

# **The Unequal *Umma*: Assessing the Muslim relationship form between Indonesians and Others<sup>1</sup>**

By Amika Wardana<sup>2</sup>

University of Essex, England

Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

[a.wardana@uny.ac.id](mailto:a.wardana@uny.ac.id)

## *Abstract*

*The article aims to explore the patterns of social interaction of Muslim communities using a case study of Indonesians residing in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The history of travelling and migration in Islamic traditions and the rise of international migration since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and its exaggeration after World War II have created separately ethnic (Muslim) niches across cosmopolitan cities in the world. Although not significant in number, there have been some Indonesian communities both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. I attempt to explore the Muslim relationship form developed by Indonesians to their coreligionists comparatively from the 'Jawi' (Jawah) community who have resided in Mecca since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the 'Azharities' who have been in Cairo since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the presence of 'Perkumpulan Ummat Islam' (the Muslim Association) in The Hague in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Primarily, the article seeks to evaluate the meanings of the Umma in the context of the inter-regional relation in the Muslim world as well as face-to-face interaction between them in terms of different ethnic-cultural backgrounds. The historical and politico-cultural position as an 'Islamic periphery' either in geographic and ethnographic senses situates Indonesians in the lowest strata within the 'hierarchical' World Muslim society. The prominent role of foreign Muslim teachers during the primary Islamisation period continued by the supremacy of Arab-Islamic cultures within the Indonesian Muslim public and private life and combined with long-term colonisation under the Dutch resulted in low self-confidence that prevents Indonesians from participating in the wider Muslim community. In addition, the large presence of the well to do (Hadrami-) Arab migrants benefited from the colonialist racial-discriminative policy which has resulted in an unequal relationship between them and the suffered native Muslims.*

*The article attempts to examine whether Indonesians maintain or transform this unequal Muslim relationship when they live outside their traditional territorial homeland both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries..*

*Keywords: Umma, Muslim communities, Indonesian Muslims*

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<sup>2</sup> Amika Wardana is a Lecturer in Sociology at Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia; and now pursuing a PhD in Sociology at University of Essex, England. He can be reached via [a.wardana@uny.ac.id](mailto:a.wardana@uny.ac.id).

## Introduction

It was widely argued that Islam has globally expanded and been culturally absorbed into the localities. Muslims practice and express their religion in different ways intertwined with a wide range of social, political and economic interests of the populace. Of the impact, the face of Islam is not one but many. The social interaction among Muslims seems to be more complex not simply unified into a single religiously defined community as illustrated in the notion of the *Umma*, the global Muslim solidarity. Throughout the history of the Islamisation and the development of the Islamic civilisation, the faith-based social relationship across ethnic differences, sectarian affiliations and regional divisions was filled up with separation, discrimination, domination, competition and exploitation instead of cooperation and collaboration under the banner of Islam.

Primarily, I aim to examine the notion of the *Umma* as a conceptual framework describing the unity within the diversity of Muslim communities. It must be noted that the term has its roots in theological sources, historical transformations and social-political uses over time (see Denny, 1975; Nieuwenhuijze, 1959; and Laffan, 2003). Instead of its role as symbolising the Muslim unity, however, recent scholars (see Mandaville, 2001; Hassan, 2006; and Marranci, 2008) put more emphasise on the plural entities of the meanings of the *Umma*. Those scholars try to make sense of the diversified nature of Muslim communities, which seems to make these worldwide religious communities impossible to generate a total unity. By acknowledging its plurality (or perhaps its divisions and antagonism too), the notion of the *Umma* maintains its prominent role to illustrate the position of Islam as the shared entities and identities among Muslims from diverse (ethnic) communities either as a conceptual framework or in the real social life.

In this article, I initially refer to these assumptions but expand with a different perspective thusly. I argue that the plurality of the *Umma* should be viewed not only on its diversities and divisions but also on the unequal relationship between Muslim groups constructed in their long term historically contingent interaction during the Islamisation period as well as the interruption of the European colonisation. By adapting the concepts of (ethnic) boundaries from Barth (1969) that persist despite the continuous move of people across diverse cultural lines and potentially generates inequality when coalesced with hierarchical-relationship social entities from Tilly (1998; 2005), the notion of the (plural) *Umma* would be tendentiously transformed into a religiously stratified community.

