

## ISLAM IN DIASPORA

### Sharia Law, Piety, and Brotherhood at al-Farooq Mosque, Atlanta

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#### Abstract:

*This article examines Islamic ritual performance of Eid prayer amongs Muslim in diaspora at al-Farooq Mosque in Atlanta, the US, whose congregational members come from all around the world. Using textual and ethnographical methods, this study focuses on the implementation of sharia law concerning Islamic prayer and on the meaning and experience of the ritual that emerge amongst the participants who perform it. This study demonstrates that the Eid ritual performance has created a special meaning and particular experience. The ritual is seen as the medium through which the performers forge their piety and strengthen the spirit of brotherhood. The ritual strengthens the brotherhood of the performers, who have different ethnical and cultural backgrounds. However, the core ritual of Eid prayer remains Islamic and is built on the Muslim Hanafi School. Sharia law concerning prayer is upheld to maintain the basic requirement where every ritual must be based on the sound Islamic texts. This suggests that the context, namely diasporic Muslim in America, has (re)shaped the meaning of the ritual but does not change the core of the ritual practice.*

*[Tulisan ini mengkaji praktik ritual shalat hari raya (Id) di masjid al-Farooq Atlanta, Amerika Serikat pada kalangan muslim perantauan dari berbagai*

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<sup>1</sup> I thank to Joyce B. Flueckiger for her constructive comments and suggestion to the earlier version of this article. The remaining mistakes if any are mine alone.

*belahan dunia. Kajian ini, dengan menggunakan pendekatan tekstual dan etnografi, mengamati penerapan hukum Islam dalam hal peribadatan dan pemakaian serta pengalaman ritual diantara mereka. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa shalat hari raya memberi makna dan pengalaman khusus. Perayaan ini dilihat sebagai medium untuk menunjukkan kesalehan dan menguatkan ikatan persaudaraan sesama muslim meskipun mempunyai latar belakang etnik dan budaya yang berbeda. Meskipun demikian, inti dari ritual tersebut menunjukkan aliran mazhab Hanafi. Pelaksanaan fiqih dalam sholat Id tetap berpegang pada Quran dan Hadis. Dengan kata lain, konteks geografi dan budaya yang berbeda telah membentuk makna baru namun tetap tidak merubah inti dari praktik ibadah yang bermazhab Hanafi.]*

**Keywords:** Eid prayer performance, Islamic law, Islamic piety, Islamic brotherhood, al-Farooq mosque

## A. Introduction

The discourses about Islam and Muslim in diaspora have not drawn enough attention to a specific issue regarding ritual performance of Islamic prayer (*ṣalāt*) in a non-Muslim context,<sup>2</sup> despite the fact that prayer constitutes a fundamental Muslim ritual. While some studies focused on Islamic prayer, the meanings of prayer for its performers remain left untouched.<sup>3</sup> Although prayer is a routine ritual, when it is performed in a particular context, it (re)produces specific meanings and (re)creates different reflective thoughts and experiences. When a prayer is performed congregationally by a diverse congregational membership, as it is often the case in diaspora, it potentially offers new meanings and experiences. Islamic prayer functions not only as a purely ritual practice

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996); Nathal M. Dessing, *Rituals of Birth, Circumcision, Marriage, and Death among Muslims in the Netherlands* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (ed.), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Haideh Moghissi (ed.), *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture, and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006); Cara Aitchison, Peter Hopkins, and Mei-Po Kwan (eds.), *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> David J. Parkin and Stephen Cavanaugh Headley (eds.), *Islamic Prayer Across the Indian Ocean: Inside and Outside the Mosque* (London: Curzon, 2000).

devoted merely to God as the sole audience, but might also as stimulant for the emergence of a particular meaning and experience. The Quranic injunctions to perform prayer are related to the formation of positive human attitudes, such as remembrance (*dhikr*), beneficence (*ḥasanah*), patience (*ṣabr*), and restraining misdeeds (*fakḥshā*) and atrocities (*munkar*).<sup>4</sup> Islamic prayer is thus not only a purely spiritual journey dealing with God but is also projected to forge human social qualities and experiences.

Unfortunately, these points, the possibilities of (re)shaping and (re)creating human qualities and experiences through prayer, remain largely unexplored. On the one hand, Islamic law, which dominates Muslim religious discourses, always addresses prayer mostly from the legal point of view. The discipline describes prayer as a strictly prescribed ritual that should be performed correctly in an exact manner and in accordance with the guidance of the scriptural texts. Consequently, this approach is prone to disregarding the meaning and experience of prayer. On the other hand, scholars have been mostly interested in disclosing the context of prayer and the ways in which such a context might be influential to the ritual performance. This eventually leaves the textual basis of prayer undisclosed. While the former approach of Islamic law tends to be “textual”, the later approach adopted by anthropologists tends to be purely “contextual”. This present study seeks to combine those approaches. This study strives to search for the meanings and experience of a prayer for its performers, especially among Muslims in diaspora. The diasporic element is stressed here because this is seen as a non-regular condition that presumably spurs a distinctive experience.

This study examines the Islamic prayer among diverse Muslim communities in *al-Farooq* Mosque in Atlanta from the textual and contextual sides and analyzes the Muslim’s views and experiences about it from the performance perspective in relation to the diasporic life. The study focuses on Eid prayer.<sup>5</sup> This ritual marks not only an annual prayer

<sup>4</sup> The Quran mentions these characters of remembrance and beneficence in (11:114), patience in (20:130), and restraining misdeeds and atrocities in (29:45). On the translation of the Quran see Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an*, ed. by ‘Arafāt Kāmil ‘Ashshī (Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Eid literally means “return” or “come back”. This ritual is named Eid because God returns various beneficences to all creatures every year, some of which are breakfasting after fasting and the accomplishment of the hajj and consuming meats

but also coincides with pivotal Islamic events in the Muslim calendar, namely the celebration of the end of fasting month and the peak observance of the hajj. A mosque becomes a center of Muslim's ritual performance and religious celebration. In diaspora, this is a vantage entry point to meet Muslims from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and to look at how Muslims with their different schools of law (*madh-hab*) perform this ritual. *Al-Farooq* precisely fits into this criterion and represents a good example of a diasporic mosque because its mission is to be the host for international Muslim communities and its plural community.<sup>6</sup> The data were gathered from observation and interview. I myself observed the ritual and talked to the congregational members from different Muslim countries. I also interviewed the Imam of the mosque.

This study demonstrates that even though the heterogeneous community and diasporic contexts of the prayer create a nuanced circumstance and particular experience for the ritual participants, the core ritual is purely based on the Islamic text derived from the Hanafi Sunni School. Within the diasporic and pluralistic contexts, this ritual helps intensify the convergence of the Muslim communities and socio-religious relationships and strengthen public piety. This occurs because a great number of Muslims from diverse backgrounds perform this ritual together, enabling them to be actively interactive each other. The mosque always emphasizes this idea of Muslim brotherhood through the sermon of the prayer. This ritual has connected the members of the Muslim community each other under the grand idea of Muslim community (*umma*).

## **B. Islam and Muslims in Diaspora: A Portrait from *al-Farooq* Mosque**

Islam and Muslims in diaspora have become an interesting theme. Scholars have been interested in looking at the patterns of change

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of sacrifices. See Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh al-Islām wa Adillatuhu*, vol. II (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1989), p. 362.

