7 Considering the silences

Understanding historical narratives of women's Indian Ocean hajj mobility

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The first documented Indian ruler to complete the hajj travelled with fanfare, accompanied by a retinue of over 1,000 companions, yet later wrote a very simple personal account of arrival in Mecca, recalling:

[t]he hour of my arrival at Mecca was the 'Ishá [first watch of the night], and the call to evening prayers was sounding from the different mosques. I entered within the holy precincts by the Báb-us-Salám [gate of peace], and, arriving at the house of Abraham, I stood and read the prescribed prayers. After that I performed the ceremonies of the Toáf-ul-Kudúm, and of running at the Safá and the Marwáh.

(Begum 1870, 53)

While some readers may start to envision Emperor Akbar¹ or another male leader as the author of this hajj narrative, it was written by Nawab Sikander Begum, ruler of Bhopal, about her pilgrimage from 1863–1864 CE. Nawab Sikander Begum's work provides a glimpse at one moment in the long history of women's hajj journeys in Asia.²

As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, historical documents provide ample evidence that numerous Muslim women from both Arabia and Asia travelled through the Indian Ocean for trade, marriage, pilgrimage, and other reasons between the 14th and 19th centuries. Yet, notwithstanding evidence such as Nawab Sikander Begum's translated and published autobiography (Begum 1870) and other published accounts of women's hajj journeys, narratives of women's historical Indian Ocean hajj travel are rarely gathered together and considered by scholars as part of larger patterns of gendered religious movement in the region. Women's roles as travellers within the Indian Ocean have been considerably overlooked in academic works, as has the better documented history of Muslim women travellers in general (see for example Tolmacheva 1993).

I originally became interested in this topic—women's histories of mobility in the Indian Ocean—while studying contemporary women's mosque sites³ in the Maldives (Fewkes 2019). Common historical narratives about the Indian Ocean rarely feature women as travellers in this arena,

representing women as largely stationary in the past trading networks of the Indian Ocean, whether working within their own cultural settings as the producers of local goods, seafarer's wives left at home, traders for port-based family businesses, or investors financing expeditions (see for example Sheriff 2010; Andaya 2001). Even studies of kinship-based religious networks—which, formed by heterosexual marriages, necessarily involve women — support the notion of a 'brotherhood' of male travellers (see for example Bang 2004). Attention solely to these versions of Indian Ocean history supports androcentric understandings of Muslim community in the Indian Ocean that relegate contemporary women's practices to the local and interpret women's sites of religious practice as spaces of solely local significance, contributing to conceptual frameworks of 'the Muslim world' that consign women to the periphery.⁴ I was therefore initially interested in collecting historical accounts of women's travel for hajj to compile an expanded history that theorized women's religious activity in the historical Indian Ocean as central to global religious histories. What I found upon investigation, however, was that there are large gaps in such historical knowledge.

The gaps in knowledge about women's past Indian Ocean hajj journeys—as well as those between what is known and what scholars conventionally consider—are worth investigating more closely. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* Michel-Rolph Trouillot focuses on meaning construction in history, demonstrating how silences in the historical record can be read not as an absence of information, but as a product of processes that include both unconscious and deliberately enforced silences (1995). Trouillot observes:

Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing. Something is always left out while something else is recorded. There is no perfect closure of any event, however one chooses to define the boundaries of that event. Thus, whatever becomes fact does so with its own inborn absences, specific to its productions. In other words, the very mechanism that make any historical recording possible also ensure that historical facts are not created equal. They reflect differential control of the means of historical production at the very first graving that transforms an event into a fact

(Trouillot 1995, 49)

Thus, historical silences are meaningful, multi-faceted, and, as we shall see, reflect not simply one-sided discourses ('history is always written by the winners'), but also the processes by which we recognize 'facts' about the past. Trouillot's discussion of silences therefore helps to focus our understanding of how exclusionary histories are produced and maintained.

In this chapter I focus on the construction of silences in and about narratives of women's historical hajj travel in the Indian Ocean from the 14th to the 19th centuries. Guided by Trouillot's insights I consider how the various dimensions of historical silences, including narrative omissions, distortions, valuations, biases, predilections, and circumscriptions, have contributed to common scholarly misperceptions of the gendered histories of Muslim practice in the Indian Ocean. Bringing together fragments of over 500 years' worth of accounts of women travelling for hajj in the region, I organize evidence to help us better understand not only how histories of women's hajj have been shaped but also—through recognition of the entanglement of historical mobilities and the Indian Ocean spaces for Muslim women—how this narrative process has potentially contorted our conceptualizations of contemporary spaces and practices.

Recognizing women's hajj histories of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is a significant arena for Islamic history. Geographically it is vast—spanning from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of Indonesia and Australia, linking through religious travel and trade these areas with the Middle East and South Asia in the Arabian Sea as well as South-East Asia through the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. While possible to define geographically, for the purposes of this chapter the historical Indian Ocean region is better conceptualized as an arena of human movement and mobility rather than a fixed geographic location.

