3 Power in Moroccan women's narratives of the hajj

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Introduction

The *Hajja* is leaving with the pilgrims (*hujjāi*);
She is wearing her Mellali *hayek*;²
How lucky you are, *HAJJA*!
Going to Hajj whilst young (*shābba*);
She tells you, “Look after the girls!”
She tells you, “Look after the lands!”
I am praying to God, my Master...
The ship is leaving;
Each has an intention;
My grave and night are coming...

This song was sung to me by *Hanna*,³ an 82 years old Moroccan woman on a September evening in 2016. She spontaneously began singing it as we sat in her son's modest living room in a small town close to Rabat when I asked her about her experiences with the hajj. The song refers to different aspects of hajj, including its history, its social and symbolic significance, and gendered aspects of the journey. Hanna's song starts with a declaration that a female pilgrim (*Hajja*) is leaving with the rest of the pilgrims to Mecca. In the past, Moroccan women leaving to hajj used to wear a *hayek*, a white cloak that covered their entire body, head and part of their face. In the song, being able to go on hajj is a subject of 'envy'. This is linked to the fact that it was rare for women to perform the pilgrimage in Morocco during the time the lyrics were composed. Therefore, women were, indeed, envious of female pilgrims who were able to make the journey to Mecca.

The song then addresses other aspects of hajj in Morocco such as the importance of saying farewell to those who stay behind, begging family members and friends for forgiveness and asking them to look after the girls and lands. This farewell is linked to the next lines of the song which function as a reminder of death and the grave. Mentioning death has a religious significance as a reminder of the importance for Muslims who are capable

of performing the hajj to do so. In the past, going on hajj was associated with older age, when people would prepare themselves for death. The hajj journey itself took many months and was full of dangers and hardships, including the risk of death on the pilgrimage route from disease, thirst or violence. Therefore, most pilgrims leaving from Morocco to Mecca took into account that they might never return home. The reference to death also serves as a reminder of the Day of Judgment when Muslims believe people will stand before God, just as they will stand near Mount Arafat during the hajj ritual to contemplate their lives and beg God to forgive their sins. The song continues with glorifying God for allowing pilgrims (both male and female) to perform hajj. According to Hanna, who learnt it from her mother, this song has been passed orally from generation to generation for a long time. It is uncertain how old the song is, but it does allude to the means of transportation at the time when Hanna learned the lyrics: ships. Up to the 1940s, while some caravans of Moroccan pilgrims travelled over land to Saudi Arabia, others went by steamship, the invention of which gave an enormous boost to the pilgrimage to Mecca since the 1850s (cf. Slight 2014, 55).⁴

Hanna's song, then, represents a creative account of various social, religious and emotional dimensions of the hajj. Taking Hanna's song as a starting point, in this chapter I explore the meanings of hajj for Moroccan women, both on a personal and on a social level. On the basis of empirical data collected through a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Morocco, I argue that the significance of the pilgrimage as a mark of success on the social, spiritual and financial levels differs across different categories of Moroccan women. Through hajj, Moroccan women negotiate different forms of capital, including social, cultural, spiritual and religious capital, which are also informed by their habitus and everyday practices.⁵

My starting point in this analysis is Elizabeth Tonkin's argument that in various ways, narrators are formed by their own narratives (Tonkin 1992, 50). Looking at the socio-cultural implications of women's growing access to cultural, social and symbolic capital related to hajj, my argument builds on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital as tools to explain and analyze women's narratives and the ways these stories are embedded in their daily lives (cf. Bourdieu 1986).⁶ Bourdieu (1990) explored how in different social fields, possessing various types of 'assets' can confer power and profit to their holder (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119).⁷ Depending on the field it functions in, according to Bourdieu, capital (or power) can present itself in economic, cultural or social forms. Building on these forms of capital, several anthropologists argued for other forms of capital, including symbolic capital, moral capital, and audible capital, among others (cf. Cooper 1999). For example, performance of the hajj song helped Hanna to produce symbolic capital as a woman who could not perform hajj herself. Studying the oral narratives of Moroccan women thus provides insights

in the ways they negotiate the ways they are embedded in different sets of power relations in everyday life.

I will more specifically highlight the social diversity of Moroccan women's mobility which is influenced by geographical origin, class, education, financial means and marital status. I will demonstrate that these variables have a direct impact on women's desires to go Mecca, their ability to actually perform the hajj and the experiences of those who have been before, during and after having concluded the pilgrimage. In the next section, I will examine Moroccan women participation in pilgrimage from Morocco to Mecca.

Moroccan women's participation in hajj

In general, not much information is available on women's participation in hajj journeys from Morocco to Mecca in the past. This lack of knowledge is related to the illiteracy of women as the vast majority of women had no access to writing their accounts. As a result, women have most likely passed on their accounts orally that reached us through means such as Hanna's song. In addition to singing her song, Hanna told me the following account that gives us an impression of the mobility of people in the rural area where she lived, and that of women in particular:

When I was young, our world – as girls – was our village; we did not think that anything existed beyond the village; we would not know how to go anywhere outside of the village. Hajj was more difficult and you needed to have money to be able to go to Mecca. I can remember that in our village, one would find one person in the whole area who had enough money to go on hajj: a man!

