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Hijrah: A Model of Sacred Emigration

Hijrah is a pattern of sacred emigration in Islamic tradition involving the flight of God's followers (i.e., Muslims) from a perilous place to one of greater safety or receptivity for life in accordance with God's wishes (i.e., Islam). Drawing upon distinctions between sacred and profane space outlined by Mircea Eliade, hijrah may be described more specifically as emigration from a perilous, profane space to a safer destination that will eventually be consecrated as a sacred space.^[1] When understood as hijrah, emigration functions as a first step in the process of that consecration.

There are circumstances where the journey begins with an exodus from a perilous, profane space to a less perilous profane space, the survival of growing tribulation in the second location, a consolidation of divine power, and a triumphant return to the previous location, resulting in the purification and consecration of both into sacred spaces (i.e., they become bestowed with significance from an Islamic perspective). The movement to and from those spaces is understood by some modern Muslims, including many Islamists, as the physical relocation required for jihad. In turn, jihad is understood as much a struggle to cleanse a territory of non-Muslims as it is a transformative inner-struggle of moral purification for those Muslims who answer the call. The establishment or redemption of honor is a key component of this inner-transformation.

According to Islamic tradition, the first hijrah refers to the migration of Mohammad and his followers from Mecca, where his life had become endangered, to Abyssinia (located across the Red Sea in what is now Ethiopia) in A.D. 615. Another hijrah to Abyssinia is believed to have occurred less than two years later.

The most important account of hijrah from the life of Mohammad involved his departure from Mecca, which had become dangerous for him and his followers, to Medina, which was initially a safer alternative, in the year A.D. 622. Through peaceful and violent methods of jihad, Mohammad's constituents eventually took control of Medina from iniquitous enemies, and they returned newly empowered to Mecca to overthrow his enemies in that location as well. This event is widely associated with the beginning of the Islamic calendar, and both cities have since become sacred within Islamic tradition.

Exodus is a closely related concept to hijrah that is more familiar to Western thought. A few examples of how the model of hijrah is used by some Muslims to recall other sacred stories prior to the life of

Mohammad may help to convey the flexibility of the concept, as well as reflect its religious importance. Islamic tradition has been known to consider the story of Moses from the perspective of hijrah. Crisis at the beginning of Moses' life motivated his mother to surrender him from the Jewish community to the will of God as proven through the fortunes of the flowing river waters, through which he arrived in the care of Egyptian royalty (from the perspective of his community, a journey from sacred to profane space). The increasing danger toward the followers of God (though Jews, understood from an Islamic perspective as Muslims) within Egypt resulted in a miraculous and difficult departure through the wilderness (i.e., unconsecrated space) in search of the land promised to Israel by God (a return to sacred space). Jesus of Nazareth presents another example of hijrah to counterbalance the story of Moses, as Jesus is sent by his mother from Nazareth to Egypt (a less perilous, profane space) in an attempt to avoid perilous local authorities in collusion with Rome. It is believed he returned as a prophet of Allah in his original homeland, which from an Islamic view, was an exodus to relative safety, as Muslims commonly believe that Jesus was raised to heaven without dying, and was never crucified.

This article is not concerned primarily with specific events in divine history, but rather, the abstraction of hijrah as a model of sacred emigration with the potential to assimilate such events to other events across space and time, including recent history, as well as to compel behaviors that have not yet occurred, in ways that are highly significant for religious persons.

From a perspective informed by the insight of Mircea Eliade into the nature of religious experience, hijrah should be regarded as a key event in the transition between chaos and order, the consecration of profane space into sacred space, and pre-Islamic time into the current era. Hijrah is a model of retelling the past, envisioning the future, and reckoning the present. It remains utilized by modern Islamists to afford religious meaning to appeals for Muslims to travel for the purpose of establishing and protecting honor through the divinely sanctioned domination of Islam in particular localities, in accordance with their understanding of divine will. The concept is also being used to frame the current migration (i.e., mass-exodus) of millions of Muslims from the dangers of the Middle East (including Syria and Iraq) to profane (i.e., non-Muslim) destinations throughout Europe. Although Europe is undergoing increasing political instability in response to the migration, it has so far remained less dangerous than the Syria/Iraq region from where many of them have emigrated.^[2] The model of hijrah will continue to be integral to competing efforts to frame the crisis, including efforts to prevent, elicit, or accelerate future mass-migrations within, from, or back to the Islamic world.

Conceptualizing Islamic Honor

Understanding why Islamist messaging fails or succeeds to inspire Muslims to mass-emigration requires willingness to examine honor within the ideology of hijrah from the standpoint of the religious person. Western observers have struggled to comprehend honor, much less recognize its significance throughout vast regions of the world beyond the West.