Using a case of Indonesian Muslims, I am concerned about the construction of the centre-periphery relationship between West Asia and Southeast Asia Islam and its further emulation into an unequal relationship between them and co-religionists from the (self-

defined) centres across the Muslim world. According to recent studies (see Hefner, 1997; Laffan, 2003; Bowen, 2003; Riddle, 2001), Indonesian Muslims, who embrace Islam considerably late in the history and originally come from the far distant region in Southeast Asia, are commonly perceived as 'less Muslims', 'not-real Muslims' or 'Islamic periphery' in contrast with Middle Eastern ones (see also Mehden, 1993). The status as a 'receiver' of Islam combined with the deprived impact of European colonisations situates Indonesians as experiencing an inferiority complex and lack of confidence in terms of religious competence and self-esteem when encountering other Muslims from the 'West'.

The situation seems to become more severe in the context of the migration or travelling of Indonesians either to Muslim or non-Muslim countries. Primarily, I am interested in the *Jawi Ulama* and students who have been in Mecca since the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Indonesian *Azharities* in Cairo since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that have played a great role in transforming Islamic knowledge and tradition from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. Of particular interest concerned to me is to elaborate their preference to group among themselves in a culturally-regionally defined community and to limit their involvement in the international gathering and socio-cultural activities of the host Muslim society. It seems that Indonesians lacked confidence and experienced self-esteem degradation when encountering co-religionists and this was exacerbated by the lack of respect among the natives. In addition, I compare to the declined role of Indonesian descents in the growing minority Muslim communities in The Hague, the Netherlands that currently dominated by Turkish and Moroccans. Despite Indonesians can be considered as a Muslim pioneer in this country, their marginalised image has hindered them to be actively involved in the emerging Muslim diaspora in the West.

### **Inside the Umma: the inequality within**

Throughout history, the notion of the Umma has been widely used to describe the unity of the Islamic faith and the sense of the global Muslim solidarity. Recently, the advancement of the information technology has connected Muslims across the world in different ways, making it easier to communicate, share ideas and opinions and develop a transnational Islamic (political) network, re-imagining the new *Umma* (Mandaville, 2001; 2002). However, this term actually inherits an internal paradox (Marranci, 2008). Theologically, the *Umma* symbolises the unity of Muslims on the basis of sharing their faith. Yet the unity should be perceived as an ideal type in Weberian terms which for a certain degree, contradicts with the reality. This concept becomes paradox when both

Muslims and social scientists admit the unity and solidarity as the essential feature of the Muslim *Umma* while neglecting any internal diversity and divisions (*ibid*).

First of all, the term the *Umma* in the Quran means "a religious community ideally unified in its beliefs" (Denny, 1975: p. 49). Denny elucidates that there was a change of its meanings from initially to describe loosely various (religious) community to exclusively for the Muslim community. The *Umma*, hence, stands for or symbolises the cohesion of all Muslims and encompasses a (religio-) social identity (Nieuwenhuijze, 1959). In other words, it gives a sense of (religious) solidarity among (Arab) Muslims above their tribal (and ethnic) loyalties and creates boundaries that either unify or differentiate them from other (religious) communities.

Recently, Hassan (2006) emphasises the meaning of the *Umma* both as 'community' and 'collective identity'. He points out that the *Umma* signify the community in Tönnies's conceptualisation embodied with primordial values and homogenous characters of its members portrayed with the similarity of faith and the consciousness of belonging to a single unified and homogenised community. Whilst as 'collective identity', the meanings of the *Umma* seems to be transformed from community to society inspired by their ethnic-cultural diversities, sectarian differences and the increase of complexities in the populace. The *Umma*, hence, has nothing to do with the 'Islamic unity' as embodied in the primordial community. The Muslim unity means a symbolic shared religious identity but not uniformity in rituals, attitudes and socio-cultural practices (see also Mandaville, 2001).

Furthermore, Hassan (2006) proposes the notion of the 'plural Islamic' *Umma* instead of the single unified one. Similarly, Marranci (2008) states the pluralistic idea of the *Umma* in terms of the shared emotional feeling, a sense of belonging of a community. As a Muslim, he feels that himself and other Muslims are parts of the religiously defined community, they are connected each other emotionally. The ability to escalate a sense of belonging among Muslims in desperate circumstances putting aside the visible antagonisms between them shows the dominant existence of a shared emotional feeling of the Muslim unity.

Nevertheless, the notion of the plural *Umma* does not necessarily eliminate the internal paradox but it instead fails to recognise it. I argue that the primary paradox inside the *Umma* lays in the persistence of the unequal relationship between Muslims, not merely its diversity and divisions or simply emotional connection. According to Kamali (2001), this concept of the *Umma* was created historically to encompass any traditionalistic-tribal divisions and is an 'umbrella-like structure' encountering any disintegrated and rival

groups in a new religious society (p. 461). The *Umma* became much more important after the successful military expansion of the Islamic army outside the Arab world by occupying Persia, Andalusia and Maghrib. Instead of its role in managing cultural diversities, the *Umma* was used to conceal the inequality, discrimination and exploitation that were experienced by new members of the Muslim community from their Arab counterparts.

