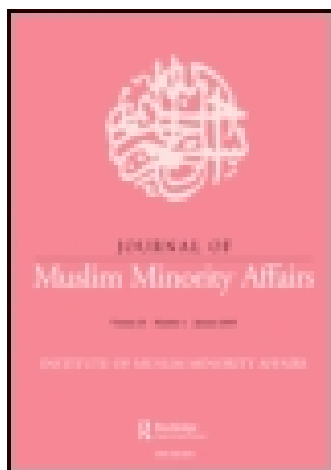


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## Hong Kong Muslims on Hajj: Rhythms of the Pilgrimage 2.0 and Experiences of Spirituality Among Twenty-First Century Global Cities

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PAUL O'CONNOR

### *Abstract*

*The pilgrimage to Mecca is an often-overlooked topic in the study of Muslim minorities. This work looks at the experiences of Muslims in Hong Kong who make up a multi-ethnic community situated in a densely populated urban metropolis in China. As a small community, these Muslims are free from the constraints of the hajj quota system that most countries are subjected to. The organisation and experiences of these pilgrims is contrasted with recent developments in Mecca, including urban development and communications infrastructure to serve the pilgrims. The twenty-first century hajj, as “pilgrimage 2.0”, characterises some of the contemporary challenges that modern hajj poses. These insights are contrasted with Lefebvre’s concept of rhythmanalysis to highlight themes of permanence and change. In addressing the similarities of both Mecca and Hong Kong as “global cities”, the experiences of Hong Kong Muslims are made distinct.*

Non-Arab pilgrims are particularly pleased to meet *hajjis* from distant regions of the Muslim world. The presence of Muslim minorities demonstrates that Islam is a universal faith transcending ethnic and racial boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

Without knowing it (which does not mean “unconsciously”), the human species draws from the heart of the universe, movements that correspond to its own movements.<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

The pilgrimage to Mecca holds an important position in the religious lives of Muslim minorities. For many Muslims it is their first experience of being in an exclusively Islamic environment. In addition, it transmits a powerful message of the global *ummah* and the diversity and dynamism of Islamic life and culture throughout the world. In this paper I explore the organization and experience of the *hajj* from the perspective of the Muslims of Hong Kong, themselves a diverse multi-ethnic community, and a minority free of the constraints of *hajj* visa quotas. In doing so, two particular themes are explored, the patterns of *hajj* organization in Hong Kong and developments over the last decade, which highlight connections between Hong Kong and Mecca as global cities.

This research adopts the theoretical perspective of Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis as an analytical mode to capture both the persistence of the *hajj* traditions, with their origins

in antiquity, and the contemporary transformations which have made the pilgrimage accessible to ever-growing numbers.<sup>3</sup>

The paper combines accounts of the *hajj* from Hong Kong pilgrims with reflections on the modern pilgrimage. It highlights some of the unique circumstances that Hong Kong Muslims enjoy as religious minorities in Hong Kong and trends in performing the *hajj* among Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds. The research combines ethnographic work with Muslims in Hong Kong, in-depth interviews with pilgrims, Imams, and personnel at the Saudi consulate. It draws on extensive research and reportage from the *hajj* and engages with examples of “social media” *hajj*, or “pilgrimage 2.0”, utilising Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr as mediums to follow and understand *hajj* in the twenty-first century.

### **Hong Kong’s Muslims**

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Previously a British Colony for 152 years, Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories were returned to China in 1997. Muslims have been a continuous feature of the modern history of Hong Kong with significant populations arriving with the colonial regime in the 1840s.<sup>4</sup> Many of the first Muslims in Hong Kong were South Asian soldiers, sailors, and merchants. They played an important role in the protection and policing of the territory up until the 1960s. Chinese Muslims have lived and worked in Hong Kong, migrating from China during various eras of repression.

In present-day Hong Kong, Muslims account for approximately 3.7% of the 7.1 million population.<sup>5</sup> A total of 270,000 Muslims live and work in Hong Kong, the largest proportion of which are Indonesian who number 140,000 and are mostly employed as foreign domestic workers.<sup>6</sup> While Indonesians are a majority, they are also nominally female and temporary residents. Other large groups of Muslims include Chinese Muslims totalling 30,000 and South Asian Muslims numbering in excess of 30,000.<sup>7</sup> Indonesians and Pakistanis are by far the most visible Muslims in the territory while Chinese Muslims, partly due to their ethnic invisibility, choice of dress and preference for assimilation, occupy a less recognisable minority presence. There are also smaller proportions of expatriate Muslims from a variety of different countries and smaller long-standing communities, such as the Dawoodi Bohras.

