

**Creating an Inheritor: Uniting al-Muhājir's Migration Story Within the Spiritual Narrative Lineage of the Prophet & Husayn's Migration Stories**

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**Abstract**

Studies on hagiographies of the migrant founder of the Ba'alawi Ḥaḍramī and its diaspora, Aḥmad b. 'Īsā al-Muhājir tend to be critical of them as being too descriptive or fantastical and fabricated in nature thereby rendering them otiose as subjects of study in scholarly research. Through juxtaposing these hagiographies with that of two of the most important ancestors of al-Muhājir, the Prophet Muḥammad and Ḥusayn, this article argues that the hagiographies of al-Muhājir's migration are purposefully aligned with the migration narratives of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn in order to cement him and his descendants, the Bā 'Alawī, as the legitimate inheritors of the Prophet and his grandson in a spiritual and genealogical chain. By carefully dismantling the elements present in these three narratives, this article stresses the need to look at history beyond its factual and descriptive utility but as a tool used to create and legitimize an ideological agenda.

**Keywords:** Bā 'Alawī, Ḥaḍramī Arabs, Ḥusayn, Muḥammad, hagiographies

*I am from Ḥusayn and Ḥusayn is from me.*

(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*)

The above *ḥadīth* is found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, in which the Prophet Muḥammad conflated his grandson, al-Ḥusayn, with himself. In a book on Ḥaḍramawt, the author, Al-Idrus (2019) credited Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-‘Urayḍī b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, or Aḥmad al-Muhājir as the narrator of the *ḥadīth*. al-Muhājir was a 9th generation descendant of the Prophet, whose migration in the 10th century to Ḥaḍramawt resulted in the establishment of the Bāni ‘Alawī or Bā ‘Alawī. The term Banī ‘Alawī means the progeny of ‘Alawī, the grandson of Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir (Bang, 2003). Claiming their descent from Prophet Muḥammad via Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir, the Bā ‘Alawī sit comfortably at the top of the Ḥaḍramī social stratification system imbuing them with religious, social and political power (Bang, 2003).

It is through Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir that the Bā ‘Alawī connect their spiritual dominance through a genealogical chain replete with venerated saints, scholars and figures before finally reaching the Prophet. Followers of the Bā ‘Alawī are constantly reminded through hagiographies, treatises, rituals and the *silsilah*<sup>1</sup> that they can find the names of Ḥusayn, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. and the Prophet within the list of Bā ‘Alawī forefathers (Bang, 2003; Ho, 2006).

Yet, the veracity of this genealogical linkage has been questioned. Knysh (1999) argued that there was a dearth in near-contemporaneous accounts of al-Muhājir’s life. As a result, historiographical works on al-Muhājir created in later centuries were plagued “with underlying agendas and biases, which often hinge on consideration of genealogy and clannish honor” (Knysh, 1999, p. 215). He argued that in their efforts to uphold their religious and genealogical pedigree, the Bā ‘Alawī from the 15th and 16th century have contrived narratives that place them as the par excellence of religious leadership whilst simultaneously eliminating

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<sup>1</sup> The *silsilah* is the genealogical tree of an individual.

historical materialities that did not fit within that curated narrative (Knysh, 1999). As such, he determined that much—if not all—of the historiography on Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir pieced together by Bā ‘Alawī scholars had been fabricated rendering it useless for scholarship.

Charges of fabrication in Islamic history is not limited to the life of al-Muhājir. Hughes (2013) stressed upon the importance of placing even the story of the Prophet, whose historiography was written only 200 years after his death, under great scrutiny, as much of its content might be highly embellished. Similarly, in a discussion on the deafening silence regarding other major events in Islamic history, such as the assassination of Imam ‘Alī, Karbalā’ and the affair at Saqifah Banu Sa’idah, Alatas (2005, p. 237) outlined how “the proclamation of majority status by those claiming to adhere to the sunnah of the Prophet resulted in the definition of historical reality through silence and falsification”. Clearly, histories in the Islamic world are re-imagined and re-crafted to fit the worldview of the group holding the pen. Additionally, Alatas (2005) criticized Bā ‘Alawī chronicles of Aḥmad al-Muhājir for being too descriptive with no deep interpretative meaning to be discerned.

Inspired by Knysh’s (1999) and Alatas’ (2005) respective criticisms of Bā ‘Alawī history of al-Muhājir as being highly fabricated yet descriptive respectively, this paper uncovers the aims and motivations behind the creation of the narrative around al-Muhājir’s migration. This paper is not concerned with investigating the veracity of this narrative. Omar Edaibat’s (2021) disquisition has done an excellent job of exploring that issue. This paper takes on a heuristic approach, arguing that al-Muhājir’s story of migration has been purposefully drawn up in parallel with the lives of the Prophet and Ḥusayn. Developing a narrative that is homologous to these figures places al-Muhājir in a spiritual historical lineage which cemented him and his descendants, the Bā ‘Alawī, as the legitimate inheritors of the Prophet and his grandson in a spiritual and genealogical chain known as the *silsila dhahabiya* (golden chain) (Sayed, 2021).

This paper proceeds with a brief overview of the literature on al-Muhājir. It provides a brief outline of his migration to Ḥaḍramawt followed by the

debates surrounding the narrative of his migration after which, the theoretical concepts that underpin the findings will be outlined. This is followed by a short outline of the methodology employed for this study. The next section proceeds to highlight the various ways in which the migratory experience of al-Muhājir is homologous to that of the Prophet and Ḥusayn, showing how he is part of their spiritual historical chain. This paper ends by stating how the presentation of al-Muhājir’s life has further entrenched the Bā ‘Alawī position in Islam’s religious hierarchy.

### **Literature Review**

Aḥmad al-Muhājir is always introduced as the grandfather of ‘Alawī b. ‘Abd Allah, the patronymic ancestor of the Bā ‘Alawī (Edaibat, 2021). His biography establishes his relationship with the Prophet Muḥammad. He was a 9th generation descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad via his grandson, Ḥusayn.<sup>2</sup> He was born in Basra, Iraq. His birth year has been a matter of great contention with some arguing it was in 243AH/857AD whilst others believing it to be 241 AH/855AD, 260AH/873AD or some even as late as 273AH/886AD and 279AH/892AD (see: Buxton, 2012; Alaydrus, 2006; Edaibat, 2021; see al-Adni Al-Masyhur, for discussion). Umar Junus (1989) explained that additional footnotes and annotations pinned within a particular historiography shape the interpretation of that history. Doing so would lend an air of authority to a piece that is considered historical fiction. The debate on the birth year amongst scholars seems trivial at first. This aspect of al-Muhājir’s life is not pivotal in shaping his biography or migration. However, the discussion lends an air of legitimacy, as it presents scholars as participating in a punctilious and prudent intellectual deliberation of al-Muhājir’s life to its minutest detail. The biographer Al-Adni Al-Masyhur, for example, concludes this debate by providing a short list of the possible birthdates proffered, apprising that the reader should make his own informed appraisal on the matter.

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<sup>2</sup> Aḥmad al-Muhājir il-Allah b. ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad al-Naqib b. ‘Alī al-‘Uraydi, b. Ja’far al-Sadiq, b. Muḥammad al-Baqir b. ‘Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn b. Husayn al-Sibt b. ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib and Fatima al-Zahra bint Muḥammad (Buxton, 2012).

