

APPROPRIATING HAJJ AS AN EFFECTIVE PEACEBUILDING AVENUE AMONG MUSLIMS IN GHANA

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***Abstract:** Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam; and even though it is primarily a spiritual endeavour, its main objective is to make its participants peacebuilders when they return to their communities. This paper seeks to explore Hajj values for potential peacebuilding among Muslims in Ghana. The paper is an analysis of a qualitative study which utilized survey questionnaires; in-depth interviews; and participant observation as the main research techniques to collect data. The study found among other things that critical values of peacebuilding such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and good relationships are inherent in the performance of Hajj; and that Ghanaian Muslims who are passionate about Hajj can leverage these values to build peace among themselves and within communities in which they live. The study concludes that the Ghana Hajj Board can use its Hajj village concept to instill peacebuilding values in Muslims who participate in it annually.*

Key Words: Ghana, Hajj, Islamic values, Muslims, Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Embarking on pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj) is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is incumbent on every Muslim, male or female, to perform Hajj at least once in a lifetime. The annual recurrent ritual is obligatory on a Muslim “who is of responsible age, in fairly good health, and is financially capable and secure.”¹ In view of this, Badawi explains that having the means to perform Hajj implies “...being of sound health and possessing what is sufficient for one to make the trip and return from the trip, in addition to being able to meet one’s needs, the needs of one’s dependants and safety along the journey.”²

Hajj is performed between the 8th and 12th day of Dhul-Hijjah, the twelfth and the last month of the Islamic calendar. The essential

¹ Hammudah Abdal-‘Ati, *Islam in Focus* (Indianapolis: American Publication Trust, 1975), 99.

² Abdul Azeem Badawi, *The Concise Presentation of the Fiqh of the Sunnah and The Noble Book* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2007), 310-311.

components of Hajj are having a proper intention for Hajj and being in the state of inviolability (*ihram*); performing the required circumambulation of the Ka'abah (*tawāf*); trotting between mounts Safa and Marwa (*say*'), spending the night at Mina during the days of *tashreeq*; standing at mount Arafat on the 9th day of Dhul-Hijjah, spending the night Muzdalifah and throwing of pebbles at the Satan (*al-jamarāt*).³ Apart from being a key pillar on which Islam is built, Muslims are always committed and keen to perform Hajj because the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that the ultimate reward for an accepted Hajj is an expiation of sin and the gift of *Jannah* (paradise). In a Hadith narrated by Ibn Mas'ud, the Prophet (pbuh) states: "Follow up the Hajj and Umrah (lesser Hajj) for they remove poverty and sins like the blacksmith's bellows remove impurities from iron, gold and silver. And there is no reward for an accepted Hajj other than Paradise."⁴

The above hadith appears to serve as further motivation for Muslims to commit to the fifth pillar of Hajj. However, many contemporary scholars have placed the significance of Hajj in the ability of the performer to be an agent of peace as peace is the overarching objective of Islam. For instance, Abdal-Ati contends that Hajj is the greatest regular conference of peace known in the history of mankind.⁵ According to him, the overriding theme that underpins Hajj as a religious ritual is peace; and this peace must be struck between the pilgrim and the Creator, his or her fellow human beings and the environment including interaction with trees and animals. Similarly, Ramadan asserts that Hajj means returning to God; and this implies that one can never detach himself or herself "from the community of destiny that binds humans together in equality, fraternity, solidarity and love."⁶

The assertions made by both Abdal-Ati and Ramadan can be connected to three important issues relating to the performance of Hajj. The first is that Hajj is held in the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar which is among the four sacred months in which war and fighting are prohibited in Islam (cf. Qur'an 2:217). Thus, the Hajj period itself teaches the morality of peace and therefore the

³ Badawi, *The Concise*, 324-354.

⁴ Ahmad bin Shuaib bin Al An-Nasa'i, *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, vol. 3, Hadith no. 2630 (Riyadh: Maktaba Darussalam, 2007), 421.

⁵ Abdal-Ati, *Islam in Focus*, 99.

⁶ Tariq Ramadan, *Islam: The Essentials* (London: Pelican Books, 2017), 106.

occasion ought to be exploited for peacebuilding among Muslims. In this regard, peacebuilding opportunities ranging from a simple targeted peace education among Muslim pilgrims during the Hajj period to special peacebuilding initiatives for Muslim communities using pilgrims after Hajj can be embarked upon to deepen societal peace.

Secondly, as the above-quoted prophetic tradition alludes to, forgiveness from Allah takes centre stage at Hajj; and that is all pilgrims beseech Allah - to turn them into born-again Muslims. However, seeking forgiveness from Allah is contingent on the person who is seeking forgiveness to forgive fellow human beings who have trespassed against him or her. Forgiveness is, therefore, connected to peacebuilding. In view of this, Ayman asserts that Hajj is a call for the faithful to ask for God's forgiveness and demonstrate the unity and equality of humankind.⁷ Indeed, forgiveness is a key dependable value even within the United Nation's liberal peacebuilding which is used in creating the needed harmony in society, especially through the reconciliation process after cessation of conflict as Stephen Pope avers.⁸

Thirdly, it suggests that the social benefit of Hajj is not only for Muslims who indulge in its performance but also it is for the entire humanity; and that the values of Hajj can together inure to world peace if it reflects the lives of Muslims wherever they find themselves. In effect, Hajj as an annual recurrent religious experience is replete with teachings for societal peace and peacebuilding that could be explored for the benefit of humanity.

