

الملاقدة العلمان

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الصلتقى العلص

لأبحاث الحد والعمرة والأبارة

Enhancing Women's Role in Providing Information and Guidance During Hajj Dr. Hadeer Abo El Nagah, Associate Professor of English Language and Literature

Taibah University

Hajj is the world's largest convention. It attracts Muslims from different countries, backgrounds and languages. More than two million Muslims gather in Mecca annually to perform this foundational pillar of Islam. Since the number of women performing Hajj accelerates annually, there is an increasing demand for guidance and information especially amongst non- Arabic speaking women pilgrims¹. Saudi women have always been actively involved in the hosting and guidance provided during Hajj and Umrah², their domestic role in making Hajj a more comfortable and beneficial experience is never denied or underestimated. However, many of those who are currently working in the field are volunteers who generally lack the professional training in language, public relations and Islamic legislation needed for such a major task.

This current study is divided in two parts; the first examines the role played by Saudi women in providing services and guidance during Hajj season³. An example based

- ² Hajj happens only once a year while Umrah (the small pilgrimage) is not limited to certain time during the year. Umrah is less challenging in management and less complicated to deal with as the numbers are usually less and the crowds do not have to perform same rituals at the same times.
- 3 Due to the space limitation in this paper and the time constrains, the points discussed here are introduced briefly, however a more detailed study is intended to follow to address these issues in more details.

on a field experience working with the International Association for New Muslims, women division, which is a part of the Muslim World League is to be briefly demonstrated. This part of the paper presents a field experience about Hajj by the new Muslims during 2012. It demonstrates some of the challenges facing Non Arabic speakers especially women and the necessity to provide special information and guidance to them. The second part of the paper is devoted to present a suggested professional training program for university students, especially females, to provide them with the language, public relation and communication skills needed to such massive task. The suggested training program will begin with English, Urdu as a start ups and it is to be developed to include other languages in the future. It is a highly condensed language program that depends on providing the trainees with language communication skills and Hajj related terminology.

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The challenges confronting Hajj management and organization may vary from cultural, religious, health and many other types of difficulties. Apart from the massive governmental efforts to organize Hajj and deal with its multiple and complicated challenges, parallel vigor is equally needed in social and private domain. Focusing on language as one of the barriers of communication during Hajj, the aim of this study is to:1- Examine the role played by Saudi women in facilitating Hajj. 2- Study some of the challenges facing the pilgrims (particularly women) form non Arabic speaking background. 3- Provide some practical solutions to these challenges. 4- Suggest a female students training program that includes mainly language, public relation and communication skills. 5- Suggest measures and procedures to promote volunteer and group work amongst female university students.

Introduction: Importance and complexity of Hajj Experience

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and obligatory one in lifetime for those with those with sufficient financial means and physical abilities to take such a journey. It is the one of the largest International gatherings in the world. Its multicultural nature makes it a deep and unique human experience. Undoubtedly, its impact goes beyond the religious rituals. Many Hajjis⁴ (pilgrims) describe it as the most intense experience of their lives.

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"And proclaim to mankind the **Hajj** (pilgrimage). They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, they will come from every deep and distant (wide) mountain highway (to perform **Hajj**)." (Qur'an: 22:27)

The cultural and human richness of the experience highlights one of the main aims of creation as it appears in the following Aya from the Qur'an"

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Qur'an:49:13)

Besides its uniqueness as a human and cultural experience, Hajj promotes the sense of unity and develops the person's sense of togetherness and tolerance towards people from different backgrounds and ethnicities. In their introduction to "Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: Religion and Tolerance in Islam's Global Gathering", Clininingsmith, Khawaja and Keremer stated that Hajj leads to a feeling of unity with fellow Muslims. More importantly, they emphasized that " It (Hajj) increased belief in equality and harmony among ethnic groups and Islamic sects and leads to more favorable attitudes toward women, including greater acceptance of female education and employment" (1). Such positive impact of Hajj is not limited to those who are performing the rituals but to all those who working in the field as well, as they come in close contact to different nationalities and ethnicities which will accordingly develop their sense of openness to the world and acceptance of others (ibid).

