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Organising Hajj-Going in Britain:

A Preliminary Report

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## 1. Acknowledgements

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Finally, I should underline that for all that this research has involved significant collaboration, the analysis and interpretation herewith is entirely my own and so the responsibility for any failings or inaccuracies remains with me. Indeed, as this report sketches only preliminary findings, and research will be on-going during 2013-14, I welcome comments and criticism, as well as the opportunity to interview new respondents.

## 2. Executive Summary: Key Findings

Every year around 25,000 British Muslims travel to Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage.<sup>1</sup> Here, and usually just once in their lifetime, they join together with around 3 million co-religionists to perform a set of rituals said to have been established by the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century.

However, until now, the organisation of Hajj-going among British Muslims has not been the subject of scholarly research.

This preliminary report forms part of new and on-going research among members of the 'Hajj industry' in the UK, from tour operators and their guides, to representatives of pilgrim welfare organisations, and officers in local and central government.

It details the results of an initial round of 11 in-depth interviews, which produced transcripts of more than 100,000 words, plus observations at Hajj industry events, the initial results of an online survey and an analysis of parliamentary discussions during the last decade.

The intention of this report is therefore to begin to locate the business of Hajj-going in the UK within its broader contexts. It focuses upon the complex and changing dynamics of relations between Saudi Arabia, UK Hajj tour operators, pilgrim markets, British Muslim organisations and the agencies of the UK state and society.

*Organising Hajj-Going in Britain: A Preliminary Report* should be read by practitioners and policy-makers in the travel and tourism sector, in Muslim and other faith—based organisations, as well as in the relevant departments of local and central government.

The key findings of the report are as follows and can be summarised under five main headings:

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<sup>1</sup> The relevant annual UK pilgrim figures for 2004-08 are as follows: 2004 (22,270); 2005 (27,910); 2006 (25,000); 2007 (21,715); 2008 (18,604). See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090226/text/90226>. In 2009 the figure was 23,000, see <http://www.britishhajjdelegation.org.uk/about.php>.

## 1) UK TOUR OPERATORS AND THE CHANGING HAJJ IN SAUDI ARABIA

- a) Against the context of Saudi Arabia's longstanding efforts to accommodate huge pilgrim numbers, as well as diversify its economy, through the infrastructural and commercial development of Mecca, costs in every part of the Hajj industry are rising with \$10 billion spent on the Hajj in 2011.
- b) While until the mid-2000s Hajj-going from Britain could still be organised independently and in small pilgrim groups, as part of the Ministry of Hajj's concern to rationalise, professionalise and consolidate the industry, in the UK all visas and accommodation must now be secured via 80 or so approved tour operators.
- c) UK tour operators appreciate the very great demands made upon Saudi Arabia in terms of managing the contemporary Hajj. However, they do feel that more could be done to maximise efficiency and minimise last minute uncertainties.

## 2) BRITISH MUSLIM PILGRIM MARKETS

- a) In recent decades British Muslims' expectations of going for Hajj have been transformed, just as they have been democratised in terms of social class, gender and generation. 91% of 211 survey respondents had always anticipated making the pilgrimage in their lifetime, while only 35% of their grandparents had.
- b) Indeed, rates of Hajj-going have increased at about twice the rate of British Muslim population growth in the UK since the 1960s because intending pilgrims here i) are not constrained by a national quota unlike pilgrims in Muslim-majority countries; ii) generally have access to the financial resources necessary to travel; and iii) no longer see Hajj as the preserve of older pilgrims preparing for the afterlife.
- c) Both 'premium' and more 'no frills' tour operator Hajj packages and experiences can be distinguished, with the former mimicking 'mainstream' holiday packages for middle classes of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and the latter offering more informally organised good value to a less prosperous but much larger and ethnically orientated customer base.

### 3) THE STRUCTURE OF THE UK HAJJ INDUSTRY

- a) The structure of the Hajj industry in the UK is unusual in that only around 50-60% of pilgrims book directly through ATOL (Air Tours Organisers' Licensing) approved tour operators. For many intending pilgrims, Hajj-going is organised more informally.
- b) Given the pilgrim numbers they must agree and pay for in advance, some UK Hajj tour operators appoint agents, sub-agents and 'touts' to help them meet their quotas. Touts sometimes include ordinary members of the community such as imams.
- c) While the Hajj industry is a risky business it is also potentially lucrative with the spend on all ATOL approved Muslim pilgrimages estimated as £36 million in recent years. Rising pilgrim expectations and the informality of the organisation of Hajj-going among sub-agents and touts is increasingly recognised as fertile ground for so-called 'Hajj fraud'.

### 4) HAJJ FRAUD IN THE UK

- a) Hajj fraud comprises a range of industry problems including incompetence, dishonesty and outright deception. Amongst sub-agents and touts especially there is inevitably a lack of skills and knowledge of tour operator responsibilities, while tour operators themselves can be unprofessional and disorganised.
- b) Subagents and touts have no power over the delivery of services, deal in cash and rarely provide written contracts, receipts or accurate documentation. Some take pilgrims' money assuming they can deliver but others over-promise and raise expectations.
- c) There was a four-fold increase in the reporting of Hajj fraud in 2011-12. Most complaints are civil and concern changes to verbal agreements and mis-described hotels, rooms or other services, but are often difficult to prosecute. The scale of the problem remains unknown, with many older pilgrims reluctant to involve the authorities, often for ostensibly religious-cultural reasons, something unscrupulous tour operators can turn to their advantage.

## 5) BRITISH MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS, PILGRIM WELFARE AND UK GOVERNMENT

- a) While Hajj fraud has come to greater public attention only in recent years, British Muslim pilgrims have also faced longstanding problems in Saudi Arabia including various disasters during the 1990s. Stampedes and fires around Mecca at this time caused British Muslim voluntary organisations including The Association of British Hujjaj (Pilgrims) to call upon government to more actively support its Muslim citizens overseas.
- b) The secular UK government has no desire to control British Muslim pilgrimage. Nevertheless, when New Labour came to power in 1997, a political context emerged which was hospitable to the greater public recognition of Islam. With Foreign and Commonwealth Office support, a British Hajj Delegation with volunteer British Muslim doctors was based in Mecca/Mina through the 2000s, continuing since 2010 as a private British Muslim initiative as political and economic contexts changed. In terms of ‘Hajj fraud’, government has emphasised the need for better knowledge of consumer rights amongst British Muslims with a national campaign launched by the City of London police in 2013.
- c) Whether on the British Hajj Delegation or Hajj fraud, UK government has had to work with interlocutors reflecting the existing religious and ethnic diversity of British Muslim voluntary organisations. The Association of British Hujjaj, the Muslim Council of Britain and the Council of British Hajjis have all been key partners in driving important health, safety and anti-fraud messages to often ‘hard to reach’ British Muslim communities. However, lacking access to significant independent resources, even they are not always well-known at the grassroots. Moreover, as yet, UK tour operators have seemed reluctant to establish a self-regulating Hajj industry body in Britain with its own voluntary code of practice.

The rate at which British Muslims travel for Hajj and other pilgrimages overseas is only likely to increase in the future, as the 2.7 million strong population continues to grow and to prosper. Therefore, it is hoped that this preliminary mapping of the issues can make a helpful contribution to practitioners and policy-makers’ broader understanding of the changing dynamics at work in this aspect of the religious, economic, cultural and political life of British Muslims.