The paper is a report of a qualitative study which utilized a theological approach in its analysis. The data collection techniques utilized for this study are survey questionnaires; in-depth interviews; and participant observation. In all, three hundred and three (303) respondents including forty (40) paid-up Hajj pilgrims were sampled across the 16 regions of the country for the study. Respondents were purposively selected from Accra, Cape Coast, Elmina, Sekondi, Takoradi, Hohoe, Koforidua, Kumasi, Techiman, Kintampo, Wenchi, Tamale, Wa and Bawku. The forty (40) respondents made up of Hajj Pilgrims were

⁷ Abu Ayman, "The Hajj: A Model for Unity for Mankind," *The Muslim World League Journal* 44, no. 12 (2016): 23.

⁸ Stephen J. Pope, "The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation and Restorative Justice: A Christian Theological Perspective", in *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding*, ed. J.J. Llewellyn and D. Philpott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 174-9.

randomly sampled from the Al-Balad Hajj Agency Special Hajj Orientation Seminar at Kumasi and the Hajj Village in Accra.

The main objective of the study was to explore peacebuilding avenues in Hajj within the context of the Muslim community in Ghana. Theoretically, the paper utilizes Oda's 'peacebuilding from below' model. Oda defines 'peacebuilding from below' as the "practice by non-state actors utilizing various resources to create amicable relationships with national, ethnic, racial, religious or political others and to build a social structure which can promote a sustainable peace."⁹ The characteristics of 'peacebuilding from below' include first, the relationality to others which encompasses restoration of relationship with others; second, historical context which means relations to memory and history of war, armed conflict or colonial rule; and third, social practice.¹⁰ Indeed, Oda's exposition on the relational peace model resonates with the Brahimi Report of the United Nations which advocates that any effective peacebuilding efforts must have local and multi-dimensional content.¹¹

Scholarly Works on Hajj and Peacebuilding

Many works have been published on the relationship between Hajj and peacebuilding. For instance, Hammudah Abdal-Ati argues that Hajj is the single largest annual convention of faith where people meet to know one another, study their common affairs and promote peace and harmony among themselves.¹² Abdal-Ati avers that Hajj is the greatest regular conference of peace known in the history of humanity and that the central theme for Hajj from the preparation to the end of the ritual is peace: peace with God and one's soul, peace with oneself and his or her fellow human beings, and peace with one's environment.¹³ Even though the focus of Abdal-Ati was not on why some performers of Hajj do not uphold the predominant Islamic value of peace as portrayed in Hajj, his work is relevant to this study as it reveals the affinity between

⁹ Hiroshi Oda, "Peacebuilding from Below: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations toward an Anthropological Study on Peace" *Journal of the Graduate School of Letters* 2 (2007): 7.

¹⁰ Oda, "Peacebuilding," 9.

¹¹ Lakhdar Brahimi, "The Report of the Panel on the United Nations Peace Operations" (2000); https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a_55_305_e_brahimi_report.pdf (Accessed May 18, 2024).

¹² Abdal-Ati, *Islam in Focus*, 99.

¹³ Abdal-Ati, *Islam in Focus*, 99.

Hajj and peacebuilding. This indeed feeds into one of the objectives of this research work of exploring how Hajj as a pillar of Islam can promote peacebuilding in Muslim communities.

Similarly, Abd al-Waris Saeed writes that Hajj is a kind of international Muslim conference where Muslims send messages of peace, goodwill, understanding and equality to all people of the world.¹⁴ He asserts that Hajj espouses love for humanity, friendship, cooperation, and universality of humanity.¹⁵ Saeed's submission on Hajj implies that the underpinning goal of Hajj is to inculcate into pilgrims the value of peaceful co-existence which is one of the issues this research sought to explore.

Reza Isfahani explains that Hajj creates harmony among humanity since it obliterates distance, racial and class differences among peoples of the world as Muslims from Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia and America meet at the annual pilgrimage; and this affords good opportunities to exchange views on concerns of various Muslim communities in the world including issues relating to peace and security.¹⁶ Isfahani's views on Hajj affirm peace values in the fifth pillar of Islam and provide a basis for further exploration of peacebuilding opportunities in Hajj as a recurrent ritual.

Furthermore, Akhatarruddin Ahmed asserts that as a cosmopolitan assembly of men and women of all races and regions, Hajj affords Muslims from all over the world to meet each other to exchange goodwill and tolerate one another.¹⁷ This assertion reveals the fact that Hajj as a religious duty has an inherent potential for peacebuilding since it cultivates a sense of tolerance among Muslims.

Additionally, Erin Kenny underscores the importance of Hajj and its impact on every Muslim and suggests that Hajj is a religious capital (investment) which produces a reborn person who has gone through a religious experience and gained renewed piety ready to impart moral values such as forgiveness and reconciliation to his or her community

¹⁴ Abdal-Waris Saeed, *Your Way to Islam* (Kuwait City: Africa Muslim Agency, 2000), 17.

¹⁵ Saeed, *Your Way*, 17.

¹⁶ Reza Isfahani, *Islam for All* (Teheran: Etell'at Publications, 1992), 45.