Whilst discussions on al-Muhājir's birth year might be aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the biography, the lack of near-contemporaneous sources led Knysh (1999) and Peskes (2005) to question the very existence of Aḥmad b. 'Īsā al-Muhājir. Umar Junus (1989) explained that the presence of information from other sources validates the veracity of a particular historical moment. The Bā 'Alawī themselves confirm al-Muhājir's existence by narrating a story of his grandson meeting up with Iraqis in Medina to confirm his genealogy (Edaibat, 2021). Additionally, Edaibat (2021) ameliorates Knysh's (1999) and Peskes' (2005) doubts by explaining that although Bā 'Alawī accounts of Aḥmad b. 'Īsā al-Muhājir may indeed be imbued with underlying biases, there are non-Bā 'Alawī sources supporting al-Muhājir's existence.

Unlike Knysh (1999) who saw limited value in al-Muhājir's history for scholarship, Edaibat (2021) saw Bā 'Alawī narratives on al-Muhājir as part of a desire to paint the group as staunchly Sunnī-Shāfi'ī from its inception. Edaibat (2021) explained that many of the works on al-Muhājir from the fifteenth century tend to posit al-Muhājir as Sunnī-Shāfi'ī. His charismatic political and scholarly leadership, strengthened by his prophetic genealogy, allowed him to unite and convert the Shī'ī and Ibādī communities in the valley. However, Edaibat (2021) continued, it was nearly impossible for al-Muhājir to be Shāfi'ī since Basra was never a center for Shāfi'ī thought at his time. Edaibat (2021) argued that Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Qalī, a non-'Alawī living in the 6th century AH should be rightly credited with the growth of the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence in Ḥaḍramawt. The projection of al-Muhājir as a pivotal Sunnī-Shāfi'ī-Ash'arī figure who converted the land of Ḥaḍramawt is an important element of the myth-making of Aḥmad b. 'Īsā al-Muhājir, as it buttresses Bā 'Alawī identity today as defenders of Sunni Islam. Edaibat's (2021) work showcases how the very lack of reliability in al-Muhājir's biography makes learning about his history important as it *precisely* reveals the ideology and religious agenda that the Bā 'Alawī wished to pursue in order to produce and reproduce its religious legitimacy.

## Theoretical Foundation

History is inextricably tied to myth-making. There are two types of myths: founding and martyrdom (Ramet, 2011). Whilst the former deals with the founding of the state, the latter involves heroic sacrifice for the nation. At the center of these myths are heroes who are usually portrayed as men of piety. Muḥammad, the Prophet, founded an *ummah* (religious community) whose political and spiritual history is spatially bound to Medina (Cole, 2018). His grandson, Ḥusayn, is a heroic martyr. Ḥusayn’s life and death have long symbolized the struggle of humanity and spiritual devotion (Bagir, 2022). He died for the sake of the *ummah*.

Myths and its heroes participate in the construction of the collective identity. They are “vehicles serving to create collective memory” (Remat, 2011, p. 246). Whomsoever is chosen to be a hero or villain will shape the contours of the community. As Lewis (1987) informed, myths serve:

“to strengthen the morale and the corporate pride of the group. The narrative need not be limited to historical elements, but may draw on mythology, religion, and pure fiction. Normally, it deals with a conflict, a clash between the group, usually exemplified in representative figures- that is to say the heroes of the narrative- and external forces. The latter may be human, of other tribes or people, or superhuman. It is interesting that in heroic poetry of this kind the essence of achievement lies in the action and in the qualities displayed in the action rather than in the result. The epic hero is not necessarily successful; his career may end in defeat and death, but it serves nonetheless to exalt the honor and courage of the tribe or the other entity to which he belongs.” (p. 43- 44)

As society advances, narratives are further contrived to suit a particular agenda. As such, whom one adopts as a hero and which myth one wishes to develop or promulgate depends on the type of identity one wishes to present to the world (Remat, 2011).

Analogizing a particular historical moment with a more dated experience also serves to further cement that historical event within the cosmology of the collective memory. Attaching a myth to something more primogenial and grander would render it dignified, legitimate and authoritative as it becomes part of a greater collective sacred cosmology (Lewis, 1987). This enterprise is even found in the Quran. Cole (2020) explained how use of the word *sakīnah* to describe the Prophet's migration to Medina tied him to the Jewish diaspora, who were expelled from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Expulsion and banishment, or in the case of Ḥusayn, death, do not denote failure. Rather, they are celebrations of an embodiment of the sacred that has been practiced from the primordial past which should be emulated in the present and future. The prophet's migration, then, becomes inducted into the sacred continuum of the Abrahamic tradition. Historiographies are then not meant to be wholly factual. They integrate and weave various historical moments into one congruent cosmology in order to explain the circumstances and particularities of the present. Therefore, to create this idealistic past, Lewis (1987, p. 56-57) argued that embellishment, that is "to correct or remove what is distasteful in the past, and replace it with something more acceptable, more encouraging, and more conducive to the purpose in hand" is only natural. What renders that historical moment factual is not the verities that are included. Rather, it is whether or not the public is able to suspend distrust of any fabrications that are within the narrative (Umar Junus, 1989). Genealogy plays an important role in ensuring this as it relates to the chronology and passage of time (Umar Junus, 1989). A historical reality is created by placing a historical figure within a narrative genealogy connecting him to other historical figures.

Following the above, I argue that the life of al-Muhājir integrates both the founding and martyrdom myths. His journey includes the most noble elements within the stories of Prophet Muḥammad and Ḥusayn. I argue after the next section that the historiography is constructed to situate al-Muhājir within the same spiritual narrative lineage as the Prophet and Ḥusayn thereby buttressing the Bā 'Alawī's position as custodians of Islamic authority.

## Methodology

As this essay is part of a wider study that looks at the Bā ‘Alawī of the Malay world (Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia), I focused on analyzing books on Aḥmad al-Muhājir that were either translated into Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia or the English language. I obtained these books from various bookstores in the three countries that specialize in selling Islamic literature. I also managed to acquire these books from the personal libraries of several Bā ‘Alawī. Therefore, the list of books is not exhaustive and represent case studies in my research.

Additionally, I also attended a personal class with a Malaysian religious scholar, ustazah<sup>3</sup> Marina<sup>4</sup>, in Malaysia. This two-day class mirrored the weekly private classes she holds with Bā ‘Alawī women, in which she discusses the various hagiographies of the Bā ‘Alawī forefathers, beginning with the life of al-Muhājir. As such, she is considered an authority in Bā ‘Alawī historiographies. We studied the hagiography of al-Muhājir written in Arabic by Abū Bakr Al- Adnī b. ‘Ali Al-Mashhūr or al-Masyhur.

Habib Taufiq AbdulQadir Assegaff who is the head of the Rabithah al-‘Alawiyah, an organization aimed at representing the interests of the Bā ‘Alawī in the Malay archipelago, have been conducting an online class for its members in Malaysia starting from 27 August onwards. I have also included the first lesson conducted in this series, which included a narration of the story of al-Muhājir, as part of my analysis<sup>5</sup>. Finally, I have included a two-and-a-half hour long YouTube video of a public sermon by controversial Indonesian Bā ‘Alawī scholar, Habib Rizieq Shahab, on the events of Karbalā’ which played an integral part in my analysis of Ḥusayn’s migration and its ties with the Bā ‘Alawī.

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<sup>3</sup> Ustazah is the Arabic term for female religious scholar.