This data represent a considerable growth in the number of Muslims in the territory. In 2000, government figures estimate a total of 80,000 Muslims residing in Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic of 2003 was in part a catalyst for the demographic change. Hong Kong people began to recruit Indonesian foreign domestic labour rather than Filipinas who had temporarily been prevented by the Philippine government to sign new work contracts in the territory.<sup>9</sup> Over the last decade, African Muslims have become more prominent, taking advantage of Hong Kong’s lack of visa restrictions as a way to access trade in China.<sup>10</sup> A rise in converts to Islam has also been a knock-on effect of 9/11 as numbers of Hong Kong Chinese have sought to find out more about the religion. So the increased presence of Muslims in Hong Kong has heightened an interest in Islam and dovetailed with a more positive attitude towards the faith in Hong Kong society. This is notable as a distinct contrast to the position of many Muslim minorities who have found themselves increasingly marginalised and insecure following events since 2001.<sup>11</sup>

## Community

Muslims are served by five main mosques, four on Hong Kong Island and one in Kowloon. These are overseen by the Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund, Hong Kong's oldest Islamic organisation which liaises with the government for the provision of Muslim needs in the territory. A number of small informal mosques operate in homes or office spaces. In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for new mosques to be built and two projects for mosques in the New Territories and Kowloon are currently under way despite some resistance from local residents and government.

Muslims enjoy a unique ethos of religious tolerance in Hong Kong although as ethnic minorities they do encounter racial prejudice.<sup>12</sup> Some of the key issues for Muslims in Hong Kong relate to the challenge of halal food in a Chinese cultural climate where pork is a celebrated ingredient. A further issue is the education and integration of South Asian ethnic minorities (many of whom are Muslim) who have tended to be directed towards English medium education which does not equip them for the Hong Kong workforce, especially since the 1997 handover.<sup>13</sup> As Muslim minorities, Hong Kong's followers of Islam are not representative of Muslim minorities from Western nations who live in a political climate of Christian heritage. They are also removed from the Muslim minorities of China, for in Hong Kong Islam operates as a religious signifier not an ethnic signifier of Hui or Uyghur identity. The ethnic moniker of Hui and its accompanying political status that exists in China is not relevant in the same way in Hong Kong. However, the experiences of Muslim minorities both in the Chinese and Western context are relevant and interconnected with the experiences of Muslims in Hong Kong.

## Rising Numbers

Throughout the twentieth century, the numbers of pilgrims travelling to Mecca have climbed dramatically. As travel by sea, rail, and jet plane has become more affordable, it has also reduced the length of time required to make the pilgrimage. The cost and speed of travel have been factors in the increasing number of pilgrims. In 2012, over three million pilgrims performed *hajj*. A variety of scholarly work on the *hajj* provides insight into the origins and development of the rites, the logistics of *hajj* management, and the prominent issue of pilgrim health and safety.<sup>14</sup> One new feature of the pilgrimage in the twenty-first century is the increased online connectivity that pilgrims are able to utilise while performing their *hajj* rites. During *hajj* of 2013, Saudi Arabia's Mobily telecommunications company reported a 273% increase in data volume across their networks from the previous year. As part of the *hajj* social responsibility programme, free Wi-Fi access is provided to pilgrims. Mobily also reported a 500% increase in the use of WhatsApp and large increases in other social networking platforms, such as Twitter, all despite lower numbers of pilgrims due to major construction projects and concerns of the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) virus.<sup>15</sup>

## Rhythmanalysis

The prolific writings of Henri Lefebvre on the subject of the politics of everyday life are recast and further developed with his exegesis of rhythmanalysis. While much of his earlier work was focused on the Marxist potential of revolutionising the alienation of contemporary modern life, rhythmanalysis sets forth a holistic field of analysis, which extends

from the sensuous temporal experience of humans to incorporate the diverse rhythms of culture, history, and biology. Lefebvre presents rhythmanalysis as an interdisciplinary mode of research that incorporates the relevance of multiple perspectives. He argues that humans are creatures of rhythms, a truth in our own biology of respiration, heartbeat, sleep, digestion, and menstruation.<sup>16</sup> In turn, we inhabit a natural world with rhythms in which we are imbedded, day and night, lunar phases, and seasonal change. In the realm of human culture we encounter patterns or repetition, rupture and change. Rhythm, in short, is representative of the human experience and it in turn corresponds with our histories, politics, and beliefs. Rhythmanalysis provides a method by which to research a topic and observe its multifarious, urban, physical, and cultural connections.

One aspect of rhythmanalysis that Lefebvre developed was the connection to sensuous and temporal experience, our engagement with changing spaces, smells, and climates.<sup>17</sup> However, rhythmanalysis has been most widely recognised and articulated in works on geography and urban space.<sup>18</sup> Sassen understands “the city as a complex and incomplete system” and argues that its speech, which I suggest can be likened to rhythm, is being de-urbanised.<sup>19</sup> In the global age the spaces of civility, which in part make cities what they are, are being recast amidst forms of social exclusion, surveillance, and the social connectivity of mobile technologies. Observing Mecca in any piece of contemporary research requires an acknowledgment of its status as a “global city” and its connection to the rhythms and norms of twenty-first century globalisation alongside its unchangeable status as a holy site.

One application of rhythmanalysis can be made in reference to the *hajj* by looking at different types of pilgrims. Consider a twenty-first century Hong Kong-born South Asian Muslim who works in finance and web design. This man performs the same circumambulations of the Ka’ba as a seventh-century Medinese pilgrim. Although their ritual performance is the same, their lives and the eras in which they live are strikingly different. Rhythmanalysis thus provides a way to capture the traditions and transformations of the *hajj* while also including and observing the experience of Hong Kong Muslims and the connections between the global cities of Mecca and Hong Kong.

