

Re-examining the *Hijrah* as a Moral Code for Political Formation of State in Islam

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Abstract

The epoch-making migration of the nascent Muslim group under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Madinah in the 6th century has not only been extensively discussed but well documented by Muslim historians and scholars of Islam to denote its significance in the evolutionary process of the Islamic faith. Many of these scholarly efforts are devoted to teach practical lessons of life to Muslims with little or no cognizance given to its place as a veritable template for State formation. Yathrib an obscured city in the southern part of hijaz emerged not just as a state of founders and settlers but the religio-political capital of Islam upon the entrance of the Prophet in 622 C:E. Madinah as the new name of the city became the launching pad for the expansion of the creed as it contends with earlier creeds and civilization in the adjoining Arabian/Persian sub-continent. An examination of leadership vacuum, migration, tribal affiliation, warfare, superior balance of power and other factors which aided the formation of the state of Madinah as well as the dynamics of state building in the immediate period of formation is the core of this paper. The moral imperatives are also examined as precept for modern theories of state formation.

Keywords: hijrah, migration, moral code, state formation, tribal affiliation

Introduction

The Arabian Peninsula prior to the emergence of the Prophet of Islam was a vast land of independent provinces administered by local chiefs and their surrogate authorities (Hitti 1985). For instance, Makkah which was

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the bastion of the Arabian pride had no central government and its affairs was under the supervisory authority of a collegiate leadership headed by the patriarch of any of the sub-tribes having ascendancy at any point in time. Though the situation in the adjoining cities was not entirely similar, yet the absence of a central government is a common denominator in the region. Just like in Makkah, the situation in Yathrib where rival tribes were contending with each other for dominance makes the enforcement of law and order almost impracticable. The rule of governance was “might is right” leaving the weak, the poor and the vulnerable at the mercy of the rich and powerful. Class hegemony and tribal solidarity were the only means of galvanizing citizenry’s participation in the affairs of the state. Internecine conflicts, public immorality and corruption consequently became the offshoot of this kind of loose governance structure begging for socioeconomic and political intervention to rescue the society from disintegration. This yearning gap was the reason for the emergence of Prophet Muhammad on the political landscape. The Makkan resistance to his religio-ethical revolution which forced him to migrate to Yathrib to establish an Islamic State which eventually wrestled power from the Arabian hegemony in Makkah and its moral/strategic implications for state formation is the focus of this paper.

An Historical Account of the Causes and Course of the Hijrah and the Formation of the State of Madinah

In 610 CE, forty years after the birth of Muhammad to the Banu Hashim of the famous Quraysh tribe of Makkah, he declared himself a Prophet after he had experienced a divine trance in the cave of Hira which marked the commencement of his Prophetic mission. While in the cave in the 9th month of the lunar year of 610 CE he encountered Angel Jubril who inducted him into prophethood with the revelation of the first five verses of the revelatory message called the Qur’an. The divine message of absolute monotheism and righteousness which was a direct assault on idol worshipping and licentiousness of the Makkan society soon attracted the strong opposition of the aristocrat elites for socio-economic,

political and religious reasons (Hitti 1985). Apart from seeing the call for the abandonment of the worship of over 360 physical gods housed in the Ka'bah for a supreme unseen one God as illogical, they also felt threatened by the social order being introduced which raised the status of the poor, slaves and vulnerable to the same level with their oppressive overlords. The fear of loss of economic and political power which the new religion portends for Makkian oligarchy made them to raise an organized persecution which would nip it in the bud. They also felt yielding the ground for Muhammad to propagate his new faith could cause the loss of the pre-eminence of Makkah in the pan-Arabian society. Consequently, the Makkians led by Muhammad's uncle Abu Sufyan were unpretentious of their intention to defend and preserve their religion and culture from being submerged by the new faith of Islam (Haykal 1976)