<sup>4</sup> A pseudonym is used to protect her anonymity and confidentiality.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Figure 1 for poster of class.





Figure 1: Poster containing information on Habib Taufiq’s class for Malaysian Bā ‘Alawī members

## Findings

### Growing Up

The Bā ‘Alawī path is seen as protected because its main religious conduit, al-Muhājir, had received religious knowledge exclusively from his household. He was taught by his father, who in turn was taught by his father, and so on and so forth up the genealogical line until it reaches the Prophet through his grandson, Ḥusayn (Al-Idrus, 2021; Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 7, 2023). The story that the Bā ‘Alawī scholars then create is that of a protected and pure lineage of knowledge that is not sullied by outside influence. Therefore, the narrative of al-Muhājir’s youth as being under the watchful eye of his father solidified the notion that his form of Islam was blemish-free.

Not only did al-Muhājir’s learning come directly from the Prophet via Ḥusayn, his life story of growing up under the tutelage of his father and grandfather echoed that of Ḥusayn’s. Ḥusayn was brought up by his grandfather until the latter’s death (Al-Idrus, 2021; Suzana Hj. Othman

and Muzaffar Dato Hj. Mohamad, 2006). He then learnt from his parents, specifically his father and recalled the various *ḥadīth* (sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muḥammad) narrated by them (Alkaf, 2007; Al-Idrus, 2021). This enabled him to become a jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) and religious master (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). The knowledge passed down from Ḥusayn would then continue until it reached al-Muhājir (Al-Idrus, 2021). As such, just like Ḥusayn, taught by his father and uncles, al-Muhājir was able to master both the inward and outward spiritual sciences making him a master in *fiqh* and the Quran (Alaydrus, 2006; Alatas, 2005; al-Hinduan, 2011; Sayed, 2021). Clearly, al-Muhājir’s role is set to be the leader of his people, just like Ḥusayn and Prophet Muḥammad.

### ***Natural Leaders in the Homeland***

After his death in Karbalā’, Ḥusayn was survived by one son who would spawn numerous grandchildren that would guarantee the longevity of Ḥusayn’s line. Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir was painted as someone who assumed the mantle of leadership (al-Hinduan, 2011). In Basra, al-Muhājir was appointed *naqib al-ashraf*, head of the household of the Prophet (Edaibat, 2021; Al-Idrus, 2021). Al-Adni Al-Masyhur explained that this mantle was handed down from al-Muhājir’s father (Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 7, 2023). Naturally, Aḥmad al-Muhājir received visits from many distinguished individuals, including famed historian and Qur’anic exegete Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (Edaibat, 2021). Al-Muhājir would then be referred to as the teacher of teachers, whose knowledge ushered in the golden age of Islam in Basra (Ustazah Marina, interview, January 7, 2023).

As a leader of the household of the Prophet, Aḥmad al-Muhājir was portrayed as the alternative leader for Muslims, independent from the purview of the Abbasids (Al-Idrus, 2021). This echoed the life of Ḥusayn who was famed for eschewing the leadership of the Umayyads. His abnegation of Umayyad leadership reached its culmination when he refused to pledge his allegiance to ‘Yazīd (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). Ḥusayn’s own life echoed that of the Prophet, who, after publicly

proselytizing his message to the Meccans, offered an alternative form of leadership from the leaders of the Quraysh (Lings, 1983).

### ***Eschewing Political Power for Religious Mission***

As more men of political power converted to Islam during the time of the Prophet, the then-Qurayshi leaders of Mecca became perturbed. One of the leaders, ‘Utbah ibn Rabī‘ah, proposed to make Muḥammad an offer that he could not refuse:

“If it be wealth thou seekest, we will put together a fortune for thee from our various properties that thou mayst be the richest man amongst us. If it be honor thou seekest, we will make thee our overlord and take no decision without thy consent; and if thou wouldst have kingship, we will make thee our king; and if thyself thou canst not rid thee of this sprite that appeareth unto thee, we will find thee a physician and spend our wealth until thy cure be complete.” (Lings, 1983, p. 60-61)

The Prophet would receive these gifts, so as long as he ceased his proselytizing mission. However, the Prophet responded with a Qur'anic verse displaying his unrelenting resolve towards his mission. The men of Quraysh then called for an audience with the Prophet, during which he informed them that he was:

“not possessed, neither seek I honor [sic] amongst you, nor kingship over you. But God had sent me to you as a messenger and revealed to me a book and commanded me that I should be for you a teller of good tidings and a warner. Even so have I conveyed to you the message of my Lord, and I have given you good counsel. If ye accept from me what I have brought you, that is your good fortune in this world and the next; but if ye reject what I have brought, then will I patiently await God’s judgement [sic] between us.” (Lings, 1983, p. 61-62)

In the above narration, the Prophet Muḥammad was depicted as a man who had eschewed economic wealth and political leadership for a religious vocation. A vision of Muḥammad as a peaceable proselytizer, engaged in “polite exchanges with members of other communities” yet is also at the ready to take arms against those who violated the covenant of God, was not contradictory as it underlined the Prophet’s quest to spread the message of God (Cole, 2020, p. 111). The Quran depicted Muḥammad’s war against the Meccans as recompense for the violations the tribe had committed towards the Prophet’s burgeoning community. Cole (2020, p. 145) continued that “Muḥammad [sic] did not aim in these Medinan wars at imperial aggrandizement but sought the restoration of a previous balance. The fighting would cease if the Meccans made restitution for their torts against the believers.” Muḥammad was on a moral mission for justice to save the Muslim community from its enemies.

Rogerson (2006) ended his chapter on Mu‘āwiyah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn by defining what makes a true inheritor of the Prophet. He stated, “if one looks to find a true Heir to the Prophet Muḥammad, look not for thrones, or through the dynastic lists of kings, look not to the triumphant progress of a great conqueror or at the beaming smiles and promises of a popular politician. Look out for one who journeys towards God” (Rogerson, 2006, p. 345). As such, the one who walks the path of the Prophet eschews economic and political leadership for the path of religion. This criterion is present in the depictions of Ḥusayn and al-Muhājir, which mirrored each other. Alatas (2014) saw Ḥusayn as embodying the ideal life which is good, satisfying, just and glorified by the community. He described, Ḥusayn’s move to Karbalā’ as the pinnacle of a conflict between two morally opposing powers with Ḥusayn representing the human ideal of “justice, decency and morality” (Alatas, 2005, p. 237).

Rizieq Shihab (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021) then expanded on how Ḥusayn embodied this ideal. He outlined that Ḥusayn's refusal to pledge allegiance to Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān, upon the death of his father 'Alī, was not because of material reasons. Rather, Ḥusayn saw Mu'āwiyah as the leader of a rebellious force who had made false statements about his father. In deference to his brother, Ḥusayn did not launch a putsch against Mu'āwiyah, despite not accepting his caliphate that lasted for twenty years. Therefore, for Rizieq Shihab (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021), the fact that Ḥusayn did not launch a rebellion was incontrovertible proof that Ḥusayn was not interested in material or political power. He was but a reluctant leader who had to rise up to save the sanctity of Islam. According to Shihab (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021), Ḥusayn's defiance of 'Yazīd as a caliph, upon the death of Mu'āwiyah, was a religious mission to rid Islamic leadership of an impious and immoral heathen, who had risen to his position through the illegal and irreligious installation of dynastic rule.