Historically, both in rural and in urban areas, Moroccan women lived in *hareems* (harems) or 'enclosed households' where extended families lived together as one unit. Particularly in cities but also in families in rural areas that could afford to observe female seclusion, women required permission from their husbands or other male family members before leaving a household (Sadiqi 2003). This was the case at least until the declaration of independence from the French protectorate in 1956. As Hanna explains, the tradition of female seclusion strongly affected who would perform the hajj:

The man who went to hajj from our village was a *faqīh*, a religious teacher who worked at the mosque... As little girls, hajj felt way beyond our reach.

In general, until the 1990s, as in much of the Muslim Middle East, in Morocco religious education and participation in formal religious practices such as mosque attendance and pilgrimage were associated with men.

Women's education was lacking or secondary to men's (cf. Badran 1995; Kandiyoti 1991). Paradoxically, women did represent the majority of religious practitioners of 'everyday' religion. They were, for instance, very active in local pilgrimage such as visiting local saint shrines (Davis 1983; Smith 1980).

As a result of the wave of orthodoxy that has swept over much of the Muslim world since the late 1980s, local pilgrimage to saint shrines has diminished considerably in Morocco, while women's mosque attendance has grown. For women, however, it remains more difficult to fulfil the obligation to perform hajj than for men. One reason for this is that in line with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic law, in Saudi Arabia it is considered unlawful for a woman to perform the hajj in the absence of her husband or a close male relative. These views have been integrated into hajj regulations, restricting the opportunities to perform hajj for all Muslim women, regardless of their nationality or Islamic denomination. This provision is only relaxed for women over 45 years of age: they are allowed to travel in groups particularly organized for women without a *mahram* or male companion.

Another obstacle that women may be confronted with comes to the fore in the story that *Hajja* Salma, a woman I met in Temara, a city in the suburban area of the capital Rabat, told me about her own hajj experience:

My husband went to hajj and umra⁸ three times before I went. His first hajj was in 2004. I performed hajj in 2014; I applied in 2009 and could not go because my mother was sick and I could not leave her behind. I applied again in 2010 and 2012 but was not until 2013 that I was successfully selected to perform hajj. I went alone with a group of other women; one man from the travel agency was responsible for us.

(*Hajja* Salma, October 2016)

Hajja Salma's reflection on her hajj experience echoes the stories of many women whom I came to know in Morocco. Although travel for the purpose of pilgrimage has in principle become an accepted pursuit for Moroccan women, due to traditional gender expectations, in practice women often sacrifice the obligation to perform hajj in order to fulfil their 'duties' towards their husbands, children and their responsibilities towards their wider families.

Becoming a *Hajja*: cultural capital in shared narratives of the hajj experience

Moroccans who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca usually acquire a higher social status. This comes to the fore, amongst others, in the honorific title that is added to their names: *Hajj* for men, *Hajja* for women. As Fatima Sadiqi (2003) has pointed out in her book on gender and language in Morocco, the politics of naming is important in the public discourse

in Morocco. Oral blessings and naming a person *Hajj* or *Hajja* carry a very positive value and were described to me as being part of Moroccan *tashrīf*, which roughly translates into ‘honoring practice’. It is *tashrīf* to call a person who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca *Hajj/Hajja* as a sign of respect. Some female pilgrims told me that the importance of being called *Hajja* is in the fact that they can distinguish themselves from other Moroccan women and express their own sense of religious achievement as pilgrims. In general, those who perform hajj expect to be addressed as *Hajj* or *Hajja*. The honorific title is thus a symbolically loaded expression that signifies an elevated status. Women who succeed in performing hajj see the new title as a metaphor for their spiritual achievement and a reflection of their religiosity.

Saying *du‘ā* or supplication prayers for someone to perform the hajj is a very common element in conversations between Moroccans. An example was a prayer expressed by a young man in the old *medina* or city centre in Rabat where I was walking with my Moroccan friend Salma. When a woman in a colourful dress stopped to look at the collection of scarves he was selling, he said out loud, “*Allāh ya‘tīk al-hajj*” [May Allah grant you the hajj]! Come and buy from me’. My friend Salma smiled approvingly and explained to me: ‘It is most precious in Morocco to pray to God and ask Him to grant someone the hajj to Mecca’ (Field-notes, September 2015).

In the public sphere, being addressed as *el-Hajja* is a form of cultural capital for women who have performed the hajj. The term of cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. It refers to a person’s distinctive skills, knowledge and practices that promote social mobility and allow people to enhance their social position (Newcomb and Crawford 2013, 66). While some female pilgrims, particularly younger ones, do not mind if people do not use the honorific title upon their return, others insist on it. A young Moroccan friend of mine, for instance, recalled a conversation she had had with a friend of her mother who had returned from hajj:

(...) I congratulated her on her safe return from hajj and said, “How are you auntie (*khalti*)?” She frowned at me and said, “You should not call me auntie anymore!... Call me *el-Hajja*!”