### Preparing for the *Hajj*

Throughout Hong Kong Muslims prepare for *hajj* in a variety of different ways. Many save for years and plan to make their pilgrimage at a certain time with spouse and elderly parents present. Others respond to their fortunes, if they have the opportunity and means to go they ensure that they take the opportunity as soon as they can. Imam Yang from the Masjid Ammar suggests that within Hong Kong, different ethnic groups have different attitudes towards *hajj*. Among Chinese Muslims, many have the wealth to be able to go. However, he argues, Hong Kong is such a busy city that people are committed to their work and the trip to Mecca is an obligation which needs three weeks or more of time off work. Therefore, many of the Chinese Muslims who perform the *hajj* are of retirement age. In my research with Chinese Muslims there is also a tendency for education and work life to take priority over religion during youth and middle age. This same dynamic is noted in Gillette’s anthropology of *Hui* in Xi’an.<sup>20</sup> Across all Islamic traditions Muslims attribute great honour in performing the *hajj* in later life just as the prophet Muhammad established the Islamised pilgrimage on his farewell *hajj* in 632CE, the last year of his life.

Yang has performed the *hajj* twice, once travelling from Pakistan when he was a student, and also once leading a group of pilgrims from the Masjid Ammar. He notes

that previously Hong Kong pilgrims would join *hajj* groups in Malaysia or Indonesia. This type of *hajj* organisation is also noted by White during the 1990s when many from Hong Kong joined the Malaysian *Tabung Haji* in order to organise their pilgrimage.<sup>21</sup> The increased number of Muslims in Hong Kong has also coincided with greater provision for pilgrims to organise and perform their *hajj* travelling directly from Hong Kong. Yang comments that over 10 years ago the Saudi Kingdom would send two officials directly to Hong Kong to issue *hajj* visas. He recalls one year being asked by the Saudis why Hong Kong has so few pilgrims. In present-day Hong Kong, Muslims are able to travel to the Saudi Consulate and submit their visa applications and health forms in person and receive their visas directly from a counter service.

### *Health Matters*

The Saudi authorities stipulate that all pilgrims must have a clean bill of health and be able to endure the travel and physical upheaval of the rituals. This took on even greater significance for the Hong Kong government in 2013 over concerns of the MERS virus that had by the start of the *hajj* period claimed 58 lives worldwide, of whom 47 were situated in Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup> Health officials visited the Kowloon Mosque in September 2013 to provide pilgrims with information on hygiene while on *hajj*. In one demonstration, soon-to-be-pilgrims were instructed on how to thoroughly wash their hands. Hong Kong's chief Imam Muhammad Arshad commented on how the instructions mirrored the performance *wudu*, the ablutions that Muslims must perform before *salah*.

The vast majority of health checks for pilgrims have in recent years been performed by a Dr Leung in Kowloon who worked for a number of years as a surgeon in Saudi Arabia. He reports that in 2013 he provided health checks and meningitis vaccinations for 452 potential pilgrims, 312 males and 140 females.<sup>23</sup> The vast majority of these Muslims were in the 30–50-year-age bracket and 95% were reported as being ethnic Pakistani.<sup>24</sup>

### *“Hajj Package”*

The prominence of Pakistani pilgrims travelling from Hong Kong is explained by Imam Yang as the fact the Pakistanis are often more impatient than Chinese to get to Mecca. The “Hajj Board” at the Islamic Union of Hong Kong decides their preference for which Imam will travel to Mecca and act effectively as a *mutawwif*, or pilgrim rite guide, for the Hong Kong *hajj* group. In recent years, Imam Arshad of the Kowloon Mosque, himself originally from Pakistan, leads the *hajj* group in Mecca. It is a prestigious role but a huge responsibility too.

For the *hajj* of 2013, the Kowloon Mosque offered a *hajj* package that included air flight to Jeddah, transportation to Mecca, Mina, and Medina, food, animal slaughter for *Eid*, and accommodation. The total cost of the package was HK\$25,400 (US\$3275). In 2012, the average monthly Hong Kong wage was HK\$13,400 (US\$1728).<sup>25</sup> There is wide disparity in the wages in Hong Kong, foreign domestic workers earn HK\$3920 per month, and many Pakistanis work as security guards or delivery truck drivers and earn salaries of around HK\$8000–9000 per month.<sup>26</sup> Further, reports estimate that over half of all Pakistanis in Hong Kong live in poverty.<sup>27</sup> In making *hajj* arrangements finances are a big consideration, as is making the most of the opportunity to travel. A number of Pakistani pilgrims choose to fly out early from Hong Kong and to travel to

Jeddah via Pakistan. This provides an opportunity for pilgrims to mark their *hajj* with celebrations often with extended family in Pakistan.