<sup>6</sup> During my interviews with one informant from al-Farooq, Mohammad Zohbe, who was also my key informant, this idea is always emphasized by him. He said that the mosque did not discriminate any Muslim to attend and perform rituals in it. The mosque is even open to everyone who wants to visit it. This message is also clearly given in the mosque's website. See <http://alfarooqmasjid.org/>

of this religion and its adherents when they move from their country into a new country or place. Some studies focused on political aspects of diaspora Islam and Muslim organizations, while others explored them from different angles and employed various approaches within the framework of religious, gender, geography and cultural studies.<sup>7</sup> A special volume discussing Muslim's issues in the US was published in 1998. This study addressed wide aspects of the Muslim life in America, ranging from Islamic legal discourse of Muslim minority, veiling and pluralism to the media's coverage on Islam, internal tensions and Muslims' splits of identity.<sup>8</sup> In his introduction to a common issue of diasporic Muslims, Jane Smith listed at least eight main problems that they often face: building mosques, establishing Muslim cemeteries, *halal* food, employment, facilities, dress code, Islamic bank and religious rights in the public schools.<sup>9</sup> *Al-Farooq* does not exempt from those problems. Yet, it has been partly successful in sidestepping from such issues.

The accomplishment of the *al-Farooq* new mosque within six years marks a successful struggle of the diaspora Muslim communities in claiming a space for their ritual and social activities.<sup>10</sup> The grand opening of the new *al-Farooq* mosque in August 2008 signals a drastic initial step of this community toward its future larger religious and social programs. This new building also demonstrates the ability of the community to provide an adequate place and space for both religious worships and cultural activities that the Muslim community in Atlanta had envisioned since the first establishment of the old building of the mosque in 1980. The new mosque which is able to load up to 1200-1400 congregation members and is always attended by roughly four thousand Muslims during Eid prayers is now completely erected and equipped with all modern facilities. This now becomes "a real" mosque which not only serves as a

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<sup>7</sup> See again on the footnote number 2.

<sup>8</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (Florida: South Florida University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Jane I. Smith, "Introduction", in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 8–9.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Slyomovics, "The Muslim World Parade Day and "Storefronts" of Mosques in the New York City", in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. by Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 204–216.

ritual place, but also a center for Islamic social activities.<sup>11</sup>

The non-ritual services offered by the mosque include education and socio-cultural programs. In 1990, the mosque established a pre-K academic religious-parochial school, called *Dār al-Nūr* that offers educational trainings and subjects such as math, science, and social studies, in addition to Islamic and Arabic Studies. Since 1994, the mosque has also run another educational institution, namely *Dār al-'Ulūm*, which is specifically designed to prepare its students to memorize the Quran. The school provides a hostel facility for full-time resident students, two qualified full-time instructors, and a dorm warden. In response to the increasing number of Muslim communities around Metro City of Atlanta, in the mid-nineties the mosque sponsored the establishment of another mosque in the Norcross area of Atlanta called Omar Bin 'Abdul-'Aziz which attracts a large number of Muslims for daily five-time prayer and over 400 Muslims attend this mosque for Friday prayer. Also, over 100 Muslim children attend daily afternoon of the Quranic and Islamic classes in this mosque. The mosque partly succeeds in solving a prevalent problem faced by Muslim parents who demand a school that accommodates Islamic values and practices, such as Islamic lessons, availability of prayer time for the students, and permission to adopt Muslim dress (*hijāb*) which often become a salient icon of the predicament of Muslim's integration into the West.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, *al-Farooq* mosque has a medical clinic that offers a free of charge for medical services on Sunday from 12.00 until 02.00 pm. It also holds a wedding ceremony when a Muslim couple wants to consummate their marriage contract and ceremony in an Islamic

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<sup>11</sup> I gained most information about the mosque from its website, at [www.al-farooqmasjid.org](http://www.al-farooqmasjid.org). I relied the additional information on my key informant. To gain pictures depicting physical interiors and exteriors building of the mosque, prayers, and other activities, see the following site <http://www.alfarooqmasjid.org/Gallery.aspx>.

<sup>12</sup> Marie Mc Andrew, "The Hijab Controversies in Western Public Schools: Contrasting Conceptions of Ethnicity and of Ethnic Relation", in *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture and Identity*, ed. by Haideh Moghissi (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 153–166. On the discussion about *hijāb* from an American law perspective see Kathleen Moore, "The Hijab and Religious Liberty: Anti-Discrimination Law and Muslim Women in the United States", in *Muslims on the Americanization path?*, ed. by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Florida: South Florida University Press, 1998), pp. 129–159.

way. One more issue that diaspora Muslims commonly face relate to the burial ritual procession and the establishment of Muslim cemetery. Realizing the importance of Muslim burial facilities in a predominantly non-Muslim country, the mosque acquired 5 acres of land for a Muslim graveyard with burial capacity up to 2,000 corpses. Up to the present time, approximately 300 Muslims from all around the world have been buried in this cemetery since its establishment in 1982. All these programs and activities disclose the mosque's endeavor to realize its main mission to become a place for international Muslim community.

To fulfill this vision, the mosque obviously declares itself as a nonprofit and non-political organization. It also claims to have no any affiliation with other organizations either inside or outside the U.S. It does not clearly define itself as either Sunni or Shi'i. Instead, it declares that

“The organization is operated and maintained by those who believe in the unity of Allah and the Last Day, establish Salah, practice Zakah and fear none except Allah (SWT). The operations of the organizations are based on well-established documents of Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah: The Quran, Aḥādīth books (e.g., Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Nasai, etc.), Ijma-ul-Ummah, consensus of companions, and Islamic scholars”.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that the mosque employs the term *ahl sunna wa al-jamā'a* to label its religious affiliation. This term commonly refers to Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, my key informant convinced me that this mosque belongs to every Muslim. He told me that the mosque remains open to any Muslim who comes to pray, no matter what religious affiliations or organizations they might be associated with. Unity is a priority here.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the informant was unaware whether Shi'i Muslims attend to and pray in this mosque, since this is not of the concern. The mosque jargon is “promoting Islamic teachings and practices”, and therefore welcomes anybody who wants to visit the mosque.

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<sup>13</sup> This is a full quotation from the mosque's website.

<sup>14</sup> On a comparative perspective about diaspora mosque that also stressed the idea of unity of Muslims, see Hoda Badr, “Al-Noor Mosque: Strength through Unity”, in *Religion and The New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*, ed. by Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz (New York: Altamira Press, 2000), pp. 193–227.

The main body governing the mosque is the Board of Trustees. It is responsible to formulate broad principles and policies for the operation of various units and to safeguard the trust consisting of all tangible and intangible assets. In addition, the Board is responsible for holding consultations with the community. It also selects a number of management directors and appropriate committees to handle daily operational management of various activities of units and institutions, including one committee on religious affairs lead by an imam. The position of imam is interestingly subordinate under the control of the board of trustee, even though this board does not interfere Islamic rituals led by the imam. In many cases, an imam assumes the highest authority in religious and ritual affairs. Yet, his influence and power usually go beyond such conventional boundaries and extend in many ways to technical matters and social affairs. According to my key informant, the mosque here appoints and hires a professional imam graduating from qualified Islamic institutions in the Muslim countries. By structuring his position in such a way, the imam remains a merely religious figure and an employee with limited power over religious and rite issues only. As a worker, he might be dismissed from his job when he is considered to trespass over his main role and transgress beyond the boundary of the mosque's vision. The board is very cautious in selecting this important figure for its congregation and attempts to prevent at a maximum way any religious militancy and ideological infiltration that the imam may bring from his home country. Within this framework, an imam is only authoritative in religious and ritual matters, but is constrained from making policies or issuing other statements; he is not entitled to represent the mosque anyway. This pattern has resulted in a total dependency of ritual performance in the mosques upon the imam.

