ISSN (print:): 2141-3584 ISSN (online): 3121-7877
ZAJOLA
Journal of the Faculty of Arts
Ahmadu Bello University • Zaria • Nigeria
https://journals.abu.edu.ng/index.php/zajola Vol. 13, No. 1, June, 2025

The Hajj as a Colonial and Post-Colonial Experience in the Gambia: 1945-1970

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Abstract
The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca or Hajj, is a journey of fulfilment for all Muslims. Indeed, Susan O'Brien, who was writing about the Hausa Bori in Nigeria, calls it 'such a marker of prestige throughout the Muslim World'. The journey to the Holy sites of Islam in Makkah and Madina is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. This is why the study of Islam in The Gambia will not be attained without a mention of the nature and motive of Hajj. This article seeks to centre the hajj as a key indication of the pattern of collaboration and accommodation between the Gambian state and its predominantly large Muslim population. It is argued that the failure of the colonial government to prioritise the Hajj made Gambian Muslims quite disappointed, and they saw the introduction of Cadi courts in 1905, or the setting aside of Muslim Eids as public holidays, as not quite sufficient. On the contrary, the strong action of the ruling Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP) soon after independence in 1965 to modernise hajj operations by introducing air transportation for intending pilgrims, adequate forex allocations and simpler inoculation regimes, made Gambian Muslims notice a safer and hassle-free hajj. Indeed, it is argued that the ease of doing the hajj due to strong state support was one of the first dividends of independence for Gambian Muslims. Using recently released files at The Gambia National Archives in Banjul and digesting the available secondary literature, this study shows how decolonization positively impacted on Gambian Muslims.

Introduction
The Hajj is a pillar of Islam whose observance involves mobility, mobilization and monetary matters. It also involves health matters such as inoculation and vaccination regimes. During colonial rule, Muslims in The Gambia faced severe constraints to access the Hajj due to the indifference of the British colonial officials. They paid askance to this fifth pillar of Islam because of religious and

bureaucratic arrogance. Yet, Muslims in The Gambia did not abandon their obligation to perform the Hajj which gave them piety and also linked them up with fellow Africans in Northern Nigeria, Chad, Sudan and of course, Hejaz. With the winning of Independence in 1965, Gambian Muslims found it a lot easier to perform the Hajj due to proactive measures adopted by the new regime.

Literature Review

The literature on Islam in The Gambia since independence is generally scanty. Darboe (2004) has ably traced the role of Islam in Gambian political life under the first ten years APRC rule; Nyang (1975) traces the influence of Islam in political alliances and choices from the start of the anti-colonial ferment to the attainment of Republic in 1970. Sanneh (1977; 2016) has written extensively on the Jahanke clerical class as missionaries and promoters of a tolerant Islam. His writings have nurtured the idea of a tolerant Gambian Islam in a region of brutal Islamic extremism. Janson (2013) focuses on the emergent tabligh reformist Islam in The Gambia;[i] Saho (2018), discusses the role of Cadi courts in colonial Gambia and how they have contributed to forging a strong voice of Gambian women in Islam.Skinner(2009) traces the rise of the reformers cum state builders like Foday Sillah(died 1895), who ruled the Emirate of Kombo until it was annexed by the British in 1894. His scholarship has shed light on the Islamic led resistance to British colonial rule in the late 1800s, whilst Sarr (2016) discussed the influence of these Islamic reformist movements on access to and management of land in The Gambia. Curiously, the scholarship on Islam in The Gambia have not dealt with the significance and role of hajj in The Gambian experience during the colonial and immediate post-independence period. However, the existing literature should be useful pointers to the presence and dynamism of Islam in Gambian society, which act as enablers for the performance of mobility based rituals like the hajj. Indeed, historians of Islam in West Africa have tended to discuss the spread, influence and practices of Islam, overlooking the Hajj.

Hajj as A Pillar of Islam

The Koran and Hadith give prominence to Hajj. From 8-13th Dhulhijja Islamic month, pilgrims visit the Islamic holy sites of Makkah and Madinah in Saudi Arabia, to worship and pray and fast to show modesty, purity and piety. As it is one of the five pillars of the religion, Muslims are highly required to perform the

journey at least once in their lifetimes, when they can afford it physically, mentally and financially.

Hajj is also about integration, mobility, network building and globalisation. Through the hajj, it is explained in this study, Gambian Muslims became citizens of the bigger Muslim sphere at a time when they were subjects in their own country, ruled by Great Britain. Hajj is also performative in the sense that its rituals carry an essence of piety, action, and companionship. The relatives and friends waiting for the return of the pilgrims, with the populations living along the hajj routes, a large, fluid audience.

The Gambian Muslims have performed the hajj since time immemorial. Pilgrims walked to Saudi Arabia to perform the rituals of hajj; some Gambian pilgrims rode on rickety lorries to reach the Hijaz; some Gambians rode on the deck of ships and schooners to reach their goal of hajj. Since the 1960s, tens of thousands of Gambians have reached Saudi Arabia travelling in jet airlines of Czechoslovakia Airlines, *Air Afrique* or Ghana Airways. The range of means of transport shows the determination of Gambian Muslims to reach Mecca for the pilgrimage.

