Young Salafi-niqabi and hijrah: agency and identity negotiation

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Abstract

This article analyzes the life of young millennial *Salafi-niqabi* in Surakarta and their strategies in dealing with power relations in their everyday lives. Studies on Salafi in Indonesia have focused more on global Salafimovements, power politics, links with fundamentalist-radical movements, state security and criticism of Salafi religious doctrine. Although there are several studies that try to portray the daily life of this religious group, the majority of previous studies focused on formal institutions and male Salafi. Very few studies have addressed the lives of Salafi women. This is likely due to the difficulty of approaching this group because of their exclusivity, and their restrictions on interacting with the outside world. Using Macleod's theory of 'accommodating protest' within the

framework of everyday politics, agency, and power relations, this research found that young millennial *Salafi-niqabi* have a unique method of negotiating with the modern and globalized world. Through what Macleod calls an accommodation which is at the same time a protest, young *Salafi-niqabi* have experienced *hijrah* as a form of negotiation of their millennial identity.

Artikel ini menganilis tentang kehidupan Salafi-niqabi muda di Surakarta dan strategi mereka dalam menghadapi relasi kuasa dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Studi tentang Salafi di Indonesia banyak memberi focus pada gerakan Salafi global, politik kekuasaan, hubungan mereka dengan gerakan fundamentalis, keamanan negara dan juga kritik atas doktrin keagamaan mereka. Meskipun terdapat beberapa studi yang mencoba melihat keseharian dari kelompok ini, mayoritas memfokuskan pada institusi formal dan kelompok Salafi laki-laki, dan hanya sedikit studi yang mengungkap kehidupan perempuan Salafi. Ini dimungkinkan karena sulitnya mendekati kelompok ini karena eksklusifitas dan pembatasan mereka terhadap dunia luar. Menggunakan teori 'accommodating protest' yang dipopulerkan Macleod dalam kerangka teori politik keseharian, agensi dan relasi kuasa, studi ini menemukan negosiasi unik yang dihadapi Salafi-niqabi muda milenial dalam dunia modern dan globalisasi saat ini. Melalui apa yang Macleod sebut sebagai akomodasi dan pada saat yang sama juga melakukan protes, Salafi-niqabi muda ini mendapati pengalaman hijrah mereka sebagai sebuah negosiasi identitas milenial.

Keywords: *Salafi-niqabi*; *Accommodating protest*; *Hijrah*; *Power relation*; *Agency*

Introduction

Hijrah has become a popular term that is recently heard on television and in popular articles, as well as in daily chats on social media and even in people's everyday conversations. It refers to people's transformation from a less religious person into a more pious one. The changes are commonly displayed through a Muslim's choice of dress, such as when previously unveiled women choose to the wear the *jalabiya*, a kind of Arab-style

veil with flowing robes, or when men avoid wearing trousers below their ankles (*isbal*) and adopt long beards (*lihyah*). Some even leave their jobs to follow what they call a totally *hijrah* lifestyle.[1] The characteristics of this phenomenon have been seen in Indonesian public spaces since the early 2000s.

The word *hijrah* originated from the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in order to further his *da'wa* mission.[2] Today, the concept of *hijrah* is more widely understood as referring to various phenomena. Scholarly studies have generally discussed *hijrah* in relation to the idea of a migration from one territory to another, referring to the interpretation of some Salafis that Muslims are obligated to migrate from places inhabited by non-believers to Muslim lands as an extension of the Salafi concept of loyalty and disavowal (*al-wala' wa–l bara'*),[3] as well as Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's interpretation of *hijrah* that is understood to mean a call to migrate to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS[4]

The term *hijrah* can also refer to a process by which a Muslim individual strives to become a better Muslim, framing it as a kind of conversion.

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[1] This phenomenon is found among Indonesian television artists who leave their careers in the entertainment industry after joining Salafism.

[2] Deni Hamdani, "The Quest for Indonesian Islam: Contestation and Consensus Concerning Veiling," Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 2007, 105.

[3] Jajang Jahroni, "The Political Economy of Knowledge: Salafism in post-Soeharto urban Indonesia", Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertation, Boston University, 2015. See also Mohamed Bin Ali, *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of Al-Wala' Wal Bara',* London: Imperial College Press, 2016 and Simon Engelkes, "From tawḥīd to takfīr: Salafi-Jihadism's Ideological Architecture Simon", *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, December 6, 2016.