### **C. Sharia Law and Ritual Performance of Eid Prayer**

#### **1. *Textual Basis in the Study of Islam and Muslim Culture***

Do we need to look at the Islamic text in the study of Islam, or the study of Muslim culture, such as Islamic ritual in diaspora? I do concur with Asad about the importance of the Islamic text in any study about Islam or Muslim culture. He argues that the anthropology of Islam

should depart its investigation from a discursive Muslim tradition that should cover the scriptural texts because Islam is “neither a distinctive social structure nor heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs and morals. It is a tradition”.<sup>15</sup> What he meant by this is that the Islamic scriptures, as part of Muslim tradition, such as the Quran and the ḥadīth, and the works of Muslim scholars (*‘ulamā’*) and jurists (*fuqahā’*) to a lesser degree, constitute fundamental texts on which Muslims establish their own traditions. In this view, neglecting those textual sources is thus tantamount to failure to apprehend the fundamental ground and basic structure of comprehensive wholeness of Muslim traditions.

Following this approach, Abu Zahra suggests that studying Islam and Muslim societies entails an integrated approach that includes both a common belief of Islamic prescription that Muslims share and the ways in which such a belief is “enacted and integrated in different social conditions in diverse Muslim societies”.<sup>16</sup> In other words, both textual and contextual aspects must be grasped together. While the strength of this method pertains to its endeavor to integrate both textual and contextual aspects of Islam in the Muslim’s life and society, the pitfall that might arise from this approach lies on the fact that not all Muslim traditions originate from the (written) texts. For example the *mawlid* tradition of the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday, which spreads throughout the Muslim world from Morocco to Indonesia, was only “an invented tradition” in the eleventh century during the Fatimid Empire in Egypt. Neither the Quran nor the ḥadīth sanctions it. Similarly, sufi’s excessive ritual practices, their music and trance have no textual bases either, but seem to have emerged to some extent as a response and synthesis of Islam to local traditions. As a result, a textual approach might be not an enough tool in elucidating certain Muslim traditions. In addition, the textual approach often traps into a truth claim and dissenting opinions about pure and origin of Islam. Muslim modernists and *salafi neo-wahabi*, for instance, always strongly criticize any religious practices or traditions

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<sup>15</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Occasional Papers Series (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Nadia Abu Zahra, *The Pure and Powerful: Studies in Contemporary Muslim Society* (UK: Ithaca Press, 1997), p. xii.

in a Muslim society as heresy and un-Islamic simply because neither textual basis nor precedent from the Prophet's tradition regarding those practices are found.

However, I find Asad and Nadias' contentions on their approaches in studying Islam and Muslim societies convincing for my own research for some considerations. First, there are many kinds of prayer with their own respective scriptural bases. Therefore, I should cite specific textual basis for this prayer. It is necessary that Eid prayer be distinguished from other prayers as they are outlined in different texts. Second, although the performance of Islamic prayer can be obviously distinguished from other Islamic rituals, such as fasting and the hajj, prayers in Islam invariably differ.<sup>17</sup> A failure in assessing the textual basis and specific purposes and features of those prayers is risky to make generalization of Islamic prayers as a merely same ritual practice since there are hardly differences in Muslim prayers in terms of physical observance.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, by approaching this ritual prayer from performance studies, as this article intends, it might cause, as Bell reminds,<sup>19</sup> oversimplification and universalization of this ritual and equate it just like other secular performances such as music show, play, poetry reading or storytelling, unless specificities and significances of this ritual are delineated. In this passage, I outline both textual and contextual bases and demonstrate how the textual and contextual constitute an interplay factor in the performance of the Eid prayer.

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<sup>17</sup> Islamic prayers can be looked at and distinguished from different angles, such as timing, purpose, and legal status. In terms of timing, daily prayers are conducted in an exact time in the morning, noon, afternoon, evening and after evening, and on special occasions such as Friday, after fasting and in the course of the hajj ritual. Not all prayers are obligatory (*wajib* or *fardl*), some are supererogatory (*nafl*). While those prayers are conducted regularly, others are performed irregularly for specific purposes like prayer for the corpse (*janāzah*), prayer of fear to enemy (*khanf*) and prayer asking for rain in severe drought seasons (*istisqa*).

<sup>18</sup> Exceptions apply to corpse prayer (*salāt janāza*) which consists of four takbīr and with only one standing body, without bowing, prostrating and sitting.

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Bell, "Performance", in Mark Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 218-9.

## 2. *The Islamic Legal Norms of Prayer*

Generally speaking, the injunctions of performing prayer are outlined in the Quran and the *ḥadīth*. Historically, Islamic ritual of prayer (*Ṣalāt*) was conjoined to encounter a pre-Islamic form of worship that had been prevalent until the early time of Islam. The early Muslim generations partly adopted that model in their worship until they were commanded to leave such a practice and perform their own prayer in a specific way.<sup>20</sup> This commandment was also meant to establish a new ritual against secular prostrations, such as the ones given by a slave or layperson to his lord or king.<sup>21</sup> The Quran commands the believers to perform prayer in destined times and tells them the meanings and functions of it in their relations to God and humans.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, there are various Prophet's sayings (*ḥadīth*) about prayer. The *ḥadīth* discloses not only prayer's position and its legal status in Islam, but also depicts its technical guides in general. According to one *ḥadīth*, the position of prayer in Islamic faith is only second to the first pillar of Islam, namely *shahāda*.<sup>23</sup> Another *ḥadīth* explains in detail the ways in which prayer should be physically performed from the beginning with a *takbīr*<sup>24</sup> until the end with *salām*.<sup>25</sup> However, the actual performative observance of Eid prayer remains interpretative domains for Muslim jurists. Indeed, some *ḥadīth* ordain this prayer, but give no exact technical guide, except the one relating to

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<sup>20</sup> Khaleel Muhammad, "The Foundation of Muslim Prayer" *Medieval Encounter* 5 (1), 1999, p. 24-5.

<sup>21</sup> Roberto Tottoli, "Muslim Tradition against Secular Prostration and Interreligious Polemics" *Medieval Encounter* 5 (1), 1999.

<sup>22</sup> On the time of prayer, see the Quran Sūrat al-Nūr (24):58, al-Baqarah (2):38, and al-Isrā' (17):78. For the meaning and functions of prayer see the footnote number 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Umar narrated this *ḥadīth* about the five pillars of Islam, namely *shahada* (Saying no god but God and Muhammad His messenger), *ṣalāt* (prayer), *ṣakat* (religious tax), *ṣawm* (fasting in Ramadan) and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage). See Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh al-Islām wa Adillatuhu* [Islamic law and its arguments] Vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), p. 497.

<sup>24</sup> Literally it means saying Allāhu akbar while holding up both hands with open palm until their position is approximately parallel to both ears, and then putting them down on the body between the breast and marvel.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Zuhaili quotes five *ḥadīths* regarding the performance of prayers. *Ibid.*, p. 495-6.

the sermon which should be conveyed after the prayer.<sup>26</sup> The consensus of Muslim jurists that this prayer has two units is based on the opinion of ‘Umar.<sup>27</sup> This is precisely because neither the Quran nor the ḥadīth offers detailed information about techniques of this prayer. This in turn leads to different opinions about the performance of this ritual amongst Muslim legal schools.