Conceptual Framework

In this article, we lean on the theoretical framework advanced by Heaton (2020) that the hajj should be viewed 'through the lens of colonisation and decolonisation' as this 'allows us to see the complexity and conflicts that went into transforming the global pilgrimage to Mecca from a set of rules and processes governed by empires to one governed by independent nation-states'. Heaton assumes that historians can also 'examine the effects of nationalism and decolonisation on the hajj' because these processes changed the experiences of millions of pilgrims through new sets of rules and administration.

The hajj experience for Gambian Muslims had its nadir days during the colonial period and its halcyon days after the achievement of independence. Indeed, it is argued here that the transformation of hajj rules or no rules during the colonial period into a better-organised, empathetic rite was a sure sign of, and a dividend of decolonisation.

The Stamp of Feminine Determination: Aja Ndouty Ndow Walks to Makkah, 1946-1947

A Gambian Muslim woman made the headlines in Bathurst's leading weekly, *The Gambia Echo newspaper*, in the mid-1940s for positive reasons. Aja Ndouty Ndow, of Lancaster Street, Bathurst performed the hajj. This was newsworthy in Bathurst because she showed sheer piety and determination to accomplish this fact. History tells us that she started her journey to Saudi Arabia in the autumn of 1945, the middle of the austerity occasioned by the ongoing Second World War. Restrictions on movements of persons were still stringently observed in The Gambia and the rest of Africa and Arabia. Shipping was hogged by the returning or demobilised soldiers; indeed, very few passenger ships were available for normal travel. Although rationing and similar wartime restrictions on food resources had been relaxed, nourishment remained a major preoccupation in The Gambia and the rest of Africa. The colonial authorities had mobilised the meagre medical resources and personnel to take care of the war wounded, sick and demobilised who were now returning in droves to their homes in the colonies. Indeed, Aja Ndouty Ndow's temerity to undertake this ambitious religious ritual beats our imagination.

All told, Aja Ndouty performed the Hajj. She walked, rode horse, camel, and rode in a steamer and a lorry to reach Makkah. She returned to Bathurst in the summer of 1947 and was given a civic welcome by the entire Bathurst community. Her return was given front page coverage in *The Gambia Echo* newspaper, a rare treat for a Muslim woman in the Christian-dominated Bathurst Press of the time. Her hajj was therefore a moment of unified joy in Bathurst.

For many years in the decades immediately preceding air transport, as many Gambian women as men would perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Banjul Muslim elder Sheikh Omar Faye and the newspaperman and social critic Mustapha Colley (born Zacchaeus Colley- he converted to Islam in 1936) went to Mecca accompanied by their wives. Binta Cham was the wife of Sheikh Omar Faye. Binta accompanied her husband to perform the hajj. She sadly died en route at a location in Northern Nigeria in 1953. Her husband completed the Hajj and returned home to a hero's welcome, beautifully described in the Bathurst Press by writer Burang John. Colley, on the other hand, died en route, but his wife

performed his funeral rites in Omdurman, and proceeded to perform her Hajj before returning home.

Binta Cham got sick en route to Makkah and had to return to die in Bathurst in the spring of 1953, while the Sheikh was away in Makkah. The fact that he was accompanied by a wife was also indicative of how the hajj had become a de-gendered religious obligation among Gambians. Many other Gambian pilgrims reportedly performed the hajj accompanied by their wives, making the role of women in this Islamic rite even more pronounced, and also strengthening the contribution of women in Islamic practice. It can be said that many men were able to accomplish the hajj rite thanks largely to the companionship of their wives.

Another Bathurst woman linked to the hajj was Ya Anna Sagnia. She was born Christian, but had converted to Islam upon marriage. She performed the hajj numerous times and paid for women to do so in the 1950s. In addition, she held colourful welcome ceremonies for women who had successfully done the hajj, Ajas, at her home in Bathurst. During these sessions of religious songs and prayers from the Koran, many women converted to Islam. This tradition continued even after she died in the 1960s, with the well-known Gamo Ya Annie Sagnia. Indeed, Ya Anna's investment in piety symbolises the fact that Gambian pilgrims used the hajj to develop a sense of belonging to a larger Muslim sphere, with Saudi Arabia as the centre, and also to evolve or appropriate 'local conceptions and practice of Islam'.

Aja Fatounding Jatta of Bakau was another woman who performed the hajj early in the 1960s. She became a notable political figure, or Yai Compin, for the ruling PPP. Aja Fatounding sponsored many other women to perform the hajj, using the pilgrimage to widen the base of her party. Among the last pilgrims to perform the hajj by road from the Gambia in the late 1950s were three women, one blind. Gambian women were, therefore, highly involved in the hajj. This shows not only the level of their piety, but also economic muscle, perseverance, financial autonomy and social independence.