Nevertheless, Hajj is a complex and challenging experience, besides the difficulties of performing the religious rituals themselves, the huge numbers, difficulty of communication, movements en masses to same places are amongst the challenges that face any organization of Hajj. The complexity of the experience itself and the interchanging factors and disciplines involved makes it an interesting case of

⁴ Hajji is the Arabic word for a pilgrim and both are used in this study to give the same meaning.

interdisciplinary research and an area that really in need and demand of thorough examination and development.

Saudi Women & the Hajj Experience

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Saudi women have always participated actively in providing services for the Hajjis. Even before the institutionalization of the Hajj guidance services, many of the domestic services were entitled to women. Though very limited studies were found in this area, historic and religious references and sources frequently refer to the domestic and health tasks shouldered by women especially at Mecca, Jeda and Al Median where the Hajjis usually needed to stay ⁵. In her introduction to the fifth volume Alam Al Twafa which is devoted solely to the female Hajj guides, Faten Hussien stated that many women across history practiced Al Tawafa⁶ (providing Hajj services and guidance), they were officially appointed by the Saudi government and were equally entitled to inherit the profession like male siblings $(20)^7$. Specially at the two Holy cities, Mecca (including Mena And Arafaa areas) and Median⁸ the role of women was mainly domestic as most of the Hajjis were hosted in private homes till recently. Hussien surveyed a sample of female Hajj guides and reached a statistics that mainly favors to increase the participation of women in Hajj services especially in the areas of reception, public relations, supervising of food preparation and catering services and paper work (48). The highest percentage of the sample surveyed were in favor of increasing the participation of women in first; reception and hospitality, second in providing religious guidance and teaching especially in female

⁵ See Al Ansari 20, 169 and others.

- ⁶ See Alam Al Tawafa : Tawafa is defined in Hussien's study as : the profession of a person who receives the Hajjis, serves them and provides guidance to them (25).
- ⁷ As stated by Hussien in the above mentioned reference, no previous studies were devoted solely for the role played by women in facilitating Hajj and Twafa as a profession.
- ⁸ While guiding the Hajjis in Mecca is traditionally known as *Twafa*, it is known in Medina as *Delala*, like Twafa, it is a family running profession till it was institutionalized by the Saudi government and it is currently mostly run by the Association of Adilaa (Hajj Guides) at Al Medina http://www.adilla.com.sa/portal/

related issues with the percentage 94,83% and 82,76% respectively (67). Other services were also offered by women such as; medical care, helping in shopping, child care, keeping of valuable possessions and many other services that should not be underestimated (72). In addition to other numerous difficulties, inadequacy of trained female service providers and limitation of language communication topped Hussien's list of the obstacles facing women and limiting their involvement in the area of Hajj services, both are addressed in the training program suggested below in this study.

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Hajj via the International Association of New Muslims 2012/1433 as an Example⁹:

Serving the Hajjis and facilitating their trip has changed through the recent years as it became more institutionalized, provided by Hajj companies or corporate that supervised by the Ministry of Hajj. However it leaves the doors are left widely open for private non-profit organizations and volunteers to participate in such a massive task. Many Islamic non –profit organizations focus their *daua* and Islamic guidance programs on new Muslims and those who recently converted Islam. This segment of the non-Arabic speakers of Muslims is in greater demand for knowledge and guidance more than any other group of pilgrims. The diversity of the backgrounds and the language spoken by the group of pilgrims hosted by these organizations comprise one of the main challenges. The International Association of New Muslims is one of these organizations, its women branch headquarters in Jeddah is probably one of the most active branches in the field. The number of new converts who are annually hosted is remarkably increasing. Since women form almost half the number of the hosted pilgrims, special programs are to be planned for their guidance and providing sound and authentic information to them. The Hajjis were usually divided into smaller groups based in their country and the language they speak. Co- pilgrims who know more than one language usually offer to translate lectures and general instructions however, their translation is generally unprofessional and sometimes misleading as they lack the basic language skills and religious information needed. Many of the hosted pilgrims, while they urgently need the information provided in the lectures and study circules organized to them, they were