Shihab (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021) outlined the reasons behind Ḥusayn's journey to Kufāh despite receiving advice against doing so. He conjured the image of Ḥusayn as a grandchild of the Prophet and the promised leader of the youths of the Heavens fulfilling his obligation to fight injustices perpetrated by 'Yazīd, a caliph known as a debauched player and philanderer. After establishing this contrasting image of good versus evil, Shihab (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021) painted a parlous picture: Ḥusayn would not do anything that would incur sin for the whole Muslim *ummah*. Migrating to Kufāh would help him muster an army, which had promised to fight alongside him against injustice, corruption and falsehood.

The Bā 'Alawī, Sayed (2021) argued, are like their predecessor Imam Ḥusayn who upheld the spirit of morality and justice whilst humbly and peacefully proselytizing the Prophetic message. The Bā 'Alawī, therefore, are inevitably the heirs of the Prophet's and Ḥusayn's mission. As the founding father of the Bā 'Alawī, al-Muhājir is at the heart of the embodiment of this spirit. In order to achieve this image, al-Muhājir is painted as an individual who relinquished economic and political leadership for a life of piety that culminated and was achieved by his migration (*hijrah*) to Ḥaḍramawt. It is within this narrative that the image

of al-Muhājir is likened to that of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn. Al-Hinduan (2011) claimed that al-Muhājir could have easily seized political power, as the Abbasid caliphate had been severely weakened and al-Muhājir's brother was a commander who had controlled various provinces in Iraq. As the head of the household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), al-Muhājir was poised to take control of the political leadership and thus obtain an elevated social and economic status in Arab society (al-Hinduan, 2011). However, al-Muhājir's hagiographies provided depictions of him rejecting these political and economic opportunities. One narrative recounted him rebuking his brother for leading a revolution against the Abbasids (Edaibat, 2021). Heeding his counsel, his brother then followed al-Muhājir's path to pursue a life of religious scholarship. Al-Muhājir's actions towards his brother mirrored that of Ḥusayn's quietest stance towards Mu'āwiyah leadership.

However, al-Muhājir could not remain quiet for so long. Just like Ḥusayn, he became a reluctant leader who had to rise up in order to save Islam from being sullied. Just as Ḥusayn had to go to Karbalā' to save Islam, the protection of the sanctity of the religion then underpinned al-Muhājir's migration to Ḥaḍramawt. As Al-Masyhur (2013, p. 80) informed his readers, al-Muhājir had moved to Ḥaḍramawt to protect the sanctity of the religion from *bid'ah* (innovation), *fitnah* (slander), corruption and disaster, envy and insults towards the Bā' Alawī and the companions of the Prophet including "Uthman, Ali, Tolhah, Zubair, Aisyah and Muawiyah [sic]".

The choice to leave the agriculturally lush Iraq for Ḥaḍramawt, a barren and hostile land for agricultural and economic enterprise, further accentuated the fact that, indeed, al-Muhājir could not have migrated for economic or political reasons (Alaydrus, 2006; al-Masyhur, 2013; Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 14, 2023). Furthermore, al-Hinduan (2011) explained that if indeed he preferred an elevated economic status, then he would have traveled to the more fertile Khurasani, Indian or Egyptian lands instead (al-Hinduan, 2011; Edaibat, 2021).

Battles in the name of correcting the trajectory of Islam were another feature of al-Muhājir that reflected that of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn. Though some accounts claimed that al-Muhājir won the hearts and minds of the Khārijīs—an offshoot of ‘Alī’s supporters who eventually felt he had committed apostasy and subsequently assassinated him as a result (Brown, 2014)—Al-Idrus (2021) discussed how this group had assembled a battalion to counter al-Muhājir’s three hundred-strong army. It is rather impressive that al-Muhājir could muster up such a large fighting group, especially since he had just migrated to Ḥaḍramawt. Nevertheless, Al-Idrus (2021) declared al-Muhājir the winner, leading to the exodus of the Khārijīs from Ḥaḍramawt - perhaps retributive justice for killing al-Muhājir’s forefather, ‘Alī.

Evidently, the migration of Muḥammad, Ḥusayn and al-Muhājir were tied together by a religious mission. Prior to his migration, Muḥammad had advised his community to seek refuge in Medina (Cole, 2020). Abū Bakr had appealed to the Prophet to leave for Medina too. Muḥammad responded that he was waiting for permission to depart from Mecca. Soon enough, Muḥammad visited Abū Bakr in the afternoon - an odd time since he always visited his friend either just after dawn or before dusk. Muḥammad had come to inform Abū Bakr that it was time to leave. He had received permission from God to emigrate to Medina (Cole, 2020).

Similarly, Bā ‘Alawī scholars painted Ḥusayn’s journey to Iraq as fulfilling a spiritual command. Baa’bud (2013) saw Ḥusayn’s journey to bring down ‘Yazīd’s tyranny and perform *al-‘amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (enjoining righteousness and forbidding evil) as having received blessings from the Prophet. Ḥusayn, he said, visited the Prophet’s gravesite where he shared his plans and received blessings from the Prophet before proceeding to Mecca (Baa’bud, 2013). Ḥusayn was portrayed as the heir of the Prophet’s legacy, as he readied himself by donning his grandfather’s garment, wearing perfume and riding his horse with the Quran in one hand (Alatas, 2014).

In his seminal work on Bā ‘Alawī figures, Buxton (2012) explained that Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā earned his sobriquet, al-Muhājir il-Allāh (the emigrant to

God) as he was following the path of the Prophet and God’s commandment. In doing so, al-Muhājir was said to have successfully protected the future of Islam and the *ahl al-bayt* from political and most importantly theological attacks (Buxton, 2012). Al-Muhājir purportedly received a sign from God through a dream. In this dream, he was summoned to “to fulfill a Godly *hijra* [sic] to carry on his family’s Prophetic legacy of calling to God (*da’wa*) and lay the foundations for a spiritual revival in this remote hinterland of the Arabian Peninsula” (Edaibat, 2021, p. 50). The sobriquet that he earned then placed him within the same spiritual historical narrative lineage as the Prophet whose *hijrah* to Medina was seen as the epitome of a religious migration to God (Edaibat, 2021).

***Persecution in the Homeland & in the Journey***

Basra, the seat of the *ahl al-bayt*, has long been plagued by disturbances that continue to spiritual and political life in the city (Alaydrus, 2006). Whilst ustazah Marina painted a picture of Basra at the height of its intellectual golden age being a result of al-Muhājir’s teachings, politically the narrative shifted to a bleak account (Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 7, 2023). Al-Muhājir lived during a time of great turmoil. The Abbasid caliphate was at the brink of collapse, exacerbated by corruption and sectarianism. This made the situation for al-Muhājir and his family more difficult (Edaibat, 2021). Iraq was facing great political and economic upheaval that endangered the the Prophet’s bloodline. This upheaval included the Zanj revolt, which took place from 255 AH to 270 AH, resulting in economic and human casualties (Alaydrus, 2006; al-Hinduan, 2011).

Then, there were the ‘Karmathians’ (Qarāmiṭah), a dissident movement named after an Ismā ‘īlī convert Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, who managed to gain a following in the traditional *ahl al-bayt* stronghold city of Kufāh. This movement gradually attracted new adherents, finally resulting in an attack on al-Muhājir’s city of Basra, leaving a path of death and devastation. The endless political and social turmoil that befell Basra compounded by the constant oppression faced by the *ahl al-bayt* strengthen al-Muhājir’s resolve to emigrate from the city (Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, 1980). Medina



and Mecca were his first stop. After reaching Medina, al-Muhājir had to postpone his pilgrimage to Mecca to the next year. It was unsafe to travel to Mecca because the Karmathians had invaded and pillaged the holy land (Alaydrus, 2006).