A month before the *hajj* of 2013, Imam Arshad provided an in-depth talk to over 100 pilgrims providing details of the rites that they were soon to perform. Arshad distinguished between secular and religious obligations. The former pertaining to paperwork, transportation, food, and accommodation while the latter related to the correct performance of *hajj* rites in order to ensure that the pilgrimage itself would be valid. Arshad delivered his talk in both Urdu and English and provided some very intricate details, including demonstrations of the prayers to make when approaching the *Ka'ba*, the performance of *tawaf*, and how pilgrims can address the *Hajar al-Aswad*. He also showed how pilgrims should dress in plain white sheets when they are in *ihram*, the ritual state of purity (*ihram*).

I had previously attended a similar talk in the British city of Birmingham in 2000 that had been organised by the "Association of British Hujjaj". In contrast to the Kowloon Mosque, the British talk was attended by several hundred potential pilgrims and the talk was presented almost exclusively in Urdu.

The majority of the audience for Arshad's talk were Pakistani with a scattering of Africans among them. The general atmosphere was jovial and many of the pilgrims spoke very excitedly about their impending journey. One commented on the fact that his plan had only suddenly fallen into place, another mentioned that it would be his first *hajj* but his wife's second. There were also a handful of quite elderly and frail pilgrims. One elderly man's phone went off during the talk, an interruption that he was not quick or dextrous enough to stop without disturbing the delivery of the Imam. The interruption of the mobile phone is a common feature of everyday life in Hong Kong. In cinemas, theatres, office meetings and university lectures, phones interrupt and disturb and disrupt existing rhythms. These disturbances can often be quite curtly dealt by those eager to listen and thus unwillingly distracted. However in the Kowloon mosque and as perhaps an image of the fraternity that exists at the heart of the *hajj*, a sea of hands reached forward to help the elderly man turn off his noisy and cumbersome phone.

### **Informal Hajj Groups**

The vast majority of contemporary pilgrims in Hong Kong will travel to Mecca as part of a *hajj* group connected to either the Kowloon or Wanchai Mosque. However, due to Hong Kong's small Muslim population there is the facility for informal groups to organise their own *hajj*, or even for individuals to independently organise their travel and accommodation. Alvi Travel, a travel agency situated in Chungking Mansions, helps pilgrims who want to arrange their *hajj* independent of the package and group organisation provided by the mosque. Alvi estimates that each year he organises *umrah* trips for around 500 people and *hajj* travel for around 50. Many come from Guangzhou and are African traders who have made money while working in China. Non-Chinese nationals are not allowed to apply for a visa or travel to Mecca from China and must therefore make their arrangements in Hong Kong. Both Alvi and the Saudi Consulate were eager to stress that Chinese Muslims from China could not make *hajj* via Hong Kong. While small numbers had previously tried to organise this and succeeded, there are now strict rules in place to prevent Hong Kong being a passage to Mecca for China's more 20 million Muslims. While both Imams had spoken enthusiastically about having Chinese pilgrims partake in the Hong Kong *hajj* it appeared that the Chinese government

had been instrumental in preventing PRC Muslims making use of Hong Kong's no quota system.

Alvi spoke of one Nigerian who had experienced a very successful year of trade and accordingly insisted that Alvi help him organise the most expensive and extravagant pilgrimage that money could buy. The pilgrim justified this lavish *hajj* as a way to ensure future fortune arguing that whatever money he spent in Mecca would be returned to him tenfold. However, Alvi tries to distance himself from the arrangement that pilgrims require inside Mecca. This is because he is not able to control the actions of others and if one of his customers is tricked and cheated while in the holy city, Alvi does not wish to be associated with such practices and be badly spoken of within Mecca.

### “Quota” System for Pilgrims

Saudi Arabia holds a quota for each country as pilgrims pursue *hajj* visas. It operates essentially on the schema that for each 1 million Muslims a facility of 1000 visas will be provided annually.

Often, the quotas for Muslim minorities are pegged to their countries' total populations instead of to the far smaller numbers of Muslims. In wealthier nations such as Singapore, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, per capita *hajj* rates are several times higher than the international average.<sup>28</sup>

I estimate that over the last decade roughly 3% of Hong Kong's Muslims have made the pilgrimage.<sup>29</sup> If we consider that the majority of Indonesians do not perform the *hajj* from Hong Kong because of financial constraints and obstacles in not having male relatives to accompany them, then the territory has a proportionally significant number of pilgrims.<sup>30</sup> Hong Kong effectively has no quota in place because of its small size and population. This was verified by me in person at the Saudi Consulate and is one of the unique elements of arranging *hajj* in Hong Kong. The visa rules state that if you have made *hajj* you are unable to apply for another *hajj* visa for five years. However, one of my respondents performed *hajj* two years in a row. On the first *hajj* he took his mother and on the second he took his wife. Acting as *mahram* could be one reason why he was able to perform the *hajj* two years in a row, but his experience highlights how accessible that *hajj* can be for Hong Kong pilgrims. Regionally, Muslims within China, Indonesia and Malaysia have much greater challenges in the timing of their *hajj* that can be obstructed by waiting lists and the demand for visas and even government interference.