Thus, the slaves and the lower classes expectedly as new recruits into the socio-religious order became objects of intense brutal persecution of the powerful chieftain of Makkah. Some of them like the family of Sumayyah were maimed and killed while others such as Bilal bn Rabah were severely beaten in the hot sun of the desert with heavy stones placed on their chests. These organized measures which did not spare the Prophet himself resulted in the migration to Abyssinia of eleven Makkian families followed in 615 CE by some eighty-three others to seek for religious asylum (Hassan 2001). Undaunted through these dark days of persecution by the temporary loss of so many followers, Muhammad fearlessly continued to preach and by persuasion convert men from the worship of the many gods to that of the God, Allah. In spite of the marginal success recorded in attracting some elites like Umar bn al-Khattab whose conversion signaled the commencement of open preaching and religious assemblage, Muhammad was still earnest in his *da'wah* mission as he visited Taif, a town about 9 kilometers away from Makkah to preach Islam to the inhabitants. More brutal than Makkah, the people of Taif sent their miscreants to stone him out of their town. Sullen and brutalized, he returned to Makkah to start planning his exit having convinced himself that he needed a friendlier environment to actualize his prophetic mission.

In seeking new ground for his proselytization, Muhammad in 620 CE met surreptitiously a party of traders from Yathrib who came for the annual Ukaz fair with the prospect of seeking for a new religious base in their domain. In the following year, a larger deputation of about seventy-five men, mainly of the Khazraj tribe also met him to firm up earlier discussion and both parties eventually agreed to become allies. They embraced the new faith, promised to provide his nascent community of believers with security and support whenever he decides to turn up in their domain. He in turn sent along with them a trusted companion Mus'ab bn Umair to teach them the new religion while he strategized on how to leave Makkah now that the coast was becoming clearer. These two events of 620 and 621 are referred to in history as the Pledges of 'Aqabah. After obtaining the firm commitment of these Yathribites, Muhammad immediately allowed about two hundred traumatized followers to elude the vigilance of the Quraysh and slip quietly into Yathrib in batches. It is instructive to mention here the role of Abu Bakr, Muhammad's childhood and closest companion in his eventual movement from Makkah to Yathrib.

When the clandestine movement to Yathrib was ordered by Muhammad, Abu Bakr sought his permission to travel with others but he said to him "do not rush, for perhaps Allah will provide you with a (traveling) companion" (As-Sallabee 2005). After Abu Bakr left his company, he began to plan and prepare for the impending journey to Yathrib. He bought two riding animals, kept them in his home, and fed them well in preparation for the upcoming long and arduous journey. Abu Bakr knew that the actual migration was going to be fraught with difficulties. He also knew that he could be ordered to leave at a moment's notice, and for this reason, he did not procrastinate, he made the necessary preparations, in terms of arranging for riding animals and provisions. This preparation of Abu Bakr was to become pivotal to the successful migration of Muhammad himself to Yathrib.

When the Quraysh came to know that the people of Yathrib had accepted Islam, and that some Muslims of Makkah had started migrating to the city, they became agitated. They held a council of war and decided it

had become expedient to kill Muhammad to protect their common tribal interest. The plan was that the young men representing all of the sub-tribes of the Quraysh should besiege his house at night and assassinate him in the early hours of the morning when he came out of his house. Muhammad forestalled the move of the Quraysh by sneaking out of his house through the back door after selling a dummy to the besieging assassins by asking his cousin Ali bn Abu Talib to sleep on his bed while he escaped.¹⁵ His first point of call after this was Abu Bakr's house to inform him that Allah had given him permission to leave and migrate to Yathrib. Abu Bakr became so happy that he began to cry. The cry of joy of Abu Bakr was not just as a result of the news of his choice as the Prophet's companion but because he knew he was well prepared for the journey. He would have been utterly disappointed with himself if he had not planned or prepared well in advance despite having a clue to the impending journey (As-Sallabee 2005)