Gambian folklore and archives in Banjul are replete with tales of hajj performance by Gambian men and women, who braved the deserts, forded rivers and leapt over chasms to reach Makkah for the hajj. A close look at these hajj tales will

reveal sheer religious determination called a*l-qadāʾ wa l-qadar* (Fate and destiny) in Arabic, and utmost submission to the desire to fulfil a pillar of Islam. The following tales will help illustrate this point.

The Hajj Odyssey of Alhaji Sheikh Omar Fye 1952-1954

Alhaji Sheikh Omar Fye was born in Bathurst in 1890. He was a religious leader, trader and nationalist politician. From 1932 to 1950, he served in the Legislative Council of The Gambia and was a trusted adviser to the British colonial government in Islamic matters. In 1937, he represented the Gambia at the Coronation of King George IV and met and made acquaintance with the future King Saud of Saudi Arabia, who was also in London as Crown Prince, to attend the Coronation. Alhaji Fye retired from politics in 1950 and returned to his profitable commercial concerns as agents for many European Cars like Standard Motors. In 1952, he retired from trading and dedicated the rest of his life to missionary work.

On October 10, 1952, Alhaji Fye left Bathurst to perform the hajj. He returned in July 1954, having successfully performed his hajj rites. His two years absence shows how hajj was indeed an odyssey. He visited most of the principal towns and cities of British West Africa, such as Freetown, Lagos, and Accra, to have religious intercourse with Muslim leaders in these cities. Indeed, his journey to Makkah was also a missionary work as he proselytised along the routes he took by car, on foot, by boat to reach Makkah. It is said that it was the Gambian Alhaji Fye who proselytised the Kono of Sierra Leone into Islam, such that upon his return from the hajj, he returned to Sierra Leone and established a mosque and asked one of his sons to stay there and continue to teach the Koran to Konos. In addition, Alhaji Fye also met worldly leaders such as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who was then thePrime Minister of Ghana. He reportedly gave Nkrumah a good description of the nationalist ferment in The Gambia, which led Nkrumah to support Gambian nationalist political parties like The Gambia Muslim Congress. Alhaji Fye stayed long enough in Ghana to be impressed by the ‘political enthusiasm of the people of Gold Coast’.

His hajj was even more spectacular because he was accompanied by his son, Muhammedu Kabirr Fye, and one of his wives, Binta Cham. Companionship was

quite a useful and common occurrence in the overland hajj route. Pilgrims always travelled together so that they could enjoy mutual support and nurse the sick among them. In case of death, as was with 'an elderly pilgrim Kausu Minte' who died at Khartoum, Sudan in March 1951. The message was relayed home by letter by his 'travelling companion Amara Ture'.

Another aspect of Alhaji Fye's hajj, which represented a common experience for Gambian pilgrims, was the vast swathe of territory he had to cross to reach Makkah. 'The Sheikh and his son called at Jos, Maiduguri, in Northern Nigeria; Fort Lamy, present day Ndjamena, Abeche, Chad; before crossing into Atbara, in Anglo Egyptian Sudan'. Indeed, Gambian intending pilgrims had to navigate the complex border entry regulations and restrictions of close to half a dozen territories ruled by different colonial powers, and therefore requiring diverse sanitary and immigration paperwork. But armed with a Letter of introduction from Governor Sir Percy Wyn Harris, Sheikh Omar toured northern Nigeria, where he was warmly welcomed by the Emir of Kano and the Sultan of Sokoto, the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims. In Nigeria and Chad, he helped to settle land and chieftaincy disputes which had bewildered the colonial authorities.

Whilst the Sheikh was able to navigate the tricky border and sanitary regulations as he had with him folios of Introductory Letters from The Gambian colonial authorities, as a former Legislative Council member, lesser mortals like Alhaji Babou Jagne, a motorist who lived in Bathurst (Banjul) and transported pilgrims to Makkah in his lorry in the 1950s, did not have such paper privilege.

To Makkah by Lorry from The Gambia, 1958

The jet age has taken the adventure out of the 22,000 miles to and from Makkah for pilgrims. This is the more-so because throughout the 1950s, Gambians' preferred mode of transportation to the hajj was the lorry. The introduction of motor transport in The Gambia started in the late 1920s. By the end of the Second World War, enterprising Gambians were popularising the use of lorry to transport faithfuls to the hajj. They purchased British Army trucks left redundant after the sudden end of the War in Europe in April 1945, adapted them into carriages and carried dozens of pilgrims on the nine-month return journey overland to Makkah.

Alhaji Babou Jagne, born in Bathurst in 1916, got his driver's license in 1930 and became a truck driver with the British Royal Navy encamped in Bathurst during the Second World War. He used his severance pay to buy a lorry which he turned

into a 30-seat carrier, and on a sultry Bathurst day in March 1958, sped off towards Makkah with 33 intending pilgrims, including three women, one blind. All of them had paid £100 to cover the cost of fuel, provisions and repairs!