The only detailed description about Eid prayer is given not in books of ḥadīth, but in Islamic law texts (*fiqh*). Scholars such as al-Zuḥaili and Jawwad offer a complete description about this prayer in a comparative perspective. Zuḥaili, for example, meticulously depicts the exact ways to this ritual performance in a lengthy passage from four Sunni schools’ views. In discussing this technique of prayer, none of the schools refers to the Islamic scriptural texts, such as the Quran and the ḥadīth. This means that the opinions of each school on this issue are gained from their *ijtihād* (struggle to understand the texts to deduce a legal inference) which might be either correct or wrong. Another scholar, Jawwad, offers comparative analysis on the observance of the prayer in Muslim jurists’ views.<sup>28</sup> He briefly sketches out each school’s views concerning the *takbīr* and the recitation in it, which become the core issue of their dissenting opinions. According to the Hanafi school, Eid prayer’s *takbīr* is repeated thrice in the first unit and done after first *takbīr* (*takbīrat al-iḥrām*) and the other three are conducted before bowing in the second unit. As for the Shafi’i school, the *takbīr* in the first unit is repeated seven times and five times in the second unit and all must be carried out after the first *takbīr*. While the Hanbali and Maliki schools contend that the number of *takbīr* are six and five in the first and second unit respectively, for Shi’i Imāmiyya the first unit carries four *takbīr* and the other three *takbīr* are conducted in the second unit. Therefore, the practice of *takbīr* in a Muslim Eid prayer depends on which school one subscribes. Another difference pertains to the readings which must be recited in the sidelines of each *takbīr*. Hanafi and Shafi’is’ followers recite the same readings,

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 362-3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370

<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad Jawwad Mughniyya, *Al-Fiqh ‘Alā al-Madẓāb al-Khamsa* [Islamic law of the five schools] (Beirut: Dār al-Tiyyār al-Jadīd, 1984), p.124-5.

while Hanbalis' recite another composition.<sup>29</sup>

Surprisingly, the first ḥadīth on the chapter of Eid prayer (*kitāb al-īd*) in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, which is often considered the second authoritative scriptural text after the Quran in the Sunni tradition, is concerned with the dress code for this ritual. Al-Bukhārī (810-870), the author, discussed the observance of Eid prayer in the course of the Prophet's lifetime in the occasion of celebration after fasting and on the day of the pilgrimage.<sup>30</sup> Of many ḥadīth relating to Eid prayers (*al-Īdain*), the first he narrated dealt with *al-tajammul* or dressing up for this ritual prayer.<sup>31</sup> According to this narrative, 'Umar, the second caliph, bought a sparkling long outer clothe (*jubbah*) for an Eid prayer. He then came to the Prophet asking whether or not to dress up with that clothe. The Prophet said that such a dress was only suitable for those who had no ethics (*libāsu man la kbalaqa labu*).<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, Bukhārī did not elaborate the Prophet's last response to Umar; what the Prophet meant by such a response. I presume that the narrative was given as a reminder to Muslims not to excessively dress up with an expensive and glaring dress or other jewelries that may arouse social enviousness. The Prophet suggested Muslims to perform and celebrate Eid in a humble way. Other ḥadīths under this chapter are concerned with the instruction to deliver the sermon after the prayer, women and children's attendance to the prayer, eating before and upon the prayer and commandment to sacrifice animals in *Īd al-Adḥa*.

Two points can be inferred from those texts. First, Eid prayer is performed in the occasion of holiday and celebration. Second, no precise technical guide is available about this ritual. This means that in addition to its basic ritual performance, which might slightly vary

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<sup>29</sup> The recitation is *Subḥan Allāh wa'l-Ḥamdu li'l-Lāh wa-lā Ilāha illā Allāh wa Allāhu Akbar* [Praise for Allah, and all praises are only for Allah, and there is no god except Allah, and Allah is great]. The Hanbali would recite *Allāhu Akbar Kabīra, wa'l-Ḥamdu li'l-Lāh Kabīra, wa-Subḥan Allāh Bukrata wa-Asīla, wa Ṣalla Allāhu 'alā Muḥammad wa 'Ālihi wa Sallim Taslīma* [Allah is great, real great, and all praises to Allah with more praises, and praised Allah morning and evening, and God may sent peace to Muhammad and his families and save them with real safety]; *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. I (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Fikr, 1997), p. 294.

<sup>31</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

from one school to others, the observance of this prayer coincides with holiday and celebration. Eid prayer is then situated in this very special annual event, making itself a contextually nuanced ritual compared to other prayers. The prayer is also to some extent identical with both ritual and celebration. Not surprisingly, Muslims strive to attend mosques with joyous feelings, donning special, not necessarily expensive, clothes, exchanging forgiveness, and, in other traditions, bringing potluck foods to mosques for having a communal feast with their family and friends.<sup>33</sup> While the core ritual performance itself mostly is the same, the ways Muslims celebrate it considerably vary from one tradition or country to another. Although these contexts of celebration do not add certain aspects, nor do they alter elements, of the performance of ritual, they inevitably influence the atmosphere where the prayer is conducted and create distinguished experiences of ritual practice and celebration.

### 3. *The Performance of Eid Prayer*

The performance and celebration of the Eid prayer in *al-Farooq* revealed those “cultural and situational contexts”, to borrow Charles L. Briggs’s term.<sup>34</sup> As I have outlined briefly in the preceding part, the mosque claims itself as a place for international Muslim community. It also claims that its congregational members stem from various Muslim countries, such as Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Middle East, and from America. Although I have no exact data about the Muslim’s demography in Atlanta, I am much aware of this diversity. When attending the mosque for the Eid prayer, I noticed colorful people there, dressing in various typical ethnical clothes and speaking in various languages. There were a large number of South Asian and African or black Muslims. Arabs, Turks, and Southeast Asian such as Malaysians and Indonesians were also visible amongst the crowd. There might have been a few other ethnic groups as well.

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<sup>33</sup> It is quite common in many regions in Indonesia that people bring their foods to mosque for a communal feast celebration upon completing Eid prayer. When I was child, I remember that Eid celebration was always identical with fireworks, which is now banned for security reasons.

<sup>34</sup> Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexican Verbal Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 13.

Such phenomena lead to the creation of a discrete atmosphere surrounding the mosque. In addition to its status as a sacred place, this mosque witnessed rituals and various expressions of holiday celebration. Unlike Friday prayers which is joined by a fewer participants, Eid prayer has been always attended by thousands of Muslims. As a result, there must be more than one round of the prayer. For those who came late and did not find enough space to join into the first round of prayer had to wait for a while before performing the second round. This may also explain why the second sermon after the first prayer was very short, for some other groups were waiting outside.

The presence of many children playing around gave another familiar scene in this mosque. Since Eid also means holiday, the Muslims came to the mosque with their entire family members. This event also constituted a best place for re-union among the ritual's participants who due to their own businesses in work days could not meet one another. Attending the mosque thereby also meant seeing people from many parts of the world. A lot of people of all ages and gender coming from throughout the world encountered each other in that event, making this place a tentatively lucrative market. Upon praying, some people sold assorted typical and traditional foods from their own countries. Bringing tickets, some others persuaded the crowd to attend an Eid party with a reasonable entry price. Still some others sold various stuffs for kinds.

The performance of Eid prayer began at 8.45 in the morning although the whole procession and sequential rituals had been started earlier. The *takbīr* or shouting and praising God's name is preferably shouted after the sunset the day before Eid.<sup>35</sup> Inside the mosque in the following morning, the congregation continued reciting it, while waiting for the prayer. After the main hall prayer of the mosque was fully occupied, participants coming later had to go downstairs to perform the prayer there. Basically, the downstairs constitutes a meeting room for weekly religious activities, Islamic lectures, discussions, and teachings, and is only occasionally used for a praying room, especially during Friday

<sup>35</sup> This should be distinguished from *takbīr* during prayer. *Takbīr* here means saying *Allāh Akbar* (God is great) three times marking a special chanting of Eid. This is always repeated speech during the night before Eid and before Eid prayer is performed. In *Īd al-Adḥā*, this praising will continue until three following days. Meanwhile, *takbīr* in prayer has the same recitation and is followed by bodily movements during prayer.

and Eid prayers due to overloading of the main hall. Meanwhile the upstairs is designed for the female hall prayer and other facilities such as a library and a small playing room for kids. In Islamic prayer, male and female participants are segregated. As a sacred place, no shoes or sandals are allowed inside mosques and should be put in a shoe-shelve. A prayer performer must be pure from physical impurity and take a ritual ablution (*wuḍūʿ*) before performing it. There are two ablution rooms in this mosque; one is behind the main hall for the males and the other is for the females in upstairs. A TV monitor that lively broadcasts the activities in the main prayer hall is available in down and upstairs, making it very convenience for the people to observe the prayer in either side.