In his comparative analysis of the history of honor, Bowman^[3] has argued that honor culture has disintegrated in the West, while remaining robust and current in the Islamic world. Western retention of an antiquated honor lexicon to articulate ethicality and legality (both antithetical to a classical honor ethic), obscures the fact that traditional honor has become alien to Western social thought. Western alienation from the experience of honor coupled with misunderstanding how this prestige syndrome influences thought and behavior of allies, adversaries, and others throughout the Islamic world, contributes to ongoing difficulty in building relationships and crafting policies that have intended effects in those areas of the world.

Western misunderstanding about honor frequently involves conflation with associated affective

experiences. Honor is not pride or respect, though experience of honor certainly could involve those sentiments. Honor is not the same as being liked, as a hated enemy may be regarded as more honorable than a beloved relative. Honor is not something set into stone, but rather, is dynamic and contestable. It can be gained, lost, and re-gained. It can be taken. Its reckoning requires social proof in terms that are respected by those of the honor group. It is better to be rich than poor, but honor is not simply economic affluence. Is not a simple quantity, such as social capital, but rather, a prestige-syndrome (i.e., a constellation of psychological, social, cultural, and religious phenomena) that corresponds functionally with social structures of the societies in which it remains a matter of grave social concern.

Honor may be approached in terms of how it is discussed. Two of the most widely recognized metaphors of classical honor are that of *stain* and *soma*. Dishonor, as understood and discussed as a stain, must be removed through actions that symbolically enact cleansing. Blood stains... and blood cleanses. So agree the ethics of sacrifice and revenge, which are necessary, though not sufficient, for the survival of honor culture. According to the somatic metaphor, dishonor may be understood and discussed as disease, and it is resolved through symbolic processes of healing the body. Purification discourse may be exhibited with either the stain or somatic metaphors. Both metaphors may co-exist where honor remains an important dimension of social existence, such as the case has been throughout Islamic history, including the ideology of the Islamic State. While metaphors of stain and soma are indispensable for understanding how honor is understood according to modern Muslims, and especially those of Islamist orientation, a great deal of discourse concerns honor in terms of space, place, and territory, in a manner that does not necessarily draw upon those metaphors.

An examination of strategic communications issued by Al-Qaeda examined the applicability of Gustavo Correa's (1958) conception of ancient Spanish honor with regard to Islamic honor as understood by those Islamists. Correa's theory was highly applicable when the Islamic umma, rather than the Muslim individual, is presumed the fundamental locus of honor. In turn, an individual Muslim's honor was discussed as being mainly derived from co-participation in the umma (i.e., the honor group). In support of Correa's observations, honor was understood as being rooted in divinity. Vertical and horizontal aspects of honor are mutually constitutive. Vertical honor is established with the umma's precedence above non-Muslims, maintained through competition (including warfare) against non-Muslims, and it functions as an ideology hierarchically differentiating the umma from non-Muslims. Horizontal honor is gendered, with domination by non-Muslims situating the umma in a feminized position, and domination of over non-Muslims situating the umma in a masculine position. However, Correa's theory did not predict the manner in which the establishment, defense, violation, and exoneration of Islamic honor is reckoned through the establishment, defense, invasion, and forceful expulsion of non-Muslims from Islamic territory. The perception and management of honor through this cultural geographic medium has been termed the geospatial reification of honor.[4]

Some Western observers attuned of understandings of dishonor as stain or disease still tend to underestimate its importance in the Islamic world. Although the geospatial reification of honor remains an important ideological component in efforts by Islamist groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda to inspire hijrah for jihad, it remains largely unrecognized by Western observers. This analysis is intended as a small contribution toward redressing that oversight.

The Ideology of Hijrah: Islamic State Compared with Al-Qaeda

For years, Al-Qaeda attempted to persuade Muslims to emigrate to places such as Afghanistan and Iraq to wage jihad against non-Muslims and apostates, but that became problematic when emigrant travel patterns were used by enemies to discover al-Qaeda's recruitment networks and training facilities. By 2010, a trend emerged whereby al-Qaeda began to insulate itself from dangers unwittingly posed by emigrant

jihadists by encouraging Muslims living in enemy societies to strike where they already are. The Islamic State has achieved greater geopolitical control than al-Qaeda, and presently is more able to receive emigrants to fight and constitute a new, more professional infrastructure. The call for hijrah on the part of the Islamic State is intended to advance its immediate nation-building efforts, which begin with survival against current enemies.

The distinction between Islamic State and Al-Qaeda is more organizational than ideological. There have been instances of hostility between these networks owing to their competition for the sympathies and loyalties of the Sunni umma. They have been known to criticize one another, and on some occasions, have clashed violently. As the Islamic State acquired territory through key military victories that eluded Al-Qaeda, some who swore allegiance to Al-Qaeda have since affiliated with the Islamic State.

Aside from a more eschatological orientation on the part of Islamic State, it shares much in common with Al-Qaeda from an ideological perspective. Both are Sunni, and intensely opposed to Shiites. Both are concerned with the practice of takfir, whereby other Muslims are subject to accusation of treachery against Islam, thereby assimilated to the status of non-Muslims. Both are jihadist and Salafist, insofar as they use violence among other means to purify Islamic lands of non-Islamic influences in accordance with their understanding that Mohammad and his early followers eradicated non-Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula. Strategic communications of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State reflect the same sense of honor, and both prominently draw upon honor-based appeals to mobilize support.

