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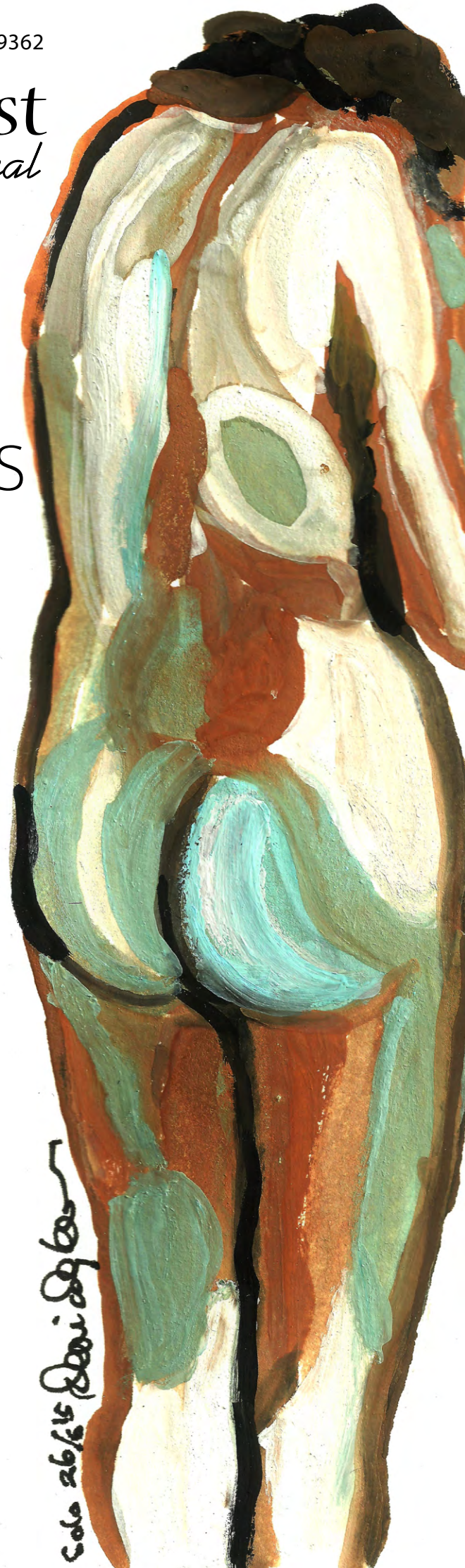
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“Gold and Silver, Branded Horses, and Well-Tilled Land”: Gender and Hadrami Migration

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Abstract

This essay examines the consequences of migration by looking at the relationship between migration and social transformation. In particular, it focuses on the construction of gender and how migration disrupted traditional gender relations among Hadramis from Hadramawt valley of Southern Yemen in Indonesia. It utilizes a fictional work criticizing migration as a point of departure in looking at the effects of migration on the traditional order. The text is important, as it is a critique of migration written from the perspective of the *Thariqah 'Alawiyyah* (the dominant Sufi order in Hadramaut), thereby, highlighting the disruption caused by migration to traditional structures. The essay is divided into four parts. The first deals with the background information concerning migration and the *Thariqah* in order to contextualize the text. The second part looks at how migration disrupts the notion of masculinity and femininity. The third part focuses on the concept of family and its reconfiguration due to migration. And the final concluding section places the Hadrami migration experience into a gendered theoretical framework to illustrate that gender is historically and culturally dependent.

Keywords: Gender, Hadrami, masculinity, femininity, migration.