At about 8.15 AM, half an hour before the prayer began, the imam came forward and stood up in the podium to deliver the first sermon in English. Sermon plays a very crucial role in Islamic ritual such as in prayer and during the signing of a marriage contract. According to Muslim jurists, sermon in such occasions is a pre-requisite without which the ritual is void. Although they disagree upon the status of sermon in prayers and upon technical matters as to how a sermon should be delivered, they made a consensus that a sermon is required as an inseparable and unalterable part of prayer. Some jurists argue that only in Friday prayer sermon is required. I am not going to argue against jurists' views stating that Eid prayer is not obligatory in Eid prayer. What I am concerned with here is the fact that a sermon is always presented in the course of Eid prayer and all congregation would not leave nor depart from their sitting before the sermon is complete. This means that in reality, sermon is an inseparable part of this prayer.

The significant and crucial status of a sermon in Islamic prayer, such as in Friday prayer, are verbally stressed in certain Muslim traditions. In many places in Indonesia, for example, especially in rural areas as the basis of traditionalist Muslim community, or in certain urban areas that follows this traditionalist pattern, the fundamental status of sermon and its crucial role in prayer are always formally emphasized in the course of the ritual. This eventually changes the whole procession of ritual performance. While in other traditions, like in the US, to best of my knowledge, the imam perform and deliver the sermon by himself, in those areas, such as in rural Java, the procession of the whole ritual and especially

in giving a sermon is unique. In this respect, an assistant (*bilāl*)<sup>36</sup> arranges and manages the entire performance of prayer. So, *bilāl*'s role is much similar to a master of ceremony in modern ceremonial performances. His main role includes calling for prayer (*ādhān*), announcing that the sermon is going to deliver and signaling the prayer is going to perform soon. He stands up and holds a long stick near to the podium reminding the audience to be carefully attentive and listen to the sermon. In this occasion, the *bilāl* recites a ḥadīth stating that if participants speak one another while the sermon is being conveyed, their ritual is futile. He might also translate this ḥadīth into a local language.<sup>37</sup> The *bilāl* will not perform his role when the imam has not been present in the mosque. Likewise, the imam will not come forward to the podium to deliver the sermon before the *bilāl* completed his performance. This in turn creates interdependency between the *bilāl* and the imam.

Although I have not seen such a practice of *bilāl* here in Atlanta,<sup>38</sup> but sermon remains a crucially inseparable part of the whole ritual prayer. Any time one enters into a mosque or a praying room and hall while a sermon is being delivered, one must stop talking to others, and be ready to listen to the sermon. Sermon thus constitutes a sole unchallenged discourse to which every audience is supposed to (or should) listen and accept the message. Since there is no dialogue, sermon thus produces only one-way, unilateral model of communication. It is exactly through this medium of sermon that ideology, religious jargons and messages are effectively instilled to the audiences' minds. The sermon becomes a medium through which this mosque attempts to negotiate the issue of plurality of its congregation and community. The language that the preacher usually uses is persuasive, straightforward, and directive to point out the main idea of the speech. It should be delivered convincingly by for example using (or/and misusing) religious symbols and words taken

<sup>36</sup> Bilāl is a name of the companion (*ṣaḥābah*) of the Prophet. He was a freed slave and converted to Islam and the first to deliver *ādhān* (calling for prayer) *iqāmat* (a simple form of *ādhān* given right before a prayer is performed).

<sup>37</sup> In mosques which do not adopt the practice of *bilāl*, this reminder is sometime translated into a small phrase in a vernacular language and is installed on the wall of the mosque.

<sup>38</sup> The role of *bilāl* here is only to deliver *ādhān* and *iqāmat* (literary means standing up).

from the Quranic verses and the ḥadīth to underpin the arguments.

Not surprisingly, the idea of Muslim brotherhood and unity has always been emphasized by the imam during this persuasive discourse. He has been aware that the issues of plurality of the audience's ethnicity, cultures and languages could be counter-productive against the mission of the mosque as a place for international Muslim community.<sup>39</sup> The most effective way to address and convey this message is through sermon and the event of Eid could be the best occasion to always re-emphasizing that idea since Muslims from different countries are going to meet. It is not an exaggeration if the imam always repeats this same message at every sermon of Eid prayer. I heard this same notion about the importance of a strong fraternity of Muslim communities in a similar sermon of Eid prayer in this mosque in the previous year. The imam was fully aware of the pattern of the community and congregation to whom he addressed his speech. This year he repeated this message. The fact that the members or participants of the prayer came from diverse backgrounds of ethnicity, language and culture was undeniably prospective to disseminate the idea of Muslim brethren and unity. Therefore, in addition to attending the mosque to performing this prayer, the Muslims were simultaneously encouraged to tighten their religious and social relations as an inseparable part of the transnational Muslim community or *umma*.<sup>40</sup> This ritual through its sermon was thus projected to creating an "imagined communal", undividedly Muslim community. Although the process and implementation of this idea would take times, the instant realization of the spirit of the brotherhood could be at least seen from the atmosphere of the mosque in the course of this ritual and celebration. Upon completing the prayer, almost everyone offered hugs

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<sup>39</sup> Tension amongst Muslim communities in the US is not uncommon. This for example includes the different visions and missions Muslim organizations in this country. Other conflicts deal with the competition between African-American Muslims and immigrant Muslims over defining and claiming of being Muslim and American. See Karen Leonard, "Finding Places in the Nation: Immigrant and Indigenous Muslims in America", in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (last) (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 50–58.

<sup>40</sup> On the discussion about the function of Islamic sermon for both religious lessons and socio-political instruments, see Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1999).

to others saying *Eid Mubarak* (blessed Eid), saying *Salām Alaikum* (peace be upon you), and occasionally calling others with “brother or sisters”. My key informant now calls me bother after we met some times during the prayer and the interviews.

After this sermon in English was delivered, some figures from the mosque’s caretakers (*ta’mīr*) interchangeably came forward to say something or convey messages relating to relevant issues of the mosque and Muslim’s affairs in general. This was surely not part of the ritual, nor the sermon. Yet, their appearance in the front of the audience assumed a very strategic meaning. Again, in this sideline speech before the ritual prayer, the idea of Muslim unity was re-emphasized. Although this did not become a core part of prayer ritual, the presence of the *ta’mīr* speaking on behalf of the mosque was decisively influential. He performed a tentative action and added a rhetorically supplementary performance just before the prayer was conducted. He came just at a right time when almost all the congregation members were present and ready to perform the prayer.

I remember when the senior *ta’mīr* member stood up and briefly started his narrative telling a short story about the mosque. His main message was clear that this mosque was a gift from God and belonged to no one, but all Muslims, a statement intended to neutralize any interest, association or sectarianism in dealing with the existence of the mosque. He emphasized the importance of cooperation amongst the congregation members for developing this mosque and its community. He also proudly announced that the *Dar al-Ulum* Islamic school just inaugurated a 12 years-old male disciple from Florida who was successfully able to memorize the whole Quran. In the end of his speech, he reminded all the attendees that they should share a communal responsibility to preserve the mosque.