His Morris 5-Ton truck drove to Kaolack, Senegal, to pick up additional passengers before heading towards the border with Mali. Surely, the former trade routes of Mansa Musa were no longer the monopoly of the camel; the mechanised caravans of the lorries were now coursing their way through as well as across the hot and long sandy trails of the Sahara. Alhaji Babou had to negotiate the slippery hills of the Futa Jallon highlands in Guinea, as much as he had to wait out sudden packs of lions gallivanting across the bush track his lorry was following in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. He drove through Northern Nigeria, Maiduguri, Abeche and Fort Lamy in Chad and onto Omdurman, in the Sudan, where just a few decades earlier the armies of the Mahdi had defeated the British army. In mid-May 1958, the truck reached Jeddah, the main port in Saudi Arabia, having crossed from Port Sudan.

The intrepid driver and his pilgrims performed the hajj and set out for home on 5th August 1958. He reached Bathurst on 16th October, 1958. The Alhajis and Ajas had earned their hajj titles the very hard way indeed.

Alhaji Babou's odyssey to Makkah by lorry was just one of numerous such efforts by Gambian pilgrims to perform their Islamic obligation. Hajj-bound lorry drivers like him performed the roles of guides, mechanics, nurses, cooks and so on for their passengers. They combined earnest entrepreneurship, adventure, with ardent religiosity. Alhaji Babou's motor odyssey to perform the Hajj in 1958 falls within the recent theories put forward by Andrew Denning that roads and automobiles had a central role in African colonies. European colonial powers knew that for them to really tap into Africa's richness to justify the colonial scheme, roads must be constructed, drivers trained and vehicles available. The productivity and governability of colonies in Africa were linked to the ability of colonial powers like France and Britain to solve the 'transport problem.' (19). The Morris truck which Alhaji Babou adapted to drive to Makkah was indeed part of the colonial lorry fleet which had been de-inventoried, and auctioned by the Public Works Department. Thus while motorization was seen as enhancing the colonial project of exploitation and control, it had the unintended consequence of promoting social mobility practices like the Hajj.

Both the Hajjs of Alhaji Sheikh Omar Fye and Alhaji Jagne, and their companions put Gambians firmly at the doors of globalisation of the pre-independence era when they passed through, interacted, experienced foreign climes, and navigated borders and state sanitary regulations. Moreover, the experience of Gambian pilgrims put them firmly on the hajj routes, which counted among them the great centres of Islamic learning and heritage: Timbuktu, Maiduguri, Kano, Abeche, Omdurman, Port Sudan and of course Jeddah. Through the passage of these centres, Gambian pilgrims stocked up on books, prayer accoutrements like mats and beads and made acquaintance with other Muslims. Gambians also exchanged local items like wooden slates for writing Koranic lessons, cowries, and hand-woven textiles along the bazaars' hajj routes on their way to Makkah.

Therefore, aside from its religious import, the hajj also became a form of interactive mobility for Gambians. The long stays at quarantine stations beside the Red Sea were periods when pilgrims got exposed to the international health regimes and similar bureaucratic regimes, which were meant to control pilgrim traffic.

Indeed, the cases explained below were classic attempts by the colonial authorities in The Gambia to control pilgrims' traffic through stiff bureaucracy, inane sanitary regulations, and utter state disinterest. They were quite the perverse of the strong attention given to hajj operations by the post-independence regimes.

Hajj as a Complex Experience During Colonial Rule

But why did Gambian intending pilgrims endure such perilous journeys to Makkah to fulfil a religious obligation? Aside from the religious earnestness, intending pilgrims received so little attention from the colonial rulers that they were on their own and had to reach the Hejaz of their own accord. Indeed, as early as 1949, Chief Landing Bojang of Brikama at a Chiefs Conference confronted the Governor Sir Percy Wright that 'Senegal pilgrims had less difficulty than Gambians' especially they 'got more help with foreign exchange' than Gambians. Several recently arrived pilgrims attested to this fact in open plenary to the chagrin of the Governor and his assembled factotums. Indeed, so embarrassed was the Governor that barely two months later, he had asked his officials to work towards 'facilitating the exchange of funds from West African into local currencies en route'. Another voice of complaint was heard from quarters as hallowed as the Legislative Council Member Hon. Abdou Wally Mbye, who

earlier in 1948 tabled a question for the Colonial Secretary on how the government was watching 'Gambian pilgrims suffer hardship and disappointment'? Here, we see at play Heaton's assertion on the nexus between hajj and nationalist politics, with the fate of the pilgrims becoming political cri *de coeur* or *cause celebre.*

Indeed, currency matters were among the least of worries for Gambian pilgrims. As they received less attention from their government, most Gambian intending pilgrims resorted to Senegal to get well prepared for the hajj. Thus, Dakar banks, shipping agents and swindlers had field days making life hard for Gambians, but also making huge profits off Gambian pilgrims. Momodou Bamba Sarr of Taifa, Fulladu West, intended to perform the hajj in 1948. He went to Dakar to get his passage tickets, inoculations and was swindled out of a princely sum of at least £200. Also, the French colonial authorities in Dakar forced Gambian pilgrims passing through Dakar to deposit various sums of money worth CFA 120,000 as security against overstaying of valid visas. A cook to the French Consul General in Dakar named Momadou Illiasa Ceesay misused his position and ran a huge swindling racket against Gambian pilgrims. In 1948 alone, five Gambian pilgrims (Alhaji Essa Waggeh, Alhaji Jebel Sisi, Momodaou Bamba Sarr, Alhaji Biwam) reported to the Police claiming to have lost £500 and 5,000 Francs to Illiasa Ceesay.