Introduction

‘I want to go where there are hoards of gold and silver, branded horses and well-tilled land’, answered the young Hadrami when the people of the port questioned his destination. This, however, was only the beginning of the journey as the young Hadrami had just arrived on the coastal rim of his homeland and was yet to board the ship bound for India. As the Hadrami arrived in India, he was struck by the dazzling beauty of an Indian maiden, fair and enchanting, alluring yet elegant. He inquired as to her name - it was *Dunya*, a name that symbolizes the tangible reality of the world. To many, *Dunya* means the world, wealth, fame, glory as well as honour. It means ‘hoards of gold and silver,

branded horses and well-tilled land’.¹ But to the young Hadrami, *Dunya* meant the splendor of the world as manifested in the beauty of a stunning maiden. His journey began as a pursuit of the world and ended as a pursuit of a woman who demanded five priceless dowries: sense of shame, manliness, mind, ancestry and religion.

The journey of the young Hadrami migrant is

1 This phrase originates from the Holy Qur’an, III: 14. The complete verse reads: ‘Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and for excellence) and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world’s life; but in nearness to God is the best of the goals (to return to)’. See: *The Holy Qur’an*, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (n.p.: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1946), p. 125.

a fictional story entitled *Maqama Dham al-Dunya*, by a learned Hadrami scholar Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Mihdar (d. 1887).² This work was a critique of migration which was popular among Hadramis. Male Hadramis, from all walks of life migrated to various locations around the Indian Ocean. Places such as East Africa, West India, Burma and Malay-Indonesian archipelago became the *mahjar* (hostland) for Hadrami migrants.³ The Hadramis formed migrant ethnic minority groups in host countries, 'but [maintained] strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin'.⁴ In addition, as translocal communities, Hadramis often held multiple identities linking them to both their place of origin and their place of residence.⁵

Migration not only affected Hadrami individuals who traveled outside of their homeland, but it also transformed the homeland. Modernity in Hadramaut has been claimed to be introduced by returning migrants who acted as proponents of Western-style capitalism due to their exposure to what Curtin described as 'fringe Westernization' in the Indian Ocean.⁶

A returning migrant had usually adapted to modernity, which was alien to the Hadramis at the turn of the 19th century. A Hadrami migrant fits the description of a homecomer, who similar to a visitor from abroad, 'becomes a menace to the identity of his group'.⁷

Transformation brought home by returning migrants posed a challenge to the traditional structures in Hadramaut. Particular emphasis should be placed on the *Thariqah 'Alawiyyah*, the prevalent sufi order in Hadramaut that has been responsible for the ordering of individual and community life. The doctrines of the *Thariqah* were the established moral codes and protocols of decency. Change brought about by migration, therefore, challenged the hegemony of the *Thariqah* as different sources of values gained currency.

This essay examines the relationship between migration and social transformation. In particular, it focuses on the construction of gender and how migration disrupted traditional gender relations among Hadramis. This is an area of research which has not been adequately studied to date. The work of al-Mihdar is used as a point of departure in looking at the effects of migration on the traditional order. The text is important, as it is a critique of migration written from the *Thariqah 'Alawiyyah* perspective, thereby, highlighting the disruption caused by migration to traditional structures. The essay is divided into four parts. The first deals with the background information concerning migration and the *Thariqah* in order to contextualize the text. The second part looks at how migration disrupts the notion of masculinity and femininity. The third part focuses on the issue of family and its changes due to migration. And the final concluding section places the Hadrami migration experience into a gendered theoretical framework to illustrate that gender is historically and culturally dependent.

2 I do not have access to the original work for it is not available in Australia. This essay is based on Engseong Ho's description of the text. See: Engseong Ho, "Hadramis Abroad in Hadramaut," in *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*, eds Ulrike Freitag & William G. Clarence-Smith (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 131-46. I have appended Ho's reading of the text to this essay, see Appendix A.

3 For Hadrami migrants in India, see: Omar Khalidi, "The Hadrami Role in the Politics and Society of Colonial India, 1750s to 1950s," in *Hadrami Traders*, pp. 67-81; Stephen Dale, "The Hadrami Diaspora in South-Western India: The Role of the Sayyids of the Malabar Coast," in *Hadrami Traders*, pp. 175-184. For the role of the Hadramis in East Africa, see: Francoise Le Guennec-Coppens, "Social and Cultural Integration: A Case Study of the East African Hadramis," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 59, 2 (1989) pp. 185-95.