### 3. Introduction

So long as they are physically fit and can afford to make the journey, it is incumbent upon the followers of Islam to undertake the Hajj at least once in their lives from the eighth to the thirteenth day of the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar, *Dhu'l hijja*. The pilgrimage to Mecca is perhaps the most emblematic expression of Muslim community, for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As one of the five pillars (*arkan*) of Islam, it is the Hajj that brings believers together at the site of their faith's genesis. The rites of this sacred journey are said not only to purify the individual believer of his or her sins, but also attest to, and reaffirm, the continuity of the *umma* (Muslim community). So while pilgrims follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad - who is believed to have established the rituals prescribed by the Qur'an (2:124ff) before his death—with around 3 million pilgrims annually, the Hajj is now 'the largest and most culturally diverse assembly of humanity to gather in one place at one time'.<sup>2</sup>

However, the contemporary Hajj remains relatively under-researched. While some interesting literature has emerged internationally in the last few decades,<sup>3</sup> and I have written elsewhere myself about the experiences of British Pakistani pilgrims,<sup>4</sup> this preliminary report concentrates on the organisation of Hajj-going from Britain. When, on the strength of previous research, the British Museum invited me to collect further British Muslim pilgrims' accounts as a resource for their exhibition, I was also keen to examine the wider infrastructure within which Hajj is organised. To that end this report is based upon original data collected mainly between October and December 2011 and during 2013. Transcripts of more than 100,000 words in total were produced following in-depth, semi-structured interviews of up to two hours duration with 11 industry experts, all but two being of British Asian Muslim heritage and all but one being male:<sup>5</sup>

- two tour operators approved by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj, one in London with a high end, multi-ethnic customer base, and one in the north of England offering mainly British Indians a mid-range, good value service;

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<sup>2</sup> Bianchi 1995: 88.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Eickelman and Piscatori 1990; Bianchi 2004; Hammoudi 2006.

<sup>4</sup> See McLoughlin 2009a, 2009b.

<sup>5</sup> 68% of all Muslims in Britain in 2001 were of South Asian heritage, including 43% British Pakistanis. See Peach 2005: 20.



- three Hajj guides/imams, one British Pakistani in the north of England, one British Arab in London, and one Irish convert from the Midlands;
- the two Hajj pilgrim welfare organisations which claim national reach, one located in the Midlands and serving mainly British Pakistanis (three representatives interviewed), and one in the north of England serving mainly British Indians; and, finally,
- two government officers, both based in London and both incidentally of Muslim heritage, one British Pakistani working in central government, and one British Bangladeshi employed in a local council's trading standards department.

I also draw upon observations at two Hajj industry related events organised by tour operators in the UK, as well as parliamentary discussions about the Hajj during the last decade or so.<sup>6</sup> Finally, while I am not generally concerned in this preliminary analysis with data collected from pilgrims, I do also cite very selectively from a survey - 'How was your Hajj?' - which ran on Bristol Online Surveys, November 2011 – March 2012, and collected 211 responses mainly from educated, 'religious' Muslims in their 20s, 30s and 40s.<sup>7</sup> This survey will be the subject of a fuller exposition during 2013-14.

The main body of this report, then, is divided into several sections, each of which provides an initial mapping of a different aspect of the organisation of Hajj-going amongst British Muslims. I begin with an outline of the changing context of the organisation of the Hajj in Saudi Arabia, showing how this frames the work of UK tour operators. The report continues with an account of how and why Hajj-going has grown amongst Muslims in Britain since the 1960s, and highlights two general pilgrim markets which underline new and established differences of class and culture with British Muslim 'communities'. The general structure of the Hajj industry in the UK is also described, most especially in terms of an analysis of the conditions giving rise to 'Hajj fraud'. In the final sections of the report I turn to British Muslim organisations and their lobbying of the UK government on the question of pilgrim welfare. I chart the career of the pioneering British Hajj Delegation which operated during the 2000s and assess the activities and reach of the main British Muslim pilgrim welfare organisations. Finally, I conclude with an account of recent developments under new economic and political circumstances.

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<sup>6</sup> A search for 'Hajj' at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) on 8 September 2012 produced 129 results.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.survey.leeds.ac.uk/hajj>.

#### 4. The Changing Hajj in Modern Saudi Arabia

The number of overseas pilgrims performing Hajj has mushroomed since the mid-1950s,<sup>8</sup> when annual figures rarely exceeded 100,000. With the end of colonialism and the absence of world wars (if not civil or regional conflicts), there has been less major disruption to the secure movement of people. Moreover, from the mid-1970s especially, fast, inexpensive air travel has also made time and distances less of an obstacle to pilgrims than in the past.<sup>9</sup> So, with more than 3 million Muslims in total performing Hajj in 2012,<sup>10</sup> immense pressure has been put on the infrastructure of the holy places during recent decades. In 1957 the expansion of al-Masjid al-Haram (the Great Mosque) complex around the Ka'ba began at a time when Saudi Arabia was beginning to benefit from oil revenues. However, the Kingdom was only just becoming a settled, rather than a nomadic, society, and was still in the early stages of selectively developing the institutions of a modern state.<sup>11</sup> As global oil prices quintupled during 1973-4 further expansion of Hajj infrastructure was also initiated, including a massive bridge to better facilitate the stoning of the *jamarat* (pillars) at Mina. Thus, the House of Saud was able to demonstrate its largesse to the 'guests of God' on an annual basis, and so lend authority to its growing claims to lead the Muslim *ummah* (global community). However, modern organisation in the Kingdom was still developing,<sup>12</sup> and various Hajj disasters resulted in a large-scale loss of human life. The severe heat, the prolonged duration of the rituals and the sheer number and proximity of pilgrims from diverse locations all intensifies risks to health and safety, especially among the elderly and infirm.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, in 1988, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a vehicle for Saudi pan-Islamism, decided to set a Hajj quota for each country at 1,000 pilgrims per million of total (Muslim) population.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, on several occasions between 1990 and 2006 hundreds of pilgrims still died in fires and especially stampedes. While blaming

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<sup>8</sup> Bianchi 2004: 50.

<sup>9</sup> Bianchi 2004: 50.

<sup>10</sup> *Al-Arabiya*, 29 October 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Peters 1994: 362. Cf. Commins 2012 for the best recent scholarly work on Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia per se.

<sup>12</sup> Commins 2012: 159.

<sup>13</sup> Gatrad and Sheikh 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Bianchi 2004: 51; cf. <http://www.hajinformation.com/main/m40.htm>. The OIC was established in 1969 by the Saudis as part of an international strategy intended to counteract the influence of Arab socialism. Following a major clash in 1987, its setting of a quota in 1988 was also a means of counteracting revolutionary Iran's attempts to appropriate the pilgrimage for its own political purposes.

pilgrim behaviour in part, in recent years the Saudis have embarked upon further major works which seem to have been generally effective.<sup>15</sup>

The development of the Hajj must also be understood in the context of the ongoing challenges that the Kingdom is facing in terms of diversifying its non-oil based economy. After the initial boom of the 1970s it became clear during a period of global recession that the population of Saudi Arabia was growing but youth unemployment was rising and living standards declining. Into the 1990s, the development of tourism was identified as having specific potential in addressing such problems.<sup>16</sup> However, outside of pilgrimage, which is the country's third largest industry, Saudi Arabia has not encouraged international tourism per se.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, the Wahhabi religious establishment, which has traditionally legitimated Saudi authority, has been hostile to Western cultural influence. Nevertheless, despite open criticism of the regime from transnational Islamists within and without the Kingdom, the monarchy can still rely upon the loyalty of Wahhabi '*ulama*' (religious scholars) to endorse its carefully managed version of Muslim modernity.<sup>18</sup> Thus, together with private capital investment partners, and boosted by rising oil prices, in the 2000s the Kingdom has been developing accommodation, retail and related services in Mecca, with a view to significantly increasing pilgrim (and especially 'premium' pilgrim) numbers.<sup>19</sup> With fierce competition between multinationals for Mecca's prime real estate, costs in every part of the industry have been driven up, with the city's Chamber of Commerce estimating that \$10 billion was spent on the Hajj in 2011.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For an account from a Saudi government perspective, see <http://www.kapl-hajj.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Sadi and Henderson 2005: 249, 256; cf. Park 1994; Burns 2007. In an effort to avert social unrest, the Saudis have also embarked upon a very ambitious programme of the 'Saudiization' of its workforce, which has hitherto relied heavily on expatriates. For instance, in the mid-2000s only 16% of hotel staff were Saudi nationals. Tourism was seen as having the potential to produce more private sector employment for this constituency.