⁹ For more information about the International Association for New Muslims, women division, which is a part of the Muslim World League consult : http://www.islamicfinder.org/getitWorld.php?id=54222&lang= unable to make the best use of it because of the language barrier. Through interviews conducting with many of invitees during last Hajj season 2012/1433, they asserted that their major problem was the lack of religious instruction in their languages, and the lack of communication and information provided during the trip. Some also have certain medical conditions and needed medical care which was not sufficient when available.

Promoting Volunteer Work among Saudi Female University Students:

Hajj as a religious experience and a unique multicultural experience can be utilized to promote the sense of belonging in its wider meaning and it can also be employed to enhance the involvement of women in the Hajj process. Numerous initiatives target male students; like the scouts and medical teams which undoubtedly have a very positive impact on both the participants and the Hajjis. Likewise, Saudi female university students can be encouraged to attend training programs to enhance their awareness of the magnitude of Hajj and develop their qualification to deal with it. The suggested program below aims at developing the sense of community and national service and encourages the students to serve their nation and faith via providing such service to the visitors of the Holy lands. Promotional campaigns are to be organized prior to the Hajj season to recruit students to participate. Additionally some awards and prizes are to be distributed to the volunteers at the end of the season to boost their sense of achievement.

Conclusion:

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Hajj is a significant experience in the lives of those who perform it and in the lives who organize it as well. Women in Saudi Arabia have always participated in helping and serving the Hajjis both officially and unofficially. Because of the complexity of the Hajj experience many factors need to be managed simultaneously, language and communication is one of the main areas that require development Inadequacy of the information and guidance available to non- Arabic speaking females during Hajj can be regarded as one of the main challenges in the Hajj experience. The participation of women in serving the pilgrims is one of the areas that need enhancement due to the increasing numbers of female pilgrims and their need to be provided by numerous services including religious and logistic ones. Recruiting female students to provide information and guidance can be one of the suggested solutions. However, it is realized that many female students at the university level have not experienced Hajj and know



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very little information about it. Therefore a professional academic training program is needed to develop female student volunteers' capabilities to deal with such challenging situation. Three major areas are the main focus of this initiative program; first is language, second is public relation and group guidance and leadership skills, and third is the specific religious basic information related to Hajj, its performance and rituals.

Recommendation: The Suggested Training Program

The suggested program is designed to equip a selected group of volunteers amongst female university students with the language and communication skills needed to deal with female pilgrims especially the non- Arabic speakers. It will include English and Urdu as a start ups and should be developed to include more languages in the coming years. This is a practical program that depends on dealing with real life situations and trains students to act positively and develops their leadership skills.

Duration: 1 Month divided as follows:

- 2 weeks preparation and orientation
- 2 weeks condensed courses and direct contact

Areas suggested for studying:

- 1- Language
- 2- Public relations and leadership skills
- 3- Legislation and Fiqh (Religious rules related to Hajj)

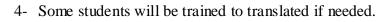
Targeted group:

This program targets female university students to be trained to provide professional guidance to non- Arabic speaker females during Hajj. Public relations employees who work in organizations in contact with female pilgrims can also be included in such intensive trainings.

Program objectives:

Upon completion of this condensed specially tailored program trainees are expected to be able to:

- 1- Communicate with basic English and Urdu with Hajjis.
- 2- Give simple directions.
- 3- Present some basic lectures that include basic religious information concerning Hajj.



5- Use basic communication skills effectively.

Program Material:

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A pamphlet of selected material will be designed purposely for this unique program

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