¹⁷ Akhatarruddin Ahmed, *Why Islam?* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1998), 13.

on return.¹⁸ Kenny's elucidation on Hajj underscores the potential of Hajj for peacebuilding activities. The value of forgiveness inherent in the performance of Hajj and the renewal of Islamic spirituality that the ritual brings along, as alluded to by Kenny, present a unique avenue for inculcating peacebuilding values among Muslims and the communities in which they live. Again, values such as forgiveness, reconciliation and peace-making feed into the global conventional liberal peacebuilding frames.

Hajj Organization in Ghana

Efforts by Muslims in Ghana to embark on Hajj as a religious obligation predate the independence of the country from Britain in 1957. Indeed, before the 1930s, Muslims in Ghana, then called the Gold Coast, travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by land through individual arrangements which took them seven years in transit to perform Hajj and back.¹⁹ The Pilgrims used to transit to towns and cities along the routes to work to get money to finance a return journey.²⁰ By the 1930s, Muslims in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) patronised Hajj travel service by a firm in Dakar (Senegal) via Ouagadougou and east to Khartoum.²¹ However, a well-organized lorry transport from the Gold Coast was introduced by the Tarzan International Transport Company after World War II.²² This reduced the time spent visiting Makkah to the range of three to six months. By the late 1940s, the British colonial administration was chartering flights to convey Gold Coast pilgrims to Makkah.²³

After 1957 when Ghana attained independence, Hajj trips were organized by Travel and Tour operators under the supervision of the government. Particularly known in this business during the time were the Ghana Airtours and Bestworld Limited.²⁴ These private travel and tour companies arranged to get visas, foreign exchange, and accommodation

¹⁸ Erin Kenny, "Gifting Mecca: Importing Spiritual Capital to West Africa," *Mobilities* 2, no. 3 (2007): 367.

¹⁹ Haruna Zagoon-Sayeed, "The Role of Hajj in Ghana-Saudi Arabia Relations" (MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 2004), 15.

²⁰ Zagoon-Sayeed, "The Role of Hajj," 15.

²¹ Charles Stewart, "Tijaniyyah in Ghana" (MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 1965), 23.

²² Stewart, "Tijaniyyah in Ghana," 23.

²³ Zagoon-Sayeed, "The Role of Hajj," 15.

²⁴ Stewart, "Tijaniyyah in Ghana," 23.

in Makkah as well as flights for prospective Ghanaian pilgrims. Even though the organisation of Hajj by Travel and Tour Companies was helpful and sometimes effective, it was generally expensive and too exploitative to the average Ghanaian Muslim. This was so because the travel and tour companies, which were organizing Hajj in the country were private companies, which were interested in maximising profit at all costs. The round-trip charges for Hajj were therefore very exorbitant. Again, such operations were characterized by deceptions since no government agency was directly in charge of Hajj; and therefore no one was held responsible for whatever went wrong.²⁵

As a result of these deceptions and corruptions in Hajj arrangements, the government of Ghana in 1975 took control of the organization of Hajj through government-controlled Hajj Committees or Board of a sort.²⁶ To date, the Hajj organisation in Ghana has been controlled by the government. For example, the 2017 Hajj was organized by the Ghana Hajj Board under the Office of the President of the Republic. Indeed, the 2017-2022 membership of the Hajj Board was under the chairmanship of Sheikh Ibrahim Cudjoe Quaye, a veteran politician, who was appointed by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo and sworn in at the seat of government (Flagstaff House) on 16th February 2017.²⁷

Ghanaian Muslims and the Passion for Hajj

The political involvement in the Hajj organization in Ghana is a clear indication that Muslims in Ghana are seen as being passionate about Hajj, and this study confirms that. The study reveals that over seventy-six per cent of 125 non-Muslim respondents across the country think that Muslims in Ghana are passionate about Hajj as a religious ritual. In a questionnaire, the respondents were simply asked the question: Do you think that Muslims in Ghana are passionate about Hajj as a pillar of Islam? The Christian response to Hajj and Muslims in Ghana implies that the performance of Hajj is a public undertaking in the country, publicly enough to be acknowledged by even non-Muslims including Christians. What this also means is that the effect of Hajj in

²⁵ Stewart, "Tijaniyyah in Ghana," 23.

²⁶ Zagoon-Sayeed, "The Role of Hajj."

²⁷ An appointment notice was issued on behalf the President from the Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana signed by Eugene Arhin, the Ag. Director of Communication at the Presidency.

Ghana through its preparation and performance can be felt by all shades of Ghanaians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Indeed, this view from non-Muslims in Ghana is amplified by Muslim respondents themselves. One hundred and twenty-five (125) out of one hundred and twenty-five (125) Muslim respondents in the study, representing hundred per cent (100%) think that Muslims in Ghana are passionate about Hajj as a pillar of Islam. Ordinarily, this result should not be arousing any curiosity because Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam anyway; and all Muslims who are in good health and can afford the journey are obliged to do so. However, the question which arises from the result of Muslim respondents regarding passion for Hajj is whether Muslims in Ghana are equally passionate about other aspects of their development such as education.

The Ghanaian Muslim community is generally considered as one of the deprived communities in Ghana as posited by Anning and Abdullah.²⁸ And yet over since 2016 an average of five thousand six hundred Ghanaian Muslims for example paid at the minimum, three thousand US dollars each to perform Hajj.²⁹ One possible explanation for this question is that there is a perception among the Ghanaian Muslim community and other West African Muslim communities that the performance of Hajj raises the social status of the performer. It increases social respectability for the one who has performed Hajj even among non-Muslims.