<sup>17</sup> Burns 2007: 229. In 2000 58% of international tourist arrivals in Saudi Arabia were for Hajj or '*umra*' and 47% of international tourism expenditure in 2001 concerned Hajj or '*umra*'. Other significant categories included 'visiting friends and relatives' and 'business / conferences.'

<sup>18</sup> Commins 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Henderson 2011: 541.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20067809>.

## 5. The Saudi Ministry of Hajj and UK Tour Operators

Against this rapidly changing context, and whether they monopolise the process or regulate a fully or partly privatised industry, many Muslim powers in diverse nation-states continue to organise, promote and subsidise Hajj-going.<sup>21</sup> In the absence of a Muslim state bureaucracy to manage such matters in the non-Muslim states of the West, it was possible until recently for pilgrims to organise their pilgrimage from Muslim diasporas entirely independently. While commercial tour operators began to appear in the UK during the 1990s, the normal pattern of Hajj-going had often previously comprised individuals leading small groups.<sup>22</sup> However, since a hotel fire near the Grand Mosque caused further fatalities in 2006, this is no longer allowed. While pilgrims can still book flights to Jeddah or Medina independently, the Ministry of Hajj (MOH) insists that pilgrims must now secure their accommodation and visas through an approved tour operator.

Presently there are around 80 approved tour operators in the UK listed on the MOH website.<sup>23</sup> Such tour operators must now take a minimum of 150 pilgrims, with an initial upper limit being 450, and an option of applying for a higher band of 900 to 3000.<sup>24</sup> The MOH used to accept tour operators with smaller numbers but is now encouraging market consolidation and mergers as it is keen to deal with fewer, more established and larger, companies.<sup>25</sup> All must travel to Saudi Arabia to present their credentials months in advance of the Hajj and book hotels, most likely leasing an entire establishment for the season.<sup>26</sup> Payments are staggered but the total amounts involved even at the mid to lower end of the

<sup>21</sup> At the 2013 World Hajj and Umrah Convention, held at Olympia, London, 21-22 May, which was organised by a London-based tour operator and entrepreneur, it was reported by officials from their respective Ministries of Religious Affairs that the private sector in Indonesia remains very small and confined to premium packages (representing only 10% of *hajjis*), whereas in Pakistan the private sector is much more widely developed (representing 50% of all *hajjis*) and not confined to premium packages. See also Bianchi 2004.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, a Hajj guide from the Midlands interviewed for this project told of how, even in the early 2000s, she and another pioneering woman regularly took a group of just 20 to 30 British Muslim converts on a 'walking Hajj' aimed at recapturing an 'authentic' experience. For an account of Hajj travelling overland from the UK in 1977, see Thomson 1994.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.hajjinformation.com/hajj\\_agents.php?id=53](http://www.hajjinformation.com/hajj_agents.php?id=53).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.hajjinformation.com/main/n4.htm>. Within this bracket it is possible to apply to bring pilgrims in increments of 300.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, some US-based tour operators have already begun to internationalise their business. See, for example, Adam Travel (<http://www.adamtravel.com/>), which is based in the US but also has offices in Canada, Russia and Italy, as well as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan.

<sup>26</sup> Woodward 2004: 184, reports that outside Hajj and Ramadan periods, hotel occupancy is just 20%, with an overall annual average occupancy of around 60%.

market underline the scale of the capital investment now required in the industry: ‘For one person in Mecca it is roughly £1,000 for a season for one bed. So there is a lot of money involved and there is also significant risk. Say, with the quota of 450 people, this means a minimum start-up cost for tour operators of half a million pounds’ (imam accompanying another north of England tour operator). Tour operators must also agree commercial contracts with a *mu‘alim*<sup>27</sup> for the supply of transportation and tents plus food in the Europa camp outside Mecca at Mina. Thus the north of England tour operator interviewed explained that, even though he may return to Saudi Arabia with a group of pilgrims during Ramadan, he will still need to visit one more time in the two months before Hajj. The release of Hajj visas by the MOH only after the holy month of fasting also puts pressure on timescales.<sup>28</sup> As the London-based trading standards officer interviewed for this project, remarks: ‘a lot of the time the tour operator wouldn’t know they’ve got your visa until a week before you travel,’ with some pilgrims receiving passports, visas and flight tickets the night before or even at the airport (central government officer, London).<sup>29</sup>

Among the representatives of the UK Hajj industry interviewed for this research, and amongst international delegations at the 2013 World Hajj and Umrah Convention (WHUC), there was an appreciation of the great demands made upon Saudi Arabia in managing the pilgrimage.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the Midlands-based Hajj guide likened it to London hosting the Olympics annually. Her London-based tour operator also acknowledged that ‘the services there, their systems, their procedures are getting more and more effective every year.’ However, WHUC delegates were frank, too, about what they saw as the lack of Saudi intervention to stabilise rising rents, regulate ‘non-quota’ pilgrims, as well as minimise uncertainties with better information sharing. Moreover, the two UK

<sup>27</sup> Literally ‘teacher’ or one who shows a pilgrim how to perform Hajj. While the late modern *mu‘alim* is effectively an agent, many have a longstanding family history of serving *hujjaj* (Woodward 2004).

<sup>28</sup> As a time of spiritual reflection, this is also a key moment for many intending pilgrims to declare their intention to travel.

<sup>29</sup> On 26 January 2004, Labour MP for Putney in London, Tony Colman, tabled ‘Early day motion 481 British Citizens and Saudi Visas for Hajj’ which details that while applications for Hajj visas ‘must be accompanied by return airline tickets ... there is no certainty that a visa will be granted ... the substantial cost of a return fare to Saudi Arabia will be forfeited in the event of a refusal.’ The motion called upon the Saudis to ‘either abolish the requirement to buy a ticket in advance or refund the cost of the ticket to unsuccessful applicants.’ See <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2003-04/481>.

<sup>30</sup> Henderson 2011: 546 quotes estimated public costs of US\$3967 million for ‘the religious services sector’ during the 2005-09 Saudi planning period.

tour operators interviewed also registered concerns about the current balance between necessary modernisation of Hajj infrastructure and respect for Islamic heritage in Mecca. Historic, and sometimes sacred, buildings from the Prophetic to the Ottoman eras have been almost entirely demolished to make way for an expanded Masjid al-Haram and new, high-rise commercial developments.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Turkish protests at the destruction of the al-Ajyad Ottoman fortress in 2002, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1748711.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1748711.stm). Critics within and without Saudi Arabia suggest that, ironically, this sometimes owes more to Las Vegas style kitsch than the legacy of Islamic civilisation. See, for example, *The Guardian* (23 October 2012), which cites Saudi architect and activist, Sami Angawi, as well as UK-based Saudi, Irfan al-Alawi, <http://www.islamic-heritage.org/>.

