

5 Reframing the gendered dimension of Islamic spirituality

Silsilah and the ‘problem’ of female leadership in *tarekat*

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This chapter provides a comparative context for debates about the ‘problem’ of female leadership in Sufi orders (*tarekat*) in Indonesia and the Muslim world. In order to reveal the spectrum of possibilities for female leadership in *tarekat*, the chapter considers discourse on *silsilah* (spiritual genealogies linking *tarekat* to the Prophet Muhammad) and leadership in the Islamic mystical tradition more broadly, in addition to Sufi ideas underlying problems of assigning women leadership positions. I draw on examples of female leadership in Sufi orders in Javanese *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur’an, Hadith and other classical Islamic texts), with a focus on Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya (TQN) in Demak, and the Javanese mystical group Subud. The Subud movement is not a *tarekat* in the classical sense, but shares many religious and organizational features with them. The Subud movement is unique in the sense that, on the one hand it shares some concepts with *tarekat*, and on the other hand it strives to serve as an antithesis to the teachings and practices of *tarekat*. The Subud movement, which is deeply rooted in Javanese culture, is more open to female leadership than *tarekat* originating in the Middle East, indicating that the gendered dimensions of Indonesian Sufi spirituality are practised in different ways to the *tarekat* that developed elsewhere. Islam in Indonesia, in general, is easily intermingled with local tradition, and accordingly provides an interesting portrait of gender relations, which is distinct from that of the rest of the Muslim world.

***Silsilah* as a mode for establishing male authority**

Bernd Radtke (1992) observes that Sufism should be understood, if not experientially, as a process for cultivating self-awareness, because as J. Spencer Trimingham (1971) explains, Sufis seek direct communion with God through the use of intuition and emotional faculties, involving the cultivation of mystical experiences and states (*al-maqamat wa al-ahwal al-sufiyya*). Sufis perceive and describe their experiences differently because they are often momentary and hard to describe in conventional language. Such experience is roughly comparable to an orgasm, which also happens momentarily. Accordingly, the

mystical states, particularly the highest ones, are sometimes described as 'spiritual orgasms' for Sufis.

Sufism in the Middle East emerged from a long process of reflection on the notions of perfection of religiosity (*ihsan*) and morality (*akhlaq*). The pioneers of the movement were early Muslim ascetics (*zuhhad*), pietists (*ubbad*) and devotees (*nussak*). This movement was located within the boundaries of *ihsan* and *akhlaq* discourse, which in its early phase has been referred to as 'proto-Sufism', the embryonic stage of Sufism. Sufism developed in the seventh century CE through the elaboration of concepts such as love (*hubb*), mystical stations (*maqam*) and mystical states (*hal*).

Since the time of the famous Persian scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Sufism influenced the Muslim world to a greater degree than other currents in Islamic thought. The Sufi orders were institutions in which modes of ritual and the relationships between disciple and master were formalized. After the twelfth century, Sufi orders such as Qadiriyya, Kubrawiyya, Syadhiliyya and Naqshbandiyya came into being. The fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258 contributed to the spread of Sufi orders because members and leaders were compelled to leave the city and propagate their doctrines in many parts of the Muslim world, including Indonesia (Zulkifli 2002).

Silsilah became central to processes of maintaining and controlling spiritual authority in the eleventh century. From that time forward, descent from the Prophet has been used to establish the authority necessary to convey sacred knowledge and ritual practice (Malamud 1994). *Silsilah* formalize authority for men who legitimately belong in the chain of transmission linking them to the Prophet, and authorizing them to convey *barakah* (blessing), entitling them to bestow licence on, and initiate, male and female disciples. A Syekh who possesses an 'unbroken' spiritual lineage is legitimized as an authentic inheritor of the spirituality of the Prophet; accordingly, he is entitled to pass on his authority to others, who are usually male.

In the *tarekat*, *silsilah* is a symbol of hierarchy. By becoming part of the *silsilah*, a person is entitled to convey spiritual teachings specific to it. Al-Khani (1977) points out that when a person enters the *silsilah* of a particular group through initiation and instillation, she or he may obtain a benefit. When she or he enters the *silsilah*, the spirits of the masters will respond and convey this to the Prophet and God. One who does not join their path is not recognized as a part of them, hence none will respond when she or he does something with the *silsilah*.