I hypothesize that the inequality inside the *Umma* becomes more visible in the context of face-to-face meetings between Muslims from different ethnic-cultural backgrounds. The *Umma* is tendentiously understood in terms of a virtual social reality influenced by Andersonian's (1991) renowned idea of imagined communities that highlights shared cultural images and identity. What is forgotten in those conceptualisations is the warning from Anderson himself of its tendency to put out of sight any exploitations and discriminations. Nonetheless, the virtual conceptualisations of the *Umma* are unable to grasp the unequal relationship that seems to be more visible in the context of real-life social interaction among members.

To contextualise this paradox of the *Umma*, I refer to Eickelman and Piscatori's (1990) study of travelling and migration in Muslim society. According to them, instead of opening the horizon of Islam and strengthening the Muslim brotherhood, the traditional travelling (and migration) in Islam such as *hajj* (pilgrimage), *hijra* (emigration), *rihla* (travels for study) and *ziyara* (visits to shrines or tombs) provides a memorable experience for Muslims to define their self-religious distinctiveness mirrored to other Muslims and become aware of the sectarian differences, ethnic and racial divisions, language gaps and a variety of Islamic customs that make up the entire *Umma*. Through this face-to-face meeting, a Muslim encounters Muslim 'others' who are interpreting and practicing Islam in different ways. The meeting of Muslims, thus, generates 'shifting' boundaries of the *Umma* that have been narrowly constructed from a territorial and ethnic-cultural basis into the wider one, the cosmopolitan *Umma*.

However, the changing boundaries do not actually occur as easily as imagined in the transformation from local to global *Umma*. As a socio-cultural (and political) category, the boundaries of the *Umma* intersect with boundaries of other categories including ethnicity, class, race, gender and regional/national origins. According to Barth (1969), those (ethnic) boundaries continue to separate and encourage interaction between their members. Through the *Umma*, Muslims are united into a single defined community but they are still divided and connected through ethnic and national (and also other socio-cultural) boundaries.

The predicament of the persistence of (ethnic and national) boundaries inside the *Umma* comes up when it combines with the hierarchical relationship between categories. As suggested by Tilly (1998; 2005), the combination generates the unequal relationship on the basis of categorical differences. He says that "a category consists of a set of actors who share a boundary distinguishing all of them and relating all of them to at least one set of actors visibly excluded by that boundary" (p. 62). When categories coalesce with "hierarchies ties between social sites in which the connections are asymmetrical and the sites systematically unequal" (p. 72), they form an unequal relationship between members. Certainly, this inequality correlates with the system of social closure, exclusion and control that set up to put some members off accessing particular resources. Furthermore, the unequal relationship becomes durable when it has been institutionalised and adapted elsewhere.

It seems that the Muslim communities are not immune from that social mechanism in which each of them is categorically different to the other, having joined the 'Islamic club' in a different period of time and with different process, while some of them have competed to dominate the communities either culturally or politically throughout history (Lapidus, 2002; see also Roy's, 1996, illustration of the domination and competition between Arabo-Sunni, Irano-Shiite and South Asian-Sunni in the recent Muslim world). The inequality of the Muslim relationship is constructed through the intertwined aspects of the macro-micro social process and the influence of the changes of the power relation in the global context over the history.

In the next section, I will elaborate the construction of the unequal relationship between Muslims using a case the experience of Indonesian Muslims. It pays attention to the history of Islamisation across Southeast Asia, the relationship between them as 'senders' and 'receivers' and its emulation into a hierarchical 'centre-periphery' relationship as well as its transformation in the context of travelling and migration of Indonesians outside the traditional homeland.

### **Indonesian Muslims constructed: the periphery**

There are questions of what Indonesian Muslims actually are or what constitutes Indonesian Muslims; how they are conceived as members of the worldwide Muslim society, the *Umma* and how they develop a form of social interaction with other Muslims over history.

In the introduction, I mention labels identified with Indonesians such as 'less Muslim', 'not real Muslim', 'syncretic Islam' or 'Islamic periphery'. The labels, however, do

not only connote with negative perceptions but surprisingly generate positive (self-) acknowledgment as well. For example in Geertz's (1968) comparative ethnographical observation between Moroccans and (Javanese) Indonesians, despite a strong sense of impurity within Indonesian Islam, they were portrayed as 'diligent' and 'patient' contrasted to the African's 'nerve' and 'aggressive' (see also Varisco, 2005). In addition, a year after the bloody terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, a joint conference sponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society (USINDO) and The Asia Foundation (2002) discussed the development of Islam in modern Indonesia that attempted to identify the distinctive characters of 'peaceful' and 'tolerant' Indonesian Muslims contrasted with 'radical' and 'fundamentalist' Middle Eastern and South Asian ones.