## 6. The Growth of British Muslim Hajj-Going

Basic data for Hajj-going in the UK is available going back to the 1960s, with my calculations showing that pilgrim numbers have increased consistently ever since at about twice the rate of Muslim population growth.<sup>32</sup> In recent years, approximately 23,000 pilgrims have travelled annually to Saudi Arabia for Hajj and this is the highest rate in Western Europe.<sup>33</sup> This high rate of Hajj-going can be explained in terms of some specific features of pilgrimage markets amongst Muslim diasporas.

Firstly, as the central government officer interviewed for this project explained, ‘no quota has been given to the UK; if you apply on time you get your visa, there’s no threshold.’ As noted above, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation normally sets a Hajj quota of 1,000 pilgrims per million of total (Muslim) population for each sending country.<sup>34</sup> However, Muslims who live as religious minorities are treated as a special case,<sup>35</sup> with the quota either waived or set against more general population levels. If the Hajj quota for the UK was based on Britain’s current Muslim population of 2.7 million, it would limit the number of pilgrims to just 2-3,000 per year, some 10 times less than current levels. A quota based on the UK’s total population would suggest a figure of 56,000 pilgrims, which has never been approached in terms of demand. Thus Muslim minorities in the West undoubtedly benefit from opportunities to go for Hajj at a time of their choosing, an option largely unavailable to most other Muslims, who may have to wait several years for their chance to travel.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bianchi’s appendices reveal that the average annual rate of Hajj-going from the UK was 121 pilgrims during 1961-65 and 4,482 during 1985-7, while my own calculations suggest an average of around 23,000 in the period 2005-09. See note 2 above. In the 30 years between 1961 and 1991 the Muslim population of Britain increased 18-fold from 55,000 to just less than 1 million. However, Hajj-going during a similar period increased 37-fold. Between 1991 and 2011 the Muslim population of Britain nearly trebled to 2.7 million, but during a similar period Hajj-going increased more than five-fold. For UK Muslim population figures see, Peach 2005: 23 and also <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bianchi 2004: 63. About 100,000 also complete the ‘*umra* or minor pilgrimage.

<sup>34</sup> There is also a longstanding ‘no return within five years’ rule but this has not typically been enforced by the Saudis.

<sup>35</sup> Bianchi 2004: 53.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, at the 2013 World Hajj and Umrah Convention, the Indonesian delegation reported that, in the Muslim world’s most populous nation, waiting times for intending *hujjaj* can be up to 15 years. Cf. Bianchi 2004: 53. I have also spoken to international Muslim students in Leeds who view their UK residency as providing an opportunity to perform Hajj given the

Secondly, income remains the most significant predictor of who travels for Hajj today and, whether individually or as part of an extended family unit, most Muslims in the West can find the financial resources necessary to make the journey at least once in their lifetime. A large majority of British Muslims are the children and grandchildren of economic migrants of Indo-Pakistani origin, who typically traced their own heritage to contexts of rural farming communities. However, while Pakistanis / Kashmiris and Bangladeshis exhibit amongst the highest levels of relative deprivation in the UK,<sup>37</sup> international labour migration is still a marker of relative prosperity considering the development issues typical of homeland contexts.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, while the picture is complex, social mobility has also been on the rise for some decades amongst a small but continually growing 'new' middle class of young, educated professionals.

Thirdly, according to Islamic law, being physically able and having the necessary financial resources makes the Hajj incumbent upon Muslims at least in terms of religious norms. Once almost exclusively an opportunity for older people to prepare to 'face *al-akhira* [the afterlife] with a clean sheet' (Hajj guide, the Midlands), amongst wealthier Muslims worldwide, including the diasporas of the West, Hajj-going is now very common among young adults. Urbanised, literate and media-savvy Muslim publics are more conscious than ever before of religious orthopraxy. Indeed, modern Islamic revivalism emphasises the virtues of actively remaking individual religious identity in the here and now, rather than simply in readiness for the hereafter.<sup>39</sup> So, while my online survey suggested that 'religious duty' was the key factor in 53% of British Muslim respondents determining when they made their pilgrimage, 'personal need or spiritual journey' was the most important factor for another 30%.

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competition for places at home. Turkey's population is roughly 75 million and 99% Muslim, so its official quota is roughly around 75,000.

<sup>37</sup> The majority of British Pakistanis actually hail from Pakistani-controlled Kashmir.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, the numbers from Pakistan performing Hajj have been low relative to population size. See Park 1994: 271. Cf. also Haq and Jackson 2009 for a very rare study of the experiences of *hujjaj*, in this case middle class Pakistanis and Pakistani Australians.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, some young British Muslims are choosing to mark their marriage as a significant rite of passage by going on Hajj together. Moreover, while many pilgrims still incorporate a stopover in the holy places on a homeland visit, such ties are weakening amongst diasporic youth, with Islam providing one alternative focus for 'homing desires': 'Instead of going on holiday somewhere else [i.e. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh], why not go on Hajj, or on 'umra?' (imam and Hajj guide, north of England). Cf. McLoughlin 2009a, 2009c, 2010a.

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## 7. Distinctive British Muslim Pilgrim Markets: Two Case Studies

As compared to their ancestors, most British Muslims' expectations of going on Hajj have been completely transformed in recent decades, just as they have become more democratised in terms of social class, gender and generation.<sup>40</sup> However, while common processes shape the UK Islamic pilgrimage market per se, quite different tour operator packages and experiences are demanded by two distinctive segments despite crossovers between them. A 'premium' UK pilgrimage market is targeted by the most professionalised tour operators at the relatively small but growing middle class of mainly British-born and educated Muslims in their 20s, 30s and 40s. To attract this market tour operators mimic sophisticated 'mainstream' holiday packages, at once appealing to the consumer as an individual but also providing the reassurance of well-organised 'bureaucratic' formality. However, this market segment is also imbued with a universalistic Islamic ethos which cuts across ethnic and denominational boundaries and so represents a clear outward-looking alternative to the established, and much larger, 'traditional' UK Islamic pilgrimage market segment. In the mid-range the latter is still often well-organised by experienced tour operators. However, they typically serve a customer base that is less prosperous overall and demands good value, as well as remaining inwardly oriented in terms of particular religio-ethnic networks. In this market segment, transactions can also be more informal, something not untypical of migrant economies more generally.

Thus, for example, the London-based tour operator interviewed for this project was established in the late 1990s after two university Islamic society activists, who had organised separate student pilgrimages, joined forces. These entrepreneurs saw a clear business opportunity to provide a premium service which 'didn't cut any corners.' The company also offers Islamic heritage tours worldwide, as well as religiously appropriate family beach holidays. Its highly professional website carefully addresses Muslim women while featuring a blog and Facebook page too.<sup>41</sup> Committed to enabling pilgrims to minimise the very considerable stresses of performing Hajj, and thus freeing them to concentrate

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<sup>40</sup> Only 35% of the young, educated and self-identified 'religious' respondents to my online survey had grandparents who had been for Hajj. This figure will have been inflated by migration, too, as compared to homeland norms, because of economic migrants sponsoring the pilgrimages of their kin. In contrast, 80% of respondents had parents (more clearly the migrant generation) who had been for Hajj, while 91% of respondents themselves (Muslims in their 20s, 30s and 40s) had always anticipated making the pilgrimage in their lifetime. Cf. McLoughlin 2009a, 2009b.