The future political leader, Alhaji I.M. Garba Jahumpa, who also headed the Bathurst Young Muslim Society, hatched plans to ease these difficulties. In 1949, he toured the rural areas to meet intending pilgrims who intended to travel to Makkah by air. Jahumpa made good progress, registered several dozen eager Gambian intending pilgrims across the country, 'enough to fill a Dakota aircraft'. Indeed, this big number encouraged the British West African Airways Corporations to arrange a 24-seater Viking aircraft to airlift Gambian pilgrims. However, as the colonial government was unwilling to undertake any guarantee for such an innovative approach to make Gambian pilgrims travel to Makkah by air, the airways charged £260 for each pilgrim and other expenses, few intending pilgrims expressed interest!

This princely sum made many intending pilgrims who had deposited up to ₤200 to withdraw, as they were no longer able to afford the cost. The cost of passage for the same hajj by sea was ₤106. Indeed, it is obvious from the exchanges between Muslim elders like Jahumpa and colonial officials that having enough pilgrims to warrant introduction was not the problem; the issue was the lack of interest by authorities to expend effort to enable Gambian pilgrims to fly to Makkah. The conflictual nature of hajj between those seeking to modernise and those paying askance to it becomes apparent.

The Case of Musa Njabu Conteh

The hardship faced by an intending Gambian pilgrim named Musa Njabu Conteh with passport No. A/305 deserves our brief attention, for it illustrates the sneering attitude of colonial authorities towards the hajj of Gambians. He lived in Gambissara, in the Upper reaches of The Gambia, and had studied theology in Al-Ahzar in Egypt. In 1947, he tried to make the hajj but it failed because he was not given a travel document. In 1948, he asked Sheikh Omar Fye to intercede on his behalf so that he could get a travel document. In a letter dated 14 April, 1948, Fye wrote a supportive letter for Conteh, whom he describes as a 'friend' 'who desires to make the hajj… and has made all the needed deposits. He is honest, reliable and worthy Muslim…' Conteh got his passport. But he again failed to make the hajj as he was caught in a foreign exchange palaver in Dakar, which occasioned his expulsion from Senegal. The British Consul in Dakar, who represented Gambian interests there, was distinctly unhelpful and seemed to have a particular hatred for Conteh, about, who he sneeringly wondered 'how can an African get so much money in his pocket… He deposited CFA 125,000 at one go…' Conteh again failed to make the hajj in 1948.

Accordingly, even if cost was a demotivator for intending pilgrims, there were other controllable indices which the colonial government was not keen to assuage. These include the inability, or rather unwillingness, of the Divisional Commissioners to furnish intending pilgrims with basic information like sail dates of ships to Lagos, and currency regulations, which should not be too much to ask from a senior colonial administrator. But why was the British colonial administration not keen to make the hajj easy for intending Gambians? The answer lies in 'apprehension' of the colonial authorities about finances, labour

shortage, disease outbreak and notably ‘circulation of anti-colonial ideas’ from the hajj routes.

The Gambian colonial state was mostly in the red, far short of the cash needed to run the small bureaucracy. This made the colonial authorities watch with acute apprehension any expenditures related to foreign travel. Money Orders and checks from the only British Bank of West Africa in Bathurst were tightly controlled. As the hajj also meant the absence of men and women from their farms and trade concerns for at least 9 months in the period before the introduction of air charter flights, the colonial Commissioners grumbled about district chiefs being absent for too long on hajj as ‘nonproductive’.

With two hospitals and only a handful of medical doctors in the entire country for much of the period under study, the fear of contagion brought along by the Alhajis and Ajas was also a frequent grumble in the Minute Sheets of the Commissioners’ files. Nasserism in Egypt, and Mahdism in the Sudan and the nationalist ferment in Northern Nigeria made the hajj routes suspect granaries of anti-British ideas which Gambian pilgrims could harvest. However, noting the inability of most pilgrims to understand Arabic or Hausa, the extent of such influence could not be ascertain. Nonetheless, as lately as 1951, Gambian pilgrims were been offered by the colonial authorities the hard to take opportunity of joining the overland Maiduguri Caravan to Makkah of Bathurst-Lagos-Kano-Maiduguri-Makkah and return at the princely sum of £197.

