Envisioning Hijra: the ethics of leaving and dwelling of European Muslims

Fadil, N.; Moors, A.; Arnaut, K.

Citation for published version (APA):
Fadil, N., Moors, A., & Arnaut, K. (2021). Envisioning Hijra: the ethics of leaving and dwelling of European Muslims. *Contemporary Islam*, *15*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-021-00461-7

Envisioning Hijra: the ethics of leaving and dwelling of European Muslims

Nadia Fadil[1] · Annelies Moors[2] · Karel Arnaut[1]

Abstract

Within the current Western European context, where the presence of Islam in the public sphere has become an object of continuous polemics and debates, emigrating or 'leaving Europe' has emerged as a conceivable option among a wide range of people who identify as Muslim. Both within and beyond specific pious circles such migratory moves have sometimes been framed as *hijra.* This special issue enquires into the way *hijra* is imagined and experienced, but also how the issue of *hijra* is debated and acted upon among European Muslims who are contemplating the possibility of leaving Europe, or who have already left the continent. In order to cover both the specific and the more general dynamics surrounding *hijra*, this thematic issue is motivated by one, albeit multi-layered hermeneutical objective. In general terms, we aim to understand the complex and multiple significations operating around the notion of *hijra* among European Muslims of various backgrounds and convictions. In so doing we seek to contribute to the mounting anthropology of Islam in Europe by examining articulations of mobility and migration through religious imaginaries and repertoires. This implies ethnographically accounting both for the perspectives and assessments of those who are situated and located in Europe and desire to leave the continent in order to perform the *hijra*, as well as for the ways in which *hijra* is lived and practiced by those who have left Europe and moved to a Muslim-majority context. In order to buttress further the emerging anthropological field at the nexus of religion and mobility/migration, this introduction cautiously maps out a number of analytical concepts which we think could strengthen the multifaceted ethnographic ventures of the contributions comprising this thematic issue: the 'ethics of dwelling', 'regimes of mobility/diversity' and religious imaginaries and repertoires, being the most prominent.

Keywords *Hijra* · Mobility · Regimes · Islam · Piety · Europe

✉ Nadia Fadil
nadia.fadil@kuleuven.be

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

"Those who are migrating in the way of God will find refuge and prosperity".
(Quran, 4:100).

The independent French movie, *Soumaya* (2019), directed by Waheed Khan and Ubayday Abu-Usayd, narrates the story of a divorced mother, Muslim, who works as an employee at a company in one of the Parisian airports. She sees her life being abruptly turned upside down when she is brutally dismissed for security reasons. The motives behind her dismissal remain unclear and every request to gain further clarity falls on deaf ears. What follows is a long search for justice, in which she tries to get to the bottom of the negative screening. Beyond legal pursuits against her former employer, Soumaya's sacking also entails obstacles, betrayals and difficult conversations with her family as well as with her ex-husband, Jérôme, a French convert to Islam, and father of her daughter. Shortly before her dismissal, he took the decision to leave the country. Exasperated by the mounting Islamophobia in his country, his decision to leave France is induced by the hope to find a renewed sense of freedom and dignity in a place where he can be at peace as a Muslim.

Set in a France that is still recovering from a violent series of terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, the movie contrasts two different coping strategies employed by French Muslims to grapple with the daunting reality of being largely cast as undesirable 'others'. Soumaya's story is that of a Muslim woman who is at the grips of an arbitrary system of surveillance and its violent ramification wherein Islamic piety is all too easily conflated with Muslim radicalism and extremism. Her approach balances between a combative stand and withdrawal (under the pressure of her aging mother who begs her to cease any legal procedure to protect her daughter). Conversely, the strategy employed by her ex-husband is that of escape or withdrawal (to Morocco) framed in a very peculiar yet rather impenetrable way. When, for the first time after his arrival in Morocco, Jérôme talks over the phone to his best friend, Kais, back in France, he immediately identifies his move as "hijra" and his space of destination as "the land of God". This initial idea is elaborated later on in the film during short telephone conversations among the two friends – dialogues that intersperse the dramatic action taking place in Paris. More than carrying very precise ideological or religious articulations of what *hijra* is, in these conversations Jérôme rather evokes his experience in terms of feeling "relieved" and "liberated", or being able to "breath" and think "more freely" – statements that are accompanied by imagery of him climbing mountains, traversing (nightly) deserts and, finally, reaching the sea. The elusiveness of these significations and of Jérôme's quest – sometimes met with incomprehension by Kais – is confirmed in an interview with the actress Soraya Hachoumi (Soumaya in the film). To the question "*Where is Jérôme?*", Hachoumi answers equally elusively: "*It's a phantom. We leave it open for everyone to make up one's mind about this character. To drown oneself in an ocean of certainty of this man*