Themes in Islamic State Messaging

Fernandez[5] has outlined four primary themes in Islamic State messaging: *Urgency*, *Agency*, *Authenticity*, and *Victory*. *Urgency* refers to an emphasis on world events occurring now, and what responses are needed from Sunni Muslims immediately. *Agency* refers to emphasis that it is up to the Muslim individual to answer the call for jihad in service to the Islamic State. *Authenticity* refers to fulfillment the individual is told will be found only in joining this soundly Islamic struggle in defense of the Islamic State. *Victory* refers to displays of power, impunity, and stateliness to impart the impression that the Islamic State is geopolitically successful and here to stay. That report recommends ideal counter-messaging to use a variety of high quality material across social media, including sarcasm, humor, distraction, and music. It should be topical, timely, and grounded in facts, taking into account the geopolitical realities experienced by consumers. It should be religiously grounded, as appropriate, to attack the ideological roots of the Islamic State. Yet, Western counter-messaging has struggled to communicate effectively with power and emotion.

This article will examine the ideological relationship between hijrah and honor as expressed in two strategic communications of the IS that have been written to explain the relationship in detail to geographically distant Muslims speaking European languages: A 20 minute 44 second long viral video entitled, "Honor is in Jihad,"[6] which is narrated in English and sections with Bosnian speech translated into English subtitles. The second source for data reviewed in this article is 42-page online magazine devoted to the topic, Dabiq Issue #3, entitled, "A Call to Hijrah", also English-based.[7] These sources exemplify a psychological warfare strategy to elicit from English- and Bosnian-speaking Muslims a specific behavioral response (i.e., emigration to the Islamic State to assist with jihad) drawing upon cognitive and affective appeals nuanced to shape Muslims' experiences of the world and themselves. Cited evidence will demonstrate that the cultural logic of hijrah within these communications prominently draws upon geospatial reification of Islamic honor, insofar as honor is understood through geospatial awareness, discussed using geospatial discourse, and contested through efforts to control geospatial areas for the dominance of Islam. The geospatial movements of hijrah between sacred and profane spaces are portrayed by the Islamic State within these sources as a mechanism of moral purification resulting in the

acquisition of honor and elimination of dishonor. The materials examined in this report will allow us to say a bit more about how honor and hijrah fit within the more comprehensive ideology described by Fernandez.

Experiencing Honor Histories of Spaces in Hijra Appeals

Islamic State appeals for hijrah are predicated upon an awareness of collective Islamic dignity yoked to the fortunes of Islamic territory. Honor is discussed in terms of the gain of territory, the enhancement of Islamic civilization, and the dominance of Islam (i.e., sharia law) in its administration. Dishonor derives from the losses of territory to non-Muslims, moral pollution of that territory through the presence of non-Muslims or un-Islamic influences, and decline of Muslim rule within those territories.

The Balkans as an Origin in Hijrah Appeals

Islamic State efforts to engender an awareness of collective humiliation on the part of Muslims around the world depends upon the distinction between lands of qu'ud from those of jihad. It is said that Muslims who live in lands of qu'ud (where jihad has been abandoned) necessarily live with dishonor related to circumstances of relative powerlessness and victimization at the hands of non-Muslims.

Certain assertions pertain specifically to the Balkan region. The history of the Balkan conflict during the late 20th century is retold to emphasize the abuse suffered by innocent and naïve Muslims, including rape and murder, for no reason other than their religious identity. These accounts tell only of non-Muslims allied against helpless Muslims disarmed through embargos. Other Muslims, including Arabs, are said to have emigrated to the region to defend the honor of Balkan Muslims, who eventually stood silently as their secular government turned against those who came to their aid (cite accusation from HIII, 5).

As narrated in *Honor is in Jihad* by Abu Muhammad Al-Bosni,^[8] a mujahedeen:

They are preparing you to be like sheep,
getting you ready for the next genocide, the next slaughter.
Remember the last war in Bosnia,
and how the same government, together with those around them,
prepared the genocide in Srebrenica and many other genocides,
and many other killings of Muslims and the raping of our Muslim sisters.
Remember the war and the jihad in that war
and the mujahedeen who came from far countries,
most of them Arabs, to defend your honor and wealth.
And what did that treacherous government prepare for them?
They prepared for them betrayal.
They betrayed them. They prepared secret American prisons
that were specifically intended for them. That was their thanks to the mujahedeen
who came to defend your honor and your wealth.
And some of you even supported this.
And you didn't rise against that, you didn't raise your voice against that.
But now, you have a chance to fix your mistake.
If you as a people, as a big group, stand up against that filthy government,
you can crush them. You can put them beneath your shoes.
And you will never bring honor back to the Muslims until you return to your religion

and until you support the Khalifah.