[4] Erin Marie Saltman & Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part. Gender and ISIS Phenomenon", *Research Report*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, May 2015, 8; Anita Peresin, "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslima and ISIS", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, volume 9, number 3 (2015), 23; Laura Sabater Zamora, "Hijrah: Answering to the Call of the Caliphate: Analysis of European Muslim Women's Migration to Syiria to Join ISIS", Master Thesis, Development and International Relation, Aalborg University, Denmark, 2016.

The term's popularity has increased with the growth of urban Muslim populations in the post 1998 of Indonesian Reformation era. The term *hijrah* can be understood as a person's conversion from a bad past to a better or more religious one. Analyzing the phenomenon of Muslim women's conversion in Java in early 2000, Brenner underscores their commitment to piety through wearing the veil.[5] Using the concept of *hijrah* to mean a kind of conversion is also found in many Salafi Wahabi sermons that encourage believers to be engage in *hijrah* by moving away from ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).[6]

This article discusses the phenomenon of *hijrah* among *Salafi-niqabi* youth in Surakarta. It explores what *hijrah* means for them, what expressions of *hijrah* they demonstrate, and what kind agency they possess as part of the millennial generation. The focus of this article is millennial *Salafi-niqabi* with various levels of education in Surakarta, from senior high school to the university level. "Millennial" refers to anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 22 to 37 in 2018).[7]

Several studies that have discussed the issues of young Salafi have focused on male Salafi, looking at their patterns of movement as well as their involvement in *jihad* movements.[8] An increasing number of studies on Salafi women in Indonesia as well as young Salafi women

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[5] Suzanne Brenner, "Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and the Veil," *American Ethnologist*, Volume 23, Number 4 (1996), 673-697.

[6] Yusar Muljadji, Bintarsih Sekarningrum & .A. Tachya R. Muhammad, "The Commodification of Religious Clothes through the Social Media: The Identity Crisis on Youth Muslim Female in Urban Indonesia," *Jurnalism si Comunicare*, Anul XII, number 2-3 (2017), 60. See also Deni Hamdani, "The Quest for Indonesian Islam…"

[7] Michael Dimock, "Defining generations: Where Millenials end and post-Millenials Begin," *Pew Research*, March 1, 2018, accessed August 1, 2018, [http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/defining-generations-where-Millenials-end-and-post-Millenials-begin/]

[8] See Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Drama of Jihad: The Emergence of Salafi Youth in Indonesia", in Linda Herrera & Asef Bayat, *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 49-62.

in other countries typically support an argument about Salafi women's subordination and passivity.[9] The work of Nisa on women in Makassar and Yogyakarta who wear the *cadar* discusses their strategies and limitations living in Indonesia. Although a similar view prevails regarding *Salafi-niqabi* women and their agency, by using McLeod's accommodating protest theory,[10] this article focuses on understanding the unique negotiation of young *Salafi-niqabi* women in what McLeod calls 'accommodation' and at the same time 'protest'. This seemingly contradictory notion started from the continuous debate between Western feminists and post-colonialist Islamic—feminists[11] in viewing veiled women in the Muslim world. While the former views veiled women as subordinated and oppressed as well as having limited agency, the latter perceives them as fully employing agency and as a kind of resistance symbol against Western cultural domination. McLeod's accommodating protest theory recognizes this contradiction in

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[9] See Emy Rubi Astuti, "Perempuan-perempuan Tereksklusi: Proses Eksklusi Sosial Perempuan-perempuan Salafi di Yogyakarta", Thesis, Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) Gadjah Mada University, 2010; Nurul Fithri Hapsari, "Studi Analisis Wacana Kritis terhadap Performativitas Identitas Perempuan Islam dalam Akun Pribadi Perempuan Salafi di Facebook", Thesis, Department of Culture and Media Studies, Gadjah Mada University, 2011; Siti Tarawiyah, "Behind the Burqa: a Study on Ideology and Social Role of Salafi Women in South Kalimantan", Conference Proceedings: Annual International Conference on Islamic Studies (AICIS) XII, Surabaya, 5-8 November 2012, 1485-1500; Reti Reka Merlins, "Pemaknaan Kesetaraan Gender Pada Perempuan dalam Komunitas Islam: Studi Pada Komunitas Salafi, Wahdah Islamiyah, dan Hizbut Tahrir", Thesis, Sociology Department Gadjah Mada University, 2010; Anassoffa'ul Jannah, "Konstruksi Identitas Kolektif Perempuan Gerakan Salafi: Studi di Masjid Ibnu Sina Fakultas Kedokteran UGM Yogyakarta", Skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014; Firza Sabrina, "Perempuan dan Media: Perempuan Salafi dan Aksesibilitas Media (Studi Etnografi Pada Perempuan Salafi di Wisma Qaanitah, Yogyakarta)", Skripsi, Department of communication Science, Gadjah Mada University, 2014.