This mobility-based perspective follows the growing body of works that shift our analytical focus from regional boundaries to instead consider how areas such as South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are interactive and mutually co-constitutive. Through such an approach, colonial South Asia—commonly constructed geographically—may be better understood more broadly in relation to Portuguese maritime movements, or the Gulfstream waterways that served as conduits for commodities from the Americas (see for example Fewkes 2017). Similarly, historian Nile Green has suggested that an Indian Ocean approach to Middle Eastern studies 'leads us to liminal spaces away from the standardizing pressures of political power and cultural hegemony to maritime frontiers that are porous and creole' (Green 2016, 747). A focus on the Indian Ocean as an arena for movement and mobility thus destabilizes hegemonic narratives of nations and centres of political power, calling to attention the roles of fluid cultural identities that cross geographic and temporal boundaries, transcending normative categorization and periodization.

A mobility-centred discussion of the Indian Ocean helps us to contextualize women's hajj journeys in a larger history of movement within the region, as the Indian Ocean commerce involved some of the earliest documented global cosmopolitan networks, linking Asian trading networks to

4th century CE Roman Empire, and bringing together the economic interests of African and Middle Eastern communities with those of the Tang Dynasty in the mid-7th century CE. As I shall address later, these histories of trade and diplomacy provide an important context for understanding hajj journeys in the Indian Ocean.

Conceptualizing the Indian Ocean region as an arena for mobility provides an alternative to frequently androcentric historical models of religious transmission, models that typically focus on the spread of Islam as occurring with the movement of men between regions. Cross-border histories of Indian Ocean travel and trade that omit women's travel narratives have contributed to false contemporary perceptions that women's experiences of being Muslim in the Indian Ocean region in the past were predominantly informed by local ritual traditions and social structures such as class, in opposition to idealized universalist and more cosmopolitan Islamic practices of men. A mobility-centred view of the Indian Ocean past has the potential to be more inclusive, expanding the lens through which Muslim women's religious practices and sites in the region are viewed academically, and illuminating previously obscured historical patterns.

Omissions and 'simple' silences

Hajj accounts from the medieval period to the present frequently omit women altogether (see examples in Tolmacheva 2013; 1998; 1993). These omissions of women and their hajj journeys in history are not neutral gaps in knowledge; as Trouillot observed, historical silences are the product of mechanisms of historical production. The exclusion of women from many medieval Muslim works on hajj and travel reflected particular social attitudes about gender in the cultural contexts of the narratives' production. Maria Tolmacheva, a historian who has produced the most extensive work on this topic to date, argues that mentions of women in the earliest texts were anomalous not because women on hajj were an anomaly, but because of conventional textual expectations. She writes:

(...) it was generally not considered good manners to discuss women-folk or specific ladies, so medieval, and even early modern, Muslim books rarely describe living women unless it is to praise them. Historical chronicles may glorify queens, discuss important marriages made by princesses, or praise pious or learned Muslim women, but some travel books — for example, "The Book of Travels" (Safar-Nama) by the Persian traveller Nasir-i Khusraw (1004–1088) — do not speak of women at all.

(Tolmacheva 2013, para. 1)

Medieval Muslim writers conceptualized 'women as public figures' as a different subject than both women in general and specific individual women in particular, leading to the selective versions of the past presented in the narratives above. These historical omissions have been, in turn, reproduced

in subsequent academic works; therefore, while the original social contexts for mechanisms of historical production may have changed, the original narratives continue to shape knowledge as they are reproduced.

Yet alternative voices exist. The most prominent exception to this rule is found in the writings of one of the most famous Muslim travellers of the time, Ibn Battuta, whose narratives have provided key evidence associated with women's hajj journeys in the 14th-century Indian Ocean. Ibn Battuta was originally from Tangier and embarked upon his travels in 1325 when he was only 20 years old; over the next 29 years he would eventually travel throughout *Dār al-Islām* (the House of Islam or the Islamic world), covering parts of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia along this journey.⁵ As Remke Kruk notes, Ibn Battuta's willingness to mention a variety of women in his life—particularly those close to him and of a certain social status that would have been considered part of the 'private'—was rare among medieval male Muslim writers, who only wrote about women in the public sphere (1995, 370).⁶

Battuta wrote about non-mobile women living in ports, who did not leave their local areas; for example, in the Maldives he claims that when men left the islands, they would divorce their wives as 'women do not leave the country' (Battuta 1976 [1355], 200). He also, however, mentioned occasions of women's mobility in several sections of his writings. One of the most striking was his account of travelling with the Khatun Bayalun of the Mongol court, who travelled in state with her own guards and retinue that included hundreds of women (Gibb 1929, 147–149). Battuta recorded women's presence as travellers in the Indian Ocean (as in Battuta 1976 [1355], 189), and his accounts from other parts of Asia suggest women frequently travelled for hajj, doing so in a manner that created new spaces for women's religious practices, such as the use of a large tent dedicated for women's prayers (Gibb 1929, 148–500).⁷

David Waines argues that Ibn Battuta discusses women in his text as an 'other' through scrutiny of particular details such as their clothing, sexual behaviour, and conduct in society (2015, 158–175). Waines demonstrates that Ibn Battuta was fascinated, and frequently at times exasperated, by the wide variation of women's roles in medieval Muslim societies, and frequently resorted to making sense of this variation by representing women as one-dimensional characters that were alternately beautiful, pious, chaste, loyal, and such, rather than as a nuanced and complex individual. Thus, while Ibn Battuta's narrative allows us to understand that women's hajj travel would have existed in the 14th-century Indian Ocean, his account does not provide any specifics for conceptualizing such pilgrimages and his portrayal of women was limited.