Hijrah is discussed as a means of resolving this dishonor through unification of the Islamic umma in support of the khalifah, co-participating in its geopolitical dominance, and by extension, its honor. The above-referenced betrayal is portrayed as contributing to the dishonor Balkan Muslims are said to share collectively, which cannot be wiped away without the decision to make the hijrah now to bolster the Islamic State.

Another example follows from the video, *Honor is in Jihad*, in which Muslims living in the Balkans are petitioned through presentation of historical events that shape a particular honor consciousness regarding the region into an experience of humiliation that may only be redeemed by jihad through hijrah:[\[9\]](#)

Long after the light of Islam entered the Balkans, the condition of the Muslims weakened. Darkness marched its way back, and the Balkans were transformed from a strong offensive frontier into a defensive one. Then, just before World War 1 about a century ago, the Muslims of the Balkans were shaken by a worldwide major offensive of kaffir nations, with the specific aim of forging a national consciousness through the creation of nation-states in the lands of the Muslims. In the Balkans, they built these states on the communist model, with atheism as the cornerstone. By the end of the Second World War, Albania had become an independent communist state. And Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina become provinces under the newly-formed and Serbian-led communist state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. An air of humiliation now engulfed the Muslims of the Balkans, a lifeless air that lingers to this day, and will only be swept by the coming winds of jihad. Or otherwise avoided through hijrah, as the mujahedeen of the khalifah continued to stress.

The dishonor of living in the Balkans, a perilous profane space due to the rule of kuffar over Muslims, is said to have been resolved for mujahedeen who make the hijrah from Bosnia and other nearby regions to the *Sham*, a term that corresponds broadly to what the West knows as the Levant, including Syria. The acquisition of honor through defense of Islamic territory is evident as stated by an elderly Bosnian mujahedeen who emigrated to the sham:[\[10\]](#)

I thank Allah for bringing us to this land to live here,
all of us who came from Bosnia with the same intention and the same goal,
insha'allah, to guard and defend the frontier outposts of Allah,
which He put there, and to defend the Khalifah.
We have been blessed with ribat
and with defending Allah's frontier outposts insha'allah.
I send a message to my Muslim brothers who are about to come here.
I ask Allah to help them and make their way easy to come to this land.
As for honor, honor is in jihad. The one who leaves jihad
only harms himself and loses honor. The kuffar always want to be supreme,
but the word of Allah will be highest, and that is why we are here,
to raise the word of Allah, insha'allah.

Defense of Islam (“ribat”) is construed as inseparable from the defense of Islamic honor through the defense of Islamic territory represented by the Islamic State.

Iraq as an Origin and Destination for Hijrah

The history of Iraq as a place that has been invaded by kuffar armies, and eventually re-taken by heroic Muslims, is central to the self-portrayal of the Islamic State:[\[11\]](#)

With no real plan to establish an Islamic state, let alone bring back the khalifah, the jihad in Bosnia came to a halt, and the sacrifices of the sons of Islam and the fruits of jihad would escape them. The arrogance of the kuffar only grew. Only 12 years after the Bosnian war, they invaded the land of the two rivers. But this time, the leaders of the jihad in Iraq were determined that such a tragedy would not be repeated. Realizing that the only way to pluck the fruits of jihad was through the announcement of the Islamic State.

The emergence of the Islamic State is thereby portrayed as an effort to redeem the collective honor of all Muslims united under the caliphate. In a section entitled, “Hijrah and Forgiveness,” *Dabiq*[\[12\]](#) shows that collective redemption resulting from hijrah is also attainable at the level of an individual’s honor:

‘AMR IBN AL-‘AS (RADIYALLAHU ‘ANHU) SAID, “WHEN ALLAH INSTILLED THE LOVE OF ISLAM IN MY HEART, I CAME TO THE PROPHET (SALLALLAHU ‘ALAYHI WA SALLAM) AND SAID, ‘STRETCH OUT YOUR RIGHT HAND SO THAT I MAY PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO YOU.’ HE STRETCHED OUT HIS RIGHT HAND; THEN I WITHDREW MY HAND. THE PROPHET SAID, ‘WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU, O ‘AMR?’ I REPLIED, ‘I WANT TO STIPULATE A CONDITION.’ HE ASKED, ‘WHAT CONDITION DO YOU WANT TO STIPULATE?’ I SAID, ‘THAT I BE FORGIVEN.’ THE PROPHET RESPONDED, ‘ARE YOU NOT AWARE THAT ISLAM WIPES OUT ALL PREVIOUS SINS? AND THAT HIJRAH WIPES OUT ALL PREVIOUS SINS? AND THAT HAJJ WIPES OUT ALL PREVIOUS SINS?’”

[SAHĤH MUSLIM]

Hijra is portrayed as a means of honor redemption whereby sins are wiped away.

Dabiq as a Destination for Hijrah

The Islamic State digital periodical, *Dabiq*, is named after a location in the Sham where it is believed an apocalyptic clash will eventually occur between Muslims and an army of enemies united against them:[\[13\]](#)

Abu Dharr (radiyallahu ‘anh) said that Allah’s messenger (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, “shām is the land of congregation and dispersal [meaning resurrection]” [sahĤh – reported by al-bazzār and others].