(August 2015)

Demanding to be called *Hajja* is making claims to a special status in terms of piety and wisdom, and often also in terms of economic status as someone who could afford to go on hajj. Such claims are increasingly being contested, however. Many people – both men and women – whom I got to know in the course of my fieldwork in Morocco asserted that a person who has been on hajj should not necessarily be referred to as *Hajj* or *Hajja*.

Significantly, one also finds that people who have performed hajj question the habit of making something special out of a person who has been to Mecca. Lubna, a *Hajja* I got to know in Mohammedia, for instance, told me:

Why would people call a pilgrim *Hajj* or *Hajja*? Would they call a person who performs prayer [*ṣalāt*] *muṣallī* [a praying person]? Pilgrimage is like praying, a duty that one has to perform as a Muslim. I would not ask people to call me *Hajja*!

As we will see in another section where I will return to Lubna's hajj experiences, there is more to Lubna's assertion than modesty only. For the purposes of my argument here it suffices to say that some pilgrims share Lubna's view, yet most continue to prefix their names with the title *Hajja*, which traditionally is held with respect in Morocco.

The rules of etiquette are subtle, however; pilgrims are expected to convey their new status among the local community in a discreet fashion. Although displaying their entitlement to the title of *Hajj/Hajja* openly is part of demonstrating their piety, to demand openly to be addressed by the honorific title or to 'show off' one's religious status demonstrates a lack of propriety and, more importantly, one's credibility as an exemplary Muslim. It is only a thin line between accorded respect for achieved spiritual enrichment and being accused of using the honorific title as sign of superiority. In order to comply with cultural expectations, pilgrims should capitalize on their new status with care. It is not considered pious to boast about being a *Hajja*; modesty must prevail.

This became clear to me in the criticism expressed by the young woman who told me about the request of a friend of her mother to call her *Hajja*. In the view of my interlocutor, this demand was inappropriate; one should not brag about being a *Hajja* since the respect thus claimed is something that should be gained through recognition of one's piety by others. Therefore, the woman who told me the story of her mother's friend confided that she always deliberately 'forgets' to address the woman in person by her honorific title:

I know that I am expected to call her "*el-Hajja*" and respect her... But – may God forgive me – every time she visits us, I call her auntie [*khalti*] on purpose...

For many women, the symbolic capital that comes with becoming *Hajja* provides access to other forms of capital within the Moroccan society. The next section gives an example from Fes where a young woman was able to negotiate her position within the local community after performing the hajj.

Hajj and access to religious capital

At the time of my fieldwork, Sawsan was 32 years old, born and raised with a 'comfortably financial family' as she herself characterized her family (Sawsan, October 2015). Sawsan performed the hajj in 2012 together with her father. Since then, she has become one of the most respected young women in her neighbourhood. Both younger and older women come to seek her advice on daily matters and request her religious guidance, as she enjoyed cultural and religious capital.⁹

In Sawsan's case, her privileged status as the daughter of a well-known official provided her with access to large social networks. Her new title, *Hajja*, allowed her to claim a high moral stance and to exert religious influence on women in her family's network. I was told that Sawsan was already known as a wise young woman before she went on hajj. Yet, only after the completion of her hajj, women began to come to her house and seek her advice. Sawsan's mother told me proudly:

I felt that she was going to perform hajj whilst young. Now, she is *Hajja*, she has religious knowledge and many women come to seek her wise advice.

For Sawsan, her religious knowledge and her ability to articulate that knowledge by offering advice to women function as religious capital and as a marker of her social competence. In the eyes of those who know her, being a *Hajja* at such a young age proves that she is religiously devoted for which she deserves respect and a position of authority among young women in her neighbourhood. Sawsan demonstrates her religious 'knowledge' at women's gatherings by giving advice and offering her opinion on different matters. During a women's meeting that I attended in October 2016, I noted that women asked Sawsan many questions about the hajj and umra. They wanted to hear her opinion when the Saudi Arabia's government decided to increase the fees of the hajj entry visa. When she spoke, both young and old women listened attentively to what Sawsan had to say and nodded in agreement. Sawsan also displayed her piety in how she dressed and by interspersing Islamic terms in her daily conversations. Her parents reconfirmed Sawsan's high religious reputation by calling her *Hajja* when they talked about her to other people.

Sawsan's extraordinary position as a young *Hajja* helped her to accumulate distinction and prestige. Such prestige or symbolic capital exists only as far as it is recognized in the eyes of others (cf. Bourdieu 1990). By increasing her religious knowledge, her hajj performance and subsequently sharing her knowledge and experiences with other women and helping them to overcome daily dilemmas, Sawsan gained respect in her local community.