### Stories of Mecca from Hong Kong Pilgrims

One of the most insightful elements of scholarly works on the *hajj* are the stories of pilgrims themselves. As part of my research, I have spoken to over 15 individuals who have performed the *hajj* from Hong Kong. In this section, I shall draw on the experiences of four individuals Esa, Wali, Ali and Fatin (pseudonyms) that provide evocative connections between Hong Kong and Mecca.

#### *Esa, a Hong Kong-Born and Raised Indian Muslim*

Esa, a 37-year-old Indian Muslim born and raised in Hong Kong, works in finance and publishing and is married with two children. His first travel to Mecca was in 2011 to perform *hajj* with his mother. He wanted to make the difficult and challenging rites



of the *hajj* as smooth as possible and decided that he would organise his travel and accommodation independently rather than join a *hajj* group at the Kowloon Mosque. However, he did meet with Imam Arshad's group in Mecca during some key dates of the *hajj*.

His mother had previously performed *hajj* in 1986 when Esa was 12 years old. He remembered staying with his cousins in Hong Kong while his parents were in Mecca, and he understood little of what they were doing at the time but recalls it as a memorable and special moment. One of the things that Esa took advantage of in 2011 was procuring accommodation in the then incomplete Abraj al-Bait hotel complex. This vast new building has set a new standard of opulence in Mecca boasting clock faces five times larger than London's Big Ben, the second largest floor space in the world, and 24-hour butler service.<sup>31</sup> Esa admitted with embarrassment that he stayed in this hotel and noted that as it overlooks the Grand Mosque there is no need for pilgrims to leave the hotel to perform their prayers.

The experience of *hajj* for Esa was influenced by his mother's surprise at the transformation of Mecca since her first visit 25 years ago. She, although older, found the *hajj* had become much easier and this, she felt, was a very good thing. For Esa the ease of *hajj* was somewhat of a concern which he described most fully with reference to the rite of *sa'ee*. As Muslims run between two small hills of Safa and Marwa they recall the plight of Hajar as she frantically searched for water. The *sa'ee* is now performed in a large air-conditioned marble paved corridor, which connects the two small hills. In describing the *sa'ee* he chose a very specific Hong Kong example. Esa explained that the distance required to travel was short, the comparison he made was the distance between the Apple and Zara stores in the International Finance Centre Mall. This example highlights not only the distance covered but it also refers to a specific marble floored, air-conditioned and busy part of Hong Kong that he could compare Mecca to. Esa reflected that in making the rites accessible for pilgrims they had also become too easy and it was at times challenging to think of the hardships they were connected to. Esa's own concerns are also directed at future generations. How can his sons have an appreciation for the meaning of *hajj*, and how different will it be when they come to perform the pilgrimage?

One example that Esa provides that highlights the challenge of new technology is that of the mobile phone. When performing *tawaf*, circling the Ka'ba, Esa was once distracted by a ringtone. Looking in the direction of the noise he witnessed a nearby man reach for his ringing phone and proceed to answer the phone call. This for Esa was an inappropriate action in the Grand Mosque and especially so when performing *tawaf*. However, Malik provides an account of an Algerian Muslim performing *tawaf* while speaking to his wife at home in Algiers.<sup>32</sup> As the couple were unable to perform *hajj* together, the phone worked as a force for good allowing them to share the experience together. In the same report, a Nigerian pilgrim argues that the phone enables him to actually perform *hajj* as without it he would never be able to be away from his business for such an extended period of time. Thus in the twenty-first century Muslims have to balance the intrusions of technology with their often meaningful assistance. If we understand the *hajj* as an important moment of Muslim unity, then technology works as a force to enhance and transmit this message. Technology has not only facilitated the performance of the *hajj*, it has also opened up Mecca to Muslims unable to perform the pilgrimage and to non-Muslims who are forbidden to visit the city of Mecca. Anyone can view the 24-hour feed of the *hajj* on MakkahLive.net<sup>33</sup> and explore Mecca on Google Maps.<sup>34</sup>

*Wali, a "Non-observant" Muslim from Alexandria, Egypt*

Wali performed *hajj* in 2004 when he was 30 years old and it was for him the culmination of spiritual upheaval. Born in Egypt, Wali had never been an observant Muslim and was singularly focused on becoming a successful singer. In Alexandria he had led an indulgent lifestyle that contributed to a destructive relationship. In 2000, he split from his wife and daughter and left Egypt for Hong Kong with hopes of achieving success as a singer in China. In April 2003, in the midst of the turbulent SARS pandemic, Cantopop superstar Leslie Cheung committed suicide by jumping from the top of the Mandarin Oriental hotel.<sup>35</sup> In the death of Cheung, who he deeply admired, Wali reflected on his life and questioned his own selfish pursuit of fame. He began searching for spiritual meaning in his life accompanying his new Filipina wife to church and then exploring and learning about Islam, the faith of his birth. His wife converted to Islam also and his commitment to Islam grew and he sought to consolidate this by performing the *hajj*.