Yet, the lacklustre approach by the British colonial officials in Bathurst was curious because it ran against the grain of the spirit of accommodation between Islamic elders and the British authorities. Since the end of the Islamic reform wars of 1850-1900, which pitted in some instances British colonial forces and Gambian jihadists like Foday Kaba Dumbuya, the British colonial rulers in The Gambia have developed reciprocal courtesies with Muslim leaders. This was why in 1903, the Cadi Courts were established in Bathurst; in 1905, Muhammedan School which taught Arabic, Koran and English was created to cater for the religious needs of Bathurst Muslims weary of sending their wards to the Christian Mission schools.

By the late 1940s, the British colonial government had permitted Muslims to mark the Eids as Public holidays. Since 1922, a Muslim elder had a seat at the legislative Council; this was increased to two in 1947. Therefore, as Lecoq (2007) says of the France's approach to pilgrims from French West Africa, the British in The Gambia were 'favorably disposed toward (Gambian) Muslims and the particular "African" Islam they believed they practiced'. The official disregard for intending pilgrims during the colonial period therefore runs perverse to the general more positive relations between colonial rulers and Gambian Muslim elders. Notably, at this time in the 1950s, the colonial authorities in Banjul were busy tackling another form of mobility, stowaways in merchant ships to the UK and other European ports.

Hajj as a Less Complex Experience 1966-1970

Through the hajj, the newly elected Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP) for Sir Dawda Jawara, Prime Minister 1962-1979, and President from 1970 to 1994, was able to show the largely Muslim electorate that it was supporting their welfare. The PPP Ministers and bigwigs who had performed the hajj during the colonial era up to 1961, experienced great difficulties such as access to travelling documents, air transportation, forex and vaccinations. Now that they were newly elected to power, the PPP Ministers wanted to do things which will help ease the hajj for Gambians. The effort at better organization of the hajj by colonial authorities reflect 'the aspirations to rationalize and modernize' the religious domain.

The first step taken by the PPP Government when it was elected in June 1962 was to create a regular air service to transport Gambian pilgrims to Makkah. Hitherto, Gambian pilgrims did so on their own accord: purchasing tickets from Air Senegal or Air Afrique agents in Bathurst (Banjul) or flying through Dakar or Freetown. Air Afrique was created in 1961 to link mainly French speaking African countries. Its network expanded to include stops at English speaking countries like The Gambia. It closed operations in 2002.

This posed hardship to the intending pilgrims in terms of cost and travel anxiety. The pain was even more acute for Gambians because they heard stories of Senegalese, Guineans and Nigerians pilgrims receiving support and facilitation

from their governments, which Gambians did not enjoy. Indeed, as stated above, Gambians took the extra burden of travelling to Dakar or Freetown to be able to reach Makkah by air.

Air travel to Makkah was seen an indicator of progress and also care for the welfare of one's citizens. Therefore, The Gambia Government created The Gambia Airways as a limited Liability Company with 40 percent shares for The Gambia Government and the rest for British United Airlines. The first task of this new company was to act as a ticketing agent, and to procure charter aircraft to transport the Gambian intending pilgrims.

However, there were already other players in the market as ticketing agents for pilgrims: namely, Maurel Freres, a French owned general services company installed in The Gambia since the 1870s. It acted as ticketing agent for Air Afrique, Czechoslovakia Airlines, Air Senegal, Air Guinea etc. The PPP government was caught in a dilemma of giving preference to its own The Gambia Airways, whilst remaining true to its ethos of free, non-monopoly business environment. In 1964, Air Afrique had requested for a monopoly of hajj flights out of The Gambia. In a Cabinet Brief dated May 1965, the Minister of Works and Communications, who was responsible for air travel and therefore hajj matters, was eager to inform his Cabinet colleagues that Government had not conferred a monopoly on Air Afrique to transport Gambian pilgrims to Makkah. However, this decision posed several problems. First, the Senegal Government would now no longer extend 'welfare and accommodation facilities' travelling by Air Afrique.

This was particularly critical because Gambian intending pilgrims were flown from Yundum Airport to Dakar by air and thence to Saudi Arabia. The Senegalese government usually cared for the in-transit intending pilgrims on the outbound and inbound journeys. If the Gambia continued to allow Air Afrique to even compete its newly created The Gambia Airways, Gambian pilgrims would continue to enjoy the special treatment. Second, the fact that Air Afrique could not hold a monopoly meant that The Gambia Airways also did not hold one as far as transporting pilgrims was concerned. Yet, Gambian officials were keen to underscore the fact that other than Government passengers to the UK there was

only one annual occasion when the flow of passengers would be seriously profitable to justify an aircraft hire. That was the occasion of the hajj! Therefore, for The Gambia Airways to survive, it needed to cash in on this milch cow of hajj passengers! The survival of The Gambia Airways was of concern to the new Government because it was the first state parastatal and, therefore, its progress was to set the agenda for future interventions in priority sectors by the PPP government.