Shaykh Hamād at-Tuwayjir (rahimahullāh), in commenting on some of the narrations about the tribulations and battles in shām, said, “in these narrations is evidence that the bulk of at-Tā’ifatul-

mans?rah (the victorious group) will be in sh?m near the end of times, because the Khilafah will be there. They will continue to be there clearly upon the truth until allah sends the pleasant breeze and it takes the soul of every person who has faith in his heart, as preceded in the sah?h narrations that the prophet (sallall?hu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, ‘Until the command of allah comes while they are upon that [condition]’” [ith?ful-jam?’ah].

The use of a myth to imagine the future should not be oversimplified as fatalism. While the Islamic State aims to convey confidence in outcome, absolute certainty appears reserved only for its resolve to be tested at Dabiq:[14]

Ab? Hurayrah reported that Allah’s Messenger (sallall?hu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, “The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at alA’m?q or D?biq (two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab). Then an army from Mad?nah of the best people on the earth at that time will leave for them. When they line up in ranks the Romans will say, ‘Leave us and those who were taken as prisoners from amongst us so we can fight them.’ The Muslims will say, ‘Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you.’ So they will fight them. Then one third of them will flee; Allah will never forgive them. One third of them will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. And one third will conquer them; they will never be afflicted with fitnah. Then they will conquer Constantinople. While they are dividing the war booty, having hung their swords on olive trees, Shayt?n will shout, ‘The [false] Messiah has followed after your families [who were left behind.]’ So they will leave [for their families], but Shayt?n’s claim is false. When they arrive to Sh?m he comes out. Then when they are preparing for battle and filing their ranks, the prayer is called. So ‘?s? Ibn Maryam (sallall?hu ‘alayhi wa sallam) will descend and lead them. When the enemy of Allah sees him, he will melt as salt melts in water. If he were to leave him he would melt until he perished, but he kills him with his own hand, and then shows them his blood upon his spear” [Sah?h Muslim].

We ask Allah to place us in the camp of the believers on the day of al-Malhamah and keep us firm until he grants us either victory or shah?dah.

The Islamic State portrays itself in the heroic position of God’s believers in the final battle, and hijrah as the means for the distant or uninvolved Muslim to join in the honor of that role. Tales of prophetic victory are told alongside prayer supplications for victory or death. This alludes to a more ambivalent attitude toward “victory”, at least regarding the experience of the prospective emigrant, than may have been conveyed by other messaging materials discussed by Fernandez but not examined in this study.

Experience of Dishonor in Non-Islamic Societies

The Islamic State argues that Muslims employed by kuffar in non-Muslim societies endure the humiliation of slavery:[15]

The modern day slavery of employment, work hours, wages, etc., is one that leaves the Muslim in a constant feeling of subjugation to a k?fir master. He does not live the might and honor that every Muslim should live and experience.

Hijrah to the Islamic State is explained as the necessary means of experiencing an honorable existence,

which can only be possible in a society organized upon Islamic principles, or in the struggle against life organized upon profane principles. Mujahedeen Sulahadeen Al-Bosni addresses Muslims frustrated in non-Muslim societies:[\[16\]](#)

Many of you back there are always complaining of not being able to have a beard, to wear niqab, of living a hard life. Well, here is your chance now. Make hijrah. If it is that hard for you and you want it to so much then make hijrah.

In these communications, hijrah is discussed as a morally significant action that brings about honor redemption partly through its intentionality. Additionally, movement in physical space is necessary to reach a sacred space where Islam enjoys full freedom in its expression, i.e., the Islamic State. Hijrah is thereby portrayed as actualizing honor otherwise impossible for Muslims to attain in profane societies or circumstances of life.

In summary, the Islamic State portrays a sharp distinction between sacred and profane territories corresponding with the traditional distinction between *dar-al-Islam* and *dar-al-harb* (i.e., house of Islam and house of war). Sacred territories are lands purified by jihad and sanctified through Islamic order, including the Balkans in periods of Muslim rule, as well as territory currently controlled by the Islamic State. Muslims live with honor in places dominated by Islam, and where its full expression as sharia is uninhibited. Profane territories are un-Islamic, variegated, and chaotic. Where Islam does not reign supreme, it is taken for granted that Muslims live in humiliation. In these communications, profane territories include the West, as well as societies ruled by communism or secularism, including the Balkans of today. Hijrah requires physical emigration from profane to sacred space, from lands of qu'ud to lands of jihad, from the Balkans or another profane place to the Islamic State. The geospatial reification of honor is indicated by the way the Islamic State treats various localities as loci of honor, such that the history of Muslim humiliation in the Balkans falls most directly upon Balkan Muslims, but it also has implications for all co-religionists – those who made the hijrah to assist shared honor with Balkan Muslims defending themselves, while Balkan Muslims who opposed them or remained neutral forfeited their own honor. Similarly, the call to hijrah in defense of the Islamic State is an appeal for geospatial movement to cleanse all that is un-Islamic from Islamic territory, thereby restoring honor for the individual, and ultimately, for Muslims as a collective honor category united under one caliphate.