In an ethnographic study carried out among the Malinkes in Upper Guinea, Erin Kenny reports that Muslims in the West African country return from Hajj feeling that they have been enriched with a status earned as a result of performing Hajj.³⁰ Kenny concludes that for Muslims in West Africa, “participation in pilgrimage creates a new kind of globally implicated person, a ‘Hajji’ or a ‘Hajja’ and also may influence

²⁸ Kwesi Aning and Mustapha Abdallah, “Islamic Radicalization and Violence in Ghana,” *Conflict, Security and Development* 13, no. 2 (2013): 151-152.

²⁹ In an interview with Mohammodu Osumanu Alidu, the Administrative Secretary of the Pilgrims Affairs Office of Ghana, he revealed that 5,630 registered and performed Hajj in 2016 through the office. This figure does not include Ghanaian Hajj pilgrims who had their visas directly from the Saudi Embassy in Accra (Interview granted the researcher, on August 21, 2016 at 2.00pm at the Hajj Village, Kotoka International Airport, Accra).

³⁰ Kenny, “Gifting Mecca,” 364.

the relative status of other members of the household.”³¹ In Ghana, Muslims who have performed Hajj prefer to be called by the status title of ‘Alhaji’ (for a male performer of Hajj) and ‘Hajia’ (for female performer of Hajj); and sometimes, those who have performed Hajj take offence at not prefixing their names with the Hajj title when their names are written or mentioned. Kenny’s study explains partly why Muslims in West Africa including Ghana are very passionate about Hajj.

Additionally, O’Brien argues that due to the marginalisation and subordination of Muslim women in northern Nigeria, for example, Hajj provides women with a unique avenue to raise their status and to be heard in public through the recount of their Hajj experiences which the society cherishes.³² This West African phenomenon is amplified by Barbara Cooper who posits that Hajj empowers women because it is the single Islamic ritual which is identical in its performance for both men and women.³³ Cooper further argues that “the uniformity of the performance of the hajj has the effect, for women, of providing one place where their practice of Islam is unassailable.”³⁴ Perhaps, these fundamental findings made by both O’Brien and Cooper account for the reason why Muslim women in Ghana perform Hajj more regularly than Muslim men. For instance, in the 2016 Hajj season, 3,800 out of the 5,630 representing (sixty) 60 per cent of the total Ghanaians who performed Hajj under the Pilgrims Affairs Office of Ghana were women.³⁵ In all this, the critical point that comes to the fore is that Muslims in Ghana, like their counterparts in other parts of West Africa, are passionate about Hajj.

This passion for Hajj among Muslims in Ghana can be a crucial resource for peacebuilding as Hajj is replete with peacebuilding values. In this regard, Lederach espouses that peacebuilding and conflict resolution thrive when it is built on local contextual and cultural

³¹ Kenny, “Gifting Mecca,” 364.

³² Susan O’Brien, “Pilgrimage, Power and Identity: The role of the Hajj in the Lives of Nigerian Hausa Bori Adepts,” *Africa Today* 46, n. 3-4 (1998), 32.

³³ Barbara Cooper, “The Strength in the Song: Muslim Personhood, Audible Capital and Hausa Women’s Performance of the Hajj,” *Social Text* 60 (1999), 14.

³⁴ Cooper, “The Strength in the Song,” 14.

³⁵ Mr. Mohammadu Osumanu Alidu, Administrative Secretary of the Pilgrims Affairs Office of Ghana, interview granted to the researcher August 21, 2016 at 2.00pm at the Hajj Village, Kotoka International Airport, Accra.

resources.³⁶ Moreover, Lederach argues that in building a peace constituency which is imperative, especially in times of conflict, “considerable attention must be given to discovering and building on the cultural resources for conflict resolution that exist within the context.”³⁷ Given that the Muslim has an insatiable passion for Hajj which has peace-seeking values, this Islamic pillar can provide an immense avenue for peacebuilding in Ghana, especially among Muslims.

Hajj Preparation and Peacebuilding

Hajj begins with comprehensive preparation and planning by the individual Muslim who intends to embark on the spiritual journey. This pre-Hajj preparation includes making the intention (*niyyah*) to perform Hajj; taking tutorials about the essence of Hajj and how it is performed; doing a health check to ensure physical fitness for the tasks of Hajj; mobilization of the required funds for the journey; the acquisition of visa; asking for forgiveness from those wronged in the past; and reconciling with people one is not in good terms with among others. Undoubtedly, an impactful Hajj will largely depend on how well the pre-Hajj preparation is organised.

In view of this, the study sought to find out the preparatory concerns (priorities) for Muslims in Ghana who seek to embark on Hajj. This question was posed to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike since Ghanaian society is an integrated one whereby Muslims and non-Muslims mostly live together. The reason for this question was to find out which of the essentials of Hajj preparatory variables were prioritized by Muslims in Ghana and how this may call for peacebuilding. The six variables provided for selection on the questionnaire were: knowledge about Hajj; health check; financial capability; asking for forgiveness from those wronged in the past; reconciling with people perceived as enemies; and all the above. Each of the 250 respondents, made up of one hundred and twenty-five (125) Muslims and one hundred and twenty-five (125) non-Muslims, was asked to select one single variable for an answer.

³⁶ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 95.

³⁷ Lederach, *Building Peace*, 97.