After this sideline speech, the congregation performed Eid prayer led by an *imām* or ritual leader. Like other Islamic prayers, the *ma’mūm* (literally those who pray and stand behind the *imām*) have to exactly follow the imam’s physical movement which consists of mainly four bodily motions; standing up, bowing, prostrating and sitting. In each position, performers must recite a respective prescribed recitation in Arabic. Of the specific features about Eid prayer is that it has two units (*raka’at*) and several *takbīrs*. The only discrete gesture that I noticed from this prayer in this mosque was that it had three *takbīrs* in the first unit and

three others before bowing in the second unit. According to the *imām*, who is from India, this pattern follows the Hanafi's school.<sup>41</sup> The form of ritual depends entirely on the *imām* appointed by the mosque board. The trustee and boards of the mosque has given a full authority to this hired *imām* as a ritual leader. This means that once the mosque hires another *imām* who subscribe to another school, the ritual performance will be presumably different. Although the *imām* of this mosque had reminded the congregation prior to the prayer about such a technical matter regarding *takbīr*, some participants still made mistake. Instead of holding up their hand three times for *takbīr* before taking a bow in the second unit, they continuously went on bowing down, as some people near to me did so. Being aware of committing mistake, they suddenly re-stood up and followed the flow of the rite before keeping on the next step, bowing.

This mistake confirms indeterminacy factor, which is often inevitable in a performance.<sup>42</sup> Of the precarious aspects of performance and ritual is synchronizing between the script or text with its actual execution. According to Dempsey, indeterminacy often occurs in performance since it is precisely on human action that such a performance takes place.<sup>43</sup> Her own ethnographic research on Hindu temple ritual and its community in Rush, New York, confirms this statement.<sup>44</sup> Human interpretation and understanding to the pre-existing text of performance or ritual and how it is simultaneously combined with exact physical gestures requires alertness and concentration as well as regular practices. Although the body motions in Islamic prayer are almost unified, a mistake is not uncommon phenomenon. Muslim jurists have formulated techniques to remind the *imām* when he missed something in the prayer. Interestingly, this technique is a gender matter. There are different ways

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with the *imām* on 20 December 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Gavin Brown, "Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Indeterminacy", *Journal of Ritual Studies.*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>43</sup> Corinne Dempsey, "Reading and Writing (to) the Devi: Reflections on Unanticipated Ritualized Ethnography", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2009), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Corinne G. Dempsey, *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

of reminding *imām* when he makes a mistake. As for male *ma'mūm*, they should recite *subḥanallāh* (God be praised) three times. Meanwhile female participants should clap their hand to their thigh three times as a warning sign to the *imām* that he misses something in the course of the prayer. It is therefore understandable that some Muslims did a mistake when performing the Eid prayer in this mosque since they might lose their concentration or simply performed it for the first time in this new diaspora circumstance where a light different model of physical observance of the ritual prayer apply. It is true because a prayer, like other physical performances, requires high alertness, combining both mind and the body into one action simultaneously.

The following performance after prayer was a short sermon presented very quickly in Arabic by the *imām*. Unlike Friday prayer in which two sermons precede the prayer, the second Eid sermon in this mosque was delivered upon completing the prayer. According to the majority Sunni legal school, Islamic sermon, such as in prayers and in a wedding ceremony, should be spoken in Arabic and cannot be substituted into another language. However, in non-Arabic speaking countries, such as in the US and Indonesia, another (the first) sermon in a local language is often added, while the primary (second) sermon is given in Arabic. This second sermon seems to be a secondary importance for it is given very shortly, and only a few understand it.<sup>45</sup> This strategy of making two sermons, one in Arabic and the other in a local language, is, I think, to make sense of the sermon for non-Arabic speaking audiences. By so doing, they will remain receive Islamic messages and lessons, which constitute the main idea of the sermon itself, in a vernacular language. The second sermon of Eid prayer appeared to be a very formal discourse since it was given in such a very short time, about five to ten minutes, while not all participants understood it. However, as a pillar of the ritual, this cannot be simply abandoned. The ending of the second sermon signs the end of the entire ritual performance of the Eid prayer. What is left unexplored about the ritual prayer is concerned with the meanings and experiences that performers require, especially if such a prayer is conducted in particular settings and contexts, such as in diaspora.

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<sup>45</sup> In Indonesia, both sermons of Eid are given after the prayer.

#### D. Eid Prayer, Piety and Brotherhood

The informants shared their narratives regarding their feelings and experiences about Eid prayer. Two issues from their stories can be drawn here, namely personal and communal. For the informants, this means that attending this congregational prayer in this mosque yielded two impacts at individual and social levels simultaneously. Personally, the prayer has made them pious. The Islamic ritual is embodied practice that not only serves as a means for performers to communicate with God, but also to shape their piety. Their personal views on this prayer were influenced by many factors such as personal subjectivity, degrees of religious knowledge and views about the meaning of ritual. Their views of performing rituals in diaspora are also shaped by previous experiences carried from their respective home countries and blended with current interactions with people in the host country. Nevertheless, all informants agreed that at the social level they obtained a similar common experience from this ritual, namely the establishment of a sense of belonging to the Muslim community and the creation of Muslim's fraternity in diaspora.

One definition about Islamic prayer states that “the *salāt* is an intense, highly regulated, formal observance that features cycles of bodily postures climaxing in complete prostration in an orientation toward the Ka’ba in Mecca”.<sup>46</sup> For most jurists, prayer is defined as a ritual activity opened with *takbīr* and terminated with *salām*. This is a normative definition that is formulated to easily apprehend this ritual from a physical point of view. However, in practice, prayer might be more difficult to explain since it involves not only physical, but also a layer of emotional and mental states in search of God within an exactly prescribed and embodied performance. This in turns provides a human agency in its full capacity to understand and implement this ritual performance. A prayer thus offers wide meanings and creates various feelings and experiences for every individual. A Chinese informant told me her feeling when performing the Eid prayer in *al-Farooq*.

When doing Eid prayer in *al-Farooq*, I thought and I wished I performed it reflectively. Since Arabic is not my native language, so I try my best to focused on what the imām reading in the prayer. When I was praying

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<sup>46</sup> Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 106.

I felt a deep feeling towards Allah, and Almighty of Allah, at the same time I was moved and touched by scene that Muslims from different places prayed together. It is Allah who brings all those people together.<sup>47</sup>

What is difficult is to focus the mind during performing Islamic prayer is that a performer is facing and communicating with invisible and supernatural Being. This perhaps causes indeterminacy in a ritual performance and influences its whole processes.<sup>48</sup> Since God is abstract and has never been physically described in Islam, the believers might create a certain imagination about God, project and present Him virtually in their prayer. Due to difficulties to achieve such a highly divine experience during prayer, Muslim jurists exclude submissiveness as a pillar or conditions of prayer. Feeling, mind and hearts' expressions belong to "inner activities" that can be hardly judged from physical appearances. These belong to the domain of sufi. Sufi's teaching emphasizes more on the inner expression during the prayer. Sufi seeks for religious experience, quality and depth, rather than for regularity and outer expression of prayer.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Muslim jurists or legal approaches are concerned with outer expressions of bodily motion of prayer. The motions and recitations of prayer must fit to the pre-existing script and all regulations and technicality which are prescribed in the authoritative Islamic texts, such as the ḥadīth and legal works (*fiqh*).

Her narrative suggested that she was caught between two opposing worlds or realities, namely divine and human, while praying. This narrative also confirmed to the distinctive approaches in Islamic prayer between sharia and sufi. The former approaches prayer from outward, regular and physical performance. Whereas, inner meaning, submissiveness and spirituality are always stressed in sufi's teaching of prayer. These two views often take place at once, as what that narrative displayed, or compete each other in defining what prayer is and should be. While her mind focused on God, her eyes were unable to avoid casting motions and

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, 13 December 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Dempsey, "Reading and Writing (to) the Devi", p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> In sufi tradition, the inner meaning of prayer is to gain spiritual experience. See Syed Ali Ashraf, "The Inner Meaning of Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting and Jihad", in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, vol. 19, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 112–18.

gestures of other people performing prayer together in the same place and at the same time. Although a congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*) is preferable, for it could strengthen unity of the community, this may also disturb one's concentration and submissiveness (*kbushū*), which a performer often seeks throughout the course of this ritual. Another troublesome potentially interrupting submissiveness in a congregational prayer stems from the fact that a great number of people, including children, attend it. This informant confirms that the presence of kids in mosques to joint their parent praying might cause hindrances because they often made noises and cried in the course of ritual.