He describes his pilgrimage as a test of faith. He was at first confused over the cost of *hajj* mistaking the HK\$7000 price of the flight as the full cost of the *hajj* package, and then he was denied a *hajj* visa by the Saudi authorities. A business contact in Saudi Arabia presented him with free accommodation in Mecca, and the Saudis eventually granted him a visa as his wife needed a *mahram* in order to travel. Wali's story of *hajj* highlights the challenges he encountered in his life and how his experiences in Hong Kong brought him to Islam. As of 2013, Wali works for an Islamic group in Hong Kong performing *da'wah*, providing instruction on Islamic issues to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and teaching Arabic. His *hajj* forms part of a religious biography in which he is presented as only a nominal Muslim on his arrival in Hong Kong. The *hajj* presents the culmination of his transformation to a messenger and advocate of Islam to lapsed Muslims and non-Muslims in Hong Kong.

*Ali, a Retired Chinese Muslim School Principal*

Ali has travelled to Mecca three times, performed *hajj* twice and *umrah* once. His first *hajj* was in 1986 when he took his parents with him. This first visit had a big impact on him but he spoke particularly of the physical upheaval. Ali found the heat incredibly oppressive and a challenging difference to the humidity of Hong Kong. The greatest physical challenges for Ali were the standing at Arafat and the stoning of Satan. Ali noted that in Hong Kong older pilgrims tend to be more practising and knowledgeable of Islam. He felt however, that Muslims should make the pilgrimage while they are still young in order that they are able to perform the demanding rites correctly. On his second *hajj* in 2007 he was invited as a guest of the Saudi Kingdom. Each year the King invites selected guests from each country sending pilgrims. For many elderly Chinese Muslims the opportunity to be invited as a guest of the Kingdom is a tremendous privilege and also a real possibility.

*Fatin, a Bangladeshi Living in Hong Kong for 35 Years*

Now in her 60s, Fatin has travelled to Mecca twice. Her first visit was to perform *umrah*. She chose to make the lesser pilgrimage first in order to prepare for the *hajj*. Her interest was in being familiar with Mecca and the requirements of the pilgrimage so that she could be certain her *hajj* would be performed correctly. In 2007 she travelled with her husband to Mecca for *hajj* with a *hajj* group organised *via* the Wanchai Mosque, which combined

with the Kowloon Mosque *hajj* group and was led by Imam Arshad. Fatin speaks about her *hajj* with humility and good humour finding no shame in highlighting some of the bad behaviour of some Muslims while on *hajj*, being critical of Saudi women who erroneously cover up their faces in the grand mosque where they are supposed to keep their faces unveiled. She reflects on the *hajj* rites and speaks of the beauty of the black stone nestled in the corner of the *Ka'ba* and explains that the *kiswa*, the covering of the *Ka'ba* cannot hang too low because people will rip pieces off of it.

I asked Fatin if in 2007 pilgrims were allowed to take cameras into the Grand Mosque. She replied emphatically, "No. Not allowed. But people sneak them in. I sneaked in my own camera". Within Fatin's responses to my questions is the very open acceptance of the changes of *hajj*. In 2013, it was possible to follow *hajj* via the photos which numerous pilgrims were uploading to social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram. Two blogs of particular note provided updates about the *hajj* on a daily basis including photos, personal insights, and even business opportunities.<sup>36</sup> While some Muslims feel that technology can be a bad influence on the piety of pilgrims, Wali criticised recent photos from within the Grand Mosque too frequently including the Abraj al-Bait rather than the *Ka'ba*, others often see these developments as an enhancement of *hajj*.

The introduction of a large 13-metre high circular walkway<sup>37</sup> to aid the *tawaf* of pilgrims in wheelchairs was for Fatin a fantastic idea and did not detract from the struggles of *hajj*, that from Esa's point of view were fading away. It is possible that Fatin appreciates the development of Mecca in the same way she cherishes the infrastructure of Hong Kong. Living in the city for more than 20 years, her appreciation of Hong Kong's facilities and provisions is distinct. Although there is little doubt the she and her husband would find their retirement funds going far further in Bangladesh, and their accommodation would be several times larger, the healthcare and security of Hong Kong make it a more preferential place for the couple to live. For Fatin, the twenty-first century *hajj* is one of provision for the elderly and needy, the opulence of the new developments is matched only by the sincerity of people on *hajj*.

In different ways the rhythm of life in Hong Kong touches upon the experience of the pilgrims in Mecca. In some cases, this is through direct comparison, in other ways it connects with what enabled them to get to Mecca, their spiritual journey and their life experiences. This is perhaps most distinct in the accounts of Esa and Wali, but not absent in the situations of Ali and Fatin.

### Pilgrims Returning Home

The fact that the *hajj* is incumbent upon all Muslims to perform once in their lives, if they are able to afford it, is in itself a powerful motivation for getting to Mecca in the first place. What is often overlooked in the planning and preparation of the *hajj* is the insight into what the aftermath of *hajj* will be. How does it transform Muslims and what do they strive for after its completion? In Anthropological works on the *hajj*, we see that pilgrims have traditionally arrived home with a new social status.<sup>38</sup> In reference to Thai Muslims, Scupin notes that *hajjis* need not contribute to meals of festivities and are not expected to undertake strenuous physical labour after returning from the pilgrimage.<sup>39</sup> Such stories are common, however with the increased numbers and accessibility of *hajj* throughout the world and pilgrims returning home to their communities are not as revered or as rare and unusual as they once were.