The study reveals that only 34.4 % of Muslim respondents think that all of the listed variables are Hajj preparatory priorities for Muslims in Ghana. Interestingly, the perception of Non-Muslims on Hajj preparatory concerns for Muslims in Ghana is not far removed from that of the Muslim respondents. Only about 30% of non-Muslim respondents think that all of the listed variables are Hajj preparatory concerns. Again, even if one comparatively looks at some of the individual variables, the same close results are recorded for Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, 23.2% and 24.8% of Muslims and non-Muslims respectively think that financial capability is the single most important Hajj preparatory concern for Muslims in Ghana who intend to perform Hajj.

There could be many reasons accounting for the close understanding of Hajj preparations among Muslims and non-Muslims in Ghana. One of the reasons which could be assigned to this close score is that because the Ghanaian society is an interactive, open and integrated one, the non-Muslims are relatively aware of the concerns of Muslims including their religious priorities. Needless to reiterate, Ghana is both a cosmopolitan and pluralistic country whereby all citizens ethnically and religiously live together in the same community. Most Rev. Matthew Gyamfi, the current president of the GCBC, notes: “Moslems and Christians have tolerated each other and have lived peacefully in our communities and in our schools for many years. Christians go to Islamic schools at all levels just as Muslims go to Christian schools.”³⁸

Such is how Muslims and non-Muslims interact at the societal level. In terms of peacebuilding, this could be a great facilitator for positive relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims once there is respect for each other’s religious beliefs and practices. But what is crucial from this result is that Ghanaian Muslims who are preparing for Hajj place much emphasis on material preparations such as finances; rather than the spiritual preparations required for Hajj, a primarily spiritual endeavour. It is particularly revealing from the above data that the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation seem not to be core considerations for potential pilgrims in spite of the fact that forgiveness and reconciliation are key concepts for Hajj. In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is

³⁸ Matthew Gyamfi, “Exercising Religious Freedom in Pluralistic Society: A Christian Perspective.” A paper delivered at National Stakeholders Forum on Religious Tolerance and Freedom in Ghana (August 30, 2015), 17.

reported to have prayed for pilgrims when he said: “O Allah forgive the pilgrim and anyone the pilgrim asks forgiveness for.”³⁹

This hadith pre-positions forgiveness as one of the key goals to be attained at Hajj. What this means is that forgiveness must be factored into preparatory processes for Hajj. It is in this regard that the Islamic theologian al-Dahlawi asserts that:

Even though hajj is a common journey and a hard work, it is not complete until there is effort on the part of souls (human beings) to connect directly and purely to God with the goal of seeking forgiveness from sins committed before arriving at the house of faith.⁴⁰

Ghanaian local scholars such as Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu⁴¹ and Hajia Fatimatu Sulemanu⁴² agree with Al-Dahlawi’s assertion on the primacy of forgiveness in Hajj and opine that seeking Allah’s forgiveness during Hajj calls for conscious effort on the part of the pilgrim to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with fellow human beings since one cannot seek forgiveness from Allah when he or she is in conflict with others in society. For Sheikh Shaibu, a prospective Hajj pilgrim ought to engage in forgiveness and reconciliation with those the pilgrim is not on good terms with. He says:

That is why in that state, before you go on Hajj, you need not to harbour malice, hate and hurt in your mind. And to be able to do so and live that experience, you should be able to forgive those you left behind. You need to reconcile. Moving and going along with that means you carry along the baggage; the baggage of humanness, your own human weakness as in dislike, hate, hurt and all the negative attributes which we describe as the elements of lower self. Things you should shed off those elements, hate, hurt, envy, greed, selfishness, egoism, and all those things.⁴³

³⁹ Sulaiman bin Ahmad bin Ayyub Al-Shami Al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu’jam Al-Awsat*, (Cairo: Darul Haramain, 1994), 8818.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Abdur-Rahim Al-Dahlawi, *Hujjatullahi al-balighah* (Dar Al-Kutub: Al-Hadithah, 1990), 159.

⁴¹ Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu is a renowned Islamic Scholar in Ghana who is also the Spokesperson of the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

⁴² Fatimatu N. Suleimanu is a former Tutor at the Department of Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. She is also a Former National Vice President of the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Ghana (FOMWAG).

⁴³ Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu, interview granted the researcher August 15, 2016 in Accra.

In line with the views expressed above by Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu, ninety percent of the Pilgrims interviewed at the Hajj Seminar at Kumasi during the 2016 Hajj season which was organised by the Al-Balad Hajj Agency see forgiveness and reconciliation among pilgrims and those they are in conflict with as a key Hajj preparatory demand. They believe that their ultimate goal for going on Hajj is to ask for Allah's forgiveness, and believe that their sins will be forgiven if they forgive those who have offended them or ask for forgiveness from those they have offended and to reconcile with them. When asked whether they (the Prospective pilgrims) intended to ask for forgiveness from those they have wronged before they get to Makkah, a respondent stated that:

Of course, you must (ask for forgiveness before leaving for Hajj). As a Muslim, you have to ask for forgiveness before going for hajj because you wouldn't know whether you'll be coming back or not. So it is always good. It is not only when you are going to hajj that you seek for forgiveness. Anytime you feel like you have wronged someone or you have done something against someone, it is good to seek for forgiveness each and every day because you don't know whether you are going to live unto the next moment. So, as a Muslim, every time it is compulsory for you to seek for forgiveness from those you've wronged. But then, if you are embarking on hajj, you are going to travel, you are going outside your country, it involves a lot, there are so many things that you might encounter, so it is compulsory for you to seek for forgiveness from those you have wronged.⁴⁴

Another prospective pilgrim respondent said:

Yes, I will ask for forgiveness from those I have wronged. And wrong is of two types, either against Allah or against humans. And so, indeed if you leave for Hajj and you are expected to come back without any sin that is in relation to what or in terms of the rights Allah SWT has on you, but when it comes to human beings, definitely I should seek for forgiveness before leaving In Shaa Allah.⁴⁵

These views from Ghanaian pilgrims indicate how the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation is attached to the performance of Hajj in Ghana. Again, it is clear from the above comments by pilgrims that there is a link between seeking forgiveness from God and asking for

⁴⁴ Prospective Pilgrim, interview granted the researcher August 17, 2016 in Kumasi.