Distortions and the stories that 'matter'

Women's travel may be omitted or simplified in many historical Indian Ocean hajj histories; however, as noted earlier, detailed accounts written by women themselves do exist. Frequently documented women's historical hajj

accounts were primarily of journeys by elite women, for, as Trouillot suggested above, ‘historical facts are not created equal’, and for each omission there exists ‘something else [that] is not recorded’ (Trouillot 1995, 49). Elite women were public figures (part of the public record, as per Tolmacheva’s points earlier), with access to the means of production of history: wealth, socio-political influence, and language skills.

Numerous histories document that in approximately 1575⁸ the royal Gulbadan Begum went on hajj in a pomp-filled journey. Gulbadan Begum—daughter of Babur, half-sister of Mughal Emperor Humayun, and aunt of Emperor Akbar—was born approximately in 1523 in Kabul (Afghanistan) and had moved to Agra (India) as a child. She was reportedly literate in multiple languages, including Persian, and wrote a memoir of her experiences (Gulbadan and Beveridge 1902 [1587]). Her hajj journey was documented by the Mughal court historian Abul Fazl (1551–1602) as well in his *Akbar Nama* (*The History of Akbar*) (Abu and Beveridge 1907). Fazl wrote:

That veil of chastity, etc., Gulbadan Begum the paternal aunt of H.M. the Shahinshah had long ago made a vow to visit the holy places, but on account of the insecurity of the ways, and of the affairs of the world, she had not been able to accomplish her intention. At this time when the delightful country of India was an abode of peace, and the vagabonds’ abode of Gujrat had become inhabited by right-thinking lovers of justice, and the masters of the European islands, who were a stumbling-block in the way of travellers to the Hijaz, had become submissive and obedient. (...) the luminary of longing arose in the orient of the heart of that shining chaste one and broke the repose of her noble mind. As the rays of truth impinged upon the antechamber of the celestial soul (of Akbar), he, in spite of his close union with her, did not prefer his wishes to hers. Moreover all his desire is that every class of mankind may become religious and worship God in accordance with the measure of their faith. He sent with her a large amount of money and goods and gave her permission to depart. In connection with this opportunity a number of inmates of the harem of fortune were also excited by the same longing, and the sovereign poured into the lap of each the money that they wanted and so made the burden of their desires light. (...) this auspicious party fastened the litters on the camels of joy, and a great number of men who had received food and travelling expenses followed in their wake.

(Abu and Beveridge 1907, 205–206)

There are several details in this account of the beginning of Gulbadan Begum’s hajj journey that are of interest here. First, while the journey is frequently referred to as Gulbadan Begum’s hajj in contemporary accounts, it was in fact undertaken by a group of elite women—referred to here as ‘a number of inmates in the harem’ and named individually later in the

passage—most of whom were older. The journey was conducted with a great deal of pomp and circumstance due to the women's status and was supported financially by Emperor Akbar. While the journey is frequently discussed in relation to Emperor Akbar's interests and regional power, Ruby Lal points out that the motivation for the hajj journey was Gulbadan Begum's religious intention and by her own wish (see Lal 2005; 2004); as such the royal women's hajj 'maps the desires and agency of imperial women', and suggests forms of feminine authority as a journey 'largely initiated and planned by the elder women' (Lal 2004, 611). Curiously, while Fazl claims the time period was one of peace, allowing for travel, he also later notes that Gulbadan Begum's family was concerned about Portuguese aggression during the time period and in advance of her journey used their elite status to negotiate a safe passage with Portuguese officials in Surat (Kooria 2017, 23).

Thus while privileged by her elite status, Gulbadan Begum's hajj experience was part of a larger historical trend; in the 16th century many hajj pilgrims travelling in the Indian Ocean faced Portuguese control and persecution (Subrahmanyam 1997; 1988; Pearson 1994).⁹ The Portuguese required merchant ships in the region to have a *cartaz* (pass) in order to sail unmolested; since trade and pilgrimage were intertwined, ships of pilgrims without the *cartaz* were targeted and attacked as if they were hostile vessels. Accounts of Portuguese hostilities against vessels carrying hajj travellers in the Indian Ocean contain several mentions of female passengers among those engaged in hajj travel. However, these non-elite women were discussed in groups, often in rather general terms rather than as individuals with personal accounts. For example, an anonymous Dutch author in the 16th century who recorded details about Vasco da Gama's seizure of a ship called the *Meri* that was travelling to Mecca laden with pilgrims, wrote:

(...) we took a Meccha ship, on board of which were 380 men and many women and children, and we took from it at least 12,000 ducats and at least 10,000 more worth of goods; and we burnt the ship and all the people on board with gun powder, on the first day of October.