It seemed that al-Muhājir's life was continuously under threat, whether in Iraq or in the holy lands. This mirrored the Bā 'Alawī scholars' narration of the story of Ḥusayn who found death beckoning him in Mecca before it eventually caught up with him in Iraq. For, Al-Idrus (2021) persecution had entered the city of Medina, where Ḥusayn was staying. Walīd ibn 'Utba, the governor of Medina had summoned Ḥusayn to be informed of Mu 'āwiyah's death and to receive his pledge of allegiance to 'Yazīd, which the latter refused to provide on the pretext of not wanting to do so privately. 'Yazīd had also commanded Walīd ibn 'Utba to capture Ḥusayn and others and to execute Ḥusayn if he did not submit. Upon returning home, Ḥusayn relayed the dire news of his persecution to his family and they decided to flee to Mecca (Al-Idrus, 2021; Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). Al-Idrus (2021) continued that Ḥusayn could not seek refuge in the sacred city of Mecca either, as 'Yazīd had instructed Amīr ibn Sa'īd b. Ash to capture Ḥusayn. In order to avoid bloodshed in the sacred land, Ḥusayn decided to leave Mecca during the Hajj season. However, he would soon face an even more tyrannical force, led by the Ubaydillāh b. Ziyād who had the previous governor, al-Nu 'mān b. Basyir Al-Anṣārī (Alkaf, 2007; Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). With 'Yazīd's blessing, Ubaydillah coerced the various leaders of the tribes in Kufāh to renege their pledge of allegiance to Ḥusayn, bribed them with wealth and property in exchange for their support for 'Yazīd. Soon, the numbers of those who wanted to fight with Ḥusayn, which Rizieq Shihab (Markaz Syariah, 2021) estimated to be around 40,000 dwindled to nothing, as these heads rescinded their promised support for Ḥusayn's cousin, Muslim b. Agil. A letter, written just before Muslim was executed, was immediately dispatched to Ḥusayn bearing the news. Impossibly trapped, Ḥusayn informed those who wanted to leave the mission to do so, for the next part of their journey, they would meet only death. (Alkaf, 2007).

Muḥammad, too had faced great adversity as soon as he made public his message of the oneness of God. His homeland, Mecca, and its inhabitants, his own family, grew increasingly hostile towards Muḥammad and his followers. The Quraysh imposed a three-year economic and social boycott that steadily took its toll on Muḥammad. However, this too would not be enough for the Quraysh, as a bounty was placed upon Muḥammad's head. Even after he left Mecca, the Quraysh continued to have men search for him, with one report stating that anyone who captured Muḥammad, dead or alive, would be rewarded with one hundred camels (Cole, 2020).

It is not surprising that the backdrop of persecution in Imam al-Muhājir's migration to Ḥaḍramawt was constructed so as to bear resemblance to that of the Prophet's and Ḥusayn's persecution. Imam al-Muhājir's position as Muḥammad and Ḥusayn's legacy was cemented through this narrative. The next phase of the narrative would then deal with the establishment of a new, pure community away from the increasing divisions that were developing in the heartlands of the Islamic world. Muḥammad was able to establish a united community in Medina. Ḥusayn's journey also inspired the birth of an alternative Islamic moral community. The next step for Imam al-Muhājir was to create a united Muslim community (Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, 1980; Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 7, 2023). In order for this to happen, he first needed to receive an invitation.

### ***The Invitation***

In the absence of historical biographies, one theory on the reason for Aḥmad al-Muhājir's migration to Ḥaḍramawt was put forward by 'Alawī b. Tahir al-Haddad, famed Malaysian Mufti and Bā 'Alawī historian (Edaibat, 2021). According to this account, one of the groups of people that Aḥmad al-Muhājir met during his pilgrimage was a delegation from Tihamah and Ḥaḍramawt (Alaydrus, 2006). Impressed by al-Muhājir's noble characteristics and personality, this delegation invited him to visit and settle in Ḥaḍramawt. One cannot help but notice that al-Haddad's theory might have been inspired by Ḥusayn and Muḥammad's migration stories. The Ḥaḍramī community needed a charismatic authoritative figure that

would adjudicate between the various rival sects and thus stabilize the local community. This, Edaibat (2021) continued, would have established various allegiances that would act as an impetus for al-Muhājir's move to Ḥaḍramawt. After performing the pilgrimage, he continued his journey to Yemen with his entourage, moving from one village to another, resolving much of the social and civil strife occurring in these places, before finally arriving in Ḥaḍramawt in 320 AH/932AD. The first city he visited in Ḥaḍramawt was the city of Hajrain whose citizens consisted of an intriguing mix of Sunnis and Shī'ites (Alaydrus, 2006; al-Hinduan, 2011). Al-Muhajir was allegedly able to unite both Shī'ites and Sunnis under his banner of Islam when he reached Hajrain (al-Hinduan, 2011). Al-Masyhur (2013) saw al-Muhājir as a peacemaker who united the Ibaḍīs and Karmathians, the very sect that triggered his emigration in the first place, with the Sunnis. As mentioned earlier, Bā 'Alawī scholars stated that Aḥmad al-Muhājir had moved to Yemen after seeing the emergence of unlawful innovations in Islamic teachings and increased division amongst Muslims (al-Hinduan, 2011).

The story al-Muhājir being invited to adjudicate a conflict between tribal groups paralleled that of the Prophet, who had been similarly invited by several groups in Medina to adjudicate between them. This once again placed al-Muhājir's story as being within the same spiritual narrative as the Prophet, al-Muhājir's migration led to the establishment of in his new settlement. His departure from Iraq so as to preserve the purity of Islam also perpetuated the image of al-Muhājir as an inheritor of Ḥusayn's legacy.

News of Ḥusayn's arrival in Mecca soon broke as far as Kufāh, prompting the heads of the Kufān tribes to send a relentless stream of letters pleading and inviting him to assume the mantle of caliph (Alatas, 2014). When these letters failed to convince him to go to Kufāh, the tribal heads sent an envoy (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). Ḥusayn soon acquiesced and sent his cousin, Muslim b. Agil to survey the situation. Muslim's arrival was greeted by thousands of Kufāns who immediately pledged their allegiance to Ḥusayn. Muslim wrote to Ḥusayn informing him of this happy news urging him to travel to Kufā and Ḥusayn also received letters from the

leaders of Kufāh, who encouraged him to go there. Around 40,000 Kufāns were ready to support Ḥusayn (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021).

In the spring of 622, the Banū Najjār, a division of the Khazraj tribe in Medina invited the Prophet to Medina, pledging absolute allegiance to him and his new religion of Islam in the hope that he would unite the acrimonious tribes there (Cole, 2020). The Prophet soon came to rule in Medina “by consensus, aiming to mediate conflicts both inside his own community and outside” (Cole, 2020, p. 97) He was seen as successfully ending the enmity between foes that plagued Medina before his arrival (Cole, 2020).

### ***The Hijrah***

Upon receiving the news, Ḥusayn decided to depart to Kufāh. Ibn Abbās advised him against the idea. He told Ḥusayn that if indeed the Kufans were his supporters, he should call on them to overthrow their governor first, ‘Yazīd’s henchman, ‘Ubaydillāh ibn Ziyād. For as long as ‘Ubaydillāh was still the governor, ibn Abbās advised Ḥusayn against traveling there (Markaz Syariah TV, 2021). Ḥusayn declined ibn Abbās’ counsel after conducting a special prayer to seek divine guidance (*istikhārah*).