⁴⁵ Prospective Pilgrim, interview granted the researcher August 15, 2016 in Accra.

forgiveness from those who have been wronged. This linkage is important because it can promote the pursuit of social peace and harmony if practised by Muslims even after the performance of Hajj.

On the question of whether the pilgrims were willing to forgive those who had offended them as they sought forgiveness from others within their families and neighbours all of the interviewees answered in the affirmative. For example, one respondent at the Hajj Village replied:

Yes, I am ready to forgive those who wronged me, even if I was not embarking on hajj. I am aware that one of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) companions was given paradise while he was alive because of this attitude. Any time that he is going to bed he had to forgive those who had wronged him. So I also happen to be one of such, I am also emulating that Sahabah (the companions of the Prophet) so that may be I'll also get that mercy that God has given him. So am ready to forgive all those who have wronged me.⁴⁶

Another respondent stated that: "Definitely, because, if you are not ready to forgive people who have wronged you, how do you expect people to forgive you? So definitely you have to start that good initiative so that others too would do the same to you."⁴⁷

Again, the inherent reconciliation power of Hajj through the act of forgiveness during Hajj preparation is echoed by Rabi'atu Ammah: "Hajj must teach reconciliation, how to reconcile with yourself, your neighbours because you are praying to reconcile with Allah to forgive you. If you cannot reconcile with your neighbour, how can you expect Allah to be at peace with you?"⁴⁸

The views expressed in the above responses show that Muslims in Ghana are conscious of the efficacy of forgiveness in ensuring spiritual and physical peace in society. The views resonate with the assertion of the Islamic theologian Sayyid Qutb that Muslim relations must be friendly, compassionate and cooperative for mutual peace and

⁴⁶ Prospective Pilgrim, interview granted the researcher August 15, 2016 in Accra.

⁴⁷ Prospective Pilgrim, interview granted the researcher August 17, 2016 in Accra.

⁴⁸ Dr. Rabi'atu Ammah, interview granted the researcher February 23, 2016 in Accra. She is a Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. Also, she was the Vice-Chairperson of Ghana Hajj Board for Hajj seasons 2006 and 2007.

security.⁴⁹ And that is what the value of forgiveness is capable of doing. Therefore, if Muslims can translate this understanding of the value of forgiveness into their daily lives as a social capital gained from Hajj, their communities will witness that social serenity which radiates peace to all, including non-Muslims. Naturally, forgiveness brings about reconciliation which creates peace in society as Pope contends.⁵⁰ But certain acts of forgiveness hinge on the restoration of justice denied in the past. For example, if someone's property is taken unjustly away from him or her, he or she might forgive the perpetrator on condition that such property has to be returned.⁵¹ Indeed, the concept of restorative justice can be associated with the Qur'ānic verse that enjoins Muslims to return trusts to their rightful owners. The Qur'ān states: "God commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners and, if you judge between men, that ye judge with justice. Truly, excellent is the instruction God gives you. Verily God is Hearing, Seeing" (Qur'ān 4:58).

Even though most exegetes of the Qur'ān associate the immediate purpose of the revelation of this verse with the keys to the Ka'bah,⁵² the general import of the verse can be extended to cover giving back to people their properties and any other rights that have been taken away from them. The thrust of the injunction is that Muslims ought to be trust-worthy, return properties in their possessions to their rightful owners, and uphold justice in all their dealings with fellow human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Obviously, such practices will promote peacebuilding among humanity. And this can be situated in the forgiveness that comes along with the performance of Hajj. With a conscious consideration to forgiveness and reconciliation in the performance of Hajj and the passion with which Muslims in Ghana attach to the annual ritual, Hajj can become a great avenue for peacebuilding in Ghana, particularly among Muslims. Indeed, one of the values

⁴⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977), 45.

⁵⁰ Pope, "The Role of Forgiveness," 178.

⁵¹ See Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott, *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

⁵² See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), 218-219. Also, Cf. Imam Jalāl-ud-Dīn Al-Mahaly and Jalāl-ud-Dān As-Soyuty, *Tafsīr Al-Jalālayn* (El-Mansoura: Dar Al-Manarah, 2010), 283.

identified by contemporary peacebuilding scholars and experts as having an immutable impact on peace in communities is forgiveness.

For instance, Pope is of the view that forgiveness has profound implications for the quality of life within and between communities.⁵³ This is because the quality of life within and between communities is contingent on the kind of relationship (good or bad) that exists among the people. If people do not harbour any ill-feeling against each other because they forgive when they are wronged, then one will expect hearty relationships that inure to peace and peacebuilding in such communities.

The concept of forgiveness is an imperative Islamic value. The Qur'ān categorically states: “Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (Qur'ān 24: 22).