(as quoted in Kooria 2017, 24)

The presence of women and children, and their subsequent deaths upon the attack of the *Meri*, were clearly not surprising or of great significance to the author of the account, suggesting that women's hajj travel was viewed as fairly commonplace.

Gulbadan Begum was not the only elite woman whose Indian Ocean arena hajj was chronicled by writers who thought the journey noteworthy. A 17th-century account by Jean de Thévenot, a French traveller, makes mention of another royal Indian woman travelling for hajj. Thévenot writes of the escapades of a Dutch pirate, Lambert Hugo, explaining:

(...) that which offended most, was the story of the Ship that carried the Goods of the Queen of Visiapour [Bijapur, JF], and was stranded about an Isle lying in Degrees forty Minutes Latitude, at the entry of the Red-Sea. Socotra [an island off the coast of Yemen in the northern Indian Ocean, JF]. That Queen who was going to Mecha, was out of the reach of the Corsar [sic], for luckily she had gone on Board of Dutch Ship but being satisfied with a Ship belonging to herself for transporting her Equipage; Hugo met that Ship, and pursued her so briskly, that the Master was forced to run aground. [He found on board, JF] (...) the Queen's Treasure was, (for she had carried with her a great deal of Money, Jewels, and rich Stuffs to make Presents at Mecha, Medina Grand Cheik, and other places) resolving to be very magnificent...

(Sen, Thévenot, and Gemelli Careri 1949, 29–30)

Notes in Surendranath Sen's edited publication of Thévenot's travelogue clarify that this passage refers to the 1661 journey of Khadija Sultana, who was also known as Badi Sahiba (Sen, Thévenot and Gemelli Careri 1949, 295). Khadija Sultana (1600–1665) was a well-known figure as the daughter of Muhammad Qutub Shah, sultan of Golkonda, and wife (at the time of travel, widow) of Muhammad Adil Shah, ruler of Bijapur from 1627–1656 (Kruijtzter 2014). She was also an important political figure by her own rights, having acted as regent during the childhood of her husband's successor, Ali Adil Shah II. Khadija Sultana is credited with shaping the course of Bijapur's uncertain succession, and keeping the sultanate functioning after the death of her husband in 1656 (Kruijtzter 2014, para. 2).

While another instance of the recording of an elite women's hajj in the 17th-century Indian Ocean, this account of Khadija Sultana's journey also documents that women of many different statuses undertook the journey; in addition to 50–60 ladies-in-waiting, who would have been women of high status, it is clear that she was also accompanied by hundreds of serving women (Kruijtzter 2014, para. 6). Whether or not the serving women would have performed hajj while travelling with Khadija Sultana is unclear as their role is not central to the historical accounts that mention them. Thévenot was more interested in the exceptional circumstances of Khadija Sultana's hajj: the story that 'mattered' in this account was the 'Money, Jewels, and rich Stuffs' as indicators of Khadija Sultana's wealth and resolve to be 'very magnificent'. Beyond a concern for appearances, we may also consider these as indicators of Khadija Sultana's travel experience that shaped her understanding of what to bring; she had reportedly previously travelled extensively for religious purposes, going on hajj a total of four times (Sen, Thévenot and Gemelli 1949, 295; Manucci 1907, 300) as well visiting holy sites in Persia and Iraq (Kruijtzter 2014, para. 7). Thévenot also notes that the Sultana travelled on a Dutch ship; reportedly her conveyance on a Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC) ship for this

hajj was not common in the time period and functioned as a sign of her political significance and good relations with the VOC (Kruijtzer 2014, para. 4–5).

From the 1860s we have the hajj account of yet another elite woman, Nawab Sikander Begum, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Nawab Sikander Begum travelled with hundreds of women, whose own roles and experiences are again not detailed, via steamship. She wrote about her own hajj journey in her book *A Pilgrimage to Mecca*, which was originally written in Urdu and later translated into English (Begum 1870). As demonstrated in the quote in the beginning of this chapter Nawab Sikander Begum wrote directly of her experiences, although she included little about the personal religious significance of her pilgrimage, focusing mostly on descriptions of her activities, events, and conversations during the journey. Nawab Sikander Begum's hajj is particularly well documented as it was also recorded by her daughter Shahjehan Begum in her book *Taj ul-Iqbal Tarikh Bhopal (A History of Bhopal)*, which offers a summary of Nawab Sikander Begum's account (Shah 1876).

There are few narrative sources on non-elite women who undertook historical hajj journeys through the Indian Ocean. Select late 19th-century European memoirs/travelogues briefly mention women on hajj—for example Dutch scholar and colonial advisor Snouck Hurgronje's book on Mecca includes a picture of an anonymous female pilgrim from Banten, Java (Ramadhini 2016, 4–5). Fictional narratives from the time period based on actual events, such as Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, also provide a glimpse of ideas and attitudes about more varied 19th-century women's Indian hajj journeys (see Tagliacozzo 2013, 117–118). In his book Conrad wrote about the pilgrim passengers of the Patna:

They streamed aboard over three gangways, they streamed in urged by faith and the hope of paradise, they streamed in with a continuous tramp and shuffle of bare feet, without a word, a murmur, or a look back. (...) like water flowing into crevices and crannies, like water rising silently even with the rim. Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there. (...) They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags — the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief. “Look at dese cattle”, said the German skipper to his new chief mate. An Arab, the leader of this pious voyage, came last. He walked slowly aboard, handsome and grave in his white gown and large turban.