Muhammad and Abu Bakr left but remained hidden in a cave in Mount *Thawr* outside Makkah for three days. The Quraysh scoured the countryside in pursuit of them. One of the searching parties came to edge of the cave where they were both holed but a spider wove its web at the entrance of the cave and assuming the impossibility of anyone being in the cave, the Makkan search party retreated. After three days, with the slackening of the vigilance of the Quraysh, Muhammad and his friend got out of the cave and took the way to Yathrib. They travelled by unfrequented paths with the help of Abdullah bn Urayqit, a non-Muslim Arab who was hired as a guide on the journey because of his knowledge with the routes. They suffered considerable hardship on account of scarcity of water and severity of the desert heat. After six days arduous journey, Muhammad and Abu Bakr reached Quba, a suburb of Yathrib on the 23rd September, 622 CE. This successful migration is called the *Hijrah*. It is not a flight but a scheme of migration carefully planned and executed for some two years (Hitti 1985)

Upon his arrival in Yathrib, the almost obscure city took a new name "Madinat-un-Nabiyy" meaning "City of the Prophet" but shortened

as Madinah. His arrival was heralded by the locals with wild jubilation who have not had a rallying point for years as a result of the divisive quarrel between the major tribes of Khazraj and Awz. Muhammad was thus not only seen as a reconciler by the warring tribes some of whom had embraced Islam but as a religio-political leader by nascent Muslim community whose membership had blossomed since the return of the covenanted Muslims at the pledges of Aqabah. Muhammad seized the momentum provided by the political leadership vacuum in Madinah to establish a state guided by the “Madinah Charter” (Hassan 2001) which recognized the different cultural and religious diversities of the emerging state. In Madinah the Muslim community was represented by the “Ansar” (Madinites whom Muhammad affectionately referred to as the “Helpers”) and the “Muhajirun” (the emigrants who came from Makkah). They were other groups like the Madinites who did not embrace Islam and the Jews and the Christians who formed a distinct religious community.

So, Muhammad immediately set out for nation building by reconciling the warring Awz and Khazraj tribes and united them under a common Islamic brotherhood. He granted the Jews freedom of worship under the Madinan Charter which recognized plurality of the society in terms of worship and culture. It could therefore be said that no one before Prophet Muhammad in Arab annals has recognized plurality as a cornerstone of human existence. Thus, Madinah started emerging as an independent plural community having the features of a modern state with the Prophet exercising religious and political authority simultaneously. Also the city became the religio-political capital of Islam and the launching pad of its *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) into the adjoining Arabian cities to the North and the Persian cities to the South.

The stability which the entrance of the Muslims brought to Madinah which had the prospect of making it a formidable state contending with earlier creeds and civilization in the adjoining Arabian/Persian sub-continents attracted the attention of the Makkan Oligarchy. Besides, there was an unsettled score between the two parties which precipitated the different emigrations until a safe haven was found in Madinah by the

Muslims. Taking advantage of the period of “holy truce”, Muslims in order to secure its border along the commercial route of Syria intercepted a summer caravan of Makkah on its return from Syria. The caravan leader Abu Sufyan who was the tormentor-in-chief of the Prophet while in Makkah got wind of the scheme and sent for reinforcement. The encounter between the reinforcement and the Muslims took place at Badr, eighty-five miles south-west of Madinah in Ramadan of 624 CE. Under the inspiring leader of Muhammad as the Prophet the ill-equipped fighters of three hundred and thirteen Muslim defeated the one thousand well equipped army of Makkah. However, not too important in itself as a military engagement, this Battle of Badr laid the foundation of Muhammad’s temporal power as a Prophet (Hitti 1985). Islam had won its first and decisive military victory. The victory itself was interpreted as a divine sanction of the new faith. The spirit of discipline and contempt of death manifested at this first armed encounter of Islam proved characteristic of it in all its later and greater conquests.