According to Laffan (2006; 2007), the construction of the distinctive and marginal image of Indonesian Muslims can be construed as the legacy of Dutch orientalist and colonialist portrayals toward their Mohammedan colonies. This image was greatly indebted to the work of Dutch scholars C. Snouck Hurgronje and G.W.J. Drewes that eventually influenced the Arabic newspaper and the 20<sup>th</sup> century American anthropologists on Indonesia like Geertz and Benda. Having feared with the spread of Pan-Islamism and anti-colonial movements from the Middle East, the Dutch colonial rule was acting to downgrade the role of Islam in the Indonesian society either politically or socially (Laffan, 2003; Bruinessen, 1999).

Furthermore, there had been self-consciousness among Indonesians themselves about their distinctive Muslim characteristics with heterodox sufistic ideas syncretised with old- (Indianised) Hindu-Buddhist traditions which were gradually accepted since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ricklefs, 2006; 2007). During this period, there occurred a polarisation of the Indonesian (particularly Javanese) Muslim society which was stimulated by the political rivalry between the minority *putihan* (literally white) group who were committed to purifying local Islamic traditions imitating the considerably 'purer' version of the Middle Eastern Islam and the majority *abangan* (literally red) groups who intended to pursue the old traditions mixing with Islam.

Strictly speaking, both Laffan and Ricklefs agree that the peculiarity of Indonesian Muslims is more or less a historical contingent narrative which is formed and continuously reproduced by diverse actors in the field over time.

This narrative also can be traced to the constructed image of Indonesians among the Arabs as proposed by Laffan's (2007) review on the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Middle Eastern newspapers which were overwhelmingly surrounded with negative perceptions such as

ignorance, lack of religious knowledge and their predicament under the Dutch colonisation. Those perceptions referred to (Dutch) Orientalist-Colonialist reports and their (Hadrami) Arab correspondents living in Indonesia who were tendentiously concerned only with the affairs of Arab communities in Southeast Asia but did not care so much about the suffering of their native co-religionists.

Nevertheless, despite it being tempting to simply accept Laffan's convincing idea of the post-orientalist/colonialist discursive construction of Indonesia as a periphery in the Muslim world including all attributes, I argue, it is better to consider too the historical process of Islamisation in this country. Particularly, this is concerned with patterns of social interaction between people from both regions, West and South Asia from where Islam came and Southeast Asia where Islam was received.

Scholars agree that the earlier conversion to Islam occurred through commercial interaction between the natives and Muslim traders from India, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula and (perhaps) south China (Meuleman, 2005; Ricklefs, 2001; Lapidus, 2002). It must be stressed that the international commercial network across Indian oceans that facilitate the interaction was mutually built on an equal position and relationship between traders from different countries (Brown, 2003; Abu-Lughod, 1989). The coming of Islam seemed to transform the form of mutual and equal interaction in trade into different/differences among relational roles as such as 'sender' and 'receiver' of Islam that eventually evolved to a hierarchical 'centre-periphery' relationship in the following period of time.

According to Hefner (1997), the placement of Southeast Asia at the (intellectual) periphery of the Islamic world is the result of the late conversion compared to other Muslim regions. Although Islam might have come to the insular Southeast Asia in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century, it only began to be embraced in the 13<sup>th</sup> and massively adhered to in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. When Islamic civilisation in Arabia, Persia, Africa, Andalusia and even Central and South Asia flourished becoming a dominant and determinant cultural force, Southeast Asia historically lacked these opportunities as their very early Islamic civilisation had ended up under the European colonisation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, Muslims in this region are thought to be a 'passive' recipient or consumer of religious products from the established Islamic civilisation in the Middle East and South Asia from where the religion primarily was brought in.

From a different point of view, Riddle (2001), who studied the Islamic literatures of the (Malay-) Indonesian world between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, found a huge number of translations, adaptations and commentaries from/on Middle Eastern and South Asian



works. There existed a common thread of all works from time to time in Southeast Asia Islam that take account of the external sources from the 'West'. Riddle notes that it was not a form of borrowing and imitation but rather a process of adaptation and further creative development to contextualise Islamic values into the dynamic (Malay-) Indonesian circumstances and cultures.