<sup>41</sup> The company also advertises that it is featured on websites such as <http://hajjratings.com/>.

on their spiritual journey, the aim of the London-based tour operator is to make the pilgrimage 'as easy as possible,' hence the motto: 'We will worry about your Hajj more than you will.' Before departure there are preparatory seminars,<sup>42</sup> a medic and 10 multi-lingual Hajj guides and helpers are on hand to escort the 200-300 pilgrims,<sup>43</sup> and two or three ecumenically-minded '*ulama*' can advise on the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of Hajj across all *madhahib* (schools of law governing the detail of ritual behaviour amongst other things). However, in offering only 4 star and 5 star packages for an 'express' (two-week) and more extended Hajj tour, which in 2011 cost between £4-5,000 per person including flights, most clients are middle-class British Muslims from a variety of South Asian and Middle Eastern ethnic heritages, as well as white converts to Islam.

In contrast, the north of England tour operator interviewed for this project, a British Indian, established his business in the early 1990s, following redundancy from the textiles industry. He also had previous experience of leading small groups for Hajj and in 2011 took 395 pilgrims, mainly from a Gujerati Indian background, but anyone who is comfortable in Urdu, the *lingua franca* of the group, is welcome. The packages he offers are good value - 'Give them four, five star, I know the people who [are] from here, they won't be happy ... not the price.' He describes the hotel used in Mecca for several years until its demolition as 'nice enough, clean enough' and, all importantly, within a few minutes' walk of Masjid al-Haram. In 2011 pilgrims paid £2,550-£2,275 depending on whether they were two or four to a room and regardless of whether they travelled for five weeks or two. The tour operator is a fan of early departures for the holy places and dislikes taking professionals on 'express' packages because, in his view, they arrive too stressed. He also contrasts the 'organised' Gujeratis who book very early with the 'last minute' Pakistanis. However, the biggest problem is food: 'I cannot satisfy them with the five star food or the Arabic food. They would not enjoy [it].' Therefore, with the hotel's agreement and the appropriate immigration checks, he brings a chef from India, although like everything else, the rules concerning foreign workers are subject to change.<sup>44</sup> Underlining the homeland orientation of this transnational operation despite a clientele including many younger pilgrims, the '*alim* who travels with him, is also brought from India. Overall, there is one Hajj guide to every 50 pilgrims and while he does run a pre-Hajj seminar, as well as clear but homespun website, this tour operator still

<sup>42</sup> I observed a London seminar organised by this tour operator on 9 October 2011.

<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Hajj requires tour operators to provide only one guide or helper to every 100 pilgrims, <http://www.hajjinformation.com/main/n4.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of foreign workers in Saudi tourism, see Sadi and Henderson 2005.

prefers to brief his pilgrims face to face, being careful to manage their expectations: 'I explain to them it's not easy ... I always paint the darkest picture possible. When he [sic] gets there he has no problem. He gets more than what I promised, but I don't promise what I can't produce.'

## 8. The Structure of the UK Hajj Industry and Hajj Fraud

In the late 2000s British Muslims' spending on pilgrimages covered by ATOL (Air Tours Organisers' Licensing) was estimated at £36 million.<sup>45</sup> For tour operators, there are therefore potentially lucrative profits with the General Secretary of the pilgrim welfare organisation, The Association of British Hujjaj (ABH, see section 9. below), estimating in his interview that there is as much as £1000-1500 profit to be made per *hajji*.<sup>46</sup> Since the 1990s low cost airlines and wealthy Muslim entrepreneurs have also chartered flights to take advantage of the opportunity to transport pilgrims in their thousands from regional airports.<sup>47</sup> However, highlighting the unusual structure of the UK Hajj industry, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) notes, too, that only 12,000 (or 50-60% of) pilgrims make their bookings through ATOL approved tour operators such as the two discussed above.<sup>48</sup> A significant number of British Muslim pilgrims arrange their Hajj through other channels.<sup>49</sup> As the central government officer elaborated: 'An ordinary pilgrim ... will not walk into a travel agent [saying], "Look, I'm going for Hajj. This is my passport. How much are you going to charge me?"' Rather, the cultural-economic logic of a large proportion of UK Hajj organisation is still very much rooted in the mutual co-operation, honour and trust associated with networks of kinship, friendship and locality, with senior figures, such as a *shaykh* (spiritual guide), or family member, often taking the lead.<sup>50</sup> Despite the expectations of UK public bodies such as the CAA, and attempts to modernise and rationalise the industry by the Ministry of Hajj, Hajj-going in the UK is still typically organised informally. However, there are certain problems perhaps most in evidence at the bottom end of this 'traditional' market.

While there may be only 80 Ministry of Hajj approved tour operators in the UK, the chief executive of the other UK pilgrim welfare organisation, the Council of

<sup>45</sup> *Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca – essential information about fraud*, 15 October 2010, National Fraud Intelligence Bureau and City of London Police, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/your-trip/hajj-pilgrims>; see also <http://islamicmonitor.blogspot.co.uk/2008/11/launch-of-national-hajj-awareness.html>.

<sup>46</sup> *Q News* (1 April 2000) gives some insight into Hajj packages available in north-west London just over a decade ago, with prices then ranging from £1,400 to £1,750 for an average of five sharing over 2-3 weeks. It was cheaper travelling from Europe, with £830 buying a trip sleeping on the floor in flats away from Masjid al-Haram. No food (or flights) included. The article suggests that even then profits of £600 per pilgrim could be made.

<sup>47</sup> See <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/bmms/1996/03March96.html#Hajj> from Britain, <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/bmms/1997/04April97.html#Hajj> and Eid news.

<sup>48</sup> See <http://islamicmonitor.blogspot.co.uk/2008/11/launch-of-national-hajj-awareness.html>.

<sup>49</sup> *Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca*, op cit.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Shaw 2000 on kinship among British Pakistanis.

British Hajjis (CBH, see section 9. below) explained that, given the pilgrim numbers agreed and paid for by tour operators in advance, ‘Some will then appoint agents, sub-agents and smaller tour operators back home who aren’t Ministry [of Hajj] approved because they can’t meet the necessary quotas [on their own].’ Like the Association of British Hujjaj, the CBH estimates that the total number of sub-agents selling Hajj packages in the UK is at least 200-250, with each of these operating various ‘touts’ at key points in the annual cycle such as during the month of Ramadan. Moreover, the London-based local council trading standards officer interviewed for this project speculated that the Ministry of Hajj’s policy of commercialisation and market consolidation has actually prompted the emergence of some ‘rogue traders’ given the profits to be made: ‘a lot of people have missed the boat and so they are trying to find a different way of jumping on the bandwagon.’ As well as the tout ‘in the [high] street, [or] corner shop, who is a money exchanger [and] will sell this [Hajj packages] as additional business’ (central government officer, London), at the very bottom of the pyramid of sub-agents are other ‘members of the community.’ These ‘uncles’ may include family and friends or imams. For instance, an intending pilgrim might very naturally ask their imam about going for Hajj, and imams, who are typically employees of their mosque committees and are rarely well-paid, may see the opportunity for a perk.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, they may be told by a sub-agent or operator: ‘Your ticket will be free. You will be my guest. Bring your congregation with you’ (central government officer, London).