(Conrad 1920, 14–15)

Women in Conrad's account were not elite individuals, but part of the masses of steerage class pilgrims from all over Asia who flocked to Mecca each year; he wrote of them as a wordless press of bodies compared to a force of nature, associated with dust, sweat, grime, and soiled clothing. As demonstrated in the above passage, non-elite Asian pilgrims were referenced as non-human animals and sharply contrasted with elite individuals in such European narratives.

Thus we can see how a selective approach to 'stories' that matter may have distorted our understandings of historical women's hajj experiences in the Indian Ocean arena. For several centuries elite women were written about in circumscribed ways that overlooked the full ramifications of their agency, distorting readers' understanding of these women's roles as public figures. Only some women's experiences were recorded in detailed historical terms; hierarchies of privilege meant that not only servants and common people were obscured but, as shown in Fazl's account of Gulbadan's journey, even 'less' elite women's stories were scarcely considered. While histories of elite women's experiences may hint at, and intersect with, the experiences of non-elites they do not offer the same depth of detail. Limited attention was paid to non-elite women whose presence was most clearly chronicled as the 'masses', and framed within European and Mughal discourses about gender, empire, agency, and power. These distortions of women's hajj narratives have limited the scope of these histories, and stunted scholarly concepts of the range of possibilities for women's mobilities in the historical Indian Ocean arena.

Narrative patterns and the stories that 'catch'

Although wealth, language, socio-political influence, colonial power structures, and other forms of privilege and domination have clearly meant that certain narratives were more likely to be published and shared than others, silences in narratives are not simply due to the direct forms of power. As Trouillot asks, 'If history is merely the story told by those who won, how did they win in the first place? And why don't all winners tell the same story?' (Trouillot 1995, 6). Trouillot proposes we consider that while there is an uneven production of historical narratives based on power imbalances, the unequal access to the 'means of such production' (1995, xix) includes not only material apparatuses (such as those that would make a history 'matter'), but also conceptual tools such as the rules that govern the production and valuation of certain types of narratives over others. The conceptual tools of historical production allow select writers to craft particular narratives in such a way as to 'catch' the attention of readers—by 'catch' I mean to say that the narrative is effective in being appealing, believable, and memorable. The point that 'catches' in a narrative may be thought of as similar to Roland Barthes's *punctum* (1981), although following Trouillot's points about uneven access to the conceptual means of

production I consider it as less of an accident; the term 'catch' is oriented towards the provenance, rather than moment (as in *punctum*), of interest to focus critical scrutiny on the source of the aesthetic arrest.

Conceptual means of production can take many forms. For example, Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (2008, 4–5), in the introduction of Nawab Sikander Begum's hajj travelogue, suggests that contemporary inattention to medieval South Asian women's hajj is due not to a lack of factual information, but rather the absence of reflexive first-person narratives from South Asians performing hajj prior to the late 19th century. She cites Barbara Metcalf's argument that South Asian accounts of hajj as a spiritual journey are a relatively 'modern phenomenon' (Metcalf 1990, 86), to contextualize older accounts, such as Gulbadan Begum's scant discussion of her pilgrimage as a religious experience in the 17th century and frame a reader's understandings of Nawab Sikander Begum's later hajj account as well (Lambert-Hurley 2008, 5–6). Lambert-Hurley notes that Nawab Sikander Begum's account lacks any retrospective of the journey as a whole, and points to passages such as the one quoted in the beginning of this article as an example of the unsentimental writing style (Lambert-Hurley 2008, 9–10).

Yet contemporary readers—historians and non-historians alike—often engage with narratives based on contemporary conceptualizations. Consider, then, the value of the aforementioned women's historical narratives for readers seeking narratives that follow contemporary notions of hajj that often focus on it as a concept or process of spiritual growth. For example, Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori write that hajj,

like all travel (...) is principally a journey of the mind. These obviously constitute physical movement from one place to another, but, owing to the power of the religious imagination, they involve spiritual or temporal movement at the same time.