Sawsan's case is not unique; I have noted numerous occasions where having been on hajj provided Moroccan women with self-confidence and

a legitimate foundation from which to access power within their social networks. Some qualifications are in place here, however. First of all, this power predominantly applies in female networks.¹⁰ What characterizes Sawsan's case is that her elevated religious status spilled over into other domains: she is often invited to participate in social events such as weddings, birth celebrations and women gatherings. This illustrates that more broadly, the pilgrimage experience is also a social project and that a valuable asset of pilgrimage concerns the fact that it also renders social capital in the sense of 'strategic positioning' (cf. Bourdieu 1986).

A second qualification that should be made relates to the ways in which social stratification in Morocco affects the ways in which hajj performance of female pilgrims from different socio-economic positions is assessed. The criteria that constitute the symbolic capital that hajj performance may generate changes in each context depending on cultural as well as socio-economic factors. While Sawsan gained much respect and religious capital in her social network after performing hajj, this may not be the case for women from less privileged backgrounds. I will demonstrate this in the next section by discussing the hajj stories of Lubna, the earlier mentioned young woman. Lubna is only three years older than Sawsan, but she comes from a very different social background.

Social capital, pilgrimage and financial needs

The travel and accommodation costs involved make it almost impossible to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca for people who have few financial means. Most Moroccans I encountered considered the fees for hajj travel packages very high. In fact, only some women were financially able to perform hajj. Those who could afford it are often either women with affluent husbands who paid for them, or women who run their own business or have inherited some money. The earlier mentioned *Hajja* Salma, for instance, was able to perform hajj after the death of her father. For women who have very little or no financial capital, it is much harder to perform the pilgrimage.

One of those women is Lubna, who grew up in an impoverished urban neighbourhood in Mohammedia, a city that is part of the larger economic conglomeration around Casablanca. Lubna is the oldest of four children, which means that from an early age, she shared in her parents' responsibilities for taking care of her younger siblings. She lost her father in 2004, and not long after, she started her first job as a daily worker in a large factory. Since then, she has been the family breadwinner and has faced many challenges, including her mother's and brother's illnesses.

Lubna remembers well how impressed she was as a child whenever her mother would tell her the story about the hajj journey of her great grandfather, who, as her mother expressed it, 'walked on his feet' from Morocco to Mecca. As a result, from her childhood onwards, every time she heard the description of the sanctuaries in Mecca and Medina, Lubna felt a strong

desire to go there herself. Recently, her dreams came true; in 2015 she performed the hajj, which is quite extraordinary for a woman in her position. Financially, she could not have afforded to pay for the hajj herself. Lubna was very lucky, however, to win in a the annual lottery her employer organized to provide three workers with 50,000 Moroccan dirhams ($\pm 5,000$ Euro) earmarked for the hajj journey.

The responses Lubna received from her fellow factory workers and from family and friends in the neighbourhood when she won the money prize that should enable her to buy a package tour for the hajj confronted her with her marginal position as a poor and single woman. She vividly recalls how everyone coveted the prize:

I still remember how everyone gathered, waiting to hear the next name. The manager took out a folded piece of paper out of the box in front of him, and read the name out loud: "Lubna, congratulations!" I could not believe it at first but I acted indifferent. A female friend standing next to me touched my arm and congratulated me. A male colleague standing to my left said, "If you do not want it; give it to me!"

While it is possible that her male colleague may have been joking, Lubna would soon learn that while they would not say so in her face, some people deemed it more appropriate that a young and poor woman like Lubna should renounce the prize in favour of somebody else. Lubna decided to ignore the rumours that reached her ears and focus on overcoming the next obstacle to realize her dream.

Indeed, winning the lottery as such was no guarantee that Lubna would actually be able to perform the hajj. The way to Mecca was still long, as she found out when trying to register for a hajj visa at the local governmental pilgrimage department. The local male governor informed her that prize or no prize, like all Moroccans Lubna would have to go through the visa lottery system before she could undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Two problems occurred in this process. The first was that for the thousands of other applicants who also registered at the local office where Lubna was to apply for her hajj visa, only 390 visas were available. The chance that Lubna would be among the lucky ones who would obtain a visa was therefore very small. The other more serious issue was that in accordance with Saudi Arabia's policy concerning male guardianship for woman, Lubna could not even register without a *maḥram*, a legitimate male companion. Lubna was thus confronted with the task to find a male relative who was willing and able to accompany her on the journey to Mecca. She decided to ask her grandfather. At the age of 85, he belonged to the category of the eldest 15% of registered applicants who are automatically selected to perform the pilgrimage without having to go through the lottery system.¹¹ Several uncles stepped in to raise enough money to buy Lubna's grandfather a hajj package tour.

Ironically, while it was Lubna who needed a male companion in order to be able to perform the hajj, in the official records Lubna was eventually registered as the companion of her fragile grandfather rather than the other way around. Her grandfather was privileged because of his old age, while Lubna was disadvantaged, both because of her gender and because of her age. Lubna told me that she was happy that her grandfather could perform the hajj because of her.