Musa Kazhim (2013) further placed Ḥusayn within the historical narrative lineage of the Prophet by painting Ḥusayn’s march towards ‘Karbālā’ as the cartographical inverse of the Prophet’s own *hijrah*. Ḥusayn started his journey from Medina towards Mecca where he gathered with hajj pilgrims in Mina and ‘Arafah to educate them about the universal values of Islam, just like the Prophet did on his last pilgrimage where he conducted his famous last sermon at the top of Mount ‘Arafah. It was on top of this hill that Ḥusayn laid bare the aims of his mission, which was to return the teachings of the Prophet and bring about righteousness on Earth, so that those who were oppressed would experience peace and declaring that the laws of God, which had been ignored, would be upheld (Musa Kazhim, 2013). Together with 72 other followers, 32 on horse and 40 on foot, Ḥusayn ventured to Kufāh on the 8th day of the Hajj month.

Ḥusayn went through a long and arduous journey, during which he met various people who offered moral support or advice but were unwilling to take up arms. Soon, Ḥusayn encountered an army of one thousand troops, which was led by Ḥurr b. ‘Yazīd at Tamimi. He informed the army he was traveling on the invitation of the Kufāns. He then presented the leader with two options: to let him enter the city or leave it. Both options were deemed unacceptable. On the orders of ibn Ziyād, a wall of soldiers surrounded Ḥusayn, preventing him from returning to Mecca. A further four thousand-strong army under the leadership of ‘Umar b. Sa’ad b. Abū Waqqāṣ advanced as reinforcements and brought news that Ḥusayn and his coterie’s access to the river and water supply were to be cut off. Ḥusayn was trapped and set up camp at ‘Karbālā’, just 25 miles away from Kufāh.

Ḥusayn once again said that he was traveling at the invitation of the Kufāns and, if he was not allowed to enter Kufāh, he should be granted safe passage home to the Arabian Peninsula, or be allowed to journey to a province of his choosing or continue on to Syria to meet ‘Yazīd. Once again, all three options were rejected. Ḥusayn was also adamant about not pledging allegiance to ‘Yazīd. ‘Umar and Ḥurr were impressed by Ḥusayn’s unrelenting resolve and started to waiver. Then a man by the name of Shamir came along and strengthened the garrison surrounding Ḥusayn’s encampment. ‘Umar b. Sa’ad readied his army for battle.

Upon observing this, Ḥusayn urged his relatives to leave the camp and seek refuge behind enemy lines but they refused, even though his youngest child was stricken with fever and parched from going days without water. So, he advised his female relatives to remain in the tent together with ‘Alī Zayn al- Ābidīn who was unwell.

There was no other way out for Ḥusayn - he faced certain death. Husayn knew in the evening of the 9th day of the month of Muharram that his fate had been sealed. At the break of dawn on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month, seventy men formed up, ready to fight a 4,000 strong Umayyad army. Arrows rained down on Ḥusayn’s men. One by one, the members of Muḥammad’s bloodline were cut down in an onslaught of arrows and their bodies trampled over, in complete disregard for the Prophet’s

commandments to his companions and the *ummah* that his family be safeguarded (Rogerson, 2006). As the dust stirred up by the horses' hooves settled, swordsmen began to hack the heads of the dead to be used as trophies to present to 'Yazīd. 'Ubaydillāh examined each head with his staff to identify the grand prize: Ḥusayn. When one of his followers saw this, he reminded 'Ubaydillāh to handle it with care, for it was that very head held the lips that were once caressed by Muḥammad (Rogerson, 2006).

Only one of Ḥusayn children was left alive in the carnage of 'Karbālā' (Suzana Hj. Othman and Muzaffar Dato' Hj Mohamad (2006). 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn was saved by his sickness and would carry on Ḥusayn's lineage, one of which led to Aḥmad b. 'Īsā al-Muhājir. In a similar vein to the stories of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn, al-Muhājir's journey was long and tumultuous. Similar to Ḥusayn, al-Muhājir was said to have prayed *istikhārah* multiple times before traveling to Ḥaḍramawt with 70 people (Alaydrus, 2006). al-Muhājir also had to take an alternative route in order to avoid persecution, a twist that echoed that of Ḥusayn and the Prophet's stories (Alaydrus, 2006).

Cole (2020, p. 93) described how the Prophet braved the elements, seeking refuge in a cave to avoid people who were trying to claim the bounty placed upon his head. Al-Muhājir's *hijrah* was not easy as well. Alaydrus (2006) presented his readers with a poem written by Imam Abdallah b. 'Alawī Al-Haddad, which described al-Muhājir as a man who traversed various lands, going in and out of caves and meeting dangerous people, until he reached Ḥaḍramawt and brought peace and a spiritual and political golden age. Continuing from Mecca to Ḥaḍramawt, al-Muhājir's route seemed to follow that of Ḥusayn's when he decided to set off during the Hajj season.

Musa Kazhim (2013) discussed the parallels between the history of the Prophet's *hijrah* and Imam Ḥusayn's movement. He stated that, other than a similarity in motivations, the *hijrah* of the Prophet and Imam Ḥusayn also have many similarities in terms of pattern and methods' such as sending a delegation to inspect the land (Musa Kazhim, 2013). Musa Kazhim (2013)

insinuated Imam Ḥusayn traveled from Mecca as a starting point to ‘Karbālā’ rather than immediately proceeding from Medina because Ḥusayn wanted to safeguard the similarities of both *hijrah* “in all dimensions, including physically, until memories about the hijrah will cause people to remember Asyura” (10<sup>th</sup> Muharram) (p. 41). The choice of Mecca as the starting point would place the Prophet’s *hijrah* and the events at ‘Karbālā’ as part of the same mission in a religious narrative lineage. The same can also be said of al-Muhājir who did not venture to Ḥaḍramawt via Basra immediately but in fact went to Medina, the Prophet’s and Ḥusayn’s hometown before starting his trip to Ḥaḍramawt via Mecca. Evidently, this would cement al-Muhājir within the same religious historical lineage of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn.

The fact that al-Muhājir’s narrative is made to align within the stories of Muḥammad’s and Ḥusayn’s migration can be further seen in other Bā ‘Alawī theoretical musings on the *hijrah*. Al-Masyhur (2013) places *hijrah* as sort of a genealogical rite of passage that the Prophet’s family experience. So he informed, “the *hijrah* that al-Muhājir undertook was a norm amongst ten leaders from the family of the Prophet (peace be upon him) such as the Messenger (peace be upon him) and his family who hijrah from Mekkah to Madinah [sic], Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib hijrah from the Hijaz to Iraq, followed by his children and grandchildren after him such as Imam al-Ḥusayn bin ‘Alī, Zaid bin ‘Alī bin Ḥusayn, Muḥammad al-Nafsu al-Zakiyah bin Abdullah al-Mahdh bin Ḥasan al-Mutsanna bin Ḥasan bin Ali bin Abu Thalib [sic] as well as his brothers Ibrahim and Idris, the grandfather of Bani Adarisah in the Maghrib and others” (al-Masyhur, 2013, p. 80). Migrating to Ḥaḍramawt, then, inducted al-Muhājir into the hallowed list of who’s who in the family of the Prophet.