The perfect guide (*murshid kamil*) signifies the person who masters both the *tarekat* and *shari'ah* and represents the figure in whom religious and spiritual knowledge are embodied in their fullest sense. Present-day masters are linked to founders of their orders as well as to such great figures of early Islam including Abu Bakr and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib by a chain or spiritual pedigree (Netton 2000). In the *tarekat*, one cannot claim to be a master without having had a previous master or, in other words, without possessing an authoritative

silsilah. This is to some extent different from Javanese mystical tradition in movements such as Subud in which revelation or divine inspiration is deemed to be of importance, and is regarded as legitimizing the leadership of a particular person (see Smith, this volume). In Javanese mystical tradition, the founder of a mystical group (*aliran kepercayaan*) must have obtained a revelation, as well as her or his mastery of mystical teachings from previous masters (the latter is secondary).

According to some Indonesian Sufi masters, when an adherent performs a practice as taught by her or his master, she or he will be supported by the spirits of those in the *silsilah* (often termed *rijal al-silsilah*) (Al-Mannuri n.d.). It may inflict danger on people who oppose this practice. This shows us the efficacy and the power of *silsilah*, indicating the danger of what may happen if an unauthorized leader assumes the position of master, and this includes women, who, according to normative interpretations in Sufism and Islam, are not qualified to become leaders of men.

A Sufi order normally includes a range of male leaders (known as *murshid*, *syekh* or *pir*) and disciples (known as *murid*, *akh* or *sahib*). In most Sufi orders the line of succession is through sons, if feasible. If sons are not suitable, then sons-in-law are the next best candidates. Cases in which the son of a master is not willing to assume the leadership, for instance, are regarded as a sign of the fading charisma of the family, all the more so if there is no one to succeed the master, implying that the charisma of the leader is transferable, in the fullest sense, only to his son. However, scholarship from the Muslim world reveals that women do rise to leadership and authority in Sufi orders, a topic to which I now turn.

The spectrum of possibility of female leadership

In this section I consider the spectrum of possibility of female leadership in the *tarekat*, as well as the ideas underlying the problems of assigning women a position as leader of the *tarekat*. Within the *tarekat* are a range of debated views pertaining to the possibility of female leadership including: (a) that a woman is a disciple, and not a leader; (b) that she may be a leader with the authority to teach but not initiate people into the order; (c) that she may be a leader with the authority to initiate only females into the order; and (d) that she may be a leader with full authority, meaning she may initiate both males and females into the order.

Examples referring to the last two possibilities include the case of a female sectional leader in the Tijaniyya order in Kano, Nigeria, in which the *muqaddama* (female circle leader) is entitled to induct female applicants into the order, and even to appoint other females as *muqaddama*. Before the 1930s, female involvement in the Tijaniyya appears to have been confined to normal discipleship without the possibility for spiritual authority. A visit to Kano in 1935 from a Northern African female master demonstrated the possibility for *muqaddama*, and subsequently she appointed the first Kano female *muqaddama*.

in the order (Hutson 1999). The example indicates that, even within the same *tarekat*, the adherents' standpoints pertaining to the possibility of female authority are not uniform, and the lack of female Sufi leadership in a certain geographical area is at times due to the absence of a precedent and model in that area.

The presence of a female Sufi master can be likewise found in the late fourteenth century in Anatolia. This woman was a descendant of Jalal al-Din Rumi and was granted authority to initiate both male and female applicants into the Mawlawiyya order. Likewise, in fourteenth-century Damascus there is a record of the presence of a female guide who was given the authority to initiate men and women into the Suhrawardiyya order (Schimmel 1993; Küçük 2009). The case of female leadership in the Chistiyya order tells of a letter from a fifteenth-century Chisti master to his female disciple, which does not specifically mention the term '*khalifa*', which means 'leader' (suggesting that the formal appointment of female adept as a spiritual guide was a problem), but it implies that she was given the authority to initiate disciples. She was even authorized to initiate male applicants into the order in her absence or from behind a curtain (Pemberton 2006).

Some Sufi orders such as Khalwatiyya and Bektashiyya allow the participation of women in the order but do not assign offices to women (Elias 1988). In the Qadiriyya order, women have opportunities to become leaders without authorization to initiate disciples (Bop 2005). Codou Bop (2005) reveals the story of a female Sufi princess, Fatima Jahanara, who excelled in spirituality, although her master could not designate her as his successor because it was forbidden in the rules of Qadiriyya (Schimmel 1982, 1995).