Having found a way to overcome the restrictions imposed on her as a female pilgrim, Lubna was now ready to prepare for her hajj journey. As it turned out, however, her worries were not over yet. When I met her for the first time, Lubna had just come back from Mecca. Upon her return to Morocco, she had expected that, in line with local etiquette, many visitors, including family members, friends and neighbours, would come to her house to congratulate her on her safe return. During the first few days following her return, indeed, some family members and close friends did visit her. Lubna's neighbours, however, and many women whom she considered her friends never came to her house to congratulate her. Lubna explained this to me by referring to the gossip her decision not to relinquish her prize had caused: 'A woman! Unfit to perform hajj because of poverty and young age...' (Lubna, November 2015). She suspected that behind her back, her neighbours and friends accused her of being conceited and not knowing her place.

To understand the wilful breach of etiquette by Lubna's neighbours and her disappointment about their comportment, it is helpful to reflect on the socio-cultural context in which the views and experiences of the various parties that feature in her hajj story are embedded. In a poor neighbourhood like Lubna's, it is very rare that people have the means to go to Mecca. The hajj is by and large conceived of as a practice of higher class of people who lead different lives, a privilege beyond the reach of one's own kind. While those who are better off are envied for being able to fulfil desires that remain beyond reach for oneself, such envy is impersonal and generalized, concerning unknown people outside one's own orbit. Lubna's story illustrates that if, to the contrary, a person from one's own circle achieves something that was not deemed possible for one's own kind, the confrontation with one's own unfulfilled desires can be unsettling. A young woman with modest means who performs the hajj defies social expectations. Showing Lubna 'her place' by accusing her behind her back of considering herself better than other women in the neighbourhood and by breaching the local etiquette of paying her a congratulatory visit upon return from Mecca can thus be interpreted as a way to restore order by punishing Lubna for the potential threat her success implied for people's acceptance of their own disadvantaged situation.

Fortunately, Lubna's recollections about the resentment of her neighbours and former friends were not the last of her hajj stories. Thanks to the bonding that resulted from sharing similar experiences during hajj, Lubna

managed to build meaningful relationships with fellow female pilgrims, thus being able to extend her social network beyond her daily environment. Not only did she feel appreciated by the women with whom she had performed the pilgrimage, but through her contacts with them, she also gained access to the different layer of society to which many of her fellow pilgrims belong. Cultivating her relationships with her new pilgrim friends thus compensated for the loss of former friendships, and provided Lubna with social capital that allowed her to reach out to a world beyond her old social network.

Lubna's story reminds us of the importance of taking an intersectionality approach in studying the experiences of hajj pilgrims; age, class and gender intersect in a very specific way in both her physical and social mobility. Her story demonstrates the enormous impact of the socio-cultural context on the gendered views on and experiences of people concerning the hajj. Lubna's habitus and everyday life, particularly her social background and her economic status, were reflected in her expectations and experiences of the hajj as much as her gender. The fact that her uncles were willing to finance the hajj of her equally poor grandfather, whereas Lubna experienced social pressure to relinquish the money prize for her own hajj journey, points to the influence of patriarchal views and practices that affect Moroccan female and male pilgrims differently. I will therefore look into the impact of patriarchal views on women's mobility that continue to inform Moroccan culture on the hajj experiences of female pilgrims.

Women's hajj, power and patriarchy

Hajja Zahra, one of the women whom I came to know in Fes, is the first wife of a successful local businessman. Her husband has been on hajj twice and he performs the umra, the 'smaller' or voluntary pilgrimage to Mecca, on a near annual basis. In the past, he would sometimes allow *Hajja* Zahra to accompany him. Nowadays, however, he takes along his younger, second wife to look after his needs whilst in Mecca. In a gathering with several other women, *Hajja* Zahra whispered to a female friend sitting next to her:

I really want to go again! But he [her husband, KaA] said no. He said he had no money to send me again! [She wiped her eyes with her hand, KaA] I feel fire in my chest when I remember those places; I miss visiting Mecca [she put her hand on her chest and sighed, KaA].

According to Islamic law, women have the same rights as men to engage in religious activities, including hajj performance; all pilgrims, regardless of their gender, ideally seek the permission of everyone who can make claims on their services or have supervisory power over them to perform the hajj. In practice, however, women meet with more obstacles than men. In the past,

family units in Morocco were mostly agnatically organized in which patriarchal views and practices prevailed (cf. Sadiqi 2003). To act outside the permission of male family members was very difficult and risky for women. Nowadays, significantly less families live in large extended family units. Patterns in familial power relations have not changed to the same extent, however; in general men continue to have more authority than women, especially over their wives and unmarried daughters. As a result, female family members tend to be more restricted in their freedom of movement than male family members. Therefore, besides the fact that for every woman under the age of 45 who wishes to go on hajj there should be enough money for an additional hajj journey of her male companion, women also face the obstacle of getting permission from their male relatives to go in the first place.