Nevertheless, in the context of the Islamic centre-periphery relationship, the adaptation can be seen as a localised and contextualised replication but actually has nothing to do with the original issues and does not challenge the position of the centre (Bruinessen, 1999; Hefner, 2002). In other words, the Middle East was conceived as the centre of Islam since the beginning and gradually idealised as the 'other' with superiority, authority and purity while the Islamised home in Southeast Asia was perceived with less quality and inability to reach the similar quality.

Another historical process I consider is the presence of the international Islamic scholarly network across (Malay-) Indonesia, the Indian sub-continent and Arabia around 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that shape this centre-periphery relationship form. In his historical analysis, Azra (2004) delineates that "the network produced intertwined, international intellectual communities ... were 'academic' in their nature ... [and] their connection to each other, as a rule, took the form of teacher-student ('vertical') relationship" (p. 30). Although there existed a horizontal relationship between teacher-teacher or student-student, the vertical teacher-student form seemed to be the most dominant pattern. It means that since its beginning, the network was hierarchical in its nature, which was centred in Mecca and Medina thus connected and connecting to the rest of Muslim regions.

In the context of Indonesian Islam, I argue that this international Islamic scholarly network had a considerable role in establishing the centre-periphery relationship between Arabia and Indonesia. Members of the network, who were central actors in converting and spreading the religious knowledge to their fellow nationals, had unintentionally constructed their region as a periphery in the Islamic world.

In addition, during the peak of the Dutch colonial era in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, the large presence of Hadrami-Arab Migrants from Yemen (who came to seek fortune throughout the emerging Southeast Asia cities) helped to institutionalise the notion of centre-periphery in the micro social level in either side of the Islamic world, among the Middle Easterners and to the native inhabitants (Mandal, 1994; Mobini-Kesheh, 1999; Laffan, 2003). These Muslim émigré were integrated well into the native Muslim society in their earlier days but eventually separated as the result of the Dutch racial-discriminative politico-economy policy. However, contrasted to the natives, their

prosperity and closed connection with the Dutch rule put them as a Muslim spokesperson and they began to impose their dignity as a (self-proclaimed) natural leader of all Muslims in the colony (Mandal, 1994; 1997; see also Azra, 1997). The social interaction between the Arab descendants and the native Indonesians became visibly unequal either in terms of economic status and politico-religious positions.

### **Indonesian Muslims: 'they have never taken a lead'?**

A well-known scholar of Indonesian Islam, G.W.J. Drewes, once wrote about Indonesian Muslims that 'they have never taken the lead' (quoted in Steenbrink, 2008 p.12) as their inherited (religious) character. Instead of accusing that the statement has a strong colonialist/orientalist influence, I try to make sense of it in the context of the meeting between Indonesians with co-religionists when they have lived either permanently or temporarily outside their traditional territory. For the purpose of this essay, I identify three Indonesian Muslim communities; the *Jawah* in Mecca, the Indonesian *Azharites* in Cairo and the *Persatuan Ummat Islam* (PUI) and/or *Persatuan Pemuda Muslim Eropa* (PPME) in The Hague that presumably shows more or less the general pattern of their social interaction with fellow Muslims.

By doing this, I attempt to examine how the notion of the *Umma* either in singular or plural terms has been used, expressed and articulated in the everyday life of Muslim communities. As I suggest before, the meaning of the *Umma* has been unintentionally transformed into a religiously stratified community historically constructed and contingent upon inequality among members. In addition, I am curiously interested in scrutinising the notion of Islamic periphery with a 'lesser quality' of Muslimness as is usually attributed to Indonesians and its impacts on the patterns of social interaction developed between them and other Muslims.

To begin with, I refer to the presence of a *Jawah/Jawis* (old-fashioned nomenclature of Malay-Indonesian Muslims) colony or *Ashab al-Jawiyyun* (brothers from Jawa) in Mecca and Madina pre-dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century when some mixed Arab/Indian-Indonesian parents followed by well-to-do native ones sent their sons to Arabia for study (Azra, 2004; Laffan, 2003). The tradition had continued during the colonisation and often justified as a *hijra* (a religiously obliged migration) from the un-Islamic (home) land ruled by the (un-believer) Dutch to the Islamic one. In the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of the *Jawah* were roughly counted about 5,600 people representing less than 5% of the Mecca population (Kaptein, 1997 cited in Laffan, 2003). However, Laffan points out that the number seemed to be underestimated as taken from

the formal colonial sources while many *Muqimun* (long-stay students and teachers) and (short-visit) Hajj pilgrims from the archipelago were reluctant to register to the Dutch consulate in Jeddah.