Metaphorical Examples of Geospatial Reification of Honor

The geospatial reification of honor is not confined to the experience of specific physical localities. It also is exhibited through metaphorical ways of discussing honor redemption. In this abstract sense, the return to honor is explained in terms of a “return to religion” through the intentionality of hijrah:[\[17\]](#)

Allah's messenger (peace be upon him) gave us great advice.
“When you start dealing with interest,”
“when you start holding onto the tails of cows and you are satisfied with agriculture,”
“and you abandon jihad, Allah will place humiliation upon you”
“and he will not remove it from you until you return to your religion.”
Return to Honor, return to jihad for the cause of Allah.

Consider the following remark by an elderly Bosnian mujahedeen,[18] where geospatial metaphor is used to claim the ultimate religious authenticity and primacy of mujahedeen among other Muslims for making the hijrah to fight for victory or martyrdom (“shahadah”).

We came here to win or get shahadah for Allah’s cause.
Shahadah for Allah’s cause is the peak of everything.

The narrator follows that testimony with a supplication in favor of those who have redeemed their honor by answering the call for hijrah:[19]

May Allah grant them the highest places in jannah, where they live on the peaks of worship, on the peaks of Islam, fearing none but Him.

To discuss honor through metaphor of terrain, and of honor redemption through metaphor of return, suggests that geospatial reification of honor is understood abstractly, in a way that is closely associated with the honor histories of any particular place or region, but not reducible to any of them.

Hijra and Affective Experience

Hijra Transforms Affective Experience from Sentimental Death to Life

The Islamic State reports that the movement between profane and sacred space associated with hijrah will result in a with a change in emotional experience, from “sentimental death” to “life”, on the part of Muslims living in kuffar societies, or otherwise stifled in the expression of Islam.

Although detractors have attempted to characterize Islamist propaganda as hateful, it is notable that hijrah is not portrayed by the IS as corresponding with a dichotomy between love and hate. While the decision for a Muslim to remain in profane space (i.e., refusing to make the hijrah) is associated with very different emotional experiences than is emigration to sacred space, love of jihad is said to persist in both situations, but colors each differently. As expressed by the Islamic State, the difference is whether the Muslim responds to the love of jihad within, or stifles it by refusing to make the hijrah. The emotional state experienced by Muslims that is associated with profane space (i.e., lands of qu’ud) is characterized by Islamic State as, “Sentimental Death”. This includes depression, emptiness, longing, fear of hypocrisy within oneself, and awareness of humiliation. These feelings are said to result from a true love of jihad that embitters the life of one who sits back and abandons its call:[20]

They used to say, ‘Some love kills.’ I do not find that to be true except with the love of jih?d, for this love will either kill you with sorrow if you decide to sit and abandon jih?d, or it will kill you, making you a martyr f? sab?lill?h if you decide to answer the call. You only have to choose between one of these two deaths” [Tal?’i’ Khur?s?n #15].

This condition described is probably one many Muslims experience daily. There is no solution for it except by taking the first step towards jih?d – hijrah.

Hijrah, as the initial step toward jihad, is discussed as the beginning of redemptive action that will manage

emotional experience through the repulsion of worry and sorrow:[21]

‘Urwah Ibn az-Zubayr (rahimahullah) said, “{That which gives you life} means war, by which Allah honored you after humiliation, strengthened you after weakness, and defended you from your enemy after their subjugation of you” [Tafsir Ibn Kathir].

Jihad not only grants life on the larger scale of the Ummah, it also grants a fuller life on the scale of the individual.

Ibnul-Qayyim (rahimahullah) said, “If there were nothing in archery except that it repelled worry and sorrow from the heart, then that would be a sufficient virtue.

The section concludes: *This life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah.*

This logic of affective experience is captured in the title of the excerpt’s section, “There is no life without jihad, and there is no jihad without Hijrah.”

Hijra Resumes Experience of Sentimental Life Through Alignment of Inner- and Outer-selves with Islam

“Life” is the term used to characterize the emotional experience Muslims are told to expect upon making the hijrah to the Islamic State, i.e., zeal, fulfillment, and dignified pride working and contributing skills in the fledgling nation. Notably, this is tempered with expectations of physical hardship and risks associated with jihad, the fallibility of the Islamic State as a human institution, and the need to respect other Muslims. [22]

Hijrah, as the proper behavioral response to inner love of jihad, is portrayed as behavior resulting in an alignment with inner (private experience) and outer (overt behavioral) selves. The change from hypocrisy to sincerity is understood to influence one’s spiritual status, integrity, and affective experience as described above. A sincere Muslim acts on his faith, and is fully actualized. It is notable that hypocrisy is discussed as a *trait* of a person, rather than of a situation.[23]

{O you who have believed! Why do you say what you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do} [As-Saff: 2-3].