[10] Arlene Elowe Macleod, *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

[11] Masood Khan, "The Muslim Veiling: A Symbol of Oppression or a Tool of Liberation?", *UMASA Journal*, Volume 32 (2014), 1-11.

which veiling denotes women's acceptance of tradition but at the same time is used to protest social constraints in their surroundings.

In addition, the fact that these young women have decided to strictly follow the Salafi path has also been an important point. At their age, as Inge points out, they are at a developmental period commonly associated with identity formation and identity crises.[12] Using data drawn from in-depth interviews and participant observation conducted between July 2017 and August 2018, this article also aims to understand the various strategies and forms of agency employed by young *Salafi-niqabi* in expressing their commitment to the Salafi *manhaj* and at the same time their youthful exuberance.

Youth and the enchantment of Salafism

The fact that youth play a significant role in the development of Salafism has been recorded by scholars. Hassan[13], Eliraz[14] and Basit[15] report that youth have been the main target of the Salafi movement for recruitment. Thousands of young men called themselves Salafis and declared their readiness for *jihad* and to fight against non-Muslims in the Moluccan conflict in 1999. Young university students started to join the university *da'wa* movement known as "Campus Islam" in the 1970s, participating in *da'wa* activities based at campus mosques. Financial support from Saudi Arabia has been provided for these movements since the 1990s, intensifying the development of the Salafi youth movement.

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[12] Anabel Inge, *The Making of Salafi Muslim Women: Paths to Conversion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

[13] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Drama of Jihad...", 51-52.

[14] Gloria Eliraz, *Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism, and the Middle East Dimension*, Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2004, 38-39.

[15] Abdul Basit, "The Ideological Fragmentation of Indonesian Muslim Students and Da'wa Movements in the post-reformed Era," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2016).

Unlike the visible development of the Salafi movement among young men, the growth of Salafi practices among young women in Indonesia has a limited record. Although her article does not explicitly mention Salafi affiliation, Smith-Hefner found a small number of technical and medical program students in Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta in the early 2000s who wore the *niqab*.[16] In a survey conducted in 2010, it was demonstrated that the practice of wearing the *niqab* was still frequently found in secular state universities, much more than in Islamic state universities.[17] Nisa states that following the recent growth of piety movements within Salafism and outside of Salafism, such as in groups like Tabligi Jama'at, the number of Muslim women wearing the *niqab* has also increased significantly.[18]

Hasan[19] and Iqbal[20] make an important point in analyzing the significant growth of Salafism amongst youth in recent Indonesian history. They point out that the social transformation of Muslim society resulting from economic development is the main factor encouraging changes within the structure of Indonesian Salafism. The linkage between social transformation and the modernization of contemporary Indonesia has also shaped this newly urbanized middle class social activism. They argue that many young Muslim villagers moved to cities or towns to pursue higher levels of educations since Suharto's New Order era introduced state projects of mass education and economic development into most

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[16] Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, "Javanese Women and the Veil in Post-Soeharto Indonesia." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 66, Issue 02, May, 2007, 390.

[17] Minako Sakai, & Amelia Fauzia, "Islamic Orientations in Contemporary Indonesia: Islamism on the Rise", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2014), 44.

[18] Efa. F. Nisa, "The Internet Subculture of Indonesian Face-Veiled Women," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2013), 4.

[19] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Drama of Jihad...", 55-56.

[20] Asep Muhamad Iqbal, "Cyber-Activism and the Islamic Salafi Movement in Indonesia", PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2017, 54.

parts of Indonesia bringing a consequence of the absence of high schools, colleges and universities in many rural areas. Accordingly, Iqbal said:

> "Living in a new, alien environment quite different from their rural experience presented challenges for these young Muslims, including harsh competition for education and jobs. These Muslim youth had generally no formal or extensive religious education since their childhood, but rather were educated in 'secular' schools and universities. In this context, certain interpretations of Islam appeared attractive to these newly urbanized Muslim youth, providing them with an alternative framework to understand their society and place within it as well as answers to their grievances."[21]

Besides enabling the younger generation to have the opportunity to be educated urban Muslims while becoming familiar with Salafism, the social transformation caused by modernization has been also challenged by many young Salafis. Hasan writes about how youth's concerns about the social, economic and political challenges under the Suharto regime in the early 1980s encouraged a return to a more comprehensive form of Islam (*kaffah*). Along with growing numbers of students who engaged in Islamic *da'wa* activities, the slogan "Islam is the solution" emerged as part of an Islamic resurgence that emphasized Islam as "a complete system governing all religious, social, political, cultural and economic orders and encompassing all things material, spiritual, societal, individual, and personal." Students associated with this movement saw becoming a Muslim *kaffah* (total Muslim) and practicing Islam in all aspects of life as the key to facing an uncertain future.[22]

The fundamental concern of this movement is the view that Islam is under attack by Western culture. These Western influences have infiltrated the Islamic world, including influencing Indonesian government

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[21] Asep Muhamad Iqbal, "Cyber-Activism…, 54.