In Indonesia, the Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya order in Madura allows for the possibility of female masters with the authority to initiate females into the order (Van Bruinessen 1998). The Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya, which was introduced from Mecca to Madura during the later part of nineteenth century, is one of the most widespread *tarekat* in Madura along with two other orders, Tijaniyya and Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya (TQN) (Van Bruinessen 1995). The first female master in Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya in Madura was Nyai Aisyah, who was appointed *murshida* at the end of nineteenth century, and was responsible for supervising the female adherents, who were mostly elderly. At this point, we can see that the recognition of female spiritual achievement in this order had been established since the introduction of this order to this region (Mulyadi 2007). The tradition of female leadership in the Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya has continued with the emergence of some female personages including Nyai Tobibah (d. 1995), Syarifah Fatimah and Nyai Syafi'ah. Nyai Tobibah, the granddaughter of Nyai Aisyah, was responsible for guiding the adherents in Pamekasan, Madura, whilst Syarifah Fatimah based her activities in Sumenep, Madura (Mulyadi 2007).

These female masters were active in leading the female communal ritual (*tawajjuhan* and *khatm al-khwajagan*) and in initiating female aspirants into the order. These female personages also gave advice to female adherents

pertaining to their spiritual and personal problems. It is worth remarking that Nyai Tobibah also guided male disciples and initiated male aspirants (Mulyadi 2007). Nyai Syafi'ah was initiated as *murshida* by her master, who also happened to be her husband, although she is not active in instructing the female disciples. The emergence of these female leaders is understood to be because of the large number (more than 50 per cent) of female disciples in the Sufi order (Mulyadi 2007), yet the history of the order indicates similar circumstances in other places.

The case of appointing a woman as a master in the Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya in Madura is not surprising when we compare it to the same order in India. The Indian master Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (1699–1781), to whom the name of Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya is attributed, was recorded as having appointed two women as his *khalifa*, who were also entitled to initiate their own disciples (Pemberton 2006).

The Naqshbandiyya order also presents cases of female masters, including that of a Javanese woman *murshida* (d. 1954) who inherited leadership and spiritual authority from her husband in East Java, Indonesia, for thirty years (Smith 2011, and in this volume), and in Central Asia, where Mastura Khanim (d. 1523) possessed the authority to initiate both women and men into the order (Sultanova 2007).

There have been no known documented cases of authorized female leaders in Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya (TQN) in Indonesia. TQN is a Sufi order which was developed mainly by the Kalimantan scholar Ahmad Khatib ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar Sambas (1803–75). TQN, which constitutes a synthesis of elements of the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiyya, is considered to be the only orthodox order that was established by a scholar from the Indonesian Archipelago. Male leaders in this order concur with normative readings of Islam and authority to conclude that female leadership is not allowed. TQN's stance on the possibility of female leadership is close to that of the Qadiriyya.

I now turn to a comparison with another spiritual organization in Java that will help us to further contextualize the 'problem' of female leadership in the *tarekat*. Although the Subud movement is not a *tarekat* in its classical sense, and from the time it was established it has served as an antithesis to the *tarekat*, it shares many organizational features with them. Some scholars (Bancroft 1981; Shah 1991), however, suppose that Subud draws its teachings and practices from Sufism. With these considerations in mind, I think it is of relevance to compare Subud with *tarekat*. The Subud movement was founded by the Javanese mystic Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901–87), known as Pak Subuh, and has developed within the realm of Javanese mystical ideas (see Smith, this volume).

In the Subud movement there are a range of roles which are assigned to women, specifically:

1. the role of mother (for the founder's wives and daughter as detailed below);
2. the highest position of informal leader in the aftermath of the founder's death;

3. female spiritual helpers with the same opportunity as their male counterparts to advance their spirituality. Likewise, these female spiritual helpers possess the same authority as their male counterparts in the sense that they are entitled to induct the applicants from their respective sex into the movement.