In his remarkable ethnographic study conducted in 1884-5, C. Snouck Hurgornje (2007) states the respectful position gained by the *Jawah* among the native Meccans with their unpretentious attitude, piety and honesty despite most of them were lacked religious trainings and unable to speak Arabic fluently. There were also many well-known *Jawi* Ulama such as Abd al-Samad al-Palimbanngi, Dawud al-Fatani (Azra, 2004), Nawawi Al-Bantani, Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabauwi and so forth who run their own religious learning circle either inside/outside the *Harram* (Laffan, 2003). It seemed that despite their small in number, the *Jawah* was remarkably visible in the cosmopolitan Meccan society.

However, Snouck noticed the decline of the *Jawah's* reputation as well as self-esteem while their number steadily increased/rose. The native Meccans had perceived them as '*ferukhah*' (literally low fellows) and mockingly called them a 'snake-eater' because of the clumsiness in front of their country-fellow creditors and money-lenders (p. 241). Their impression of naivety, as they were tricked by their countrymen, made them thought they could get away without paying their debts. In addition, the awkward *Jawi* pilgrims had often become a soft target for exploitation by the *mutawwif* (or Sheikh who acted as a Hajj guide) that claimed them extra costs in gaining God's blessings.

In the context of academic milieu in Mecca, Snouck observed the lack of an international gathering among the *Jawi* students in order to anticipate severe discriminations and harassments. The preference of the *Jawah* to stick with their own academic circles outside the *Harram* and to keep using Malay instead of Arabic in the circulation of religious ideas, might be seen as an opposition among the arrogant attitudes and ascribed status of the religious authority shown by local Meccans (Hurgornje, 2007) or simply as a sign of an inherent shyness and modesty (Laffan, 2003). The social relationship between the *Jawis* and the natives seemed to be separated either under ethnic-cultural differences or competition to hold religious authorities. In addition, Snouck added the growing awareness among the *Jawis* to look up to the superiority of the native Arabs and a self-degradation to look down on the homeland and people of *al-Bilad al-Jawa* which they belonged to. The fact that their land was colonised by the (un-believer) Dutch gave them tremendous shame among Muslim colleagues.

Whilst in Cairo, the presence of Indonesian students in the University of Al-Azhar dated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Laffan, 2004; Roff, 1970). It seemed that the

modern system and curriculum in Islamic studies introduced by Al-Azhar had attracted Indonesians to come to Cairo changing their direction from Mecca which was still overwhelmed by the old-fashioned style of Islamic learning (Laffan, 2003). This change might be also motivated to avoid discrimination and harassments from local inhabitants as commonly experienced by the *Jawis* in Mecca (Abaza, 1993).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Roff (1970) notes the presence of about 20 Indonesian students in Al-Azhar mixing with other students from Malaysia (and perhaps Pattani/Thailand). They lived together in the small *Riwag al-Jawa* (student lodge) next to the Al-Azhar mosque. The number has steadily increased particularly after independence, from around 80 in 1953, 415 in 1982-3, 730 in 1987, 1,000 in 1993 (Abaza, 1994) and 2,700 students in the year of 2000 (Abaza, 2003).

According to Abaza (1994), who conducted fieldwork among Indonesian Azharites (Al-Azhar students) in the late 1980s, there existed a similar pattern to the *Jawi* in Mecca in their preference to group with other students from Southeast Asia origin in a newly constructed city at that time, *Madinat Nasr*, which was commonly called as *Kampung Melayu* (Malay Ville). Abaza underscores that the grouping of Southeast Asian communities in a considerably remote area of the metropolis Cairo was encouraged by pragmatic reasons such as wanting to save money and the available facilities to support both their daily life and study particularly among female students due to the location being close to the Girls' Azhar faculty.

However, in her later publication when she nostalgically revisited *Kampung Melayu* in 2000, Abaza (2004) revealed that there were many sad and desperate stories about the arrogance and bureaucratic treatment by Al-Azhar administrative staff towards Southeast Asian (and African) students as well as the continuous experience of sexual harassment of female Indonesians who lived across the street to/from *Kampung Melayu*. The decision to group in that remote area, nonetheless, was likely not only motivated by economic or academic rationale but also from the wise decision to deal with the lack of respect towards/from among the native inhabitants.

Similar stories have been observed by Laffan (2004) when he visited Cairo in 2002 and 2003 where he interviewed some Indonesian students. According to him, despite there exist an open and mutual interaction between Indonesians and local people in this city, Egyptians seems to look down Indonesians. The uncomfortable situation and embarrassment faced by his informant who had lived in Cairo for seven years by a young Egyptian waiter in an Egyptian restaurant gave him an indifferent impression. Furthermore, other sensitive issue such as the low rate of the academic accomplishment

among Indonesians in Al-Azhar which Abaza (1994) noted only 30% of students obtained a degree, and the reluctance of Egyptians (and Arabs) to acknowledge the work of Indonesian scholars (Laffan, 2004) look to confirm the general phenomena.