As *Hajja* Zahra's story shows, in present-day Moroccan society, which in Moroccan-Arabic is called *Lkelma d rrjāl*, 'the oral word of a man' can control the mobility of their female relatives. I witnessed *Hajja* Zahra bringing up the issue of her longing to return to Mecca on several occasions, and each time her words were accompanied by tears and sighs. One of her most repeated remarks was that she feared she would die before settings eyes on the Ka'ba again. *Hajja* Zahra's grievances are aggravated by the fact that since her husband married his second wife, this younger woman gets to accompany him on his umra trips. This privilege has become the focus of attention in the rivalry between the two wives. In this sense, *Hajja* Zahra's longing for Mecca should be interpreted in terms of her feelings about her marital situation as much as in her desire to live a pious life.

In the context of Moroccan patriarchal family relations, women often have to act strategically to negotiate 'permission' from their male relatives for their movements outside the house. In this situation, bargaining with others to speak to their husbands can be an effective tactic. *Hajja* Zahra, for example, spoke to people who were close to her husband, such as his sister-in-law, her sons-in-law, her older sons and her husband's older brother. The conversations I witnessed between her and her relatives reflected a process of negotiation in which both male and female family members were involved.

In some cases the permission women seek from their husbands is not a permission in any formal sense, but more of an agreement. Most female pilgrims that I got to know during my fieldwork performed the pilgrimage to Mecca alongside their husbands. To go on pilgrimage with one's spouse appeared to be the simplest way to avoid disagreements or restrictions imposed by the husband. It also reduces their risk of becoming the object of gossip: in the eyes of outsiders the legitimacy of women who perform pilgrimage is enhanced if they do so to accompany their husbands as dutiful wives. Therefore, while in religious terms the hajj of a woman equals that of a man, the symbolic capital that male pilgrims gain by hajj performance tends to be bigger than that of female pilgrims.

Women, symbolic capital and male's ability to perform the pilgrimage

Since pilgrimage to Mecca is obligatory for both Muslim men and women who are able to perform it, some women invest heavily in tactical manoeuvring in order to fulfil their religious duty. Other women, however, put male relatives – particularly their husbands – before themselves when it comes to efforts to allow one family member to perform the hajj. In this sense, even women for whom the hajj is beyond personal reach can influence who travels to Mecca indirectly. It would be a mistake to interpret such activities in terms of altruism only. Creating or enhancing a relationship of indebtedness can be an effective way to exert power over others, particularly for those who have limited access to formal power.

During my fieldwork, I came across several examples of women who exerted this 'hidden' power. Approaching hajj performance as a family project by assisting family members in going to Mecca was a common phenomenon among the women I met. As mothers and housewives women play a principal role in transmitting socio-cultural norms and values and providing encouragement and support. In the next subsection I explore how a wife can play a pivotal role in the pilgrimage of her husband. I will zoom in on the story of Auntie Sarah, a 50 years old higher educated woman living in the urban conglomeration of Casablanca. When interviewing Auntie Sarah about her husband's pilgrimage to Mecca in 2010, this is how she began her story:

There was this time when I told my husband: "I have a feeling you will go to hajj". He said: "I wish these words will go directly from your mouth to Allah".¹² I told him that I had a good feeling about it. I registered his name, attended the selection process, and there it was. They called the first name, then the second and ... the third was his, "al-Sharīf Mūlāy Muḥammad".

(Auntie Sarah, 20/08/2015)

Auntie Sarah herself has not performed the hajj. She knew that her husband wished to go but that he did not have the financial means and therefore kept postponing his registration year after year. Without consulting her husband, she decided to register his name for the *qur'a* as the lottery for hajj visa is known in Morocco. In her view, her husband's intention, or *nīya*, to go on pilgrimage needed to be pushed forwards and she was the one to make that step on his behalf. Smiling somewhat triumphantly, Auntie Sarah told me:

After every prayer, my husband would put his hands up and pray, "*Yā Rabb*, Oh God; I hope that these feet will be washed with Zamzam water".¹³ One day I was coming back from work when I saw a poster

about the hajj registration. I thought to myself, that's his opportunity, I will go and register my husband; we did not have the financial means or anything to help us make it happen, but I did not think about that at the time; all I thought about is that I can help my husband in making his wish come true.

Besides providing verbal support and encouragement, Auntie Sarah saw it as her responsibility to give practical support to her husband in proceeding on the path to his pilgrimage. She recalls that upon leaving the registration centre and walking back to her house, she wondered what other people would think when hearing that she had registered her husband for the hajj visa lottery: 'They might think that I control my husband!'. Once at home she told her husband what she had done. She clearly remembers the happiness she saw on his face when he realized what his wife had done for him.

A few months later, again without her husband, Auntie Sarah joined the hundreds of men and women that had gathered at the registration centre to hear the results of the hajj *qur'a*. The third name mentioned was that of her husband. Overjoyed she phoned her husband to deliver the good news that he would be able to perform the hajj in the year to come.