4 This is a definition of diaspora, proposed by G. Sheffer, see: Gabriel Sheffer, "A New Field of Study: Modern Diaspora in International Politics," in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, ed. G. Sheffer (London, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986) p. 3.

5 On the characteristics of a marginal man, see: Robert E. Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," *The American Journal of Sociology* 33, 6 (1928): pp. 881-93.

6 Philip D. Curtin, *Cross Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 251. A significant body of literature has been written on the impact of Indian Ocean migration on Hadramaut, see for example: Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of*

Empire: Hadramaut, Emigration and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002); Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadramaut: Reforming the Homeland* (Leiden, Brill, 2003).

7 Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel 1550-1880* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), p.11.

Migration & Thariqah ‘Alawiyyah

The causes of Hadrami migration have been discussed by Ulrike Freitag. She identified the ‘push factor’ as the socio-economic condition of Hadramaut in the late 18th and 19th centuries - a condition full of internal conflict as well as strains on ecological systems susceptible to droughts and locusts.⁸ Freitag also argued that increased global economic opportunities became the ‘pull factor’ of migration.⁹ The growth of global capitalism brought new opportunities to frontiers including the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 played an important part in increasing mobility with more frequent availability of steam ships in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ The result was the widening and deepening of the world economy, which paved the way for the agricultural boom that ended with the 1930s depression.¹¹ Many Hadramis were allured to participate in the mercantile project. For this reason, they migrated to locations along the Indian Ocean in order to partake in the expanding capitalist marketplace.

Migration involves relations of power.¹² That is, relationships between places are structured fundamentally by global capital, although there is room inside this framework for movement. The Hadramis went to places such as the Malay-Indonesian archipelago because of the substantial capital there. Hadrami migrants accumulated wealth in the *mahjar* and sent remittance back to the homeland. The impact of this was immense, as money began to flow into the economically

poor valley.¹³ This phenomenon was described by van der Meulen, who visited a Hadrami town, Hureidha in the 1930s saying, ‘The bounties of Java gave Hureidha her chance, lifted her out of poverty and decay to the rank of a prosperous oasis’.¹⁴ It is clear, therefore, that the relationships enshrined in migration between Hadramaut and ‘the world’ was based on inequality. It located Hadramis as weak and poor while ‘the world’ was strong, rich and full of opportunities. This was portrayed by al-Mihdar as a relationship between a poor man and a rich woman, in which the former chased the latter.¹⁵

Thariqah Alawiyyah was founded in Hadramaut during the 13th century by *al-Faqih al-Muqaddam*.¹⁶ The principles of the *Thariqah* focus on following the *Qur’an*, the Prophetic traditions and the teachings of pious predecessors, while maintaining *zuhd* (ascetic and anti-materialistic lifestyle).¹⁷ The lexicographer Ali al-Jurjani defined *zuhd* as ‘the hatred of the world and turning away from it’ (*bughdz ad-dunya wa al-l’radz ‘anha*) and ‘the act of quitting the comfort of the world in order to acquire the comfort of the Hereafter’ (*taraka rahati ad-dunya toliban lirahati al-akhirah*).¹⁸ One luminary of the *Thariqah*, Abdullah bin Alawi al-Haddad claimed the world as the home of diseases, problems and distress.¹⁹ The notion of *zuhd* has been a fundamental concept in the tenets of the *Thariqah*. It is from the *Thariqah*’s notion of *zuhd* that we may appreciate its opposition to migration, which was seen as a capitalistic endeavour.

The concept of *zuhd* was also pivotal in the

8 Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, p. 48.

9 Ibid. p. 48. See also: William G. Clarence-Smith, “Hadrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay World, c. 1750 to c. 1940,” *Hadrami Traders*, pp. 297-314; William G. Clarence-Smith, “The Economic Role of the Arab Community in Maluku, 1816 to 1940,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 26 (1998): pp. 32-49.