[22] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere, *Contemporary Islam*, Volume 3, Issue 3 (2009), 232-234.

policies. Issues such as the rise of secularism, Jewish conspiracies, Communism, Christianization, and American domination have been primary focuses of this movement. The movement is a response to the Indonesian government's efforts towards accelerated modernization and globalization. These phenomenon can be interpreted as a threat to a strictly ordered lifestyle, compounded by the emergence of problems of uncertainty as well as dysfunctional, dangerous, and life-threatening environments. Leccardi and Ruspini argue that these problems make it more frustrating for youth who live in "a phase 'in-between' and have to be mobile as well as ready to reap opportunities".[23] Therefore, returning to an Islamic way of life, as well as the importance of the notion of a single Muslim community (*umma*) has emerged as a solution for Muslims and is part of the appeal of the Salafi movement.

Salafism offered these emerging lower middle class Muslims an alternative community, justifying their alienation from the society that surrounded them through doctrines of submitting only to God and fighting all forms of deviation from the 'true' Islam. It also provided newly urbanized Muslims with a new and holy identity, as well as a sense of pride. They claimed that this significantly changed their lives from individuals who lived on the fringes of society to the "the saved ones", (*al-ṭāifat al-nājiyat*) and "the victorious group" (*al-ṭāifat al-mansūrat*), who were rewarded with a sense of sacred mission and identity.[24] To these young, urbanized, and educated individuals, Salafism provided concepts of a 'true' Islam, of being 'true' Muslims, and of social justice that provided them with an explanation for their relative marginality, complete with a framework of endorsed actions and responses.

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[23] Carmen Leccardi& Elisabetta Ruspini (eds.), *A New Youth? Young People, Generations and Family Life*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006, in Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam..", 234.

[24] Asep Muhamad Iqbal, "Cyber-Activism...", 54-55.

Young Niqabi and choosing a Salafi life

Salafism offers a conservative and strict way of living as a Muslim that has significantly attracted more young people to leave the so-called "young, sparkling world". After a period of searching for identity, they decide to enter into the controlled and submissive lifestyle promoted by Salafism. The motives of these young *niqabis* for entering into their new lives are not monolithic. While some *Salafi-niqabis* choose Salafism on their own, some find it through the influences of their peers in a new environment, and others are guided by their close family members or other influential persons in their lives. At this stage, young women, ages about 17 to 22 years old,are in the transition from being under their parent's control to being more influenced by peer interaction and inspiration. They commonly look for a community which can comfort them and help them from their new identity.

These *niqabis* started to wear the *niqab* when they were in university, inspired by discussions about Islam with their peers. They attended weekly Islamic discussions at sites on and off campus. Their initial interest in Salafism stemmed from their feeling that Salafism offered the truth about Islam. They were convinced by the Salafi teaching because of the tradition of referring to the Quran and Sunnah, which they believe are absolutely right and must be followed by Muslims. They cited these teachings as inspiring them to commit to following the principles of Salafi *manhaj* and to change their lives. The promise of clear and instant answers to their concerns seemingly fulfills a need for this younger generation, who tend to be skeptical of the world around them. As Iqbal said, they have to adapt to the new world which is different from their past world.[25]

Fatima recalls when she was about 20 yearold student and became interested in the Salafi way of life in the early 2000s. She began to wear

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[25] Asep Muhamad Iqbal, "Cyber-Activism...", 54-55.

the *niqab* in the last years of her study for her bachelor's degree at a State Islamic University in Central Java. She felt a fear of 'liberalism', especially the promiscuity of the students around her at that time. Fatima said that although wearing the *niqab* was uncommon, and in fact not allowed at the time when she studied at the university, she fearlessly wore it as she saw her female friend's relationships with male students had no boundaries. To avoid this kind of behavior which she saw as un-Islamic, and to protect herself from the threat of 'free' sex, Fatima was willing to quit university and marry a man she met through one of her friends. However, Fatima stated that the challenges to her decision to wear the *niqab* did not stop once she was married. She met resistance towards her decision from her own family and her in-laws.