Having come this far, Auntie Sarah faced a new responsibility: finding the necessary funds to make it possible financially for her husband to perform the hajj. She told me:

We did not have any "*santim*".¹⁴ Our savings amounted to around 4,000 dirhams; not much at all compared to the 45,000 dirhams that we needed for hajj fees. I told him, "Let's ask the school for a loan of 20,000 over our salaries." Next, I called my sister in Italy and asked if she could give us 1000 Euros. I was involved in a money saving project with the teachers at my school and we had saved about 10,000 dirhams in that group. We put all the money together and I went to pay. All that I returned with were 200 dirhams.

Auntie Sarah's role did not end there; she next took on the responsibility of managing the salaries of her husband and herself to save the money needed to buy the necessary items for hajj such as *ihrām*¹⁵ dress, shoes and other needs. When her husband finally left for Mecca, she made sure to tell him how to spend the money he took with him and what gifts to buy. She herself spent days shopping in Casablanca for 'hajj gifts' for friends and family who would come to congratulate her husband upon his return. She bought prayer mats, beads, scarfs and other gifts. She also worked for many days preparing sweets and food for the return of her husband.

Listening to the stories that Auntie Sarah and other women, particularly when they shared such stories during women's gatherings, reminded me of the argument made by the anthropologist Barbara Cooper concerning the claims that women make to authoritative religious space by sharing their

hajj stories with others as instances that ‘present women with an occasion to talk strikingly openly about themselves and their own lives’ (Cooper 1999, 91). I recognized this in the women I worked with in Morocco coming to the fore, for instance, in the setting in which Auntie Sarah told me her stories. It struck me that while her husband is a well-known teacher in the local community and was willing to share his pilgrimage experiences with me, during the three interviews I had with him and his wife in the their home he mostly gave the floor to Auntie Sarah and would often nod his head in agreement with what she was saying.

While in her article Cooper focuses on the stories of women who had performed the hajj themselves, I noted that Moroccan women who had not performed the pilgrimage could still be active agents in the process that led their male relatives to perform pilgrimage to Mecca. Like Auntie Sarah, women would take centre stage in their stories and speak about their roles confidently and in detail. The culturally specific nature of power and influence wielded by women thus came to the fore both in the performance and in the content of the hajj stories that women told me either in person or at women’s gatherings I attended. From these performances and stories I learned that wives may play both a motivational and a practical role in encouraging and supporting their husband’s pilgrimage. In her stories about the pilgrimage of her husband Auntie Sarah claims authority by presenting herself as the motor behind the success. Similarly, the songs sung by Hanna that I discussed in the beginning of this chapter also function as symbolic capital for a woman who could not perform the hajj herself. This production of symbolic capital through narratives and songs in return justifies and acknowledges the position of those who could not go to Mecca vis-à-vis those who did perform the hajj. Although these women were not the ones who performed the pilgrimage in Mecca, they nonetheless claimed authority as active agents in the process that allowed others to perform pilgrimage.

In conclusion

In this chapter I have studied how female agency comes to the fore in Moroccan women’s stories about pilgrimage to Mecca. Zooming in on the stories of women who varied considerably in terms of age and socio-economic class allowed me to relate women’s hajj experiences to their mobility in everyday life and to the various forms of capital needed for and generated by performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Until recently, because of the physical and social mobility implied by visiting Mecca, most Moroccans tended to associate the hajj performance with men rather than women, whom they associate with more local pilgrimages to saint’s shrines. Although the number of female pilgrims has grown over the last few decades, the stories presented in this chapter addressed the challenges that women continue to face before they are able to go on pilgrimage to Mecca.

Some challenges affect all women, such as restrictions on women's mobility due to patriarchal traditions according to which women fall under the guardianship of men. A major obstacle for all female pilgrims is that according to Saudi hajj regulations, women under the age of 45 need to be accompanied by a male guardian. As the stories of *Hajja Zahra* illustrate, living in a polygamous marriage is a patriarchal tradition that can also become particularly painful when tensions between marriage partners are played out in relation to the issue which wife gets to join the pater familias to cook and do the laundry for him on his journey to Mecca. At the same time, framing marital tensions in terms of being thwarted in one's efforts to develop one's piety by revisiting Mecca, *Hajja Zahra* has a powerful tool to negotiate her position as first wife.

Cultural gender expectations may also result in women prioritizing their domestic responsibilities as caregivers for family members over their ambition to fulfil the religious obligation of hajj performance, as *Hajja Salma* did. Again, such choices should not be interpreted one-sidedly as pointing to women's lack of agency. The story of Auntie Sara illustrates that women may have their own reasons to invest in facilitating other family members to perform the hajj. For one thing, they often share in the religious prestige that comes from having a *Hajj* in the family. Moreover, by putting much effort in helping others to go to Mecca, women can lay claims on the same family members and thus improve their position in the family.