Although within a family and in the local ethnic community those who have completed the pilgrimage may have a higher status, many Muslims regard personal conduct after the

*hajj* as the most important basis of respect. This is echoed in a document produced by Esa to give Hong Kong pilgrims guidance in performing their *hajj*. He assiduously goes through the specific requirements of the rites and finishes on a reflection of what to do after *hajj*.

Whatever hardships you faced, I am sure you will agree they pale in comparison to the amazing experience of Hajj. Whatever challenges you faced during this trip, you should be grateful to the Almighty for the opportunity of being able to return home to your family. If you were to reflect on the above two points alone, you will find yourself saying nothing but “Alhamdulillah”, for everything the Almighty has done for you. In fact, one sure way to tell if this trip will stick with you is to see whether you will come out of this trip a better person and whether you will become extra particular about not missing your five daily prayers. Meanwhile when visitors come and see you, encourage them to go. Do not lie about the challenges but highlight the positive advantages of this experience too. Just imagine if something you say, a word or a sentence nudges them in their hearts and minds and make them want to go, you will be rewarded for their experience—and *vice versa*—Therefore, be calm and honest and most importantly, DO NOT for a second think you are better than anyone in the room.<sup>40</sup>

This is the advice that Esa has taken on himself. On returning from *hajj* he has been vigilant to always make his morning *fajr* prayers. In this way he takes his two *hajj* experiences as motivation for increased piety. From my observations of Esa it seems that he has also taken on a more pious role in extending and sharing his knowledge with others particularly in the production of various publications to help Hong Kong Muslims while in Mecca.

Fatin explained that she never wanted to leave Mecca. Her experience was so powerful that she felt she could not leave. In surveying numerous accounts of pilgrims from Hong Kong, the UK, and in published works, this is a very typical account. One of the most difficult elements in capturing the *hajj* in research is the profound impact of the spiritual journey and the physical connection and unity experienced as part of a vast human collection with a universal focus. In trying to understand this, it is possible to see the departure from Mecca as being in some ways an opposition to the experience of *hajj* itself.

Wali exemplifies this in explaining the depression he felt on his journey back to Hong Kong. The everyday challenges of life, delayed flights, crowds, jet lag, all pressed down on him as an immense burden. The feeling of loss and emptiness lasted a few days after returning to Hong Kong, but Wali went further and deeper in his commitments to Islam from that point on.

Health has always been a concern on *hajj* and since the first cases of the MERS virus in September 2012, pilgrims have been subjected to close scrutiny. On returning from *hajj* in 2012, Imam Arshad had contracted the flu. The cautious Hong Kong health system immediately admitted him to hospital and put him in isolation until they were sure that it was not MERS.

Within Hong Kong little is known of the hundreds of pilgrims who travel to Mecca and return each year. Although the South China Morning Post ran a story on the pilgrimage of 2013, it made no reference to Hong Kong’s Islamic community.<sup>41</sup> The theme of *hajj* was only picked up by the media at the end of the pilgrimage and explored through the topic of MERS. With Hong Kong’s history of infectious diseases, including Bird Flu, SARS and Swine Flu, the population is always cautious of new pandemics that could devastate in the compressed living spaces of Hong Kong.

### Mecca and Hong Kong as “Global Cities”

The topic of *hajj* from the Hong Kong perspective has some notable elements. The fact that there is no quota system for pilgrims in the territory provides unique opportunities for Muslims to organise *hajj* in a variety of different ways. For many Pakistanis, Imam Arshad provides an attractive service as a Pakistani *mutawwif* with Hong Kong’s cultural competence. Chinese Muslims might prefer to patiently bide their time and perhaps even be invited as a guest of the King. Indonesians may be fortunate to arrange and organise their *hajj* during their time in Hong Kong although without family members and husbands it is often hard for them to achieve this even if they do have the means. I was relayed one story in which one family paid for the *hajj* of the Indonesian domestic worker they employed.

Beyond these circumstances, the *hajj* in the twenty-first century is itself a remarkable phenomenon. The Saudi development of the *hajj* has created pilgrimage 2.0 in which Muslims can tweet their *tawaf* and all the rituals they perform throughout the pilgrimage. In fact pilgrims can be guided through the *hajj* rites *via* iPhone apps and keep friends and family updated with their progress with photos and blog updates. The struggles of *hajj* have been transformed, the rites remain the same but the rhythm of the pilgrimage has altered. While previously *hajj* caravans had to navigate the danger of Bedouin bandits, hunger and illness, the contemporary *hajj* mirrors some of the ease as well as challenges of modern life. Transportation, food and protection are easy to come by, but at the same time they are accompanied by crowds, traffic, commercialisation and the ubiquitous imposition of technology. Wali warns people to not spend their time shopping in Mecca, “everything is made in China anyway”! The ease of modern life, the convenience of Wi-Fi access, shopping malls and McDonalds can all impose as distractions from the real focus of what *hajj* should be. In an era of surmounting secularisation, Mecca is also representative of the challenges Muslims face every day, particularly for those living as minorities in secular societies like Hong Kong.