Verses like these moved the Sahab (Companions) so that they would not be counted by Allah amongst the hypocrites. The fear of hypocrisy creeping into their hearts did not leave them time to rest, contrary to the Muslims of this era who constantly feel safe and secure concerning their faith and deeds. The Sahab knew that the essence of hypocrisy – both major and minor – is discrepancy between what the inner self encloses and what the outer self discloses, and that minor hypocrisy can beget major hypocrisy.

Therefore, an unkept promise of hijrah to Allah could result in a devastating ending for the slave.

Hijrah resolves the dishonor of hypocrisy (understood as inner/outer self-discrepancy) through the alignment of both with the impersonal, moral centrality of Islam.

Discussion

The geospatial reification of Islamic honor is evidenced by the purported manipulation of honor (i.e., gain or loss) based on geospatial movement that traverses meaningful dichotomies between sacred and profane space, including the lands of jihad (that of the Islamic State) versus those of qu'ud (the Balkans, the West), places of worldly comfort versus the "frontiers of ribat" (i.e., defense of Islam), inner/outer-self misalignment (from denying overt action consistent with inner-love of Islam) versus aligning both with Islam (when that love is reciprocated with the decision to make hijrah), and emotional management (from sentimental death to dignified pride). To transition from dishonor to honor is to travel from the lands of qu'ud, beyond the frontiers of ribat, to the peaks of Islam (jihad). Hijrah is portrayed by the Islamic State as emigration to honor redemption.

The sources examined conformed to previous observations about the theme of *Victory* identified by Fernandez. The Islamic State has demonstrated its success by reports on victorious battles, using photographic evidence of dead enemies and celebratory mujahedeen. The humiliation of enemy prisoners was not a central theme in *Honor is in Jihad*, but *Dabiq* offered photographic evidence of vanquished enemies. While both sources stated belief that they would triumph over their enemies, it would be more accurate to say that both emphasized a spirit of determination to win or die trying, rather than the presumption of immediate victory. Both sources also attempted to temper the idealism of prospective emigrants with realistic expectations of the difficult aspects of jihad, and human imperfections with the Islamic State. This realism has been less prevalent with past messaging from Al-Qaeda and other Salafist groups, despite also having attempted to inspire hijrah through similar demonstrations to convey the appearance of power, competence, and impunity against enemies of Islam.

Islamic State emphasis for hijrah in the immediate future bring support to previous observations regarding the theme of *Urgency*. However, these appeals draw upon a geospatially reified sense of honor and sacred place relating to a vast divine history. The stories of Moses, Mohammad, his early followers, and historically recent jihadists including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, are mobilized in those appeals to shape an experience of dishonor involving rivalries ranging from recent wars in the Balkans to clashes between Muslims to violent struggles in the earliest days of Islam. Eschatological content also shapes perceptions of a grim but glorious future that is foreseeable, if not immediate, and presumably certain regardless of any given emigrant's experience of hijrah. Taken together, the materials examined here reflect a concern with urgency, but the logic of those appeals remain dependent upon construal of historical events nuanced by shared understandings of more ancient distant divine histories.

Although these sources exhibited numerous instances of support for previously observed theme of *Agency*, a great deal of attention is devoted to elaborating pretext to make hijrah seem the only righteous response for sincere Muslims. The appeals drew upon the presumed primacy of the honor of the group, regardless of whether the honor group of reference was Muslims as a whole, Balkan Muslims, or enemies such as Shiites, Christians, Jews, or Yazidis. These materials affirmed the importance of agency appeals directed at the individual Muslim, but those appeals were predicated upon the importance of group membership and co-participation in the honor (or humiliation) of the group, which in turn was predicated upon deeper assumptions of the primacy of the Islamic umma. These materials demonstrated that even when appeals were being aimed at the individual Muslim, that very individualism was predicated upon a collectivistic orientation and sense of identity.

These materials approached *Authenticity* from distinct but interrelated perspectives. The modeling of authenticity as alignment between private desires, sentiments, and inner-experience with outwardly visible behaviors, shows a dynamic that would not necessarily be obvious to those of other faiths or cultures. It seems likely that this is a nuance that has been ignored by Western-contrived counter-messaging derived from rational-actor models of decision-making and behavior. If the Islamic State believes that Muslims

likely to join them have sentiments that are different from their outward expressions of self, it warrants consideration whether counter-messaging efforts could be nuanced more effectively by if designed to resonate with that dynamic.