Besides factors that affect all women, hajj performance can also be hampered by the specific ways in which women are positioned in different sets of power relations, for example, on the basis of their age or socio-economic position. The stories I have discussed here thus illustrate the need to take an intersectionality approach to understand how women's hajj experiences are related to their mobilities. Hannah, the old woman who sang a hajj song for me, grew up at a time when Moroccan participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca was rare. Her song not only reflects the enormous symbolic significance of such extraordinary occasions as women departing for Mecca, but also refers to the envy this caused among those who stayed behind.

Envy plays a major role in the hajj stories of Lubna, the young lower-class woman who was able to go on hajj thanks to the factory lottery she won. Lubna suffered from the resentment of her neighbours and friends who considered it ludicrous for a woman in her position to perform hajj. Yet, making new friends among her fellow pilgrims opened up opportunities for Lubna for upward social mobility. Contrary to the criticism that befell Lubna, on the basis of her privileged status as the daughter of a well-known official with a broad network, the equally young and single Sawsan gained powerful symbolic capital through her hajj performance. The honorific title *Hajja* allowed her to claim a powerful, moral position among the women in her family's network.

The specific stories of individual women that I have discussed are at the same time very personal as well as representative of broader cultural

patterns that inform Moroccan women's desires, views and practices of the pilgrimage to Mecca. In this sense, they underline Tonkin's argument that, in various ways, narrators are formed by their own narratives; the stories my interlocutors shared with me contain both 'scripted' and 'unscripted' elements relating to the specific intersecting positions of the women involved in Moroccan society. While some elements in the stories I discussed may be 'unscripted' from a purely authoritative religious point of view, besides pointing to sometimes very individual character traits, such elements often do tend to be 'scripted' in the sense of corresponding either implicitly or explicitly to cultural views on the daily lives and mobilities of the category of women that the narrators belong to. Specifically, the stories I have analyzed in this chapter illustrate that the universal Muslim obligation to perform hajj can work out very differently for different categories of Muslims in terms of the various forms of capital one needs to possess in order to be able to embark on hajj, and the various kinds of capital that performance of the pilgrimage may generate.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for their generous grant (360-25-150) for the research project 'Modern Articulations of Pilgrimage to Mecca' on which this chapter is based.
- 2 Worn by women in more cold areas of Morocco, *el hayek* (or *haik*) is a traditional white outdoor cloak made of silk and wool. It covers the whole body except the face and hands. This large piece of garment is a symbol of modesty and discretion (Mellali: made in Beni Mellal, a city located in the centre of Morocco with rich historical background, particularly from the Ishmaelite Era (XVII Century).
- 3 *Hanna* is a phrase used locally to address grandmothers as a sign of respect.
- 4 Resources that I came across during my fieldwork included a short video from 1949 documenting the Pilgrimage to Mecca from Morocco. The film states that 450 pilgrims who were chosen among 2,500 from Morocco sail towards Jeddah leaving for Mecca, whereas hajj flights did not commence until 1957 (Guttery 1998).
- 5 *Habitus* is defined (by Bourdieu) as an experience and possession of a tradition by an agent.
- 6 Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital is connected with his theoretical ideas on class. He identifies three dimensions of capital each with its own relationship to class: economic, cultural and social capital.
- 7 The field, in the conceptualization of Bourdieu, is a competitive arena of social relations where agents/institutions/entities/organizations deploy immense physical, mental, symbolic and strategic resources in the production, acquisition and control of capital.
- 8 The *umra* is the so-called 'smaller' or voluntary pilgrimage to Mecca that can be performed throughout the year.
- 9 I have classified the acquisition of religious knowledge through hajj as both cultural and religious capital because the process strongly resembles that of an educational process. The power of religious capital lies in how it represents a form of power.

- 10 It must be noted that in Sawsan's case, her father also showed much pride in her being a young pilgrim. I observed, for example, how he would also pay close attention to her when she was giving her views and that he also occasionally asked her advice.
- 11 In Morocco, the eldest 15% of pilgrims do not go through the lottery system in order to give more opportunity to older people to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. In 2016, the oldest pilgrim was 95 years old and the youngest of them was born in 1933 – 83 years old. These oldest pilgrims were allowed to be accompanied by one person to look after them who would not have to go through the lottery system themselves.
- 12 *Min fummek ilallah* (From your mouth to Allah) is a local expression that indicates hopes for whatever has been said to be realized: May God fulfil your wishes.
- 13 Drinking water from the well Zamzam, which, according to the Islamic tradition, Hajar discovered to quench the thirst of her baby son Ishmael after having been abandoned by Abraham in the desert, is one of the rites of the hajj.
- 14 *Santim* (from the French word centime) – one santim is worth 1/100 of a dirham and is abbreviated c. It is rare to see a coin smaller than 20c these days and there is no smaller currency than a santim.
- 15 *Ihrām* are the clothes one wears once entering the state of ritual consecration. For men, *ihrām* consists of two white seamless sheets draped around the waist and left shoulder. Women can wear any kind of clothing that hides bodily contours. Women should cover their heads but leave their faces uncovered.

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