To outwit the demanding Air Afrique, The PPP Ministers asked for a price war on hajj tickets. Accordingly, Air Afrique set its hajj package to Makkah in 1966 at £205 return plus £9 as Saudi Pilgrim Tax; The Gambia Airways was asking for £170 Saudi Pilgrim Tax included; Maurel Freres which was hitherto agent for Air Afrique, but now chartered Czechoslovakia Airlines, was demanding £155 plus £9 Saudi Pilgrim Tax. The choice rested on the patriotic inclinations of Gambian intending pilgrims, but officials were eager in their correspondence on the matter to request from the general public 'a measure of preference for The Gambia Airways in connection with charter flights originating from The Gambia'.

From the foregoing, it is discernible that it was the hajj that tested the trade negotiations skills, and international air travel regulations savviness of the new PPP government in the two years before Gambian independence. Also, it was the ardent desire to make a mark with its electorate that this government created its first parastatal to give intending Gambian pilgrims a better fares deal and greater travel comfort.

In The Gambia, one who has performed the hajj answers to the sobriquet of Alhaji or Aja for women. It assures respect and consideration and the titles also point to a high level of religious piety and accomplishment. The headgear brought along from Makkah is indeed a well-protected and highly treasured heirloom.

The PPP Minister were keen to harness this religious and social prestige associated with performing the hajj. Thus at the larger governmental level, there was keenness to be seen to be supporting Muslims perform the hajj in ease and comfort unlike the hassle it was associated with prior to 1965. But at the micro level, PPP Ministers seized upon the ease in the preparations for the hajj to

perform it themselves. In 1964, the Minister of Works and Communications Sir Alieu Jack performed the hajj, of course with the support and privileges that accrue from a diplomatic passport, Note Verbale and protocol courtesy at Makkah from the Saudi Government. Upon his return in June 1964, he garnered a unanimous acceptance from the Prime Minister and his Ministers that his titles should now be: 'Alhaji Hon. Sulayman Jack, M.P, J. P'. His Secretary circulated letters to all Government departments and Radio Gambia of the new titles of the Minister. The insistence on the Minister carrying and be addressed as Alhaji indicates that hajj was a social capital in addition to its religious value in Gambian society. Indeed, as summed up by Mishra, hajj has 'political salience', and 'appeal at personal level'. In 1974, President Jawara's turn to add Alhaji to his titles, when he performed the hajj accompanied by his new wife, Chilel.

If the British colonial authorities used bureaucracy to stifle the desire of Gambians to intend the hajj, the independence government led by Sir Dawda Jawara used bureaucracy to seek to improve and banalize hajj to make it accessible, pleasurable and rewarding journey. This was done with a raft of measures taken by The Gambian Cabinet in 1966 onwards. In addition to creation of The Gambia Airways in 1965, a Hajj Advisory Committee was also created in 1966 to give technical advice to Government on the modalities to make hajj easier for Gambians. Led by the highly respected Islamic scholar Alhaji Abdoulie Jobe, who later became Imam of Banjul, and had iron cast ties in Saudi Arabian scholarly circles, the committee comprised of seven members all of whom had performed the hajj earlier in the 1950s, mostly likely by lorry or sea passage or both.

The Committee was tasked to enhance the ability of Gambians to perform the rite. They innovated a hajj guide system, where Gambian Arabic speakers accompanied the pilgrims to Makkah to support them navigate the hajj rites. The Committee also recommended, and obtained from Government, a yearly increment of pilgrims quota from the Saudi Government, so that intending pilgrims will not suffer the disappointment of rejection by travel agencies. The Committee laid down the regulations on vaccinations, luggage allowance, medical support to pilgrims paid for by Government, and foreign exchange rates with Gambian banks. Indeed, the Committee described the 1970 Hajj as 'spectacular

success', which would have been even more successful were it not for the death of one female pilgrim.

Unlike during the colonial era when hajj matters were largely left to the British Divisional Commissioners, and advice sought mainly from one person, Alhaji Sheikh Omar Fye, who was the Muslim Member of the Legislative Council, hajj matters now became more democratised and participatory. There was even a very conscious effort to have an even ethnic representation on the Hajj Advisory Council to increase its national character. Moreover, a Civil Society Group called the Pilgrimage Committee was created to liaise with and act as a pressure group to enhance the comfort of pilgrims. Their work with the government resulted in the attachment of two medical assistants to travel with the pilgrims from 1968 onwards.

Hajj as Diplomacy: The Case of Czechoslovakia Airlines and the Gambia Government

Hajj influenced the international relations outlook of the Gambia government soon after independence. Whilst during the colonial era, the effort was to for example, harmonise sanitation regulations among the four British colonies of Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and The Gambia to forestall disease spread, the PPP government made allies with countries it believed had what it took to ease the hajj experience for Gambians.