In the Netherlands, the presence of Indonesian Muslims can be traced to before and during the colonisation period. In 1602, the Achenese envoys led by the ambassador Abdul Zamat (or Samad or Hamid) arrived in this country but because of his poor health eventually died and was buried in the great church of Middelburg under the Islamic way (Poeze, 2008; Steenbrink, 2008). The steady arrival of Indonesians consisted of students, low-skilled workers and so forth to the country, despite not all of them being Muslim, had increased during the peak and the late colonial period (Poeze, 2008).

Particularly after the Second World War, the pattern of migration was largely different where about 12,500 Moluccans ex-KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlands Indische Leger* or The Royal Dutch Indian Army) soldiers and about 30,000 Surinamese with Indonesian (Javanese) origins arrived (Amersfoort, 2004; Amersfoort and Niekerk, 2004). Nevertheless, Steenbrink (2008) notes that there is not clear statistical data about Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands today although the *Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek* in 2004 notes that 7,392 out of the 8,400 Dutch citizens of (recent) Indonesian descent were Muslims. The number seems to be incorrect as only a few Moluccans were Muslims while there were about 16,000 Indonesian Muslim descents holding Dutch citizenship and 20% of Surinamese Muslims with Javanese origins.

Compared to the other Indonesian diaspora in two Middle Eastern countries, the life and the incorporation of Indonesian Muslims into (minority) Muslim communities in this Western country seemed to be rather different. Considered as a pioneer, Indonesians were actively involved in the establishment of the first Muslim organisation, *Jong Islamieten Bond* (Young Islamic Association), in the mid 1920s (Steenbrink, 2008). Indonesians themselves established their own organisation in 1932, namely *Perkumpulan Islam* or PUI (*Indonesische Islamitische Vereniging* or Indonesian Islamic Association), that was initially built to handle an Islamic graveyard in The Hague (Poeze, 2008). PUI built a small *Musalla* (Islamic shrine) that became a centre for Islamic learning supported by Ahmadiyah representatives from Woking, England. PUI also was one of the founding members of the Union of Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands (*Federatie van Moslim Organisaties in Nederland*) in 1975 (Landman, 1992 cited in Steenbrink, 2008).

After the Second World War, the new arrival of Indonesian Muslims established a new association in 1971 called PPME, *Persatuan Pemuda Islam se-Eropa* (the Union of Muslim Youth in Europe) (Steenbrink, 2008). The association centred their activities in

Masjid Al-Hikmah in The Hague built in 1996 and actively participated in providing a place for worship and religious services and promoting Islam on the national level (even across Europe). Moluccan Muslims also had their own mosques funded by the Dutch government in the years of 1980s-90s in Ridderkerk and Waalwijk that hosted numerous national Islamic events like a yearly contest in Qur'an chanting and conferences in the 1990s (*ibid*).

However, Steenbrink points out the declining role of Indonesian descents and their reluctance to join into the growing minority Muslim communities in the Netherlands today as widely dominated by Turkish and Moroccans (see also Shadid, 1991; Rath, Sunier and Meyer, 1997). The PPME works exclusively among fellow Indonesians while the PUI pursues its limited role as the administrator of the Muslim cemetery in The Hague (Landman, 1992 cited in Steenbrink, 2008). Steenbrink explicitly suggests that the phenomena related to the marginal image/position of Indonesians in the Muslim world. The tendency to import the Indonesian Islamic model from today Indonesia to this country makes them feel inferior and lack of confidence encountering co-religionists from other countries.

According to Sujadi (personal communication), who is currently researching the history of the Indonesian Muslim organisation in the Netherlands, these phenomena are primarily related to the lack of interests and the limited religious knowledge among them compared to members of other Muslim communities. The constructed image of Indonesians, either Muslim or non-Muslim, belonging to the old-Dutch society not to (new) minority Muslim communities makes them reluctant to be politically active in promoting Islam and demanding political recognition as a distinctive religious community.

I argue that the inferior feeling in terms of religiosity and Islamic knowledge seems to be a major characteristic of Indonesians in the Netherlands not merely a new phenomenon. The fact that PUI needed an assistance to run its Islamic learning centre from Ahmadiyah representatives in Woking and the limited religious knowledge among recent generations provide a clear evidence of their inability and lack of confidence to participate in wider Muslim communities. Although there is no available information stating the preference to group among themselves to avoid discrimination and harassment from dominant Muslim groups, the (self) marginalisation of Indonesians in this country looks very similar compared to the experience of the *Jawah* and *Azharites* to stay in a comfortable zone among fellow nationals.