Rumindah (d. 1936), Pak Subuh's first wife, whom he married on 9 October 1926, played a significant role in the early dissemination of Subud's core spiritual training, known as *latihan kejiwaan*. She was accordingly addressed as Ibu (In. 'mother') by Subud members. Rumindah was the first person with whom Pak Subuh shared the *latihan*, and only thereafter did he begin to share it with his male companions (Longcroft 1990: 14). Siti Sumari (d. 1971) was Pak Subuh's second wife, whom he married on 15 November 1941, a few years after the death of Rumindah (Sumohadiwidjojo n.d.: 40). Rumindah's death left Subud without a female spiritual helper to assist Pak Subuh in disseminating the *latihan*. Upon marrying Sumari, Pak Subuh appointed his new wife as the women's spiritual helper, and since then the Subud movement has been readily accessible to women (Longcroft 1993: 95). The tradition of appointing wives as spiritual helpers continued in the aftermath of Sumari's death, when Pak Subuh married Mastuti in 1974. She accompanied Pak Subuh during the last period of his life (Sumohadiwidjojo n.d.: 64), and assisted him in the further development of the Subud movement inside and outside Indonesia. The members of the Subud movement around the world also honoured her as an Ibu figure.

Subud's emphasis on revering Pak Subuh's wives extended to that of his first child, Siti Rahayu Wiryohudoyo (b. 1928), from his first marriage. Siti Rahayu was first exposed to Subud's international members after Sumari's death when she began to accompany Pak Subuh on his overseas travels, for instance in 1957 and in 1972 (Longcroft 2001: 204). Siti Rahayu's role in the Subud movement was secured when she had her ascension in 1971. From then on, Pak Subuh assigned her a duty to provide new names to those requesting them (Lestiono n.d.: 43; Smith, this volume). After the death of Pak Subuh on 23 June 1987, Ibu Rahayu was recognized as the most respected informal leader of the Subud movement, and members also address her as Ibu. Most adherents of the movement perceive that she is endowed with charisma, hence her advice is the most sought after since the death of Pak Subuh. The Subud example contrasts to that of formal *tarekat* that adhere to *shari'ah* notions of male authority as the only form of legitimate leadership. However, an examination of spiritual attainment of female Sufis reveals that women have played a strong role as mystics throughout history.

'Men sent in the form of women': spiritual attainment of female Sufi seekers

The history of Islamic mysticism shows that asceticism and sexual abstention were more common among female than male Sufis. Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah

was recorded among those early female Sufis who observed these practices (Smith 1978). This may be seen as an effort on the part of female Sufis to break the prevailing image that women are inferior to men in terms of spiritual and religious capacity. These female Sufis observe strict ascetic exercises like fasting and supererogatory night prayer, which might lead them to cease their menstruation. This is due to the fact that menstruation has been employed in Islamic tradition as a justification to ascribe an inferior status to women (Elias 1988).

It is common for Muslim authors to describe these female Sufis as 'women who achieved the status of men' or as 'a man sent in the form of woman' (Elias 1988: 211). There was also a widespread saying among Sufis that 'the seeker of God is masculine' (Schimmel 1982: 147). Such expressions are normally considered to be an appreciation of the spiritual achievement of Sufi seekers, but these expressions in fact confirm the inherent inferiority of women by reinforcing patriarchal modes of thought that are so prevalent in Islamic and Sufi traditions.

By contrast, we encounter attempts by some scholars to describe the 'feminine' as an ideal state of spirituality (Elias 1988: 209). Such efforts can be observed, for instance, in the works of classical figures such as Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), as well as contemporary authors such as Annemarie Schimmel (1975, 1982, 1993, 1995) and Sachiko Murata (1992).

Ibn al-'Arabi transformed the concept of divine love into the notion of the 'creative' or 'ideal' feminine. For him, the spiritual woman exemplifies the medium in a perfect manner through which one can attain an understanding of the divine beloved, or in other words he strives to conceive of the 'celestial' woman as a characteristic and the highest manifestation of the divine. In keeping with this, Jalal al-Din Rumi is convinced that 'celestial' woman is a ray of the divine. This standpoint seems to glorify the 'celestial' woman as 'ideal' or 'creative' feminine (Elias 1988). One may see, however, that the efforts to ascribe the quality of 'feminine' to the ideal state of a human being, and of spirituality, are also idealist, or in other words, they are based on the idealism of certain persons. The viewpoint of some authors who consider the 'beingness' (Smith 1978) (rather than the 'masculinity' or 'femininity') of the seeker after God may be able to do more justice in relation to the position and spiritual achievement of female mystics.