10 Engseng Ho, “Hadramis Abroad”, p. 139; Ulrike Freitag, “Hadramaut: a Religious Center for the Indian Ocean in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries?,” *Studia Islamica*, (1999): p. 182. Also see: Appendix B.

11 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 2004): pp. 206-7.

12 Katy Gardner & Filippo Osella, “Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia: An Introduction,” in *Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia*, eds Katy Gardner & Filippo Osella (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), p. xlii.

13 Christian Lekon, “The Impact of Remittances on the Economy of Hadramaut, 1914-1967,” *Hadrami Traders*, pp. 264-80.

14 D. van der Meulen, *Aden to Hadramaut: A Journey in South Arabia* (London: John Murray, 1947), p. 156.

15 See Appendix A.

16 Syed Hasan bin Muhammad al-Attas, *Umar bin Abdurahman: Kisah dan Sejarah Pengasas Ratib al-Attas*, Vol. I (Singapore: Masjid Ba’alawi, 2001), p. 66.

17 Alawi bin Tahir al-Haddad, *Uqud al-Almas* (Singapore: Kerjaya Mahdudah, 1991), p. 54.

18 Ali bin Muhammad al-Jurjani, *Kitab at-Ta’rifat* (Cairo: Dar al-Irshad, 1991), p. 130.

19 Abdullah bin ‘Alawi al-Haddad, *Ad-Durr al-Mandzum li Dzawiy al-‘Uqul wa al-Fuhum* (Beirut: Dar al-Hawi, A.H. 1312), p. 453.

construction of femininity and masculinity as idealized by the order. Women were expected to conform to the *aurat* (modesty), whether in dress, customs, habits, speech, actions as well as adornments. The femininity of a woman who did not abide by the rules of modesty would be questioned. In 1931, a scholar wrote to the Sultan advising some revisions of prohibited customs. He suggested that silk be allowed in dresses in limited yardage, although the *til* (Javanese style blouse with gold decorations) should be forbidden. In addition, silk pillows should not be permitted, while jewelry and implements for coffee and tea should be limited.²⁰ This suggestion highlights connections between women's ostentation and their sexuality. Modesty in terms of dress, behaviour and decorations and adornments, were pivotal factors in the construction of femininity.

Masculinity also hinged on the idea of *zuhd*. The word *rijal* simply means men in Arabic. Among the sufi in general and the followers of *Thariqah 'Alawiyyah* in particular, *rijal* has a different connotation, that of a man with a lofty spiritual station. The scholars in Hadramaut utilized the word *rijal* in this fashion.²¹ *Rijal* are 'real men', those who have turned themselves away from the material world and directed their face to God in order to attain spiritual enlightenment. To reach this level, one has to practice *zuhd*. This means that a truly masculine person, was one who abstained from worldly pleasure, and attained a lofty spiritual station. To quote the aforementioned Qur'anic verse used to describe *Dunya*, 'real men' are those who rather than chasing the world, believed that 'in nearness to God is the best of the goals (to return to)'.²² Migrants therefore, were not 'real men'.

Thariqah 'Alawiyyah acted as the juridical system of power that produced subjects they subsequently come to represent. According to Judith Butler, juridical notions of power regulate political life 'in purely negative terms... through

limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice'.²³ The notions of femininity and masculinity were regulated by the doctrines of the order; to be feminine or masculine, one has to perform in accordance to the tenets of the *Thariqah*. Those who refuse to abide by the script were seen as non-masculine men and non-feminine women.