Unfortunately, one legacy of commercialisation, rising expectations about what pilgrims can expect and the informal way in which Hajj-going has been organised hitherto is ‘Hajj fraud.’ More than 80% of victims are over 65,<sup>52</sup> with many likely to be relatively uneducated. Unlike tour operators, who hold passports, visas (and tickets where flights are included), sub-agents and their touts are not Ministry of Hajj approved or ATOL registered. Thus, despite being the contact point for the consumer, they have no power over the delivery of services, deal in cash and rarely provide written contracts, receipts or accurate documentation. As the London-based trading standards officer reported, most complaints he receives are civil in nature, whether in terms of changes to verbal agreements regarding flights (delays, routes, stop-overs), mis-described hotels, rooms or

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<sup>51</sup> On mosques and imams, see McLoughlin 2005a; and for critical commentary on imams as Hajj touts, see regular contributions to the London edition of the *Daily Jang* (ABH religious scholar).

<sup>52</sup> *Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca*, op cit.

other services.<sup>53</sup> While such issues have been reported to trading standards departments in the UK only in recent years, they are also often difficult to prosecute because of a lack of evidence or the amount of time that has elapsed since the alleged offence. Hajj fraud involves a range of industry problems including incompetence, dishonesty and outright deception. Amongst sub-agents and touts especially there is inevitably a lack of skills and knowledge of tour operator responsibilities, while tour operators themselves can be unprofessional and disorganised concerning their liaison with the Ministry of Hajj. So, some will take pilgrims' money assuming that they can deliver but there is no doubt that legitimate tour operators also over-promise and raise pilgrim expectations, both verbally and in terms of advertising, setting a relatively high price for low standards.<sup>54</sup>

Shaped by their socialisation in modern Britain, more Muslims are now willing to assert consumer rights that they enjoy not as pilgrims but as UK and European citizens. Indeed, according to the Economic Crime Directorate at the City of London Police, there has been a four-fold increase in reporting UK Hajj fraud from 2011 to 2012.<sup>55</sup> However, the full scale of the problem remains unknown, with many older pilgrims especially still reluctant to involve the authorities, often for ostensibly religio-cultural reasons. Amongst this constituency at least, the 'traditional' attitude persists that, having become 'holy' or 'pure' as a *hajji*, and so prepared for the afterlife, one does not speak of such worldly things (central government officer, London).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> He reports having received 34 complaints in 2011. One complainant (letter, 3 August 2011) from East London paid £2,200 per pilgrim for a separate room for his family party of five people. However, on arrival men were separated from women and he was directed to a bed in a room with six others which had one shared bathroom and was never cleaned; in his absence he was also evicted from one tent in Mina and moved to another: 'Please note many pilgrims suffer a lot because of such mismanagements but don't complain, reason being of their holiness for becoming *hajjis*.'

<sup>54</sup> Where quality is compromised in terms of accommodation, food or transport, the impact on the elderly and frail with other illnesses such as diabetes and heart conditions can be especially deleterious. See Gatrad and Sheikh 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Commander Steve Head, speaking at the 2013 World Hajj and Umrah Convention.

<sup>56</sup> If, having told everyone they know that they are going for Hajj, and then there is a problem, some may perceive this as a curse or not being 'called' by God. Tour operators may also deploy emotional blackmail in religio-cultural terms, insisting that Hajj is a *jihad* (struggle) and that those who complain will not have their pilgrimage 'accepted' by Allah. Communities may reinforce such silence, too, especially if family are involved.

## 9. The Hajj, British Muslim Organisations and Government

Large South Asian Muslim heritage diasporas have come to exercise a certain political leverage in particular locales of Britain since the 1980s. However, successful lobbying on behalf of Muslim pilgrims in the UK began somewhat later only in 1997-8. Moreover, it was initially targeted at national rather than local government given a primary concern with problems overseas in Saudi Arabia. The Association of British Hujjaj (ABH) is a registered charity based in Birmingham, the city with the second largest Muslim population in the UK and one dominated by British Pakistanis, the largest single Muslim ethnic group in the country. Formed in response to the various Hajj disasters of the 1990s, the ABH chairman himself told of how, immediately after the 1997 tent fire at Mina (near Mecca), which killed over 300 pilgrims and injured many more, he had been unable to determine the fate of various family members.<sup>57</sup> On other occasions, too, the general secretary and many local people had been unable to easily access help when they were affected by thefts or deaths in the holy places; it seemed that every year *hajjis* returned to Birmingham with tales of human tragedy. Thus, in a longstanding tradition of *khidmat* (voluntary religious service), various businessmen and professionals in the city, together with a number of senior Muslim medical doctors and religious scholars, decided to establish the ABH.

The ABH's pioneering objectives were therefore twofold: i) to persuade the British government to better support its Muslim citizens on Hajj and 'umra<sup>58</sup>, and ii) to educate British Muslims about health and safety matters in Mecca and its environs. In terms of the former, the late Dr Syed Aziz Pasha of the Union of Muslim Organizations, UK and Eire, a Muslim umbrella organisation founded in 1970, had called upon the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to consider a UK Hajj mission following the Rushdie Affair (1989) but to no avail.<sup>59</sup> However, when New Labour came to power in 1997 it was dependent on many votes from

<sup>57</sup> Apparently the FCO was unsure of how many British Muslims were performing Hajj in 1997 because many held dual nationality, <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/bmms/1997/04April97.html#Hajj> and Eid news.

<sup>58</sup> The 'umra is a voluntary rite which involves the performance of abbreviated rituals and can be performed outside Hajj season.

<sup>59</sup> See the blog of the Media Advisor of the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC). The ICC provided the secretariat for the Hajj Advisory Group (2002-06), <http://islamicmonitor.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/launch-of-british-hajj-delegation-2012.html>. Following the Rushdie Affair the Tories did not concede any Muslim claims for public recognition as 'Muslims' and insisted that they speak with one voice. This was a contributory factor in the founding of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

amongst the expanding Muslim population of the UK's inner-cities. So, while retaining a social inclusion agenda despite continuing many Thatcherite policies, a political context emerged that was hospitable to extending existing 'multicultural' and 'faith-based' opportunity structures to include the public recognition of Islam.<sup>60</sup> In this context, the ABH approached a fellow British Pakistani / Kashmiri, Baron Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, the Labour councillor raised as the first Muslim male life peer in 1998, and it was he that provided the necessary 'bridging power' to government. Together with Lord Ahmed, at a meeting in the House of Lords on 15 July 1999, the ABH managed to convince Baroness Symons that there was diplomatic advantage both at home and abroad in the UK being the first non-Muslim government in the West to publicly legitimate the Hajj by establishing a delegation.<sup>61</sup>

Lord Ahmed went on to lead the very first delegation in 2000. However, it was eventually decided by the FCO that he would do so alongside another dignitary, Muslim Council of Britain (MCB, established 1997) general secretary, (now Sir) Iqbal Sacranie, a Gujerati heritage businessman originally from Malawi. Increasingly privileged by New Labour as the interlocutor between the state and 'hard to reach' British Muslim communities, at the time, the MCB was sometimes criticised by existing Muslim organisations for seeking to assume control of their work.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, representing a very different religio-ethnic segment of interests, the ABH general secretary is on record suggesting that the whole British Hajj Delegation (BHD) initiative had been 'hijacked' and 'politicised,'<sup>63</sup> with the proposed delegation and its leadership increasingly dominated by MCB affiliates. When Lord Ahmed eventually resigned his role, it was a member of the MCB's Board of Counsellors, and another new Labour peer, Lord Adam Patel of Blackburn, also of Gujerati heritage, who subsequently led the BHD from 2001, the year in which MP for Blackburn, Jack Straw, became Foreign Secretary.

<sup>60</sup> See Modood 2005, as well as Fetzer and Sopher 2005. The latter argue that patterns of church-state relations are especially significant in shaping opportunity structures for the recognition of Muslims in Western Europe.