(2013, xii)

Eickelman and Piscatori's comprehensive explanation of hajj and other Muslim journeys here is powerful and useful for studying the wide range of multiplex Muslim religious travel experiences. It is less applicable, however, to historical hajj accounts that do not reflect personal spiritual journeys and/or offer readers little to consider in the way of the religious imagination. This concept of hajj—and the accompanying expectations for narrative styles in such a genre—mean that many of the earlier accounts of women's hajj, texts written by both Muslim women and men, may be overlooked as such because they do not 'count' as spiritual narratives.¹⁰

Another form of historical narrative that is frequently reproduced is that which contains outlandish points to engage the readers' interests. One such detail is found in accounts of Khadija Sultana's 17th-century hajj journey in the work of an Italian traveller, Niccolao Manucci (1638–1717). According to his account Khadija Sultana was reportedly initially refused entry to

Mecca as a widow; Manucci claims that she declined to engage in a symbolic marriage with any of the many men and boys available at the gates for this purpose, saying they were all beneath her status, and instead agreed to marry symbolically to a cock that she carried under her arm as she entered (Manucci 1907 [1708], 300). William Irving, the 18th-century translator and editor of Manucci's account, observes in a footnote that this 'story must have been invented' as it is not based on any actual requirements for married state when entering Mecca,¹¹ suggesting that it most probably had grown out of the requirement that women on hajj be accompanied by their *mahram* (male kin who can accompany a woman in travel) (Manucci 1907 [1708], 300). While the sensationalistic nature of the story is immediately apparent, there are two significant facets of this anecdote for those interested in studying women's historical hajj: first, that women's hajj journeys were obviously the subject of some interest and speculation for European writers of multiple time periods, and second, the suggestion of a system in place in Mecca during the time period for women who arrived without *mahram*.¹² The latter circumstances must have been commonplace if many women were going on hajj during the time period; even if the *mahram* requirement were well-known throughout Asia, many *mahram* may have died during the arduous journey to Mecca.

The material and conceptual means of production of historical narratives overlap at times, as forms of the voices that 'matter' translate into stories that 'catch'. For example, while Gulbadan Begum's elite status provided the material means of production that would favour dissemination of the details of her hajj experience, public interest in elite Mughal women and the spaces associated with them—particularly the harem (women's domestic spaces in Muslim Mughal households) as a focal point of countless Orientalist studies—may confer conceptual advantages as well. This advantage may, in turn, give rise to valuable new understandings; Ruby Lal points out that Gulbadan Begum's writings about the hierarchical and complex social structures of the Mughal harem demonstrate a rarely shown view of harem life, which was most often written about by European authors of the time period as an exotic and sexualized setting (Lal 2004, 592–593). Gulbadan Begum's perspective on the harem therefore helps us to reconsider how women's agency is discussed in other texts of the time period.

The preferential selection of particular types of narratives in history, by both readers and scholars, has therefore contributed to further imbalances that may lead to silences in historical records. Recognizing that narrative forms are specific to particular time periods helps us to understand selective contemporary public and scholarly discourses about Indian Ocean hajj mobility. As demonstrated in the anecdote of Khadija Sultana's entrance to Mecca, these stories that catch readers' attention have the potential to replicate misinformation and further obscure comprehension of women's actual hajj experiences. However, this is not simply a line of inquiry for deconstruction; understanding the role of historically contextualized discourses

and narrative advantages in constructing women's histories of hajj in the Indian Ocean arena can prompt a new examination of the contexts surrounding the narratives that yields other types of insights on women's Indian Ocean hajj mobilities.

Expanding the boundaries of hajj narratives

An expansive conceptualization of pilgrimage can also help us to discern an additional feature of history contributing to the silences associated with these historical narratives. As Trouillot stated earlier, there is 'no perfect closure' to a historical event (Trouillot 1995, 49); hajj narrative accounts are by nature incomplete as they do not encapsulate the pilgrimage experience as the beginning and end of the journey, and a traveller's perspectives are not bookends for a hajj experience. Understanding hajj experiences as not just a particular type of journey but as a part of Indian Ocean mobility that as a whole can allow us to see how other forms of mobility—including trade, the movement of refugees, and adventure—in the region contribute to understanding women's hajj experiences as well.

Just as Annelies Moors has called into question Orientalist assumptions that Islamic law was 'monolithic, static, and rigidly patriarchal' through consideration of more varied documents—fatwas, court records, and property receipts—than classic law texts (1998, 26), so too can we expand our understandings of women's hajj mobilities in the Indian Ocean through an examination of a broader variety of documents. Personal accounts, ships' lists, public health records, village ledgers, contemporary sites linked to the past, and other sources all continue to stand testament to a range of women's historical hajj experiences and shape Muslim practice today. These sources offer insights into the hajj journeys of non-elite women in the Indian Ocean; for example, a plethora of late 19th-century European colonial administrative documents clearly demonstrate that Nawab Sikander Begum and her women were decidedly not the only women travelling for pilgrimage in the Indian Ocean during this time, evincing the regional movement of women from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

This is apparent in official records of late 19th-century complaints about the conditions and management of hajj landing and quarantine stations off the coast of Yemen in the southern end of the Red Sea—filed by pilgrims with the British consulate in Jidda in 1882 and mentioned in government conferences again in 1894—that refer to patterns of mistreatment of women among the pilgrims from India, demonstrating that ordinary women from India were going on hajj in significant numbers during this time period (Low 2007, 62 and 107). Supporting these are public health guidelines published by the British colonial administration in Singapore, which outlined how medical inspections for women should be carried out on pilgrimage ships and stipulated that only female health officers could carry out such inspections (Tagliacozzo 2013, 144 and 154).

