Discovering the Diversities of Indonesian Islam in Contemporary Cairo: 
The Case of the Indonesian Azharis’ Community

KINOSHITA, Hiroko*

Abstract

This paper tries to clarify activities of the Indonesian Azharis in contemporary Cairo focusing on (1) the interactions within the Indonesian communities and (2) their relationships with Egyptian society. Though hundreds of students from Indonesia has been flowing into the Azhar university little has been written on this issue.

The paper clarified that (1) Indonesian students were reproducing their Indonesian lifestyles within the regional organizations. These geographic divides, however, were overcome by some extracurricular activities: publishing the periodics and discussions. Through these activities the students recognized diversities of Indonesian Islam.

Simultaneously the paper depict that (2) while the majority of the students were weak to adapt with environment of Cairo, some students were willing to communicate with the society. It can be pointed out that both experiences fostered their nation identity as Indonesian. It is in Cairo that Indonesian students recognize the diversities of Indonesian Islam and enhance their national identity.

Keywords: Diversities, Indonesian Islam, Studying Abroad, Azhar University in Cairo, Area Studies

* Ph.D. Kyoto University, Research Fellow of Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (DC), h-kinost@asafas.kyoto-u.ac.jp.
1. Introduction

“Various religious traditions are different—not only in detail but in basic orientations. Each is unique.”1) 

“Nationality arose from exile, when men could no longer easily dream of returning to the nourishing bosom that had given them birth—and it would obviously be a mistake to assume that long-distance nationalism is necessarily extremist.”2)

“Travel is particularly important when considering changes in Muslim imagined communities past and present. Travel creates boundaries and distinctions, even as travelers believe that they are transcending them. In the hope of creating new horizons, travelers set off from home, encounter ‘others’ and return with a sharpened awareness of difference and similarity”3)

This paper tries to depict the Indonesian Azharis’ community in contemporary Cairo. Since the late 16th century, the Muslims of Southeast Asia have been engaged in the social action of traveling in search of knowledge in the Middle East. As Eickelman and Piscatori pointed out, those Muslim travelers exerted great influence that led to various soci, politic, and economic changes in their home societies.4) As the case of the travelers mentioned above, travelers to the Middle Eastern countries in contemporary era display great dynamism. According to Roff, the May- Indonesian students in the early 20th century in Cairo figure prominently in politic activism against the colonial government.5) Furthermore, Laffan examines that travelers returning from the Middle East, especially those from among the Azhar in Cairo played a significant role in the independence movement from the Dutch East Indies.6) Thus traveling

4) Eickelman & Piscatori, Muslim Travelers (1990), 5.