Additionally, these rites of passage also act as markers of time. Muḥammad’s migration marked an important moment in Islam, such that it is used to mark the beginning of the Islamic calendar (Ho, 2006; Cole, 2020). It is through Ḥusayn’s death that Shī’ī Muslims converted their political beliefs to a religious cosmology rooted in the events of ‘Karbālā. Similarly, al-Muhājir’s migration marked the birth of Bā ‘Alawī history.

### ***The Numbers 70 and 72***

Scott (2008a, 2008b) discussed how the numbers 70 and its derivatives like 72 play an important role in sacred cosmology and shape the ontological understanding of God and the universe. He highlighted how, like other Abrahamic faiths, the numbers 70 and 72 are featured in many religious motifs in the Quran and aḥadīth.

Seeing that many religious traditions placed importance in the number 70 and 72, Scott (2008a, 2008b) drew the conclusion that 72 represents the ideal number of a group. The spiritual significance of the numbers 70 and 72 was not lost on storytelling traditions, with many adventures and heroes having an association with these numbers (Schimmel, 1993). Inspired by Ibn Khaldun, Conrad (1998) argued that numbers should not be taken in its literal form but figuratively - that is by magnitude. Conrad (1988) explained that using symbolic numbers as factual numbers for the interpretation and formulation of history is highly problematic. What one can formulate is how some numbers are part of the topoi and *donnée* of Islamic tradition to denote the scale of the group. In his reading of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim*, Imam Zakariya al-Nawawī explained, for example, that the number 70 can either “literally or metaphorically to mean ‘many times’.” (al-Nawawi, 2015: 90). Additionally, in terms of grouping of men, the number 7 and its various iterations were a popular symbol in religious literature (Schimmel, 1993; Conrad, 1988). Therefore, what the number showed was that Imam al-Muhājir and Ḥusayn had a strong following and a large number of supporters. I would argue that these numbers are part of the topoi of Islamic tradition, but not an indication of the size. Rather, use of these numbers places a group within the Prophetic sacred historical lineage.

With this in mind, al-Ṭabarī’s take on the sequela of the Umayyads, decades after the death of Ḥusayn at their ancestors’ hands, is compelling. As if to divine retribution, al- Ṭabarī discussed how the Umayyads, the dynastic line of Mu ‘āwiya and ‘Yazīd, was brought to an end by the Abbasids, the family of the Prophet's uncle, when 72 Umayyad princes were killed, leaving just one to survive, in a manner eerily similar to that



done by the Umayyads under ‘Yazīd against Ḥusayn and his family (Conrad, 1988).

One then wonders if this tradition also inspired the hagiographies of al-Muhājir (which were written hundreds of years after his migration) to use this number to represent the number of people who journeyed with him. I would argue that the number of 70 travelers with al-Muhājir was used to parallel Ḥusayn’s (Alatas, 2014). I was not able to find a list of all the names of 70 or 72 individuals who followed al-Muhājir’s in his migration. Interestingly, as Conrad (1988) predicted, Alaydrus (2006) tells his readers that the ability for Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir to gather such a large number to migrate with him showed that he was well loved by his followers.

### ***The Chosen Land***

Aḥmad al-Muhājir’s migration was seen as a way to preserve the true, pristine condition of the Prophet’s message, separating it from the social, political and religious corruption of the day. This served to highlight that the Bā ‘Alawī hold the true message of the Prophet. Just as the migrations of the Prophet and Ḥusayn symbolized the beginning of a new periods in the Islamic era, so did al-Muhājir’s migration, which marked the beginning of the Bā ‘Alawī era. Bā ‘Alawī scholars aligned al-Muhājir’s journey with that of the Prophet by positing Ḥaḍramawt as a safe haven, similar to Medina (Alaydrus, 2006; Sayed, 2021). The choice to migrate to Ḥaḍramawt was legitimised by using various verses and narrations in the Quran and aḥadīth that spoke to the value of the land (Sayed, 2021).

Ḥaḍramawt’s position as a chosen land was firmly established not only in the Quran and aḥadīth but by placing it within a broader sacred historical narrative. Tarim, has been notable in Islamic history since the time of the Prophet, when he appointed Salim b. Amr, a member of the Medinan community to bring the message of Islam to Tarim (al-Saqqaf, 2005). Furthermore, in order for Ḥaḍramawt to be seen as a chosen land, it had to feature in the Prophet’s inner circle. Even though many of the Ḥaḍramī tribes had left Islam during the time of Abū Bakr As-Siddiq, the first caliph,

the people of Tarim pledged their allegiance to him and the religion. The rest of Ḥaḍramawt would follow suit leading Abū Bakr to pray that the city would “remain well-inhabited, that its water remains abundant and blessed, and that it remains full of righteous saints (*salihin*)” (Edaibat, 2021, p. 41). The city would then earn the epithet, ‘Medina As-Siddiq’ named after Abū (al-Saqqaf, 2005).

So, Ḥaḍramawt was established as a sacred land because the Quran, aḥādīth, the Prophet and his companions spoke of it. So sacred was the land that al-Muhājir’s “choice of Hadhramawt” was “divinely inspired or revealed to him in the form of a dream vision, where the Imam [Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Muhājir] was destined to fulfill a Godly *hijra* to carry on his family’s Prophetic legacy of calling to God (*da’wa*) and lay the foundations for a spiritual revival in this remote hinterland of the Arabian Peninsula” (Edaibat, 2021, p. 50). The land and the Imam embodied legacies of the Prophet connected through an Islamic historical narrative lineage.

### ***Hijrah as a Transformation of the Land***

Ustazah Marina described Ḥaḍramawt as a valley frozen in time, giving its settlers a lived experience of the Prophetic medina (Ustazah Marina, personal communication, January 14, 2023) Ḥaḍramawt is the sacred space home to a sacred people. The genealogy is a validation of the land, and the land the verification of the genealogy that began with the Prophet and Medina. Just as Muḥammad had attained political leadership and converted Medina to Islam so did al-Muhājir in Ḥaḍramawt. Al-Muhājir, we are told, single-handedly eradicated the Ibadi sect from the land (Buxton, 2012). Edaibat’s (2021) research showed that is limited evidence to support this narrative. However, this transformative narrative placed al-Muhājir within the same religious narrative lineage as Muḥammad and Ḥusayn.

What became apparent was the use of religious *donnée* to describe al-Muhājir. Depictions of al-Muhājir parallel the Prophet’s and Ḥusayn’s. Descriptions of the Prophet always included comparisons of him with a full

moon.<sup>6</sup> In his narrative of Zaynab's, Ḥusayn's sister, soliloquy towards 'Yazīd, Al-Idrus (2021) explained that Ḥusayn was seen like the sun due to his high status. Additionally, narratives of the Prophet's migration saw him as being welcomed with open arms by the people of Medina and noted how the people changed as a result of his arrival (Lings, 1983). Descriptions of al-Muhājir and the people of Ḥaḍramawt reflected an amalgamation of praises paralleling those given to the Prophet and Ḥusayn. Al-Habsyi (2021, p. 47-48) presented al-Muhājir's migration as a momentous event that brought about blessing and happiness to the new land and drove away destruction and unlawful innovation:

"Allah gifted them (Ḥaḍramī) Aḥmad bin Isa who is full of blessings. Someone whose arrival has the right to be greeted... like a star who brings direction to those who have lost their way, the full moon who brightened the dark night, the sun whose benefits spread through the mountains and plains. Until finally, he, his family, and his followers settled and stayed in Ḥaḍramawt. Once settled, people in droves visited him... Pure souls are happy and sullied souls fear his arrival...The full moon of the Prophet's Sunnah shone in the pinnacle of perfection and the sun rose again when before it set."