In view of the above-stated verse, Asad explains that even though this verse has its immediate revelation focus, its ethical import is timeless as it links up with the Qur'ānic principle of countering evil with good.⁵⁴ Similarly, Ali argues that the act of forgiveness is a duty of every Muslim as he poses the question: “If Allah forgives us, who are we to refuse forgiveness to our fellows?”⁵⁵ Undoubtedly, the concept of forgiveness becomes even more apparent in the performance of Hajj since the ultimate goal of the performance of the ritual is to seek Allah's forgiveness.⁵⁶ Indeed, as indicated in Sahih Muslim, the main theme which ought to be on the mind of a pilgrim is seeking forgiveness from Allah to become a born-again with a fresh sheet (*haji al-mabrur*).⁵⁷ It can therefore be said that there is a close link between Hajj and the act of forgiveness. The act of seeking forgiveness from Allah during Hajj is expected to have an introspective effect on the

⁵³ Pope, “The Role of Forgiveness,” 178.

⁵⁴ Mohammed Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Watsonville: The Book Foundation, 2003), II: 599.

⁵⁵ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2008), 870.

⁵⁶ Al-Tabarani, “Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat”, 8818.

⁵⁷ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim* (Beruit: Dar El Fikr, 1998), 201.

individual doing the act (the pilgrim) and on his or her relationships afterwards.

Ghana's Hajj Village and the Promotion of Peaceful Values

The preparation for Hajj in Ghana begins at the homes of intended pilgrims and ends at the Hajj Village. The most crucial aspect of the Hajj preparatory points in Ghana are the activities at the Hajj village. It is the place where pilgrims are finally processed and put on flight for their journey to Hajj in Saudi Arabia. The village is also used as the last Hajj orientation point before the departure of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia to begin the actual rituals of Hajj.

Ghana's Hajj Village was established by the former President of Ghana, Mr. John Dramani Mahama. The original idea is to create a village where prospective pilgrims can access preparatory services including Hajj orientation and documentation before their departure to Saudi Arabia for the annual Muslim pilgrimage. The village was also to serve as the administrative headquarters and information centre for the Hajj organisation in Ghana. However, the current state of the Hajj village does not fully fulfil the purpose for which it was established.

The village does not have the facilities to accommodate prospective pilgrims for residential Hajj orientation before their departure to Saudi Arabia. Rather, the current Hajj village accommodates the Pilgrim Affairs Office and has pavilions for daily orientation for prospective pilgrims between 3-6 hours before their departure. The pilgrims are organised in batches and according to 'agencies' under which they registered and paid to perform Hajj. However, pilgrims who paid directly to the Pilgrim Affairs Office are organised into separate groups under the direct control and supervision of the Pilgrims Office. This is a daily affair for the two-week departure schedule for pilgrims who have their names on the flight manifest to Saudi Arabia. Every batch scheduled to travel is given time to report at the Hajj village for special orientation on the Hajj before the actual departure time.

Averagely, a single Hajj travelling batch was made up of five hundred (500) prospective pilgrims, both male and female. During the 2016 Hajj season, for example, the Ghana Pilgrims Office organised twelve (12) flights. The first ten flights were made of five hundred (500) pilgrims each, while the last two flights were made of three hundred and

fifteen (315) pilgrims each. In terms of the pre-departure orientation of pilgrims at the Hajj village, prominent local Islamic scholars known in the Ghanaian were brought in as resource persons to interact with pilgrims.

The orientation is focused on teaching pilgrims how to perform Hajj according to the teachings of the Qur'ān and practices of the holy Prophet (pbuh). The scholars also stressed the attitude of the pilgrim before, during and after Hajj. However, the key themes that ran through all the pre-departure orientation sessions were the concepts of forgiveness and peace before, during and after the Hajj ritual.

Speaker after speaker, the scholars related a good Hajj to the attainment of the status of rebirth which according to the scholars is premised on one's commitment towards forgiveness, sincere repentance to Almighty Allah and attainment of peace between the pilgrim on one hand, and once Creator (Allah) and fellow human beings on the other hand. The scholars largely drew on two Islamic texts, one from the Qur'ān and the other is a popular hadith relating to the ultimate objective of Hajj (rebirth). The Qur'ānic verse frequently utilized by the resource persons at the pre-departure orientation states:

The pilgrimage shall take place in the months appointed for it. And whoever undertakes the pilgrimage in those months shall, while on pilgrimage, abstain from lewd speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling; and whatever good you may do, Allah is aware of it. And make provision for yourselves, but verily, the best of all provisions is *At-Taqwa* (piety, God-consciousness). So fear Me, O men of understanding (Qur'ān 2:197).