Considering both Mecca and Hong Kong as “global cities” is an important way in which to follow their connections. The significance of Mecca is not just as a “holy city”, but also as how the draw of the holy has facilitated trade and commerce. In the pre-Islamic sixth century, caravans travelling to Yemen from the Mediterranean would make a special detour to pay tribute to 360 idols situated outside the *Ka’ba* in the city of Mecca.<sup>42</sup> Abd al-Muttalib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad was responsible for rediscovering the *Zamzam* well and distributed water to pilgrims who would perform the pagan pilgrimage around the *Ka’ba*.<sup>43</sup> While there has been some challenge to the notion of Mecca as an important place of trade<sup>44</sup> it is generally considered that prior to the Islamisation of the *hajj*, the wealth and trade of Mecca was tied to the pilgrimage. In present-day Mecca it is clear that this connection has endured for everyone who lives and works in Mecca is connected to the *hajj* in some capacity. Similarly, the fortunes of Hong Kong extend from the modern period and the carving of the territory as a node in a colonial network of commerce and trade.

Both Hong Kong and Mecca are examples of Sassen’s global cities. Hong Kong is an exemplary finance hub that fuels the engine of globalisation, a place of capital and human flows. Understanding global cities by “their partial shaping within a network of other cities”<sup>45</sup> fits also with Mecca, which is intricately connected with the urbanity of Muslims throughout the globe. The *hajj*, to use Sassen’s idea of speech, is enunciated by Mecca, drawing people from remote villages through the ports of other global cities to the Grand Mosque and the *Ka’ba*. The *hajj* is representative of both centripetal and

centrifugal rhythmic forces, drawing people into Mecca and then sending them home with stories and experiences that in turn fuel the centrifuge. As custodians of the *hajj*, the Saudi authorities enjoy tremendous prestige in accommodating and servicing pilgrims and they contribute to the “speech” of Mecca. The Saudis also place themselves at the forefront of universal Muslim critique. The politicisation of the *hajj* is a rhythm that extends, in different forms, back to the ancient rites themselves.

In 2013, three topics dominated the political debate, the health management of MERS, the destruction of Islamic heritage, such as Abyssinian architecture, due to the construction taking place in and around the Grand Mosque, and also the recruitment of the G4S security group to aid in *hajj* management.<sup>46</sup>

The rapacious nature of development in Mecca provides another connecting rhythm of the *hajj*. Just as key historic buildings and sites are being removed in the pursuit of an ever more advanced and modern Mecca, we also see a matching form of development in Hong Kong which in constantly looking forward, removes sites of historical interest and encroaches on public and green space.<sup>47</sup> Lefebvre states that “for there to be change, a social group, a class or a caste must interfere by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner”.<sup>48</sup> It is an assertion echoed by Sassen as she declares: “power, whether in the form of elites, government policies, or innovations in built environments, can override the speech of the city”.<sup>49</sup> In the light of the Saudi development of *hajj* over the last 30 years we can see that a new type of era has emerged, the very modern *hajj*. In 1913, Arthur Wavell described himself as a modern pilgrim performing some of his journey by motorcar, however his experience differs enormously from that of pilgrims 100 years later.<sup>50</sup> During the *hajj* of 2013 the connectivity of pilgrims via their mobile devices highlights a new period in the modern *hajj*.

## Conclusion

In exploring the idea of rhythm, we see the enduring nature of the *hajj* rites that have remained unchanged in 14 centuries. Despite modern transformations, this sense of permanence in the *hajj* is remarkable. However, the relevance of rhythm analysis extends to connect the *hajj* with a new form of struggle. Gone are many of the historic challenges of *hajj*, there is little threat of Bedouin bandits, starvation or sandstorms for modern pilgrims. However, along with the persistence of health concerns in new guises, a connection exists between the *hajj* and the mundane aspects of modern life. In the modern global city of Hong Kong, crowds, construction, excessive wealth and the ubiquitous connectivity of mobile communications contribute to an erratic urban everyday life. These same issues are notable for Hong Kong pilgrims in Mecca, perhaps inescapable. These rhythms highlight connections between Hong Kong and Mecca, but they also distinguish the contemporary *hajj* as being representative of a new global era in which even the sacred has intersections with the mechanisms of global capitalism and the technologies of social networking.

Lefebvre notes that “When lives are lived and have mixed together, they distinguish themselves badly from one another” he asks us to bring clarity to our understanding of the chaotic modes of modern life by using rhythm analysis to perceive the interactions of these different lives.<sup>51</sup> In presenting a rhythm analysis of the *hajj* from Hong Kong some of these intriguing interactions have been revealed. They allow us to understand the experience of *hajj* in the twenty-first century and to recognise the often-overlooked Muslim minority as a pilgrim bringing their own local experience and perspective in the global rhythm of the *hajj*.

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