Al-Muhājir then produced a pure bloodline, the members of which were seen as stars filled with knowledge, comprehension, nobility and sincerity and whose saintly spirits "roam the streets of Tarim" (Sayed, 2021, p. 5; bin Hafidz, 2021). So important has Tarim become as a sacred space that it has even superseded that of the heart of Islam, Mecca. Sayed (2021) reminded us of the story of Habib Ḥasan b. Imām al-Ḥaddād who preferred to die in Tarim rather than Mecca because "the intermediary realm (*barzakh*) of Tarim is unlike the intermediary realms of others" (Sayed, 2021, p. 5). Thus, Islam was "milked in Makka, churned in Madina, and the

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<sup>6</sup> In Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3636, "Abu Ishaq reported: A man asked Al-Bara', may Allah be pleased with him, "Was the face of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, like a sword?" Al-Bara' said, "No, it was like the moon."

cream was extracted in Hadramawt [sic].” (Sayed, 2021: 6) Al-Muhājir’s story played a central role in transforming Ḥadramawt and its spiritual heart, Tarim, into part of a sacred cartographical lineage that includes Mecca, Medina and ‘Karbālā.

### ***Al-Muhājir’s Successful Hijrah***

Yet this success needed to be confirmed by the Prophet himself. Alatas (2019), through his study of the Bā ‘Alawī saint Habib Luthfi, suggested examining dreams were imbued Islamic authority. I, too, notice that dreams play an important role in legitimizing authority. Dreams simultaneously compress and suspend time, permitting the dreamer to be within the same spatial-temporal realm as historical figures, making the dreamer the purveyor of legitimacy. So, bin Jindan (2006, p. 7-8) takes Habib ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Umar b. Yahya’s dream where the latter asked the Prophet if he was content with al-Muhājir’s *hijrah* from Basra to Ḥadramawt as a form of approval of al-Muhājir’s actions. Similarly, Buxton (2012) narrated a congruent story as he ended his biography of al-Muhājir:

“One of the knowers of Allah saw the Prophet and asked him: ‘Are you pleased with the migration of al-Muhājir Aḥmad bin ‘Isa to Hadramawt?’” The Prophet said to him, “I am pleased with everything Ahmad bin ‘Isa is pleased with. [sic]” (p. 13)

The use of dreams is then an example of how the compression and suspension of space and time are vital elements in the Bā ‘Alawī hagiographic motif of al-Muhājir’s migration, which entrenched him within the spiritual narrative lineage. Another form of compression and suspension of space and time is through the act of the visitation of graves, an important ritual in the Bā ‘Alawī religious itinerary. The graves of Muḥammad and al-Muhājir became sites for legitimization. Buxton (2012) mentioned that Habib ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Umar b. Yahya smelled the same scents that permeate the grave of Muḥammad at the grave of al-Muhājir. Here, one notices how the migration story is legitimized through

Bā ‘Alawī rituals, which in turn are also legitimized through situating al-Muhājir within the same spiritual lineage of the Prophet.

Then Buxton (2012, p. 13) continued, ‘it has been said that the migration of the Prophet was from Mecca to Madina, and the migration of his offspring was from Basrah [sic] to Hadramawt.’ Al-Masyhur (2013) explained that historians had unanimously agreed al-Muhājir was the only *ahl al-bayt* who could be honored with that special status, even though many from his uncle’s family also migrated elsewhere due to persecution. For Bā ‘Alawī scholars, it appears, al-Muhājir’s place in the spiritual narrative lineage confirmed his position in the proprietary line of descent from the Prophet.

### ***A Greater Spiritual Narrative Lineage: Ties with Prophet Abraham***

Shomali (2014) saw Ḥusayn and ‘Karbālā’ as embodying the continuation and protection of the path of Muḥammad and his religious predecessor, Abraham. ‘Karbālā’ is tied to the historical Abrahamic land of Mesopotamia. ‘Karbālā’, as a space, positions Ḥusayn’s legacy within Abraham’s spiritual narrative lineage (Musa Kazhim, 2013). Structuring Ḥusayn towards an Abrahamic ideal mimic the Muḥammadan enterprise. The Prophet had proclaimed Medina as his sacred abode, just as Mecca was to Abraham (Cole, 2020). Muḥammad insisted on a religious theology that was centered around Abraham (Cole, 2020).

This topoi was then taken up by Bā ‘Alawī scholars such as Alaydrus (2006), who explained that al-Muhājir followed the path of Prophet Abraham, who left his kids and wife in a deserted place with the hope of bringing his grandchildren closer to God. As such, Alaydrus (2006) continued, al-Muhājir’s choice of a similar barren and deserted land of Ḥadramawt was due to his desire that his descendants would remain steadfast in their piety. It then could not have been a mere coincidence that al-Muhājir and Ḥusayn’s journey was made during the Hajj season, in order to place them within the Abrahamic spiritual narrative.

### ***Conclusion***

Knysh (1999) argued that fabrications in the story of Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Muhājir rendered his narrative worthless. Conversely, Alatas (2005) saw these narratives as being too descriptive. This essay does not seek to sieve out the truth from the possible numerous fabrications and myths in al-Muhājir’s story. It attempts to illustrate how the story has been shaped to mirror the Prophet and Ḥusayn. Lewis (1987) informed that historiographies are information pathways that guide a community’s understanding of its present and future. Historiographies are created “to amend, to restate, to replace, or even to recreate the past in a more satisfactory form” whilst appearing timeless and truthful, so that the present may be understood and justified and the future can be directed. (Lewis, 1987, p. 55) Indeed, one sees this in the Bā ʿAlawī narrative of Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Muhājir’s migration. The Bā ʿAlawī achieved its high status in society precisely because it was able to connect its genealogical lineage to a spiritual narrative lineage, eternally tying the Bā ʿAlawī to the story of Ḥusayn and Muḥammad through their founding father, Aḥmad al-Muhājir.

Bā ʿAlawī scholars paint al-Muhājir’s *hijrah* as a success story. He had followed the injunctions and advice of the Prophet and settled in a new “place far from outside influence, [and] he created a new environment which followed the path of his predecessor, the path of Prophet Muhammad [sic]” (Alaydrus, 2006, p. 37). As a result, al-Muhājir’s grandchildren is seen as “inheriting knowledge and manners of the ahlul bait [sic] in the purest form without the influence of the turbulent external world” (Alaydrus, 2006, p. 37). The Bā ʿAlawī had obtained their rightful place in the religious and social hierarchy, not simply by inhabiting a lifeless genealogical chain but by having a chain which embodied the spiritual narrative of the Prophet and Ḥusayn through the migration of their forefather, Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Muhājir. As bin Jindan (2006, p. 7) stated in his sermon, "If al-Muhājir did not recognise the path of the ahlul bayt [sic], then no one on this earth would have known that path." Al-Muhājir, then, is seen as someone who saved the path of the Prophet’s family, Ḥusayn and his descendants, from extinction. It is through his migration story that al-Muhājir keeps the legacy of Muḥammad and Ḥusayn alive in the Bā ʿAlawī sacred belief system.

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