A similar situation and reasoning was relayed by Kiki, who majored in Indonesian Literature at Gadjah Mada University Yogyakarta in 2000. She decided to wear the *niqab* in the second semester of her studies. Suffering from anxiety, she felt peaceful when she saw women wearing the *niqab* on campus, and this is what initially drew her interest in learning about Salafism. Like Fatimah who donned the *niqab* in response to her fear of free sex and moral delinquency among the young university students around her, Kiki experienced a similar moral panic during her time at university. Therefore, after joining Salafi discussions and Islamic sermons in mosques around her campus, Kiki decided to wear the *niqab* and leave her university studies. Eventually, Kiki decided to study Islamic doctrines in a Salafi-run Islamic school.

Another *niqabi* interviewed for this study, Rini, a 22 year old university student, highlighted her belief that there is *fitnah* in every part of a woman's body. Rini recalled that she was not wearing the *niqab* when a mature man often tried to approach her, asking about how she was, often texting her and even trying to arrange to meet her. After she began

to where the *niqab*, the man continued to contact her and ask about her studies, but he did not ask her to meet up again. In regards to this point, Rini understands that even while wearing the *niqab* with no intention to tempt a man, that a woman can be a temptress and a source of *fitnah* for men. Rini concluded that her *niqab* can at least decrease male's intentions to tempt women, and will help her avoid *fitnah* and un-Islamic behavior. Rini also related a story from a Salafi *ustadz* she listened to on YouTube. The *ustadz* said that one day, a male lecturer asked a *niqabi* student to recite the Qur'anic and Hadith arguments (*dalil*) for wearing the *niqab.* The female student was not able to answer him properly. The next day, she returned to class without her *niqab*. The lecturer told her she should continue to wear it, because the student was very beautiful and the lecturer feared being attracted to her.

In contrast to the previous stories, Ifa, a 18 year old senior high school student, said that she follows Salafism because her father guided her to the Sunnah path. Although she initially was not curious about her father's new appearance - wearing long long robes, growing his beard and only using trousers that fell right to his ankles - the persistent advice and requests of her father for her to follow the path of *hijrah* was a big factor in her embracing the Salafi lifestyle. Ifa said that to follow the Salafi path one does not need to know Salafi doctrines from the beginning. Those can be learned little by little while practicing what Salafism orders. Even though it was hard at the beginning, Ifa agrees with her father that following Salafism has brought her back to a safer life than is commonly faced by teens who go on dates and spend their time hanging out at cafés and malls.

Similarly, teenager Nur started to wear the *niqab* when she was in junior high at a Salafi Islamic School. Although she had studied at the Salafi Islamic school since elementary school, female students were only

obligated to wear the *niqab* once they started junior high school and reachedpuberty. Nur admitted that initially she wore the *niqab* just to follow the school rules. In senior high school, she learned the doctrines related to the *niqab*. Later, while attending thelocal university run by the Islamic school, she was taught about the different schools of Islamic thought (*ikhtilaf ulama*) regarding the *niqab*. Nur said that she began to seriously study the Salafi doctrines, including those about the *niqab*, when she was in senior high school. She did not experience any difficulty in wearing the *niqab*, as at that time almost all of the female students and teachers at the Islamic school where she lived and studied wore the *niqab*.

Hijrah: toward an ideal vision of Muslim youth

After becoming familiar with Salafism either on their own, or through the direction of other people, these *niqabis* have performed what they call a '*hijrah*'. Adraoui stresses that after embracing Salafism, Salafist believers try to achieve social and cultural environment by representing both physical as well as moral exile, a process that starts from putting distance between themselves and "sources of perversion".[26] Muljadji, Sekarningrum and Muhammad found that the radical groups they researched on Facebook defined *hijrah* as completely leaving ignorance (*jahiliya*) behind. Correspondingly, for these young *niqabis*, wearing the *niqab* is generally seen as a kind of *hijrah*, meaning a migration from their previous non-Islamic lifestyle to a more Islamic one in accordance with the Salafi *manhaj*.

The way my *niqabi* informants understand the notion of *hijrah* in following a Salafi way of life initially starts by wearing the *niqab* and limiting their interactions with male counterparts. Hana admitted that

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[26] Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, "The Hijra in French Salafism: Toward a Complete Social and Cultural Break", *Ethnologie française*, Volume 4, Number 168 (2017), 649.

she started to wear the veil in senior high school, but at that time she claimed that she did not know how to wear the veil in the *syar'i* way. After getting to know the Salafi doctrine and learning how to veil in the *syar'I* (in accordance with the Islamic law) style, she decided to become an ideal women as Salafism describes. She began her *hijrah* by wearing a longer *hijab* and dark robes and *niqab,* as well as limiting her interaction with males in public. Similarly, the idea of *hijrah* was used by both Lisa and Rini to explain the process of change they experienced in adopting their current *niqab* practices. Rini explained this process as a period of self-improvement, leading her to become a Muslim woman who is able to protect her *izzah* (value) and herself. Similarly, Lisa describes her decision to wear the *niqab* as a *hidayah* which God gives her to be a better person.