Menstruation, sexuality and female leadership

Menstruation has been offered as a valid reason why women are hesitant to participate in the rituals of the *tarekat*, particularly those that demand periods of spiritual retreat. This explains why the majority of female participants in *tarekat* retreats and rituals are middle-aged to elderly women who have ceased menstruation. As one female disciple I interviewed explained, menstruation has hindered women from aspiring to the leadership of the *tarekat*. In keeping with more general Islamic practice, the Sufi orders do not allow a

menstruating woman to observe the rituals of the *tarekat*, let alone lead the communal recitation of God's names (*dhikr*).

Stories about relationships between male masters and female disciples reveal hidden sexual dimensions that present problems for Sufi orders. The Nishapurian Sufi Ahmad ibn al-Khidruyya (d. 854) expressed jealousy upon learning that his wife, Fatima, removed her veil whilst engaged in discussion with her Sufi master, Tayfur Abu Yazid al-Bistami. Fatima explained to her husband that her relationship with her master was purely for spiritual purposes, which she continued with, until the time she noticed that her master was watching her hand, which was an indication that his intention was no longer purely spiritual (Roded 1994; Schimmel 1982).

Such intense contact is necessary for the master-disciple relationship, yet between a male master and a female disciple can lead to ethical problems, and this reason is enough to prevent and limit the number of female Sufi leaders. Therefore, female masters and deputies in *tarekat* are usually the master's relatives (daughters, wives or sisters), which is a strategy used to avoid ethical problems that conflict with *shari'ah*-based interpretations of sexuality. Yet when interpreted from another perspective, it is also possible that women have received the transference of their male relatives' charisma or, in other words, that women are in the shadow of men. Achmad Mulyadi's (2007) account of the female Sufi master Nyai Syafi'ah reveals that this female personage was initiated as *murshida* in the Naqshbandiyya-Mazhariyya in Madura by her husband, serving as his assistant. A similar case can be found in the Muridiyya order in Senegal, where Sokhna Magat Diop was assigned the rank of *marabout* (a leader of one branch of the order) due to the absence of a male heir upon her father's death. Prior to dying, her father appointed her as his successor of the *tarekat* (Bop 2005). We also encounter a similar case in the Tijaniyya in Madura. Nyai Musyarrah was appointed as the female circle leader (*muqaddama*) by her relative, Kyai Jauhari (Van Bruinessen 1995).

The Mawlawiyya order opens more possibilities for the interaction between men and women. The masters of this order supervise both men and women, and both sexes at times conduct the musical whirling ceremony together in one place (Helminski 2002). This is the most likely reason why we encounter the presence of female masters in this Sufi order. Hülya Küçük (2009: 152), however, points out that the intense interaction between men and women in an order does not necessarily mean that it also allows women to hold offices. The Bektashiyya provide a common space for the activities of men and women, but not for female leadership.

There are several reasons why a female leader in the circle of *tarekat* is problematic. If a woman was to be incorporated in the *silsilah* and authorized to initiate both women and men, this would contradict the Islamic principle that women are not allowed to lead the religious rituals of men which is derived from the stipulation that women are not allowed to lead the congregational prayers of men. Or, if a woman was included in the *silsilah* and granted a limited authorization for initiating female applicants into the order,

this would run counter to the ideas underlying the *silsilah*, which is regarded as a means of transmitting full male authority.

The Subud movement adopts a noteworthy position regarding menstruation and other female biological matters, because members consider menstruation as a kind of purification, and therefore ban menstruating women from performing the spiritual training. Pregnancy is also considered a form of purification, and accordingly after seven months of pregnancy a woman is not allowed to perform the spiritual training, unless it arises spontaneously.

This is a clear message that, in Subud, menstruation does not obstruct women in aspiring to roles of authority and in attaining higher levels of spirituality. In this movement, a woman at an age of menstruation can be appointed as a spiritual helper. This is due to the principle of collective leadership that has developed in Subud, which enables menstruating spiritual helpers to be replaced by non-menstruating ones, and members may perform the communal spiritual training even in the absence of spiritual helpers. I now turn to a comparative discussion of female leadership in Subud and *tarekat* TQN that is based on fieldwork I conducted in both groups from 2007 to 2008.