Counter-messaging nuanced to stimulate those hidden sentiments may need to engage the bases of emotional experience associated with *Authenticity* (or alternately, with hypocrisy) ideologically in terms of what is understood as Islam. This will require a realistic appraisal of the range of thought within the Islamic World. Public statements from Western leaders and others claiming that groups such as the Islamic State do not truly represent Islam may have short-term gains in terms of slightly assuaging popular antipathy toward the West, but perhaps at the cost at messaging efforts remaining ideologically discordant to the worldviews of intended audiences. From these materials, it is clear that the emotional life of authenticity involves inner/outer-self alignment with each other, and with other external criterion of righteousness, including religious scripture and repetition of behaviors of the prophet Mohammad and other highly regarded Muslims. The Islamic State is one of myriad Islamist groups that justifies jihad against non-Muslims and heretics based on their understanding that actions taken by Mohammad and his followers resulted in the purification of the Arabian peninsula (and later other Muslim territories) of Christians, Jews, animists, and other non-Muslims. Western construal of what Muslims privately understand as “Authentic” Islam requires a more clear understanding of how the life of Mohammad is remembered by modern Muslims, including his relations with non-Muslims. To the extent Mohammad is remembered as a prophet and culture-hero who eradicated the religious other through word and deed, it becomes necessary to consider the prospect that ideological receptivity to such messages may be greater than some Western observers suspect, and the possibility of justification for considering continuity between “jihad of the sword” (i.e., violent struggle against non-Muslims and religious corruption) and “jihad of the tongue” (i.e., where that struggle is pursued through peaceful methods including strategic communication, messaging, and ideological subversion). Counter-messaging content should take those shared memories into account or there will be minimal chance of ideological resonance with those who respond favorably to Islamic State messaging.

Attempts to communicate effectively with consumers of Islamic State communications may also benefit from attention to nuances of honor, including the geospatial reification of honor that Islamist groups use to recruit and inspire organizationally unaffiliated Muslims to act independently according to an ostensible common Islamic moral impulse. It remains unknown to what extent, if any, honor may be mobilized in appeals for hijrah by other authorities to elicit, accelerate, or prevent mass-migration of Muslims to, from, or within the Islamic world. Messaging that ignores or contradicts the cognitive (worldviews, collective memory, distinction of sacred and profane spaces), affective (humiliation awareness, distinction between sentimental death and life), and social (perceptions of self, co-religionists, and others) aspects of ideology that are accepted as credibly yoking hijrah to the establishment and defense of honor understood geospatially would seem less likely to facilitate intended migratory responses to, from, or within the Islamic world.[24]

End Notes

[1] Eliade’s innovations into the History of Religion involved turning concern from the impersonal texts and rituals toward the experience of religious man. His work is too extensive to reiterate fully within this article. For an introduction, see:

Eliade, Mircea. (1957). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated from French: W.R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers

Eliade, Mircea. (1954/1949). *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, translated: W.R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954. Originally published as *Le Mythe de l'eternel retour: archétypes et répétition*, 1949.

Eliade, Mircea. (1958). *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated: R. Sheed, London: Sheed and Ward

[2] A popular reference to hijrah in terms of the current the mass-migration of Muslims into Germany was available as of 2/17/17 at: <http://www.vdare.com/posts/the-violent-new-or-perhaps-old-meaning-to-muslims-of-hegira>

[3] Bowman, James (2007). *Honor: A History*. New York: Encounter Books

[4] Fricano, Guy (2012). Horizontal and Vertical Honour in the Statements of Osama Bin Laden. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(2), 1-21

[5] Fernandez, Alberto M. (2015). Here to Stay and Growing: Combating ISIS Propaganda Networks. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers 2015. Available online: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IS-Propaganda_Web_English.pdf

[6] The Islamic State. (June 5, 2015). Honor is in Jihad. Available online: https://www.liveleak.com/view?i=bc5_1433706605

[7] The Islamic State. (2014). Dabiq Issue 3: A Call to Hijrah. Available online: <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-3-the-call-to-hijrah.pdf>

[8] *Honor is in Jihad*, 11:40-13:21

[9] *Honor is in Jihad*, 2:47-3:53

[10] *Honor is in Jihad*, 17:45 – 18:50

[11] *Honor is in Jihad*, 13:21-14:24

[12] *Dabiq*, 23

[13] *Dabiq*, 9

[14] *Dabiq*, 15

[15] *Dabiq*, 29

[16] *Honor is in Jihad*, 3:53-4:30

[17] *Honor is in Jihad*, 8:51-10:47

[18] *Honor is in Jihad*, 19:00 – 20:44

[19] *Honor is in Jihad*, 19:00 – 20:44

[20] *Dabiq*, 28

[21] *Dabiq*, 31

[22] *Dabiq*, 33

[23] *Dabiq*, 25

[24] No claim is made that emotionally compelling appeals alone would cause mass-migration in the absence of necessary and sufficient circumstances making migration sensible, necessary, and possible.

About the Author



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Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/honor-in-hijrah-as-expressed-by-the-islamic-state-0>

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{2} <http://www.vdare.com/posts/the-violent-new-or-perhaps-old-meaning-to-muslims-of-hegira>

{3} https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IS-Propaganda_Web_English.pdf

{4} https://www.liveleak.com/view?i=bc5_1433706605

{5} <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-3-the-call-to-hijrah.pdf>

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