However, it is argued that religious teachings and practices should be imparted to kids and children since the early years so the internalizations of such values to their mind and memories could run smoothly. This is seen the best practice to instill piety to the children and those who come to the mosque to pray. Inviting them to mosque is regarded one of the effective means for the realization of religious values, teachings and embodiment, such as piety, as one important objective of Islamic ritual. Although piety may be seen as political matters, as Mahmood argues,<sup>50</sup> but it is basically refers to the improvement of personal spirituality and characters. When one is spiritually piety, one is said to be close to God. If Muslims reaches the level of piety, he/she has fulfilled the fundamental element of Islamic prayer. Piety spurs them to behave benevolently. This quality helps produce good human behaviors, such as patience (*sabr*), virtue (*ḥasanah*), respect (*ikrām*) and humble (*tawāḍu'*). This kind of piety is what my informant is sought in her prayer as she states that she wants to be as close as possible to God during the ritual.

Her experience of performing the prayer also suggests that she was amazed by the plurality of the congregational members. As she states, these people come from around the globe. But they gathered in the mosque for the same reason, namely attending Eid prayer and meeting their Muslim colleagues from diverse social, ethnical and cultural background. This is what she did not find when she conducted the prayer in her home country. In other words, the prayer has strengthened her feeling about how diverse Muslims are and how strongly they are linked

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<sup>50</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

to each other on the basis of the same faith. The prayer offers her an opportunity to establish a strong sense of fraternity among Muslim community in Atlanta.

For two other informants, Eid prayer always reminded them into their home country, in which it constitutes a big religious ritual and public celebration. The Indonesian informants told his perception and experience upon completing the ritual. He said:

I definitely felt something, if not everything, was different. Even from the moment I left my house for Eid prayer it was different. Back in Indonesia, I could hear the *takbīr* from my house. People are walking in groups to the prayer location, which is just on the street in front of my house. Yes, on the street. No traffic was allowed during the prayer. Here, Eid was quiet. And finding a place for the prayer surely was much harder compared to what we have in Indonesia. The same happen after the prayer. Back home, I gathered with family and relatives, celebrating, “*sungkeman*”, and enjoyed “*ketupat*”. Here, it was just another ordinary day, that is, I still had to go to a class. The good thing about this was I didn’t have to spend more money because of Eid. I think that was a more proper way to celebrate Eid, in modesty.<sup>51</sup>

*Takbīr* which marks the coming of Eid is always shouted by Muslims the night before it. Many Muslims chant it in mosques and streets in rallies using a loud speaker. Upon completing Eid prayer, the member of the congregation usually exchange forgiveness. They then go home for family’s forum of *sungkeman*, in which the whole member of a family gather and the children pay respect to the parent by means of bowing themselves before the parent and shaking their hand, asking for mutual exchange of forgiveness. Since Eid is always commemorated as a two-day national holiday, which in practice often lasts for about a week, family members who live away from their parents are almost always back home for this celebration with their parents, relatives, neighbors and friends. This tradition creates a massive tentative migration called *mudik* from cities back to villages and leaves many cities, including Jakarta, empty during those days. The situation will be back to normal after the people accomplish their celebration. A special dish called *ketupat*, or rice cooked in the coconut leaf, is served, making the day unforgettable for

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<sup>51</sup> Interview, 18 December 2008.

many Indonesians.

His last word shows how he performed the prayer and celebrated this holiday in diaspora. To him, modesty is a keyword here. Modesty, like other pious characters, is one thing that the Prophet advised Companion Umar should adopt in celebrating Eid, as the narratives in the previous passage has revealed. Unlike his previous experience about Eid in his country, he is now aware that the essence of Eid celebration is not to dress up with glaring garment or to spend much money to buy food and other expensive Eid paraphernalia. Rather, the principle is modesty.

Another narrative on the Eid tradition in the Muslim community was shared by the informant from Guyana, who told a similar story to that of my Indonesian informant. She always remembers her family and community in her country whenever Eid is coming. She explained:

It's very sad to be performing the Eid prayer away from my family. The community in Guyana was very close knit, so after the Eid prayer, we went to visit other people at their homes, or they would come to visit us, and that was how we spent the rest of the day, visiting people. Here everyone hurries to finish prayer so they can go back to work or so they can go shopping. It is a different kind of environment, because the people have not known each other all their lives and have not grown up together. This is one of the problems with praying at *al-Farooq*, because the community is so big so diverse and people come from so many different places. It makes it harder to connect personally with individual group of people. But this offers me a very valuable experience of how diaspora builds up a communal feeling as one community.<sup>52</sup>

This informant has a fixed feeling about the prayer and its celebration. To her, Eid is always identical with family gathering. She had been rarely away from her family when celebrating Eid. Her remembrance of Eid at her home country always brings her mind back to her family, relatives and neighbors. However, having Eid prayer and celebration at diaspora does not always hurt her feeling because she has met people from various countries who, perhaps, hold the same feeling as hers. Here is the spirit of communalism emerge. In her view, Eid is the ritual performance that provides a precious opportunity to strengthen brotherhood among Muslim participants. The congregational members of the mosque do

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<sup>52</sup> Interview, 19 December 2008.

not know one another except for those who have previously known and met either as friends or colleagues. These community members come to the mosque for the same reason; performing and celebrating Eid. The other differences are left behind as they are bounded in commonality as brother and sister in faith.

Both the Indonesian and Guyana narratives told us the feelings of disassociation from their family. In this respect, Eid prayer meant romanticism and remembrance to the past with families, friends and places. In contrast, here in diaspora it was perceived less than a special day. It was weekday, like an ordinary day, where they had to work right after the prayer, except if Eid was on weekend or Sunday. This might reduce the meaning of Eid as a religious event, where in those countries such as Indonesia and Guyana it constitutes religious ritual and cultural performance which evoke powerful memories. But they are united in common brotherhood as member of Muslim community (*umma*).

Unlike those two informants, the Chinese girl had no romantic feeling on Eid day. Her narrative focused more on the ritual itself and its impact of personal piety rather than to its celebration. This was because, as her told me, of the different tradition that she had in China. According to her, Chinese Muslims do celebrate this day, but not in a communal way. Each mosque holds each own prayer ritual and celebration without necessarily having connections to other mosques in the district she lived in northern China which has thirteen mosques. To them pious personality or the increase of public piety is paramount in Islamic ritual, such as Eid prayer.