Having examined these works, it seems that the *longue durée* interaction between Middle Easterners and Southeast Asians in terms of the Islamisation with their

hierarchically different status as 'sender' and 'receiver' has evolved to shape the very nature of the *Umma* not merely as a unified community but also as a stratified one. On the one hand, it provides ways for both groups to build a close relationship, facilitate cooperation and share the common faith and religio-cultures. Particularly for Indonesians, by joining this 'Islamic club', they had an opportunity to involve in the tradition of migration and travelling in Islam such as *Hajj* pilgrimage, *hijra*, and *rihla*. Through this tradition, they were able to come and stay in Mecca and Cairo building their ethnic-cultural niche and incorporating into the cosmopolitan Muslim society there. Whilst in The Hague, the similarity in the Islamic faith made Indonesians able to coalesce with coreligionists from Turkey, Morocco and other Muslim regions together establishing a minority Muslim community in the West.

On the other hand, however, by joining the Muslim *Umma*, Indonesians can be seen unintentionally to subsume themselves under the (Arab/Middle Eastern) Islamic cultures. The nature of the stratified *Umma* is constructed by the strong influence of the hierarchical religious authority and the knowledgeability in Islamic teachings, which is likely measured by the cultures of the dominant (Arab) groups, demeaning the position of Indonesians. As explained before, the declined status among the *Jawah* in Mecca was referred initially to their lack of religious training and fluency in Arabic while among the Azharites in Cairo by their lower academic achievement and in The Hague by their limited (Islamic) religious knowledge. It is clear enough how the inequality inside the *Umma* works and eventually relegates the position of Indonesians in the bottom line of the Muslim world.

Nevertheless, I consider the impact of the colonisation on the persistent sense of inferiority among Indonesians in three diasporic communities above. It does not merely refer to the Dutch 'colonial discourse' borrowed from Said's Orientalism that portrayed the 'less Islamic' quality of Indonesians as proposed by Laffan (2006; 2007) but also the fact of the deprived experience under the colonisation that constructed their awkwardness. In Mecca, the Dutch occupation of their home country brought a great shame among the *Jawah* and made them lacked of self-esteem while in Cairo, the arrogance of Al-Azhar administrative staffs and the lack of respect of young Egyptians severely experienced by Indonesian students might be explained as the legacy of post/colonial cultures. In the Netherlands, the marginalised image of Indonesian Islam has contributed in their declining role in the minority Muslim communities.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The article describes the construction and persistent inequality inside the *Umma* as particularly experienced by Indonesians among co-religionists either in Muslim-majority countries or in Muslim-minority one. It provides a clear illustration how the notion of the *Umma* symbolising the Muslim unity and solidarity in the diversity has been transformed into a hierarchical stratified community over/throughout history. For Indonesians, who come from a far away region from the Arab heartland and have relatively different ethnic-cultural traditions, embrace Islam lately and experience a deprived life under colonisation, the construction of the hierarchical Muslim society has become a historical burden in their interaction with other Muslims. In the context of migration, the situation is not merely experienced by Indonesians in the Middle East where the majority and superiority of the Arabs as the native and the 'sender' of Islam are obviously visible but also brought in Western countries where the Muslim diaspora recently emerged in last couple decades.

Lastly, it seems to be ironic that the growing internationalisation of Muslim affairs situates Indonesia as a model for a moderate and tolerant Muslim country although perhaps among Muslims themselves this is like a euphemism for 'less Islamic' or 'not real Muslim' representations. Similarly, the self-acknowledgment among Indonesian Muslim scholars about the distinctive character of Indonesian Muslims as 'moderate' and 'tolerant' in the USINDO-TAF joint conference on Islam in Modern Indonesia in 2002 seems to change the negative image into the positive one. Furthermore, the establishment of the United Kingdom – Indonesia Islamic Advisory Group (UK-Indonesian IAG) by Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2006 aimed to bring the moderate and tolerant model of the Indonesian Islam into the British multicultural society (Indonesian Embassy London, 2006). Recently, President Barack Obama (2009) proudly said that 'Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance ... [as] I saw it firsthand as a child in Indonesia ... an overwhelmingly Muslim country'.

All of these become ironic for Indonesians, as particularly shown by three diasporic communities above, who have lively experienced a marginalised position in the Muslim society. In addition, the predicament of the inequality inside the *Umma* is continually obscured while at the same time the indifferent characteristics of Indonesian Muslims contrasted to Middle Easterners are proudly acknowledged as a 'desired' model of the 'moderate' and 'tolerant' Muslim in the contemporary globalised world.

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