It is important at this point to historically locate the author and the readers of the text we are examining. Al-Mihdar was among the revered scholars of the *Thariqah*. His biography appears in the hagiographic collections of saints of the order, *Taj al-A'ras*.²⁴ Al-Mihdar was even described as *natiq 'asrih* (the spokesman of his time), which secured his position as a representative of the *Thariqah* in the discourse of migration.²⁵ Importantly, al-Mihdar's text was written and distributed in Hadramaut. The target audiences were the male and female Hadramis whose gender and sexuality was already regulated by the *Thariqah* as the juridical system of power. In their reading of the text, within which prevalent notions of masculinity and femininity were disrupted, the significance of the text emerged. After all, meanings are not simply inherent in texts, but are produced through the various and mediated mechanisms of reading.²⁶ The meanings that imply subversion of gender inherent in migration could only be understood by Hadramis who were aware of the 'idealized' version of gender as represented by the *Thariqah*.

Gender & Migration

Before discussing various aspects of gender and migration, it is important to note that

20 Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, p. 140.

21 See for instance in the collection of letters of Ali bin Muhammad al-Habsyi: Ali bin Muhammad bin Husein bin Abdullah al-Habsyi, *Majmu' Wasaya wa 'ijazat* (Singapore: Kerjaya Mahdudah, 1990).

22 The Holy Qur'an, p. 125.

23 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990), p. 2.

24 Ali bin Husein al-Attas, *Taj al-A'ras fi Manaqib al-Habib al-Qutbh Soleh bin Abdullah al-Attas* (Kudus: Percetakan Menara Kudus, 1979) vol. I, pp. 576-680. For discussions on this hagiographical collection, see: Kazuhiro Arai, *Arabs who Traversed the Indian Ocean: The History of the Al-Attas Family in Hadramawt and Southeast Asia c. 1600-c. 1960* (PhD. Thesis, University of Michigan, 2004) pp. 165-200.

25 Ali bin Husein al-Attas, *Taj al-A'ras*, vol. I, p. 680.

26 Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 25.

Hadrami migration was an exclusively male activity. This can be seen in the personification of a Hadrami migrant as a man in al-Mihdar's text. Women refused to leave their homeland and stayed behind with the children.²⁷ As a result, polygyny, a practice that was allowed, yet frowned upon in Hadramaut, became routine among migrants.²⁸ Because men left their homeland indefinitely, they married again in the *mahjar*. Migration became a process where acceptable polygamy was practiced.

Migration also became a site where Hadrami men, such as our hero, encountered non-Hadrami women. Most men married women outside Hadramaut, giving birth to hybridized children, who challenged the notion of lineage purity. These children were derogatorily called *muwalladin* in Hadramaut or *Arab peranakan* in Indonesia,²⁹ hence highlighting the fact that the hybrid, born out of the transgression of boundaries, 'figures as a form of danger, loss and degeneration'.³⁰ What is important to stress is that migration became a site of hybridization through intermarriages. Engseng Ho, for instance, characterized the waters of Malay-Indonesian archipelago as a site of creolization. In his eloquent words:

*As superior Buginese warriors from the East and spiritually potent Arab descendant of the prophet from the West entered Malay areas, their incorporation into the Malay family generated and expanding skein of kinship relations which stretched from the Hejaz to Sulawesi, and was densest in the Straits of Melaka.*³¹

Through inter-marriage due to migration, purity in lineage was challenged. For that reason,

27 L.W.C. Van den Berg, *Hadramaut dan Koloni Arab di Nusantara* (Jakarta: INIS, 1989), p. 63.

28 Ibid.

29 Engseng Ho, "Hadramis Abroad in Hadramaut," in *Hadrami Traders*, p. 131.

30 Nikos Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, eds. Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 259.

31 Engseng Ho, "Before Parochialization: Diasporic Arabs Cast in Creole Waters," in *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, eds Huub de Jonge & Nico Kaptein (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), p. 16.

ancestry became one of the dowries required to marry *dunya*.

Migration was also a process which questioned the prevalent notion of masculinity and femininity. As noted above, *Thariqah 'Alawiyyah* emphasized the notion of femininity with modesty. The Indian woman, encountered by our hero was described as immodest, she spat as she walked and was uncovered in the company of men. This illustration served to contrast between Hadrami women and women from outside.