Accounts of the well-known case of the abandonment of the *SS Jeddah*, a ship that had come from Singapore carrying pilgrims from Southeast Asia in 1880 that was the basis for the fictional narrative in *Lord Jim*, indicate that it involved 992 pilgrim passengers, with 778 men, 147 women, and 67 children (Gilsenan 2006, 3). In the aftermath of the *SS Jeddah* case there was a flurry of news in European newspapers about Indian Ocean pilgrimage ships, providing further documentation of a varied classes of women on these ships, such as a letter to the editor about a hajj-bound ship in 1880, in which the writer mentions that a baby was born on board a pilgrimage ship and ‘the mother was a deck passenger’ (Tagliacozzo 2013, 120). Shipping companies noted the names of many female passengers, demonstrating that late 19th-century hajj ships such as those operated by the British Thomas Cook company accommodated ‘respectable’ women *Hajjas* in private rooms, although they were accused of overbooking these non-elite but more wealthy female passengers (Low 2017, 67). Dutch colonial records documented both sides of the journey, making individuals’ mobility more easily apparent. We can see from the Dutch consulate’s entry records in Jeddah that in 1898 there were 753 female pilgrims that arrived from the Dutch East Indies (Ramadhini 2016, 4); at the same time colonial village administrators in Indonesia were recording the names of *Hajjis* (men who have completed the hajj) and *Hajjas* (women who have completed the hajj) who had successfully returned from their pilgrimages (Tagliacozzo 2013, 181–182).

A focus on mobility within the Indian Ocean helps us to understand women’s hajj journeys as part of broader histories of movement within the region, for, as a number of scholars have pointed out, commerce and piety were historically not separate endeavours in this arena (see for example Tagliacozzo 2013; Pearson 1996; Subrahmanyam 1988). While non-elite women are rarely mentioned in early hajj histories, studies of trade and commerce in the region suggest women were frequent travellers in pre-20th-century Indian Ocean accounts.

According to Michael Pearson, a majority of early modern period European ships travelling in the Indian Ocean did not carry women on board, with only a few notable exceptions (Pearson 2009, 695). Yet Asian ships—both Mughal and Chinese, both usually staffed with Muslim crews—frequently did carry women. Women travelled on these ships as individual passengers who paid for their own passage, as the wives of elite passengers, as servants, slaves, or as family members of the crew, whose households were on board (Pearson 2009, 696–697). Asian Muslim ships sailing in the Indian Ocean from the 16th century to the beginning of the 19th century were reportedly more stable social units than European ships of a similar size, fostering a generally egalitarian community where it was safer for women to be actively involved in ship life, unlike in European ships where rigid class hierarchies were used to both restrain and reproduce violence among crew members (Pearson 2009). It was on such ships that Muslim

women from both Arabia and Asia may have travelled through the Indian Ocean for trade, family reasons, and as pilgrims whose movements were tied to religious geographies.

Tolmacheva suggests that many of Pearson's points hold true for earlier histories, noting that a 10th-century sailor's accounts mention the presence of women passengers—some slaves and free women of status—and sailors' wives on Indian Ocean ships (Tolmacheva 2013, para. 15). Tolmacheva writes that in Muslim travel networks, including the Indian Ocean routes:

[women] were always a minority among the travellers, and not all travel was voluntary. Nevertheless, women's presence in caravans, hotels or on shipboard was not infrequent, and treated by others as unexceptional. This attitude is implicit in the narratives of medieval and early modern observers, including legal authorities on social norm.

(Tolmacheva 2013, para. 5)

As demonstrated earlier, Battuta's travel accounts do not address women's hajj mobility directly, but do contribute to this notion that women were regular participants in Indian Ocean trade and travel during the 14th century too. In a description of a Chinese ship, Battuta wrote:

Four decks are constructed on the ship which contains apartments, cabins and rooms for the use of the merchants; and a cabin in the ship contains apartments and lavatories and has a door which can be bolted by the occupant who may take with him his female slaves and women.¹³ Sometimes it so happens that a passenger is in the aforesaid residential quarters and nobody on board knows of him until he is met on arriving at a town. The sailors let their children live in these quarters and they sow greenery, vegetables and ginger in wooden tubs.

(Battuta 1976 [1355], 189)

Battuta's observations here—including noting the size of ships, the presence of women among paying customers, the availability of private quarters for women on board, and the family life of sailors aboard these ships—suggests that many of Pearson's points about the pervasive presence of women on ships in the Indian Ocean has a history that extends past the early modern period. Attention to the varied forms of recording female mobility in the Indian Ocean can also contribute to studies of late 18th and early 19th centuries through studies as different as those of refugee movements (Bradley 2014) and the religious architectural sites that commemorate Southeast Asian women who completed hajj (Skinner 1972, 51).

Our recognition of the incomplete nature of historical narratives and how hajj histories extend beyond the boundaries of written accounts necessitates an awareness of alternative sources on other forms of women's mobility, particularly through trade, in the region. The inclusion of diverse forms of

information challenges limited notions of women's historical journeys, as the expansion of hajj studies beyond the boundaries of the hajj narratives themselves allows for insight into a more varied—in terms of class and gender—environments of movement.