facing the sea. The viewer is free to choose Jérôme's destiny." (Bakhtaoui 2019, our translation from French). The latter sentence is particularly enigmatic as it may refer to imagining the outcome of Jérôme's decisions (in the film) as well as to viewers choosing to duplicate Jérôme's decision to make *hijra*. Taken together, Jérôme's conception of *hijra* appears to situate itself in between two contrasting options: (a) an exit strategy account which can be found in some recent media platforms in France, promoting *hijra* as a possible solution for Muslims who seek to cultivate a dignified religious life in a more welcoming context,[1] and (b) a seemingly escapist individualistic flight, away from the hurdles and challenges that confront French Muslims in their fight for acceptance.[2] In its singularity as well as its resemblance to related significations and enactments of *hijra,* Jérôme's foreshadows the double quest of this special issue for its various significations as well as its shared structuration.

This special issue engages with the complexities of *hijra* as evoked in the vignette above and seeks to explore how the question of *hijra* is debated and acted upon, and how it is signified and experienced by European Muslims who are contemplating the possibility of leaving Europe, or who have already left the continent. Within the current Western-European context, where the question of Islam in the public sphere has become an object of continuous interrogation, the question of *hijra* has emerged as a possible horizon within specific pious circles. Several academic studies have started to attend to these invocations of *hijra*, but have done so in a way that largely takes them as an expression of Salafism or Wahhabism (Olsson 2014; Roex 2013), or as a signpost of new forms of radicalism (Adraoui 2017; Uberman and Shay 2016). The different contributions of this special issue present, however, a different perspective on this question. They locate the language of *hijra* within a distinct socio-geographical context, i.e. continental Western-Europe, where Muslims have been the object of incessant public debates for almost two decades (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2010; Scott 2007), and where the continent is largely understood and described as being "in crisis". The economic aftermaths of 2008 and the subsequent recessions, as well as the ongoing debates on multiculturalism and migration, have produced a new moral geography in the continent which has also triggered new forms of emigration (see also Arnaut et al. 2020). We therefore do not primarily, and simply, hold *hijra* as an expression of a particular theological orientation (e.g. Salafism), but rather seek to account for the ways in which self-identified pious European Muslims invoke this language in relation to a changing political climate and economic conjuncture, and the ways in which aspirations of migration and mobility are rearranged in this respect. In doing so, this introduction analytically underlines the multiplicity of *hijra*, variably as a 'notion', a 'language', a 'placeholder' of divergent experiences

---

[1] See in this respect the website: http://hijra.albounyane.com that supports and advices Muslims on how to prepare for the hijra, and even offers coaching sessions. The popular French website Al-Kanz also devoted a series of articles and interviews with Muslims who left France to settle in Muslim-majority contexts in 2013 and 2014.

[2] For a critique on the glorification of hijra within the Francophone Islamic field, understood as an "individual flight into a utopia", see Aissam Ait Yahya: "Remarque et reflection autour de la hijra" (2019) (https://editions-nawa.com/smartblog/132_reflexion-autour-de-la-Hijra.html).

and aspirations – all of them to some extent imbued by social imaginaries, rooted in religious sources but branching out widely into the everyday struggles of Muslims in Europe and beyond.

This special issue is thereby motivated by two central objectives. The first one is to understand hijra as an "ethics of dwelling". Without trying to emulate Zigon's (2014) concept too closely, the notion of "ethics of dwelling" helps us to grasp what all contributions in this special issue indicate in different ways: that *hijra* signals a commitment to a place, a social context, a community or a country, either in positive terms – situating the potentiality of belonging, of becoming oneself, of self-realisation, etc. in an auspicious environment to which one wants to contribute – or, in negative terms – expressing the impossibility of such reciprocal self/world-building and the urge to leave one place for another. In Zigon's words: "dwelling offers an ontological starting-point for understanding how differences manifest because of an essential sharedness, as well as offering a link between this ontological starting-point, ethical motivation, and political practice. This is so because when worlds break down, dwelling is no longer possible. When this occurs, the demand of an ethics of dwelling is felt, and some respond to this demand." (2014:758). In proposing to frame our inquiry into *hijra* through this notion of "ethics of dwelling", our aim is, thus, to investigate whether and how the mobilisation of *hijra* draws on a particular understanding of mobility and immobility such as experiences of "stuckedness" (Hage 2009, as explored in the paper by Vroon-Najem and Moors, and Evers), or as a never fulfilled desire of spiritual improvement an excellence (as explored in the papers by Ter Laan and Al Korani) or, on the other hand, becomes re-activated as a social and political telos that is part and parcel of a quest for social change, which can also result in violent forms of militancy (see the contribution of De Koning). We thereby adopt a trans-local geographical perspective that seeks to account both for the perspectives and views of those who are situated and located in Europe and desire to leave the continent in order to perform the *hijra*, as well as for the ways in which *hijra* is lived, practiced and imagined by those who have left Europe and moved to a Muslim-majority context, and/or have returned to Europe after an unsuccessful experience abroad.