Although sharing a similar concept of *hijrah* as a transformation towards a better future, Ifa was initially introduced to the concept by her father. She admitted that she previously had no interest in Salafism, despite her father's efforts to familiarize her with Salafist teachings through recordings of Salafist *ulama's* sermons. Ifa's first move towards *hijrah* was changing the short veil to a longer one and wearing the *niqab.* Ifa said that her life has dramatically changed since she undertook *hijra.* She left her hobbies behind and changed her daily activities to align with what the Sunnah recommends. Her father is now in control of her activities. He has banned many of her previous activities such as watching television and movies (even cartoon movies), hanging out with friends, belonging to the student choir group, as well as limiting her interaction with male friends. Ifa now always asks her father what activities she can and cannot do.

All of these *niqabis* admitted that they need a supportive environment to keep the spirit of *hijrah* alive. Therefore, some *niqabis* attend Salafi sermons regularly, as well as discussions held by Salafi followers both on

and off campus. Some *niqabis* even leave their friendships with non-Salafi *niqabi* friends and find new friendships within the Salafi community. As Inge highlights, Salafi women commonly seek certainty and a group that will support them in practicing Islam correctly.[27] These young *niqabis* also seek an environment that supports their *hijrah*. Ifa shared her reasons for this as she said: "I have very close friend since we were in the beginning of tenth class. But now I leave her. This is because, if I am still friends with her, I will be far away from Sunnah. It is hard indeed, but *Alhamdulillah* I have a new friend which has already done *hijrah* like me."

Hana faced something a little different. She felt that she never distanced herself from her friends. However, since she began wearing the *niqab*, her friends, especially those in the campus Islamic organization she used to belong to, started to keep away from her. Hana regretted this as she said that she never blamed other people for their beliefs, and that she didn't act any differently towards then. However, she felt more distant from her friends. "This does not mean we do not make friends anymore, but we end up rarely speaking to one another. With male friends, yes, I reduced my interaction".

Lisa, however, states that she made no changes after starting to wear the *niqab*. She still teaches martial arts to younger male and female students, and has normal interactions with her former friends. The only thing she changed was to avoid wearing pants. She modified her martial arts outfit to be more like a skirt that still allows her flexibility to move. Lisa points out that before wearing the *niqab*, she asked for approval from her mother. Her mother allowed it with the requirement that she should be like the Lisa her mother has always known. Her mother warned her to not become an introverted person after donning the *niqab*. At the moment, Lisa enjoys her popularity as a *niqabi* student who is well-known

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[27] Anabel Inge, "The Making of Salafi Muslim Women...", 11.

on campus due to her *niqab* and other activities.

Hana and Rini had a different experience with their parents. They hid their *niqab* from their parents at first to avoid their objections. These two *niqabis* admitted that it took them about a year or more to finally wear the *niqab* after they started learning about Salafism. Rini admits that her parents still don't know that she wears the *niqab*. Fears about reactions on campus, ability to find a job as well as a marriage partner are some of the things that the *niqabis* I spoke to mentioned as reasons their close family objected to their decision to wear the *niqab*. However, many *niqabis* stated that they only faced these challenges when they first started wearing the *niqab*. After that point, their parents have agreed explicitly or implicitly with their choices. However, all the *niqabis* I spoke to agree that following what their parents want is necessary to completing their *hijrah* path. Therefore, many of them only wore the *niqab* part-time in the first few years after they adopted it in order to accommodate their parent's requests.

Imagining the future

After experiencing different processes of *hijrah*, these young *Salafi-niqabis* have been reborn as new people, redefining their young selves with a Salafi identity. At the age when many youth are busy building their dreams of achieving good jobs after studying, these young *Salafi-niqabi* choose to focus on their present lifestyle, following the Salafi *manhaj* as a provision for the afterlife. They start to build their new dreams based on the *manhaj,* leaving their previous future goals or their parent's hopes behind. The Salafi *manhaj* determines that the best place for a woman is at home, and these young *niqabis* agree without doubt and adapt their lives to follow this rule.