In conclusion: entanglement of historical mobilities and contemporary Indian Ocean spaces

As we have seen, well-known written accounts of hajj in the Indian Ocean are incomplete, sometimes omitting women altogether, while other times only focusing on the specific experiences of a few elite women and/or stories that are considered oddities or extraordinary. Individually these accounts do little to normalize the notion of historical women's mobility in the region, and expand understandings of the relationship between mobility, religion, and gender in the pre-20th-century Indian Ocean. Sources that provide additional details about women's hajj journeys in the region—ships' designs, illustrations/photographs from Mecca, broader regional histories, architecture, and colonial records—suggest that women were far more commonplace participants in Indian Ocean pilgrimage networks than previously understood. Through critical analysis of these historical accounts, with attention to silences in the narratives and inclusion of evidence from the other sources, I hope to demonstrate the potential for a more holistic and inclusive history of Indian Ocean mobility, allowing us to understand that many Muslim women from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds engaged in religious pilgrimage in the Indian Ocean between the 14th and 19th centuries. Making the arduous journey aboard vessels from throughout Asia these women, like their male counterparts, faced a variety of challenges specific to the time periods, only some of which were linked to their gender identities; class, colonial power structures, and the material constraints of ocean voyages shaped the travel experiences of both women and men in this system.

The gaps between women's actual pilgrimage experiences in the past and limited historical facts about these practices not only impact our theories of the past, but influence interpretations of the present as well. To return to my initial interest in the subject (the relationship between historical women's mobilities and contemporary religious sites in the Indian Ocean), the long history of Muslim women's mobility in the Indian Ocean draws into question androcentric models of the movement of Muslims, and hence Islam, in the region. Although contemporary women's mosques and related prayer spaces are found in many areas historically linked by Indian Ocean trade—including China, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, the Lakshadweep Islands, the Kenyan coast, Yemen, and other areas—most scholars have assumed that histories of male travel in the region mean that women's spaces in each of these places are unique, culturally specific, and/or modern phenomenon that are peripheral to the history of the 'Muslim world' (Fewkes 2019, 180–183). This critical review of histories of women's mobility in the

region suggests potential new ways of considering women's mosques spaces in relation to the historical Indian Ocean; when the locations of contemporary women's prayer mirror the sites associated with the historical religious movement of Muslim women, we should ask how women's mosques might be examined as Islamic sites potentially linked to trans-regional religious mobility rather than marginalized as locally oriented places. Exploring the sources of silences associated with women's hajj journeys and types of narratives that have shaped women's representation in these historical discussions thus renders thinkable a reinterpretation of contemporary religious sites in the historical Indian Ocean that suggests how dominant narrative voices about religious practices may continue to shape notions of contemporary local communities.

Notes

- 1 Emperor Akbar, a Mughal ruler (1556 to 1605 CE), was discouraged by his advisors from making the dangerous voyage and never went on hajj (see Lambert-Hurley 2006). He instead sent his aunt Gulbadan Begum, as discussed later in this chapter.
- 2 For examples see Behrens-Abouseif 1997; Brack 2011; Johnson 2000; Lewis 2004; Tolmacheva 1998.
- 3 Mosques in the Maldives that were, until recently, separate buildings run by women as sites for women's Islamic worship and study.
- 4 For further examples see Beverly Mack's work that critiques how West African women are represented as being 'on the periphery of the periphery of the Muslim world' (Mack 2000, 91).
- 5 See Dunn (2004) for more biographical details about Ibn Battuta's life.
- 6 While the public/private dichotomy is commonly thought of as a spatial division, Battuta's works demonstrate the social dimensions of the public/private, through which some women were not considered a part of the private sphere, including slave women on one end of gendered social hierarchies and queens on the other.
- 7 This is discussed in more detail in Tolmacheva (2013).
- 8 Some historians date Gulbadan Begum's hajj as early as 1574, while others as late as 1578.
- 9 Pearson has suggested the Portuguese had secular—political and economic—reasons for their hostilities against hajj ships (1994); however Kooria argues that Portuguese aggression was to at least some extent religiously motivated (2017).
- 10 This is not an argument for limiting our understanding of hajj to physical travel; this 'journey of the mind' is an inclusive conceptualization that embraces and celebrates meaningful aspects of Muslim pilgrimage. This is simply a descriptive deconstruction, prescriptive at the most only as a reminder to also consider historical accounts with more literal readings of hajj.
- 11 Irving also notes that he confirmed this point with the British consul stationed at Jeddah (Manucci 1907, 300).
- 12 Tolmacheva has noted an Ottoman era custom in which women who traveled on hajj alone might marry a guide in Mecca temporarily to receive guidance during religious observances; the marriages were symbolic only and, like all activity while on hajj, excluded sexual relations (Tolmacheva 1998, 173). Such a custom might also have formed the misconceptions expressed in this anecdote about Khadija Sultana.

- 13 While in this translation Husain translated the term as ‘women’, Gibb translated this word as ‘wives’ (Gibb 1929, 235); the contrast highlights the role of class in shaping narrations of women’s mobility.

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