Though in the following year the Makkans still under Abu Sufyan regrouped and met the Muslims at Uhud where they succeeded in killing many Muslim combatants and even wounded Muhammad, but their marginal triumph was not to endure.²¹ Islam recovered and passed on gradually from the defensive to the offensive and its propagation seemed always assured. Though one could say that hitherto, it had been a religion within a state because of autonomous status of the non-Muslim groups in Madinah, however after Badr, it passed into something more than a state religion-it itself became the State. Since then Islam came to be what the world has ever since recognized it to be- a religion and a civilization.²²

***Hijrah* as a Practical Model for State Formation in Islam**

State formation is the process of the development of a centralized government structure in a situation where one did not exist prior to its development (Oxford 2023). Scholars in several fields such as anthropology, sociology, history, economics and political science have had to develop theories and templates to explain the different dynamics of

state formation over the centuries. In fact, intellectual discourse on this subject matter has been “one of the favorite pastimes of social scientists over the course of the past century” according to Jonathan Haas (Stocker & Xiao:2019). However, the exploits of the Prophet in the establishment of the Madinan State often treated from an historical perspective has not been considered as a model for State Formation by many of the works in this field. Perhaps except for the works of Ibn Khaldun (d.1406) and Al-Mawardi (d.1058) - two Muslim historians and Political Scientists- which have been extensively reviewed over time by other scholars, many of the existing works are devoted to ancient, medieval and modern states particularly of Western Europe to the exclusion of the Islamic State of Madinah (Hamid 2018). While it is true that Muhammad did not see himself more than a man and a Prophet, the fact that Muslim political theorists like Ibn Khaldun and Al-Mawardi saw him more as a military and political strategist who employed the instrumentality of religion to establish a state which stood the test of time, makes an assessment of the hijrah a compelling academic necessity. Beyond religion therefore, other factors which not only aided the formation of the theocratic state of Madinah but also adopted by Muslim *mujaddid* (reformers) over time are discussed under the following headings:

1. Political Leadership Vacuum

The state of affairs in Yathrib before the arrival of Islam provided the religious and political impetus for the success of the Hijrah. They were two dominant tribes of Awz and Khazraj who were idolaters like the Makkans sharing their town with the Jews whom they hated and often fought and who also fought them in return. This frosty relationship soon attracted the attention of the Christians of Syria of the dominant church of East Roman empire who shared mutual animosity against the Jews. These Christians consequently allied with the Awz and the Khazraj in Yathrib in the constant friction with Jews. Such conspiracy was responsible for the death of many Jews and deprived the Jewish community of its dominion and power within the city. It also raised the Awz and Khazraj to a position

of power greater than that which trade relations with the Byzantines had hitherto established for them (Haykal 1976).

Having failed to get theirs against the locals Awz and Khazraj tribes in physical skirmishes, the Jews changed their tactics and instead of victory in battle, they sought to divide and diffuse the solidarity between the two tribes. Soon the tactics succeeded and the two tribes were at each other's throats. Through the continuing hostility of the two Arab tribes, the Jews secured their position, increased their trade and wealth, and re-established the dominion, possession and prestige which they had once enjoyed. This ascendancy of the Jews was expectedly to the discomfiture of the warring tribes who in the course of time started bemoaning their mutual losses and craving for an opportunity to wrest power and dominance from the Jews. That opportunity came with the contact members of the tribes had with Muhammad during the annual *Ukaz* (traditional literary fair) which resulted in the two pledges of *al-Aqabah*. This desire to get someone who could restore their pride of place in their land, more than religious consideration, was the impetus for their commitment to assist Muhammad whenever he chose to migrate to their land.

As "nature abhors vacuum" and the necessity for every society to evolve a system that can effectively guarantee cooperation amongst its people to secure itself as propounded by Ibn Khaldun (Sulastris 2019), the political leadership vacuum in Yathrib was yearning to be filled at the time of the *Hijrah* of the Prophet. Just as the Awz and Khazraj needed him as a rallying point to restore their pride, the other elements including the Jews were expectant of a unifying force having become weary of the constant friction between them and their hosts. His entrance signaled the commencement of the transformation the Yathrib society, comprised of different interest groups, into a State of established authority. At the same time, his assumption of the leadership of the city without external prompting though often predicated on his personality as a prophet but contextually can be interpreted as the consequence of absence of no other authority in Yathrib to contend with him. By obtaining the allegiance of members of the warring tribes who were the aborigines of the city, the Jews

as immigrant community, though were disgruntled by the acclamation of the Prophet's leadership had no option but to join the momentous. The fear of forceful conversion to Islam which would have been a major source of concern and conflict in the emerging state was diffused by the granting of freedom of worship in the Madinan Charter promulgated Muhammad as not just a Prophet but the overall political leader.