Female leadership in Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya and Subud

The case of Sa'adah Muslih (b. 1926), the wife of TQN's high-profile leader, Muslih 'Abd al-Rahman al-Maraqi (d. 1981), problematizes discussions of female leadership in a *tarekat* that is officially opposed to women in positions of leadership and authority. Sa'adah Muslih is involved in organizing certain aspects of TQN communal ritual at the Pesantren Futuhiyyah, Mranggen in Demak.

The collective ritual of TQN comprises three main sections: the teaching of Islamic law (*shari'ah*), the concluding prayer sequence (*khataman*) and the recital of *dhikr* (*tawajjuhan*). The first section of the communal ritual is led by a religious scholar.² This particular section clearly demonstrates the order's commitment to *shari'ah*. The latter two sessions are led by a Sufi master.

The collective ritual of TQN at the Pesantren Futuhiyyah, Mranggen, is normally held twice a week, on Mondays (for men) and Thursdays (for women). The communal ritual for male members is held from approximately 10.00 a.m. until 1.00 p.m. The communal ritual for female members of TQN begins earlier as a result of the teachings of Sa'adah Muslih. She instructs the congregation to perform the supererogatory prayer of glorification (*salat al-tasbih*), teaches the prescriptions of Islamic law and the recitation of *sala-wat* (poems to praise God and the Prophet Muhammad). Sa'adah Muslih is entitled to teach Islamic law at the TQN gathering but she is not authorized to lead the *khataman* and the *tawajjuhan* or to initiate applicants into the brotherhood because she has not been appointed the position of *khalifa*.

Many female disciples visit Sa'adah to ask for her advice and *baraka*. Female disciples prefer to consult Sa'adah rather than male religious leaders

(*kyai*), due to her seniority and her closeness to the disciples. She also provides the female adherents with authority to recite certain supplications. Some of these supplications were recorded in her writings. *Tarekat* members strongly acknowledge Sa'adah's spirituality, but assigning her an office in the *tarekat* is another matter, and this remains a problem for most TQN leaders.

Sa'adah's involvement in the organization of the TQN communal ritual is, however, remarkable when we compare it to the limited role of other female religious personages (*nyai*) in Mranggen, most particularly at Pesantren asy-Syarifah, Pesantren Ibrohimiyyah and Pesantren Rohmaniyyah. These *pesantren* also hold communal rituals for the female adherents of TQN, but without active female personages. The communal ritual in these *pesantren* is controlled completely by male leaders.

Sa'adah's ability to play an active role in organizing the communal ritual is due in part to her husband's charisma. She is, however, also recognized for her religious and spiritual knowledge, found in her religious treatises, including *al-Bayan li al-salat al-masnuma* (Explanation on Supererogatory Prayer), *Durrat al-fawa'id* (Pearl of Wise Sayings), *Risalat atibba' al-qulub* (Treatise on the Physicians of the Soul) and *Munh al-'ibada* (Virtue of Worship). The fact that Sa'adah is consulted by the female disciples is a clear indication that she is recognized as a leader of the *tarekat*. One may say that she is a *de facto* leader of considerable significance despite the fact that she is not assigned a formal office.

Sa'adah's mastering of religious and spiritual knowledge can be considered as an aspect of her (limited) agency. Her capacity is recognized by *tarekat* members, especially female followers. The male leaders of the TQN also acknowledge Sa'adah's capacity, and accordingly they allot time for her to lead some parts of the TQN communal ritual. Sa'adah is aware of this capacity, and she continues to guide and to give advice to female adherents. Sa'adah maximizes her role as a female leader, aware of the doctrinal constraint that she cannot initiate female aspirants into the order. The notion of agency serves to substantiate the notion of role, most notably in highlighting different modalities of capacity which evolve in an actor's endeavours. Agency can thus be construed as

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its 'iterational' or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

(Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 962)

In the Subud movement, both males and females are designated as spiritual helpers with limited agency. Female spiritual helpers possess the same authority as their male counterparts, yet their entitlement to initiate applicants is restricted to their respective sex. At present, the highest informal

leader of this movement is a woman, Ibu Rahayu, the daughter of the founder, Pak Subuh. The emergence of Ibu Rahayu as the leader of the Subud movement shows that the adherents were in need of such a figure. It is worth remarking that Pak Subuh never considered himself as a leader, although this is questionable because some members interpret that his practices were in fact those of a leader, and it cannot be denied that his advice as well as his teachings are the most sought after in the movement. Ruspana (2005) points out that most Subud members regard Pak Subuh as the 'spiritual leader.'

