

Title—The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca

Author—Eric Tagliacozzo

Year—2013

Categories: Islam, Movement, Hajj, Colonialism

Place: Indian Ocean/Southeast Asia

Time: 1300-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Tagliacozzo's book attempts to craft a comprehensive history of the hajj in Southeast Asia. His central argument includes three intertwined arguments. First, he argues that the Southeast Asian hajj started out as a more or less individual phenomenon, a practice undertaken by those who were able to pay and who gradually took along other Muslims via their own pecuniary means. Second, he posits that in the colonial age, the pilgrimage became much more of a state-sponsored enterprise, one that could be ordered and adjudicated accordingly. Third, he argues that the postcolonial age has seen a synthesis of these earlier two approaches with states regulating the hajj but individuals determining the kinds of journeys they are able to make. He claims that this hybrid model has become the hallmark of the modern hajj in Southeast Asia.

The book is organized into three roughly chronological parts. The first part deals with the pilgrimage to Mecca as seen from the first centuries where there are records. This section begins by mapping out the early modern world of voyaging and exchange, which started to create a Southeast Asian ecumene. He focuses on the economic of the hajj from precolonial to colonial times, grounding the spiritual journey firmly in its material realities. The second part deals with the high colonial period of both Southeast Asia and the Middle East, roughly the second half of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. In this section, Tagliacozzo looks at the hajj from four different colonial perspectives. He considers the aspect of disease in relation to the hajj, arguing that controlling contagion presented a huge problem to colonial pilgrims and the colonial states that ruled them. The last part is focused on the modern hajj, specifically exploring the role of the state in the operation of the modern pilgrimage. In his last chapter, he focused on those countries where Islam is the religion of only a minority of the population, such as India or Burma, but where Muslim lines of pilgrimage and the accompanying issues of movement, separatism, and violence loom large in the control of the hajj. Tagliacozzo's book aims to encapsulate the lived experiences of a large number of people over many centuries. He includes his book as part of the literature that is moving away from orientalism as the dominant paradigm for studying the Middle East—making his study of the Southeast Asian hajj in the *longue durée* fit well into emerging literature.

His argument rests on the assumption that the religious and the economic have always been intertwined and that social stratification is important to how religion is practiced. His book attempted to understand the life arc of one ritual of Islam and from one part of the world. Tagliacozzo claims that politics were at the core of the hajj, and that the practice served to deeply connect the various polities in the Southeast Asia/Indian Ocean region.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Islam became one of the greatest connective strands between Southeast Asia and the Middle East, as well as between various Southeast Asian polities
- European powers strived to control the main lines of the pilgrimage during the colonial era
- The connections created by the pilgrimage allowed Islam to survive and evolve in Southeast Asia