Some young *niqabis* decided to stop their public activities early on in their contact with Salafism. Fathimah and Riski quit university to

study at a Salafi Islamic School and then got married. Others chose to finish their studies at the university. Rini states that her future dream is having her own business office, which she imagined as "a company for Allah". She hopes to employ women in her business. Her second dream is becoming a lecturer at a university, as she likes to teach and wants to write a textbook. However, she underlines that if after marriage her husband wants her to be at home, she has to agree, and that she will not be disappointed. She said that staying at home is also an '*ibadah*' for which God will reward her.

Lisa admitted that she is puzzled when people ask her what her future goals are. This is because she realizes that after she is married, decisions about her future are in her husband's hands. "If I said that I want to be a teacher, I do not know whether my husband will allow me to work or not." However, Lisa is now ready with an alternative skill if in the future her husband wants her to stay at at home. "I have a plan to take a sewing course. So, if my husband does not permit me to work outside, I can sew at home. I am also thinking to start a food business. I can also teach reading the Quran or make a *taklim* (religious gathering) at home. So I will make sure that my activities will not stop when I am married."

Beside the considerations about what a future husband may want, parent's desires are also concern for *niqabis* when they imagine their futures. Hana emphasized that although Salafism encourages its followers to focus more on the Quran and Sunnah learning, she cannot leave her study at university because it is an *amanah* (mandate) from her parents. Hana states that her parents wish her to continue to study at the postgraduate level and become a lecturer at a university afterward. Hana so far agrees with her parent's requests, as long as future jobs allow her to wear the *niqab*. However, Hana also emphasized that if she gets married, her decision to work or not will be up to her husband.

While Rini, Lisa, and Hana have been studying at university, Ifa has had to face the fact that her father asks her to not to think about attending university. Ifa said that her father intends to marry her to a man he chooses after she finishes senior high school. "I have dreamed of studying at a university after finishing high school, until suddenly my father said I am ready for *ta'arruf* (to be introduced to an intended marriage partner). But I am still negotiating with my father to allow me to continue my study at university."

These young *niqabis* are still in the process of negotiating their future lives. The Salafi *manhaj* that they strictly follow has redefined their imagination of the future to be suitable for what *Salafism* requires. The rule of a woman's role as defined by her husband becomes a boundary which these *niqabi* must fit themselves within, and they employ various strategies to follow the *manhaj* but at the same time to fulfill their individual hopes and desires.

Young *Salafi-niqabi* agency and negotiation

The *niqab* worn by the young Salafis in this research symbolizes, on one hand, the strong commitment young women have to the choices they make at a very early age, and their determination in dealing with the difficult situations that follow. Kabeer argues that although they face opposition from others, an individual who has a capacity to choose their own life and pursue their own goals can be said to possess agency.[28] These young *niqabis* admit that *hijrah* and wearing the *niqab* are hard choices, as they have had to leave their previous activities, hobbies, goals, and friendships. They even faced the objections of their close family and friends, as well as from their public surroundings. This is because wearing

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[28] Naila Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflection on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", *Development and Change*, Volume 30 (1999), 437.

the *niqab* is still viewed as a kind of subculture amidst Muslim traditions in Indonesia, and it is still a rare practice amongst Indonesian youth.

On the other hand, their obedience to *hijrah* and their efforts to follow the Salafi *manhaj* by wearing the *niqab*, limiting their appearances in public, and submitting their lives to their husbands after marriage denotes these *niqabis* acceptance of a view of women as sexually suspect and naturally bound to the home. This perspective has dominated the view of *niqabi* women among many feminists and scholars. *Niqabi* have been perceived as having no agency in their lives, and referred to as subordinated, oppressed, and victims of power relations. However, Macleod stresses that there are always reactionary behaviors as all women are active players, even those seen as subordinated. These women protest through their accommodation in various ways, not always in the form of words.

Despite fully following what the Salafi *manhaj* has suggested about women's dress, especially the necessity of wearing the *niqab* when they are in public or with men who aren't related to them, as well as avoiding intermingling between men and women (*khalwat)*, some *niqabis* practice exceptions to these rules. Rini said that she still cannot wear the *niqab* when having a chat with her cousin. Although a cousin is categorized as unmarriageable kin in Islam, she cannot bring herself to wear the *niqab* around him. "I cannot wear the *niqab* in front of my cousin as we have already known each other since we were children," she said. The other rule she cannot fully follow is to avoid listening to music. "After I know that music is forbidden in Islam, I totally stopped playing music. Before I started wearing the *niqab,* I loved to play the violin. I played it when I was anxious and playing it made me feel fresh again. However, for listening to music, I had to decrease this activity gradually. Because I know some of the lyrics very well, sometimes singing just suddenly comes from my

mouth." Hana relates a similar experience. She cannot also instantly stop listening to music and watching television, but now she gradually limits her exposure.