<sup>61</sup> *Independent on Sunday*, 17 October 1999,

[http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/blogs.fco.gov.uk/blogs/the\\_hajj/](http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/blogs.fco.gov.uk/blogs/the_hajj/).

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, *Q News*, 1 March 2000.

<sup>63</sup> McLoughlin (2005b, 2010b) has argued that the vast majority of British Pakistanis have had little to do with the MCB, which traces its roots to the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs formed during the Rushdie Affair. Despite representing probably the single largest constituency of British Muslims, even when the MCB's star fell in the mid-2000s, rival Pakistani organisations with historical links to Barelwism and Sufism such as the British Muslim Forum and the Sufi Muslim Council failed in their bids to recover mainstream political influence.



## 10. The British Hajj Delegation

Between 2000 and 2009 the British Hajj Delegation (BHD) included eight or nine volunteer British Muslim doctors, including eventually one or two women doctors, as well as a chief medical adviser. They were joined as part of the BHD by one or two counsellors and two or three FCO staff from the UK's consulate in Jeddah. According to all the constituencies interviewed, the undoubted benefits of the BHD in Mecca and beyond were twofold: firstly, pilgrims no longer had to leave Mecca and make the long journey to Jeddah to access consular services; secondly, unlike the doctors delivering medical services on behalf of Saudi Arabia, some of whom were from overseas, the BHD doctors were English-speaking and offered a home-visiting service to those too ill to travel (*Asian Image*, 11 October 2010).

While the core concern of the BHD was medical, it was also part of a wider Foreign and Commonwealth Office strategic priority which saw domestic and foreign policy interests converge in the context of '9/11' and the so-called 'War on Terror.' There was a desire to both improve British Muslim perceptions of UK government policy and promote better relations with the Arab and Muslim world more generally.<sup>64</sup> In its heyday, this use of 'soft power' was ritually performed when Foreign Secretary Straw launched the delegation annually in partnership with its new leader and representative of British Muslim pilgrims, Lord Patel. In the company of various ambassadors and diplomats, this event was hosted at the symbolic home of the wider Muslim world in the UK, the Saudi-funded Regent's Park Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC).<sup>65</sup>

Even while in other arenas of policy 'Old' Labour state multiculturalism faced stern criticism, this gathering communicated New Labour's vision for the UK as a multi-faith, participatory democracy where, as active citizens, British Muslims could take a role in UK diplomacy.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, while many of the BHD medics funded their own locum cover, the government was forced to defend criticism of the overall cost of the BHD when it was clarified that the pilgrimages of other

<sup>64</sup> This included UK universities, the British Council, the BBC World Service, and sat alongside military and political interventions in Afghanistan. See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmfaff/36/36we06.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> The ICC was finally opened in 1977, following the UK government gifting a site in Regent's Park, London, to the Muslims of Great Britain and its empire during the 1940s. Subsequent funding for the building came from the Saudis and others, with several Muslim embassies acting as trustees, <http://www.iccuk.org/index.php?article=1&>. Britain is a longstanding ally and trading partner of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>66</sup> McLoughlin 2005b, 2010b.

faiths were not being supported in a similar fashion.<sup>67</sup> For instance, Sir Michael Jay, head of the diplomatic service, maintained that the Hajj was ‘a unique event which merits special attention.’<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, during the 2000s, FCO expenditure on the BHD increased every year from around £40,000 in 2004 to £110,000 by 2009.<sup>69</sup> A Hajj Advisory Group had also been established in 2001-02 with a view to encouraging British Muslims to privately support the BHD. However, despite the involvement of the Muslim Council of Britain, the Association of British Hujjaj and other organisations with close connections to diverse Muslim constituencies,<sup>70</sup> such finance was not generally forthcoming with the exception of some small contributions from Bombay Halwa Ltd and GlaxoSmithKline.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the Hajj Advisory Group was abolished in 2006,<sup>72</sup> the year that Jack Straw left the FCO.

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<sup>67</sup> *The Independent*, 28 April 2003.

<sup>68</sup> No special support is given to Hindus from the UK participating in the Kumbh Mela which has been ‘trouble free’ hitherto,

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmhansrd/vo010118/text/10118>.

<sup>69</sup> *Asian Image*, 11 October 2010.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2007-01-30b.112114.h&s=Hajj+delegation#g112114.r0>.

<sup>71</sup> In 2003-04 the total projected cost of the BHD of £65,000 was offset in part by sponsorship of £10,000 from Bombay Halwa Ltd and also £5,000 from GlaxoSmithKline,

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmfaaff/745/745we10.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2009-02-24a.47.0&s=Hajj+delegation#g47.1>.

## 11. Pilgrim Welfare Organisations, their Activities and Reach

Since 2004, and always a few weeks before the official British Hajj Delegation (BHD) launch, ABH patron, Lord Ahmed, has hosted a complementary but parallel event, 'Hajj Awareness Week,' at the House of Lords. There are also ABH pre-Hajj camps and seminars in cities with significant Pakistani numbers, including Bradford, Manchester and Glasgow, as well as Birmingham and London. Indeed, despite being marginalised from the BHD, the ABH secured small pots of state funding during the 2000s to deliver Hajj-related health and safety messages to 'traditional' Muslim communities, which the government has otherwise found hard to reach as well as integrate.<sup>73</sup> For instance, when, in 2001, an outbreak of the rare W135 strain of meningitis was traced to UK *hujjaj* or those who had been in close contact with them,<sup>74</sup> the Department of Health worked in partnership with both the ABH and MCB, as well as private sponsors, to raise awareness of the issues, including new Ministry of Hajj immunisation requirements.<sup>75</sup> Officers of the ABH make regular contributions, too, in the British Pakistani public sphere, including the Urdu press and a newly burgeoning Islamic satellite television sector which is an especially significant means of reaching women.<sup>76</sup> However, in my online survey, only 24% of pilgrim respondents were aware of the existence of the ABH. Similarly, the London-based trading standards officer argued that while the ABH is clearly 'doing their bit for the Hajj ... I don't think a lot of local [British Bangladeshi] pilgrims in Tower Hamlets are aware of what ABH are doing or whether they exist.'

Of course, that the UK government was unable to work with a single interlocutor on Hajj related matters is simply a reflection of the complexity and divisions amongst British Muslim voluntary organisations in the UK per se. Indeed, if the ABH mainly reflects mainly the networks of British Pakistanis, the second and only other Hajj welfare organisation of any significance, the Council of British

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<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmhansrd/vo000707/text/00707w12.htm>

<sup>74</sup>

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmhansrd/vo010503/text/10503w16.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, the leaflet, *Advice to British Hajjis* (2001/02), was sponsored in part by British Airways and Noon Products/Bombay Halwa Ltd. The previous year, three women in Blackburn, Liverpool and Ilford had died from the same infection having returned from Hajj. See British Muslims Monthly Survey, <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/bmms/2000/04April00.asp>.

<sup>76</sup> Channels include Noor TV (established 2006), Ummah Channel (established 2009) and Takbeer TV (established 2010). The Midlands guide interviewed for this research complained that women are too often treated as 'appendages' to Hajj travel groups, with knowledge rarely shared with them directly.

Hajjis (CBH), is based in Bolton, Lancashire which, like some other north-west locations, is a key node in UK Gujarati / East African Asian Muslim networks. While this means that the CBH also has links to Lord Patel as a key MCB figure, notably, the organisation is a British-born led initiative, too, and so reflects a different approach to that of an older generation of community leaders. Having been for Hajj himself in 2005, and having subsequently attended a Muslim Council of Britain seminar in London during 2006, its chief executive, an information technology professional in his 30s, was left wondering why so much accumulated knowledge about Hajj-going was still not being shared at the grassroots: 'Why weren't people being educated?'. Since holding their own first 'Health at Hajj' seminar in Bolton during 2006, the CBH's volunteer young professionals have delivered various events, including flu and meningitis vaccination clinics, in thirty locations around Lancashire, Yorkshire and beyond.<sup>77</sup> However, according to my online survey, only 23% of respondents had heard of the organisation (1% less than ABH), which suggests that, at present, it is no better known nationally.