The other popular text utilised extensively by the scholars during the pre-departure orientation is a hadith which is captured in *Riyadh-us-Saleheen* and reported by both Bukhari and Muslim states: "Whoever performs Hajj for the sake of Allah and does not commit sin, nor engage in sexual intercourse, he returns from Hajj like the day his mother gave birth to him."⁵⁸

Many Islamic Theologians and contemporary scholars consider the above-mentioned texts as providing the basis for the preparation and

⁵⁸ Yahya Bin Sharaf An-Nawawi, *Riyadh-us-Saleheen* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2009), 615.

performance of Hajj. Considering, the above-stated Qur'ānic verse, al-Qurtabi, for example, explains that the intention for Hajj means one applying himself or herself to begin the Hajj with a pre-determined inward intention to wear the *Ihram* with clearly visible activity and to recite the *talbiya* which is heard and geared towards attaining peace with the self, the Creator, fellow human beings and the environment.⁵⁹ Similarly, Hudhud asserts that prohibitions in Hajj as enumerated in the above-mentioned Qur'ānic verse such as sexual intercourse, committing sins and engaging in disputes are meant to perfect souls for peaceful relations.⁶⁰

So far, the discussion on the work and the role of the Hajj village in Ghana regarding the pre-hajj preparations indicates that it is an opportunistic avenue for Islamic peacebuilding. The Hajj village orientations if well focused and tailored, will imbibe in the pilgrims the practical concept of peace and the building of peace among Muslims and non-Muslims in the communities in which they live. This is because it is the last point for Hajj orientation for pilgrims just before they board flights for Hajj. At this point, pilgrims would be ready to listen attentively to the core essentials of Hajj and its lasting lessons and experiences for the wellbeing of all humanity of which peace is the ultimate. In his editorial summary captioned “Hajj: A Celebration of Peace,” Muhammad Zakir Hossein rightly states among other things that: “As a rich spiritual experience, Hajj has a great message and lessons for the benefit and wellbeing of man and all humanity, resulting in the spiritual and behavioural development in the life of a Muslim.”⁶¹

The values of righteousness, forgiveness, reconciliation, love and unity dominate the pre-departure orientations at Hajj village. Indeed, these values are not exclusive to Ghanaian Muslims. They are universal values that ought to have a changing effect on the pilgrim. In this regard, Ali Jumuah Mohammad Abdul-Wahab has underscored the

⁵⁹ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazraǧī al-Andalusī al-Qurtubī, *al-Jami' li ahkam al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2014), 779.

⁶⁰ Ibrahim Salah al-Sayyid Hudhud, “The Performance of the Essentials of Hajj and its Impact on the Purification of the Soul,” in *Hajj Civilization: the legitimate purpose and the human demands*, ed. Ali Bin Muhammad Bakhsh (Makkah: Grand Hajj Conference Proceedings, 2015), 94.

⁶¹ See Muhammad Zakir Hossain, “Hajj: A Celebration of Peace,” *The Muslim World League Journal* 44, no. 12 (2016): 1.

changing effect of Hajj on a genuine pilgrim who surrenders to the dictates of the annual ritual. According to Abdul-Wahab Hajj infects a Pilgrim with good character, and good speech and distances people from backbiting, gossiping, damnation, spying, and envy which positively affects the pilgrim's dealings with the community.⁶² Therefore, an avenue like the Hajj village whereby the real values of Hajj as a pillar of Islam are purposefully instilled in the pilgrims can be an effective platform to promote peace.

This fits into one of the peacebuilding frameworks espoused by Hiroshi Oda and John Paul Lederach. For example, Lederach has espoused that one of the socio-economic techniques for peacebuilding is to help people, organizations and institutions "to acquire an appreciation"⁶³ for peacebuilding through their own cultural settings. Similarly, Oda describes peacebuilding embarked on by non-state actors such as religious groups, civil society groups, local leaders and 'ordinary persons' among others as the most efficient framework to consolidate peace.⁶⁴ In all this, both Oda and Lederach agree that the ultimate for any peacebuilding initiative is to bring good relationships among people. Therefore, Hajj orientations, if well planned, will have an aggregate positive effect on communal relationships in Ghana which will pre-empt tensions both within Muslims, and between Muslim communities and their non-Muslim counterparts.

Conclusion

This paper sought to explore Hajj values for potential peacebuilding among Muslims in Ghana. It discussed how the values of Hajj may be rehearsed for peacebuilding, especially in the Ghanaian Muslim community. The discussion focused on the analysis of the empirical data collected on Hajj and peacebuilding in Ghana. The discussion has revealed that Hajj holds great potential for peacebuilding among Muslims and between Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbours in Ghana.

⁶² Ali Jumuah Mohammad Abdul-Wahab, "Faithful Intents In Maximizing the Rites of Hajj and Umrah and Its Impacts on the Individual and Society," in *Glorifying the rituals of Hajj*, ed. Ali Bin Muhammad Bakhsh (Makkah: Grand Annual Hajj Conference Proceedings, 2014), 206.

⁶³ Lederach, *Building Peace*, 88.

⁶⁴ Oda, "Peacebuilding," 7.

The paper also reveals that critical values of peacebuilding such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and good relationships among others are inherent in the performance of Hajj. These values were attested to by Hajj pilgrims and local Islamic scholars as values that impact pilgrims during preparations and performance of Hajj. Additionally, these values are replicated during the performance of Hajj itself where forgiveness and reconciliation become the focus of every pilgrim before Allah. These Hajj values can be leveraged through well-defined projects to engender peacebuilding among Muslims in Ghana. Also, the analysis of the data suggests that the Hajj village concept in Ghana can inure to positive impact in society if well planned with a peacebuilding focus. Hajj orientations before departure for the ritual in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been identified as great platforms on which values of peace are inculcated in the pilgrims.

It is recommended that the Hajj Board of Ghana creates a peacebuilding avenue during Hajj preparations to make pilgrims peace ambassadors in their various communities when they return from Hajj. This can create an impact as those who perform Hajj in Ghana (Alhajis and Hajias) are highly regarded by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Also, the paper recommends that the Hajj Board makes these peacebuilding values the focus of pilgrim orientation at the Hajj village during every Hajj season.

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