Another important characteristic was her direct and challenging manner of speech. She was not ashamed to ask for dowries and she even instructed the Hadrami man to return home. As Susan Gal noted, speech is a very important gender signifier, which is relative to time and place.³² In Hadramaut, women speak in a modest and indirect way. Outside Hadramaut, women made demands of men. Al-Mihdar's Indian woman, therefore, served to illustrate the unfeminine women outside Hadramaut, who failed to perform their role as women. As for the man, his masculinity was automatically challenged as well, as the true form of masculinity lied in men's ability to reign over their families, and especially women. The case with our hero, was that he failed to project his masculinity because the woman's performance was also 'masculine'. This led to the failure of the man's control over the woman and hence, his masculinity was challenged by her 'unfeminine' behavior. That is why manliness became another dowry to marry *dunya*.

Another challenge to masculinity can be seen in the mobility of the woman. She traveled from India, to Singapore, Java, East Africa and Istanbul. This is very different to Hadrami women, who did not travel. In Hadramaut an unmarried girl who reached womanhood was confined to the house and only permitted to mix with family members. She was not even allowed to socialize with married women. The

32 Susan Gal, "Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender," in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, ed. Micaela di Leonardo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 175-203.

restrictions to her movement are reflected in the name *bint al-bayt* (girl of the house).³³ The social invisibility of the women in Hadramaut, which constitute part of their womanhood, was contrasted with the mobile Indian woman. In this case, the man followed her around the world just to speak to her. He was no longer the possessor of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, that is, masculinity ‘constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities’.³⁴ The migrant was no longer able to extend his control over women, let alone over other men.

Al-Mihdar’s work portrayed the outside world in binary opposition to the idealized Hadramaut. The binary logic is a constant in his work. The clean life at home, the corrupt life abroad, further gendered terms of personifying Hadramaut as male and the world as female. The Indian woman was different to Hadrami women in her performance of gender roles, as well as her race and economic status. The Indian woman was seen as unfeminine by Hadrami standards as seen in her carefree attitude, she was also a different race and had higher economic status than the man. This shows how the construction of gender, as Butler argued intersects with race, class and other variables.³⁵ The unfeminine characteristics of women outside Hadramaut, in turn, diminished the migrants’ masculinity as masculinity is defined against femininity.

Family & Migration

The English traveler, Freya Stark who visited Hadramaut in the 1930s wrote, ‘our slave, poor as a rat himself, has just brought in a woman with children to feed whose husband has vanished in Java: it is a story I hear every day’.³⁶ Women left alone to nurture their children were direct outcomes of migration. The fact that Hadrami women did not accompany their husbands to the *mahjar*, meant that they had to face the difficulties of maintaining the family by themselves. Some women received financial support from their

husbands, while some did not. In this way, migration altered the structure of the family in Hadramaut. A married woman with children had to perform the duties of both parents. As a father figure she had to teach fundamental religious knowledge to the children, while as a mother figure, she had to perform domestic duties. The story of the Hadrami scholar/poet, Ali al-Habsyi, whose father migrated to Mecca, illustrates the importance of his mother in his father’s absence.³⁷ As a result of migration, the traditional roles of Hadrami women were altered, with women taking on both parenting roles. In addition, the *Thariqah* emphasized the duty of fathers to educate their children.³⁸ By failing to perform this important task, Hadrami migrants’ masculinity also became questionable.

As noted before, most Hadrami migrants practiced polygyny and married into the local population in the *mahjar*. Van den Berg reported that households of Hadrami who married Indonesian women, were considerably ‘Indonesianized’. The daughters of the migrants acted in the same manner as indigenous Indonesians. Hadrami customs and protocols were only adhered to superficially.³⁹ Strict Muslim dress code, which symbolized women’s adherence to *aurat*, was no longer observed. A Hadrami scholar in East Java complained that his contemporaries were ‘showing off’ their daughters by allowing them to wear skirts above their knee.⁴⁰ This shows how the influence of traditional Hadrami culture faded within the family in the *mahjar*. The influence of the local mother, in Hadrami family in the *mahjar*, was stronger in the molding of the family. The father was no longer seen as the dominant parent who controlled the family in accordance to religion. Here, a Hadrami migrant traded both his sense of shame and religion, which were two dowries demanded by *Dunya*.