In 1971, The Gambia decided to establish diplomatic ties with Prague. The push factor for such diplomatic move was that The Gambia Airways was eager to enter into a hajj flight charter agreement with the Czechoslovakia Airlines, which operated a regional hub in nearby Dakar, Senegal. This airline offered more competitive rates for its charter flight to Makkah than any other airline operating from Dakar, including the famous Pan-African Air Afrique. This necessitated a string of air agreements signed between Prague and Banjul from 1965 onwards. The establishment of diplomatic ties helped to give The Gambia more favourable contracts with the Czechoslovak Airlines. Here we can refer to Heaton's assumption that decolonisation was key to improving the hajj experiences and processes. The foreign policy of an independent The Gambia helped to ease air access for its pilgrims.

Indeed, so eager were both countries to maintain this air diplomacy that when in 1974, Czechoslovakia Airlines sent a note to Banjul on the last minute unavailability of their aircraft to fly out 200 Gambian pilgrims, President Jawara dispatched his Works Minister Sir Alieu Jack to Prague as a special envoy to appeal personally to the President of the East European country for a reversal of the decision by Czechoslovakia Airlines.

Curiously, in the period 1966 to 1990, the entire diplomatic exchanges between Banjul and Prague were about access to Czechoslovakia Airlines planes for the annual hajj, and to a lesser extent requests for overfly permission by the Czechoslovakia Airlines en route to deliver supplies to Guinea Bissau. Banjul-Prague ties were indeed largely airworthy!

Hajj Strengthened Saudi-The Gambia Ties

The same can be said of Banjul-Riyadh ties. Some of the earliest diplomatic notes sent out from Riyadh for the newly independent The Gambia were related to Saudi Airlines's mandate to check the air worthiness certificates of all aeroplanes taking in pilgrims. Moreover, it was the hajj of Alhaji Sheikh Omar Fye in 1953 which sowed seeds of Saudi-The Gambia diplomatic ties and strengthened the religious ties. Fye was invited by King Saud (1953-1964) to stay beyond the hajj as a Special Guests of King Saud. He even attended the Coronation of King Saud in 1953 and impressed the Saudi King with his mastery of Arabic, and successive Saudi monarchs have had strong ties with Gambians at the state and individual level.

Another influential Alhaji was Abdoulie Jobe (1910-2004). He retired as senior Government Postmaster in 1964 and performed the hajj. He used his stay in Saudi Arabia to also make acquaintance with the Royal Palace, such that in 1967, he obtained a Special Royal Invitation from King Faisal to return to Saudi Arabia to complete a book manuscript. He returned in 1969 with innovative ideas of strengthening the teaching of the Koran in Gambian schools. His report on this scheme was adopted by the Gambian Cabinet, and from 1970 onwards, Government schools were required to hire Islamic/Arabic teachers who taught a set syllabus Alhaji Jobe designed while sojourning in Saudi Arabia. As Imam of Banjul from 1983, he worked with the Government to have the Saudi King Fahd

build the new and imposing King Fahd mosque in Banjul. His hajj indeed had far-reaching diplomatic and social benefits! Such people to people ties morphed into supporting strong Saudi- Gambia diplomatic ties such that in the mid-1970s, The Gambia opened its first embassy in the Arab world in Riyadh, and opened its first Consulate General in Jeddah to ease the hajj for Gambians.

Conclusion: Policy Matters

The study is relevant to understanding of the strong Islamic ethos of Gambians, which even the nonchalant attitude towards a key pillar of Islam did not dim. Also, this study situates The Gambia firmly at the centre of the hajj routes. Bathurst, the Gambian capital, became a departure and arrival point for hundreds of Muslims who did the hajj. Bathurst, therefore, also harbours hundreds of tales and stories about the hajj, the Holy Sites of Islam and the peoples along the hajj routes. In the villages and towns of the Gambia, rosary and beads could be purchased in Abeche, Chad; leather pouches purchased in Maiduguri or Kano in Northern Nigeria; and salt platters purchased or exchanged for a metre of hand-woven Gambian cloth at Omdurman. Of course, goblets of Zam-Zam holy water from Medina were served during the copious welcome ceremonies of the newly arrived Alhajis and Ajas. Indeed, the hajj routes have tangible and intangible components, of hajj goods, friendship, unity and piety.

Alhajis returned to The Gambia to name or rename their villages for great towns they passed through on the way to Makkah such that even a cursory look at a map of The Gambia today will indicate place names like Maka Gui(for Maiduguri, Northen Nigeria); Jiddah(for Jeddah, the Red Sea Port of entry into the Holy Land); Barra(for Atbara, another significant town on the hajj route in Sudan; Sam(for Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, or Mina.

Accordingly, the hajj remains a unifier and diplomatic capital linking The Gambia and all modern states found along the hajj routes. The ongoing insurgency by Boko Haram and similar terror groups has as its epicentre the hajj routes. Thus, the once thriving caravan routes for pilgrims headed to Makkah are now death traps swarming with Islamist cutthroats, primed to slaughter innocent people. Probably, any attempt to resolve the insane wars of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Chad and Cameroon or the fratricidal war in Sudan, can situate the shared values

of the hajj routes as a template for mediation towards peaceful resolution of these shameful theatres of violence now desecrating the once pompous and integrative hajj routes.

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