Thus, because of their parallel ethno-denominational locations, the CBH and the ABH often end up doing quite similar work within their own networks and diasporic public spheres. Nevertheless, the two welfare organisations differ significantly in terms of their expectations of government. With estimates that only 10% of Hajj fraud is reported,<sup>78</sup> and well-aware of the religio-cultural factors inhibiting this in 'traditional' pilgrim markets, the ABH has argued that it is the responsibility of central government to proactively benchmark and regulate the UK Hajj and 'umra industry as distinct from the 'secular' travel and tourism industry. Indeed, following lobbying by the ABH, their then local MP, Roger Godsiff, led a House of Commons debate on 25 March 2009 concerning 'Hajj Pilgrims (UK Tour Operators).'<sup>79</sup> During the debate, he reflected the organisation's criticism that the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform was taking a 'soft approach' by focusing only upon low levels of 'community awareness' of consumer rights. Rather, it was suggested that all

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.the-cbh.org.uk/>.

<sup>78</sup> *Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca*, op. cit. The ABH's home town trading standards department in Birmingham claimed that only four out of 40 Hajj and 'umra tour operators and agents in the city were fully compliant with UK package tour regulations in 2012. See <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/watchdog-calls-on-government-to-stop-muslims-181285>.

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090325/halltext/90325h0004.htm>. Godsiff was MP for Labour, Sparkbrook and Small Heath, 1992-2010.

travel agents should pay a bond to ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents) with 'a number of small tour operators going out of business ... a price worth paying' to protect a vulnerable community.<sup>80</sup> However, in contrast to the ABH, which clearly still imagines an 'Old' Labour interventionist welfare state, the CBH emphasises the need for self-regulation of the Hajj and *'umra* industry in the UK. Such a view reflects the more neoliberal influences within both the New Labour (1997-2010) government and especially the present Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition (2010- ).

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<sup>80</sup> Reinforcing my analysis of the 'traditional' Hajj market segment in the previous section, the ABH chairman acknowledges that 'our people, due to lack of education, they do not take full precautions ... unfortunately it's still a lot of people who are travelling with the *chacha lalas* [uncles].'

## 12. Recent Developments

In a secular, multi-faith society the central government officer interviewed for this project was clear that the UK state ‘does not want to control religious pilgrimage ... [it is] important that tour operators work together and have a national body.’ To facilitate this, a Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform ‘compliance summit’ (16 July 2008) had been organised to ‘hear [from tour operators] their views on how they believe the sector can improve its reputation and achieve greater consumer confidence.’<sup>81</sup> However, while following this summit, the Civil Aviation Authority subsequently reported increased ATOL (Air Tours Organisers’ Licensing) and IATA (International Air Transport Association) registrations among UK Hajj and Umrah tour operators, the CBH has also sought to establish a national British Hajj and Umrah Council which would see tour operators sign up to a voluntary code of practice.<sup>82</sup> This move exemplified the argument of the central government officer that, while tour operators themselves – and indeed established Muslim representatives in Britain more generally – seem to lack leadership capacity, they are being ‘shaken up’ by a younger generation of ‘can-do’ activists and entrepreneurs. However, if the independent-minded, north of England tour operator is anything to go by, the CBH still has work to do in winning UK tour operators around to the idea of a trade organisation: ‘You don’t get everybody in same frame of mind. I can’t see that happening. I do my own thing. It keeps me free.’<sup>83</sup>

In the wider context of the global financial crisis, moreover, and an even more pronounced neoliberal emphasis on a ‘small state’ and the ‘big society,’ during 2010, the new UK coalition government, despite petitioning from the ABH, the CBH and others, withdrew its support for the British Hajj Delegation (BHD) medical team.<sup>84</sup> In public communications, consular ministers also seemed to adopt a more admonitory tone with pilgrims, urging them to heed Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice and ‘take responsibility for their own pre-

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldhansrd/text/80630w0004.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> Yet, following the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform summit, an Association of British Hajj and Umrah Agencies was also established in East London, comprising 10 to 12 Ministry of Hajj approved members, and accounting for about 80% of the market amongst British Bangladeshis there and beyond (trading standards officer, London).

<sup>83</sup> Moreover, a tour operator from the north of England, who was one of the few from the UK attending the 2013 World Hajj and Umrah Convention, very strongly opposed the idea that Hajj welfare organisations in the UK – or ‘NGOs’ (non-governmental organisations) as he put it – could represent either tour operators or pilgrims’ interests, despite their decade long position as interlocutors vis-à-vis the state.

<sup>84</sup> *Asian Image*, 11 October 2010.

travel preparations.<sup>85</sup> Suggesting that British Muslim organisations no longer had the ear of government, in sharp contrast to the previous decade, the review of the BHD ‘did not include consultations with community leaders but, rather, took an objective view ... The FCO does not provide medical services at any other event involving large numbers of British nationals.’<sup>86</sup> Given its new ‘muscular liberalism,’ and the envy which government resources directed to Muslims have aroused since ‘7/7,’<sup>87</sup> a Tory establishment with fewer political reasons to court British Muslims decided that the Hajj was no longer ‘unique’ or deserving of ‘special’ support. Government argued that there had been a significant improvement in Saudi medical facilities and a related drop in market demand for BHD medical services although this was strongly contested by the CBH.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, a new chapter in the story of the BHD has already begun, with its re-launch as a private British Muslim initiative by Lord Patel at the ICC on 29 September 2012. On the new organisation’s website, and for the very first time, the logo of the ABH sits alongside that of the CBH, as well as those of certain well-known Ministry of Hajj approved tour operators. It will be fascinating to see three things: i) whether, in the absence of financial support from the UK state, the new BHD can build organisational leadership capacity and sustainable intra-Muslim alliances, ii) what if any relationship it will have to attempts to establish a national body for tour operators, and iii) to what extent any such developments will positively impact on the experiences of British Muslim pilgrims.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/travel-advice-for-hajj-pilgrims>.

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2010-11-01d.19875.h&s=Hajj+delegation#g19875.q0>.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Muscular liberalism’ was a term used by British Prime Minister, David Cameron, in a speech delivered in Munich on radicalisation and the failure of multiculturalism (5 February 2011). See <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>.

<sup>88</sup> ‘The number of people treated for minor ailments was 5,967 in 2007, 2,965 in 2008 and 254 in 2009,’ <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2010-11-11a.345.3&s=Hajj+delegation#g380.1>. However, the CBH chief executive argues that in 2009 ‘The advertisement of the delegation being there came out too late ... people didn’t know where the delegation was.’

<sup>89</sup> See <http://www.britishhajjdelegation.org.uk/>.

### 13. List of Acronyms

Air Tours Organisers' Licensing - ATOL  
Association of British Hujjaj - ABH  
British Hajj Delegation – BHD  
Civil Aviation Authority - CAA  
Council of British Hajjis – CBH  
International Air Transport Association - IATA  
Islamic Cultural Centre - ICC  
Ministry of Hajj – MOH  
Muslim Council of Britain - MCB  
Organisation of Islamic Cooperation - OIC  
Union of Muslim Organizations - UMO



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