In addition, while Salafism requires its followers to be modest and to avoid wearing cosmetics and colorful attire, Rini tries to negotiate with these rules. Her hobby and part-time profession before *hijrah* was doing cosmetics for women. She was often asked by her friends to do their make up for graduation ceremonies. Rini admitted that after starting to wear the *niqab*, she still loved to make up her friends when they asked her. Sometimes she also makes herself up when she goes out of the house, but she underlines that it will be not seen by others as she is wearing the *niqab*. Rini and Lisa also still wear colorful attire when they are at home.

Some of the young *niqabis* I interviewed revealed that they often experience boredom at home. The *manhaj* suggests avoiding public appearances, and this is a struggle for some *niqabis*. Rini said that when she is anxious, she walks around the campus park. Inhaling fresh air and looking at green trees helps to control her energy. When Ifa's father banned his family from listening to music and watching television, Ifa downloaded children's movies such as *Moana* and *Cars,* but her father found out and deleted them all from her computer. "After my father deleted them, I downloaded them again, he did it again, and I download them again," she said. "I asked him why I cannot watch these children movies as they are not showing adult content. My father just replied that there is no advantage at all for me to watch them." As she spends almost of her time at home after school, Ifa admitted that an invitation from her friends to study together outside, sometimes in a small café, is one of the ways she entertains herself.

Continuing the hobbies they had before *hijrah* is also a challenge for *niqabi*. They acknowledged that their previous hobbies were activities

that Salafism forbids, such as drawing, listening to music and watching television, hanging out with friends in public places, and having relationships with male friends. All these young *niqabis* said that they have automatically stopped their relationships with male friends when they decided to wear *niqab.* As Ifa said, "I have had at least three 'puppy love' relationships with males since junior high school, and the last was three months before I wore the *niqab*. Now I will not do that again as Salafism forbids dating before marriage." However, Lisa views this differently. She has had a relationship with a male friend since her second semester in university. He was her friend in senior high school and they did the same extracurricular activities. She met him again at university and joined the the same campus organization that he did. "Yes, we have a commitment to have a relationship. But we do not do it like the common young people do such as dating out, chatting, and meeting often. We just have a talk when there is something important by Whatsapp, or sometimes we meet during the campus organization activities but we just do nothing." Lisa shared that she does not want to be matched with someone, as she feels more comfortable by herself.

All of the *niqabis* I spoke with said that they changed their previous hobbies to new hobbies that Salafism agrees with. Listening to music and watching television are replaced by listening to the Quranic readings on cassette (*murattal)*. Hanging out with friends is replaced by going out to join Salafi public religious sermons with family or friends (*daurah*). While drawing, especially drawing animals and humans is forbidden according to the *manhaj*, some *niqabis* have replaced that activity with learning calligraphy. While some young *niqabis* strictly avoid public spaces if they can, others are still participating in hobbies such as swimming, boxing, jogging, hiking and martial arts. Along with saying that these activities are their hobbies, they related that sports benefit their bodies and are

acceptable long as they are done without mingling with men.

Thus, the *hijrah* undertaken by these young *niqabis* has led them to face hard challenges in their everyday lives. Some *niqabis* acknowledged that they cannot fully change to an ideal Salafi follower after *hijrah*, but that they make a continuous effort to be perfect Muslims (*kaffah*). Along this path, these young *niqabis* have to make negotiations between their previous identity and the new one. In this sense, although they seemingly accept the *niqab* as a symbol of what feminists call subordination and oppression, they have also exercised their agency. The agency is in the form of their struggle to negotiate their interests, emotions, and wishes under the power of the Salafi *manhaj*. This negotiation has been a kind of alternative way of facing a situation they cannot fight, but at the same time they cannot surrender to its circumstances.

Conclusion

The concept of *hijrah* among millennial *niqabi* shows the complex processes of negotiation between strictly following the Salafi *manhaj* and the pursuit of their youthfulness. The Salafi doctrines that require these young women to live strictly according to Salafi rules have changed the way these Millennials experience their youthful worlds. Through the *hijrah* concept, they transform what they term their un-Islamic pasts into what they call the way of *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* followers. This new identity changes the way they see themselves and their surroundings, how they behave, and how they imagine their futures. Borrowing Macleod's theory of accommodating protest, the negotiations of these millennial *niqabis* confirms their persistent struggle to accept the Salafi *manhaj* on one side, and to find alternatives for their youthful pursuits on the other.

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