33 Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, p. 127.

34 R.W. Connell, *Gender & Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 183.

35 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 3.

36 Freya Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (London: John Murray, 1942), p. 119.

37 Novel Muhammad Alaydrus, *Sekilas Tentang Habib Ali bin Muhammad al-Habsyi, Muallif Simtud Duror* (Solo: Putera Riyadi, 2000), p. 24.

38 Umar bin Muhammad Maulakhela, *Jawahirul Anfas fi ma Yuridhi Rabban Nas* (manuscript), vol. I, pp. 422-3.

39 L.W.C. van den Berg, *Koloni Arab*, p. 122.

40 Abdulkadir bin Husein Assegaf, *Kunjungan Habib Alwi Solo kepada Habib Abubakar Gresik* (Solo: Putera Riyadi, 2001), p. 15.

Migration altered the traditional Hadrami familial structure. It expanded the nuclear family with a strong masculine father and gentle feminine mother, into an unregulated and dispersed notion of translocal family. Many cases illustrate how a person in Hadramaut, had a brother in India and a sister in Malaya, who could not communicate because of linguistic barriers. Simultaneously, the roles of fathers and mothers were renegotiated. Familial roles were no longer seen as exclusively linked to sex; a female could be a ‘father’, while a male could be a ‘mother’. In this way, the traditional gender structure presented by the *Thariqah* was challenged. Migration provided the avenue for the re-structuring of familial gender performance.

Conclusion: Theorizing Gender & Hadrami Migration

The case of Hadrami migration and the dynamics of traditional values opposed to ‘modern developments’, shed light on the relationship between gender and social change. It is the purpose of the remainder of this essay to conclude this discussion by placing it into a theoretical framework. The case of Hadramaut shows how gender is culturally and historically specific, drawn by the ‘juridical system of power’ and performed by the constituted subjects. In contrast to the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, however, the constituted subjects are imbued with agency to resist. The constituted subjects were not passive recipients of the discursive formations that defined their subjectivity. Rather, they also provided ‘agonism’ and ‘permanent provocation’, to use Foucault’s term, to the knowledge/power structure that defined subjectivity.⁴¹

Migration, in the case of the Hadramis, became a process of transgression. Hadramis who migrated to the *mahjar* transcended the discursive formations that defined their gendered subjectivity. In the words of Jonathan Friedman, ‘it is precisely in the metaphor of border-crossing that the notion of homogenous identity

is carried and reinforced, since it is a prerequisite of such transgression’.⁴² Migration became a site of transgression and contestation, a site where notions of masculinity and femininity were negotiated, while identity was subverted as a result of encounters with ‘others’. Such encounters with different cultural-systems provided alternatives to traditional subjectivity. This resulted in the production of variant of subjectivities. Different notions of masculinity and femininity emerged as alternatives to the traditional, challenging the hegemony of the ‘juridical system of power’. For that reason, through the eyes of traditionalists, such as al-Mihdar, migration became a site of degeneration.

The outcome of migration to gender relation is both historical and culturally specific. For the Hadrami traditionalists, migration became a process of losing masculinity as a man became embedded in global capitalism. In contrast, migrants in different societies and times, such as Kerala migrants to the Gulf, secured their masculinities and maturity due to their ability to accumulate wealth.⁴³ For this reason, Lacan’s symbolic ordering of the Phallus as the signifier of sexuality is not adequate to explain the construction of gender in both Hadrami and Kerala cases.⁴⁴ Such explanations are ahistorical and assume artificial uniformity.

As the case of Hadrami migration shows, political processes determine the outcome of gender construction. Following Joan Scott, I define political as when ‘different actors and different meanings are contending with one another for control’.⁴⁵ Gender construction in the case of Hadramaut involved relationships between men and women, religion and global capitalism, and Hadramaut and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. It involved sexual

41 Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), p. 73.