A ritual performance can also stimulate reflective thoughts, in addition to reflexivity and technicality which often become a main focus in performance studies.<sup>53</sup> Having experiences on this ritual prayer in diaspora stimulated deep reflections among the informants who were concerned with the normative Islam and how this was perceived and practiced differently by different Muslims. The Chinese informant for instance noticed salient features of unusual Islamic practices amongst Muslims here compared to those of China. One thing that she remembered from

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Bauman, "Performance", in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-centered Handbook*, ed. by Richard Bauman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 27.

her experience from performing this prayer in diaspora was concerned with the way female Muslims adopted their dress. In her understanding and practice of veiling, in which she herself has adopted a *hijāb* since a few years ago, a female Muslim must cover all her body except for face and palms in the course of prayer. She was struck by some black woman who let their necks unveiled while performing prayer. She was thinking of the Islamic texts from which such attitudes is tolerated. While still searching for the answer to such a puzzle, she encountered another unfamiliarity of Islamic practices. This occurred when her landlady invited her to attend a forum of Islamic teaching. In this forum she saw all members donned a white long dress, and rarely did female participants, including the lady, wear a headscarf. Interestingly enough, during this meeting, she continued her story, the participants were receiving Islamic sermon from a cassette of tape recorder in a Persian language. She also saw a picture of the teacher of this group hanged up on the wall, in which the members paid a great respect to him. The lady later told her that what she and her fellows were practicing was about Islam. According to the lady, Islam should not be looked at from its practice and should not therefore be distinguished from one to others. "Islam is Islam, nothing else, and there is no such a kind or group of Islam like this or like that", she quoted the lady's statement. All these experiences gave her reflections about "a true" Islam. "I was confused about all of those practices, and which one is correct?" once she pondered. From her reflections, it appeared to me that she came from a tradition where Islam was monolithically practiced. The traditions in the Chinese Muslim community she came from could possibly offer only or nearly a single interpretation and unified practice of Islam. In this view, Islam is often understood and described as a monolithic religion with the same expressions and practices amongst its adherents, regardless the socio and historical contexts where they take place. This monolithic perception is now being challenged when she lives in diaspora after engaging in the ritual and interactions with pluralistic Muslim communities.

Her reflections on such practices partly fits into McGown's thesis that Islam and Muslim traditions in diaspora change into a certain degree as a result of adaptation into a new circumstance while they are still keeping on ties with old tradition from their home country. Based on

her field work on Somali Muslim diaspora in Toronto and London, she maintained that Islam is not a monolithic entity, either in its coherence or in terms of how its principles are interpreted by its adherents.<sup>54</sup> She argued that there are varieties in which Muslim around the world interpret Islam. Those variations come from different parts of the world and from the country where Muslims reside. This diversity and flexibility suggest, she said, that “Muslims are not precluded from making the kinds of adjustment that entail integration into Western liberal countries”.<sup>55</sup> So, unveiled women and their Islamic circle group listening to virtual religious lesson in their vernacular language transmitted through a modern device suggest a constant endeavor to maintain relationship with previous tradition while forming their current identity in diaspora.

If the Chinese informant encountered specific practices of Islam invoking her reflective thoughts about the origin and pure of Islam and about personal and public piety, another informant regarded differences of religious practices natural. Differences often occur and should not be merely overlooked from either ways as true or untrue practices of this religion. He said:

For me, the greatest impact of having seen the diversity is to be more open in thinking about Islam practices in Indonesia. For example, why not having two waves of Eid prayer? Why not having an exact same starting Jumah prayer time? Why having the way we practice Islam? Is it because it's the way it must be practiced or is it just a tradition? I still don't know, though.<sup>56</sup>

Although he was less assured about differences in Islamic practices, he was willing to accept them. Rather than judging differences, he reflectively thought of Islamic practice in diaspora in a more constructive way. Diaspora ritual performance encouraged him to think of Islam critically and welcome the possibilities to adopt a certain practice and implement it into another place. Transnational experiences and the complex hybrid cultures, as he noticed them in *al-Farooq*, offered him a cosmopolitan insight about Islam. Such a reflection often forges identity

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<sup>54</sup> Rima Berns McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Berns McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora*.

<sup>56</sup> Interview, 18 December 2008.

construction among diaspora people. The experiences of migration and mobility from one country to another and from one place to others and a reciprocal encounter of Muslims coming from around the globe constitute an important factor to the construction, negotiation and contestation of various identities, including religious identities.<sup>57</sup> His experience demonstrates how diaspora Muslims engaged in contestations and struggles over religious meaning, practices and places, a common phenomenon that diaspora people share.<sup>58</sup>

This ritual performance of Eid in this mosque also shaped a collective meaning and created a close social relationship among its congregational members. The informants believed that a congregational prayer, let alone if it is performed in a special occasion such as on Eid day, offered deep impacts for the community. This created a feeling of unity and the spirit of brotherhood amongst this diverse pluralistic congregation. Although such a sense and spirit did not emerge automatically, they were at least determined that they could be able to engage in a wider social interaction with other participants of prayer. The informant reckoned that Islam helped him proceeds this unification processes and negotiations. He said:

I did feel that by performing Eid prayer on Eid day gave me a feeling of membership, or affiliation, to Islam. However, personally, I make connection with other people in a more personal way. That said, affiliation to Islam may help me feel a connection with someone but beyond that, I need to establish communication with that person. That's why even when I sit with people in a mosque, I couldn't make a connection with them if they speak in languages that I don't understand.<sup>59</sup>

The process of conversation and interaction, as that narrative displayed, did not take place at once. Even each congregational member should initiate themselves to interact with others. However, two factors might hasten that process; Islam and this Eid ritual. Islam played a very decisive role in such processes since it constituted a common denominator that brought the community together into the mosque. The members of this mosque community came from different countries. They spoke

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<sup>57</sup> Aitchison, Hopkins, and Kwan (eds.), *Geographies of Muslim Identities*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>58</sup> Aitchison, Hopkins, and Kwan (eds.), *Geographies of Muslim Identities*.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, 18 December 2008.

various languages and adopted their own ethnic attires during the prayer. All were almost different, except one, namely their religion. The people confessed themselves as Muslims and attended the mosque to perform Eid ritual prayer. As a religion, Islam provided a basic structure of interaction and convergence amongst them. It was however through this ritual performance of Eid prayer that the seed of convergence grew up. The accomplishment of this socio-religious convergence toward the establishment of a Muslim community could run faster since the mosque made use of this ritual, especially through the sermon, as a means of creating Muslim brotherhood and fraternity. Almost at every pivotal event I have attended in this mosque, such as in Eid ritual prayers, the notion of the Islamic community was everlastingly repeated and reemphasized. This undeniably gives a profound impact to the community.

Another informant from Guyana explained that even though she missed her family and Eid celebration in her home country, she nevertheless got a valuable experience from seeing a heterogeneous community performing the prayer and celebrated it together. She explained:

It's a great feeling to see so many different races and cultures and ethnicities praying under one roof and in unity. Even though you may miss your own community and your own family, it makes you reflect on the bounties of Allah and the beauty of Islam when you see so many different people together. And it does make you feel a part of a larger Muslim world community.<sup>60</sup>

In short, through this ritual performance, the informants gained increasing quality and quantities of social interactions with others, an experience that lead them into the creation of feeling of unification and the establishment of a cohesive society based on a same faith and into the improvement of religious spirituality and piety. This was a common collective experience that they acquired after engaging in ritual performance of Eid prayer in this mosque.

### **E. Concluding Remarks**

In this study, I have demonstrated how a normative Islam of sharia law about a ritual is practiced in diaspora and what such a ritual has meant

<sup>60</sup> Interview, 19 December 2008.

and created for pluralistic Muslim communities. I have examined how Islamic texts and contexts are intertwined in the actual realization of Eid prayer, and how this complexity influenced the ways in which Muslims in diaspora perceived and experienced this ritual. This study reveals that the ritual has established and strengthened two important religious values, namely piety and brotherhood. This could happen because among other things the mosque always advocates the issue of plurality of its community through this ritual.

The Eid ritual prayer, especially through its short informal speeches prior to the prayer and through its sermon, obviously played this process of negotiation. This ritual performance became a means of social cohesion that created the spirit of union in a heterogeneous congregation and pluralistic community. This study also reveals that a slightly different performative ritual action relating to the *takbīr* of this prayer in this mosque is not influenced by the cultural context or social factors stemming from its diverse congregational membership, but rather by religious views and textual sources that the mosque, especially the imam, follows. The contexts of the ritual create a nuance of ritual environment, but do not alter the substance of the prayer.

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