Ibu Rahayu's role in Subud was secured when she had her ascension in 1971. Such an experience is considered a legitimization of leadership in Subud (Smith, this volume). This experience allowed Ibu Rahayu to discern better the nature of the *latihan* and accordingly do more for its propagation. As an informal leader of Subud, Ibu Rahayu clarifies in her speeches that it would be difficult to talk about the experience of the members if she herself had not experienced it.

Acknowledgement of Ibu Rahayu's authority in Subud is most visible in Subud texts in the aftermath of her ascension. The second edition of *Bapak's Advice and Guidance to Helpers* (1971) does not contain any explanation from her, but the third edition of *Bapak's Advice and Guidance for Helpers* (1981) incorporates some of her explanations. Ibu Rahayu's earliest explanation recorded in this handbook is dated November 1974, a few years after her ascension in 1971. When we look into the audio compilation of Ibu Rahayu's talks, we notice that her earliest explanation was recorded in this audio library dated June 1972, sometime after her ascension in 1971.

Ibu Rahayu's ascension is regarded an indication of her spiritual capacity (Smith, this volume). In this regard, ascension can be considered to represent Ibu Rahayu's agency, which cannot be detached from the spiritual habitus of the Subud movement. In Subud, ascension has been deemed as a practitioner's highest spiritual achievement. Pak Subuh is also believed to have had this sort of experience before he began to spread the *latihan*. This spiritual credential has helped Ibu Rahayu in intensifying her role as a female leader within the movement. The acknowledgement of this role by Subud members ultimately translates into authority.

Conclusion

The standpoint of the *tarekat* pertaining to the structuring and conveyance of authority has a direct impact on the question of the possibility of female leadership. In the circle of *tarekat*, spiritual authority is transferred from male to male or, in other words, the *silsilah* is bound to specific names and personages and leadership is hierarchical. The appointment of a subordinate leader is performed by an individual from the higher levels of leadership or by those who possess authority for this action. It is because of the principle of *silsilah*, the structure of authority in the *tarekat* and *shari'ah*-based notions of sexuality and the female body that the possibility of female leadership remains

restricted, especially in relation to ethical problems of interaction between a male master and his female disciples. I point out here that in orders where there is intense interaction between men and women, it does not necessarily mean that these orders accept or allow women in authority or leadership positions.

One possible reason for the emergence of female leadership in the Subud movement is the fact that in Subud an egalitarian principle underlies relationships among practitioners. Interaction between leaders and ordinary members is not based on the disciple–master mode of relationship, in which the authorization of the master is a necessity for the disciple if the latter aspires to an office in the organization. Likewise, the disciple–master mode of relationship necessitates an intense contact between two parties so that the master may convey her or his teachings to the disciple. In Subud, intensive contact between leaders and ordinary members is encouraged, but this is not considered a prerequisite for members' further spiritual achievement.

The structure and mode of conveying authority in Subud have direct implications for the possibility of female leadership. This movement has developed a collective authority from which the appointment of local spiritual helpers comes. There is nothing in the organizational structure of Subud similar to the notion of *silsilah*, which when compared to *tarekat* indicates that there is no problem in designating a woman as a spiritual helper (see Smith, this volume).

Women have the same access to spiritual enlightenment as men do, yet the designation of a woman as a formal leader remains a problem in some *tarekat*, as it does more broadly in the Muslim world. Women may enjoy a close communion with God and throughout history have obtained reputations of sainthood, but formal leadership in the *tarekat* is another matter; this sort of leadership requires a formal recognition and authorization, which is mostly in the hands of men.

Notes

- 1 This chapter has been adapted from part of my doctoral thesis and book *Ritual and Leadership in the Subud Brotherhood and the Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2012). I wish to thank Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward for their comments on versions of this chapter.
- 2 During my fieldwork, I encountered various types of religious scholars who led this session of communal ritual. Some of them obtained the authorization as *khalifa*, some did not, and some were not members of TQN (interview with TQN leaders and a leader of the *pesantren* in Mranggen, Central Java).

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