42 Jonathan Friedman, “Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarrelling: Cosmopolitans Versus Locals, Ethnic and Nationals in an era of De-Hegemonization,” in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, p. 79.

43 Filippo Osella & Caroline Osella, “Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala (South India),” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, 1 (2000): pp. 1-16.

44 Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge*, p. 85.

45 Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 49.

differences as well as racial, ethnic and economic ones, as well as institutions such as families and religion. Gender, therefore, can only be determined specifically in the context of time and place. It is continually performed but at the same time ever changing and transforming. Certainly, in the case of Hadramaut and the ensuing migration, gender construction had been intimately linked to the notion of 'gold and silver, branded horses and well-tilled land'.

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Appendix :

Engseeng Ho’s description of *Maqama Dham al-Dunya*

The following is Engseeng Ho’s description of Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Mihdar’s work, *Maqama Dham al-Dunya*, which forms the basis of this essay. It is taken from: Engseeng Ho, “Hadramis Abroad in Hadramaut,” in *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*, eds Ulrike Freitag & William G. Clarence-Smith (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 135-6.

The *Maqama Dham al-Dunya*, by Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Mihdar (d. 1887), is a work of rhyming prose disparaging the world. The term *dunya* is equivalent to a number of things. It stands for the world outside Hadramaut, and for the corrupt material world, opposed to the hereafter. It is a synonym for money, in Hadrami parlance.

The worldly and base nature of the lands

to which Hadramis migrated, the *mahjar*, is elaborated in the form of a journey by the author away from a homeland stricken by famine. He leaves home and family for the coast, and there, at the edge of Hadramaut, asks for advice on where to go, where women and sons gather and there are hoards of gold and silver, branded horses and well tilled land. The expression is revealing, for in the Koran, these are the possessions of the world, the *dunya*, which men covet; from these it is better to return to God.

Our author, however, has just begun his journey. He continues and finds himself in Surat, India, a fertile and graceful land of rain and trees. One day in the moonlight he comes upon a shadowy figure, a woman wearing a shawl, carrying a stick, not shy, surrounded by companions and spitting as she goes along. He

is entranced and wants marriage, but her price is heavy. She wants five treasures: his sense of shame, manliness, mind, ancestry and religion. The symbolism is rather unsubtle; she is the *dunya* he has been searching for, over land and sea. She taunts him: "What are the likes of you doing here? Your land is sought by pilgrims, your ancestors the earliest, who cared not for the world nor its trappings. Why don't you follow them and go home?"

He is not to be shaken off so easily. He wants to be considered one of them. So he gives her his sense of shame, and they write it on a piece of paper. The next morning, after dawn prayers, he looks for her in vain. She has gone to Hyderabad, he is told. So he goes, walking among Banyans and other infidels, a place of drink and fornication, where Islam is weak. He is told by the ruler to be as one of them, if he wants to fill his pocket. Otherwise he has no business being there. He meets her again, and the crowd tells him to give her all the five treasures. He gives her the second, his manliness.

Again she disappears. He is told she has gone to Java, a sweet land without harshness. He goes to Singapore, a place famous for business; but she has just gone to Batavia, Semarang, Tegal, Cirebon and Surabaya. She leads him through the trading towns of north Java, well known to Hadhramis, places where they don't hold to the Friday congregation, and thought revolves around prices.

He finally caught up with her, and she still demands all five treasures. He remonstrates with her, but no one comes to his aid nor respects the rights of the stranger; their women's clothes are scandalous. These are people lost to religion and ancestry. He is in it too deep by now, however. Two treasures are with her, and he still has not the *dunya*. How can he face going home? He gives over his ancestry; never mind, this is preserved in the books at home. The plot is predictable. He follows her to Cairo and Istanbul, where he finally manages to wrench back his treasures before losing the most precious of them all, his religion.