Building on this prophetic precept, Muslim adventures into new lands particularly during the orthodox and Ummayyad periods have always been aided by the presence of political vacuum accentuated by either weak/corrupt leadership or internecine wars between the contending parties. Amr bn As's expedition into Egypt which culminated in the effective birth of Islam in North Africa was largely successful because the local Egyptians opened their borders to them as a liberating force. Just as the Prophet was seen as an arbiter in Yathrib, Amr bn As and his other generals were regarded as liberators by the locals who were groaning under the oppressive rule of the Byzantine rulers who took over from the Roman authority (Ali 1979). Same scenario played itself out with the entrance of Islam into Spain through the exploits of Tariq bn Ziyad and Musa bn Nusayr who defeated the weak forces of the visigothic rulers of Iberia through the help of the locals who saw them as liberators.

2. Migration

Migration has become a standard model for the establishment of a state, particularly amongst Muslims since the success of the *hijrah*. The tradition of a change agent leaving a place of extreme danger to a comfort zone in order to accomplish the objective of the change which the *hijrah* represented has become a template used by many Mujaddid (Reformers) in the centuries following the formation of state of Madinah. For instance, Usman Dan Fodio, the 19th century Islamic reformer in Northern Nigeria had to migrate with his followers from Yunfa to Gudu in order to escape assassination after a period of protracted persecution. It was from Gudu, having been strengthened by a large number of people who fought alongside him that he launched attacks to wrest power from the corrupt

Hausa/Fulani oligarchy in the region. Between 1804 and 1808, an Islamic State which annexed virtually all the Hausa/Fulani territories in the North Western part of Nigeria was established (Adamu 2006). This pattern of migration in the quest of more congenial environment has become a standard model for not just reformers but Muslim mystics. Ibn Arabi, the 13th century Muslim mystics had to flee Egypt when he was threatened with mortal danger as a result of constant theological conflicts with local scholars. He had to wander from cities to cities until he finally arrived and settled in Baghdad where he lived the greater part of life before his death around 1240 CE. Ibn Arabi considered his movement as hijrah with Egypt representing his own Makkah and Baghdad as his own Madinah (Ali 1979).

3. Tribal Affiliation

Muhammad was related to Yathrib in ways other than trade. Moreover, in Yathrib was his father's grave. In Yathrib lived Banu al-Najjar, uncle of his ancestor 'Abd al-Mutallib, and hence his relative. To that grave, Aminah, the loyal wife, as well as Abdul Mutallib, the father who lost his son at the very height of his youth and power used to come for yearly visits. Muhammad himself accompanied his mother to Yathrib when he was six years old and visited his father's grave with her. On their way back to Makkah, his mother, Aminah fell ill and died and was buried at al-Abwaa' midway between Yathrib and Makkah (Haykal 1979). It was no surprise that Muhammad found the Yathribites as potential ally and their city as a more congenial environment for the propagation of the faith. This tribal connection between Muhammad and Yathrib was to become an important basis of attainment of some kind of solidarity amongst its people before and after migration. Solidarity which Ibn Khaldun referred to as *asabiyyah* needed to attain societal cohesion makes "people unite efforts for the same goal, defend themselves and reject or defeat the enemy" (Sulastri 2019). Though Ibn Khaldun agreed that Muhammad deployed Islamic brotherhood as a higher means of "*asabiyyah*" to achieve immediate bonding between the *muhajirun* (Makkan emigrants) and the *Ansar* (Madinite Helpers), yet he posited that this would not have been possible if he was not connected

with the people tribally. Besides, in his theory of developmental stages of history, tribal affiliation *asabiyyah* was the first stage (state establishment stage) of the five stages of the evolutionary process. In al-Mawardi's view, though religion is the major element that leads to social cohesion, "but it is only an additional force that is needed to buttress tribal solidarity" which cannot be wished away in state formation process (Hamid:2018)

