the management of the *hajj* — and thus offers the possibility to generate economic capital in the pilgrimage business. On the local level, economic capital is invested in the pilgrimage — and thereby transformed into cultural and eventually social capital. In this circular transformation of "Arabness" its symbolic capital seems to be of most relevance, as connections to the Holy Land are extremely prestigious.

To be "Arab" has its own meaning within the social context of Madura. Of course, the symbolic significance of "Arabness" may include ideological facets; yet, in the Madurese case, the engagement with "Arabness" seems to be much more related to local cultural meanings and values as well as economic activities rather than to

major shifts in Islamic legal thought and lifestyle. The ritualization of the pilgrimage, as apparent in the story of Ibu and Pak Sukis, marks the continuous (and maybe even increased) significance of local traditions and the village community and the importance of sustaining social relationships. Obviously, the village is not losing its importance in the course of modernity and economic progress. The rituals and social relations back home appear to be as substantial as the journey to Mecca itself.

Madurese Muslims negotiate Muslim identities at their nexus with modern "Pop Arabness", and pious consumption as well as the revitalization and reinforcement of Madurese tradition and hierarchies. In fact, changes in Islamic lifestyle seem to be especially related to the democratization, decentralization, and politicization of Islam and Islamic consumer culture. This underlines how religious and cultural orientations are embedded in social, political, and economic contexts and consequently related to contestations over power, material gain, and prestige. The question of the "right" interpretation of Islam, Islamic lifestyle, and morality is also a question of access to economic resources, social prestige, and societal influence.

Moreover the pilgrimage represents an arena wherein the Madurese emerge as influential intermediaries, being proud of their networks and informal channels. By staging "Arabness", they show their pride in being able to "handle" Arabic culture. Historical ties with the Arab World and the role of people of Arabic descent are evoked in these discourses. Thus Madurese Muslims — and especially the *kyai* — not only claim regional leadership but also mark their national (and international) significance.

The creative adoption and staging of Arabic style, language, and customs has become characteristic of Madura. As the Madurese make this Arabic style their own — while at the same time criticizing and mocking Arabic Islamic traditions like Wahabism — they challenge the "ownership" and the essentializations of "Arabness", in which certain cultural markers are equated with fundamentalist ideologies. Even though the "Arab" markers that are popular among the Madurese are essentialist in another way, they nevertheless challenge the dichotomy between "Arab" and "Indonesian" that is prevalent in the *Islam Nusantara* discourse. The Madurese affinity for "Arabness" hints at the frictions within Indonesia and within the NU, especially concerning the question of which features of localized "Arabness" — like Hadhrami Arabness, Pop Arabness, and Madurese Arabness — may rightfully form part of the cultural diversity of *Islam Nusantara*.

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