4. Warfare

Whereas Muhammad did not enter Yathrib as a conqueror, he needed to galvanize the people into an organized army in the immediate years of his ascension as the religio-political leader of the city. The twin necessities of protecting the people of Madinah and defending its territories from the imminent aggression of the Makkan oligarchy that were embittered by the escape of the Makkan Muslims and the receptiveness of the Madinites made preparation for war a compelling reality. Therefore, expectedly both clashed in three different battles between 624 CE, two years after the Hijrah and 628 CE when a ten years truce was negotiated between them at Hudaibiyyah. Warfare therefore is the major factor not just in state formation by power seekers but a necessary ingredient in building of state and in the consolidation stage after the emergence of the state.

5. Superior Balance of Power

Balance of power has been described particularly in International Relations, "as the posture and policy of a nation or group of nations protecting itself against another nation or group of nations by matching its power against the power of the other side". This factor applied to the success of the *Hijrah* in the immediate years after the formation of the Madinan state. Muhammad knew that for him to survive the hostility of Makkah and its allies within the region, he also needed to form alliances to strengthen his position after accomplishing internal cohesion through the inauguration of the Madinan Charter which recognized plurality. While in Makkah the main contending force against the nascent state of Madinah remained largely without organized system of government and

only coming together when there is a need to attack the latter, Muhammad continued to consolidate power through establishment of common solidarity with his people, providing laws for interpersonal relationship through revelation and reaching out to adjoining tribal communities for alliances and mutual cooperation (Hitti 1985). Within the first decade of the *Hijrah* therefore, this strategic moves towards balance of power tilted in favour of the nascent Madinan State with the triumphant entry of Muhammad and his followers into Makkah in 630 CE leading to the destruction of all the idols in Ka'bah and the enthronement of Islam as the state religion.

6. Spiritual Intervention

Spirituality is used in this context to describe interventions in the course of the Hijrah that are beyond human comprehension. Just as the mission of Muhammad was itself divine aimed at delivering his people from primitive worship and barbaric lifestyles to a life of faith in One God and righteousness, some incidences in the course of the Hijrah can also be interpreted within the realm of the divine. Spirituality in this sense is the belief in God's continuous intervention in human affairs in different ways. It is for this reason that his escape through the back door whilst the arranged Makkan assassins who encircled his residence slept off was not seen as a mere coincidence but the intervention of Allah, the God Who sent him (Haykal 1979). The same interpretation has been given to the spider web woven incident at the entrance of Cave Thawr which confused the trailing Makkan spies while Muhammad and his companion Abu Bakr was inside (As-Sallabee 2005). Suraqa ibn Malik's failed attempt to arrest the duo of Muhammad and Abu Bakr when his horse got trapped in the sandy plain of the desert was also considered as a divine intervention considering his skills and determination to get them back to Makkah. He was a skilled horseman who after locating them and hoping to win the bounty that the Quraysh had put on their heads made spirited efforts to get them apprehended. It was said that Muhammad commanded the ground to open up and swallow him and his horse and upon his plea for

mercy, he was released. His futile mission made him to return to Makkah and announce his own conversion to Islam. Beyond strategic planning and taken advantage of local dynamics; *mujahidun* (Muslim fighters in the cause of Allah) and *mujaddidun* (reformers) have always sought for and relied on external spiritual aid through communion with God in prayers for the success of their military expeditions and reformatory agenda in emulation of this prophetic precept.

Conclusion

The attempt of this paper is to re-examine the significance of the *hijrah* beyond religious lenses. The emergence of the Islamic State of Madinah in the Arabian region known for its lack of central governance structures and loose administration served as the impetus for its consideration as a model for the formation of state in Islam. Such factors as political leadership vacuum, tribal affiliation, migration and others are treated within the context of the theories of Ibn Khaldun and al-Mawardi- two Islamic historians and political scientists. The moral lessons from the *Hijrah* for Muslims in life-changing endeavors are also succinctly discussed.

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