The second central aim of this special issue is to equally situate and embed *hijra* within dominant regimes of mobility and diversity in Europe. The ethics of *hijra* are performed in concrete contexts in which Muslims in Western Europe are subject to particular categorisations, in which their presence is securitised if not problematized, their social mobility channelled, etc. The different contributions in this special issue situate these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and marginalisation, in wider configurations or, as we prefer to call them dominant regimes of diversity/mobility which, in the vignette above, was presented as suffocating and incarcerating, blocking not only one's religious fulfilment, but also one's social mobility and professional aspirations. Inspired by the work of Glick-Schiller and Salazar (2013), Grillo (2010), and Eule et al. (2017:2718), we consider regimes of mobility as assemblages of interests, negotiations, policies, discourses, regulations and struggles of dealing with diversity related to mobility and migration, e.g. informing ideologies of integration (Favell 2016; Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Rytter 2019). These regimes consist of a reflexive process of external ascription, i.e. attribution

of legal status, racial or ethnic profile, cultural or religious identity, and self-iden-tifications (Fassin 2011), that affects migrants´ social mobility and aspirations in important ways. Such 'regimes' appear in the introduction and in the different con-tributions first and foremost through the public discourses, policies, bureaucratic and policing practices surrounding Muslims in Europe as well as European Muslims outside of Europe. By situating *hijra* within these regimes of mobility and diver-sity, we seek, hence, to account both for the contextual circumstances and political economy wherein the language of hijra is shaped (i.e. Western-Europe in crisis, the racialization of Muslims), as well as the intersubjective ethics and imaginaries that undergird this experience of mobility or stasis.

In sum, by bringing these two analytical levels together in our understanding of *hijra* (the ethical and the regime), this special issue thus seeks to enable an interdis-ciplinary dialogue between migration and mobility studies and religious studies by attending to the ways in which movements and migration become articulated and indexed through distinct religious imaginaries and repertoires and within particular political economies.

Hijra and European Islam

In Arabic, the term *hijra* is often used to signify "abandoning", but may more broadly refer to 'movement' or 'migration'. Within the Islamic tradition, *hijra* car-ries an important symbolic weight as it refers both to the exodus of the prophet Muhammed in 622 from Mecca to Medina and the start of the Islamic calendar (also known as the *hijri* calendar). Over many centuries, *hijra* has been at the centre of ongoing debates on whether migration is a preferable solution for Muslims who are not capable of fully practicing their faith in the their context of residence (Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 1996; Masud 1990). As such, the term *hijra* assumes a condition of existential unsettledness, envisioning the possibility of moving and relocating as an ethical possibility of self-realisation and world-building elsewhere. The latter can even be taken in the sense of detachment from the world (*dûnya*) that is promoted (see for instance Casewit 1998; Saritoprak 2015). As the different chapters indicate, the ongoing signification of the term *hijra* among European Muslims needs to be situated against this context of century-old theological debates around this term, in particular as it relates to the experience of Muslims' presence in Europe. Never-theless, we do not seek to essentialise these theological debates or assume a deter-ministic hold on Muslims' conduct and action, but rather treat them as a discursive repertoires articulating an ethics of dwelling within which such ethical conduct can be situated (Asad 1986; Eickelman and Piscatori 1990a:19).

For long, the theological discussions on Muslims' presence in Europe has been informed by a longstanding distinction between '*dar-al-islam*' (place of Islam) and '*dar-al-harb*' (place of war) or '*dar-al-kufr*' (place of unbelief). These notions have historically been informed by theological viewpoints that draw on conceptual dis-tinctions between territory that is under Muslim control and non-Muslim territories. The perspective that informed these viewpoints was that Muslims would be exposed to continuous threats, ranging from their physical safety to the risk of spiritual

corruption, if and when residing outside of the *dar-al-islam*. Medieval jurists, who have been foundational for the further development of Islamic jurisprudence, were divided on the permissibility of living, or even travelling, to non-Muslim land. While scholars such as Abû-Hanifa, Imam Malik or even the Sufi Ibn'Arabi, were opposed to a long-term residence in *dar-al-harb*, also in some cases due to their exposure to the Andalusian experience and the Reconquista (Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 1996:44–45, Verskin 2015), others adopted a more lenient take.[3] The Shafi'i school, for instance, held the view that Muslims were permitted to live in non-Muslim territory provided that they could practice their faith (Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh 1996:43, Shavit 2018:372). As a rule, however, and across these different viewpoints, Muslims were discouraged from permanently settling as a minority community in a non-Muslim territory, unless for reasons of proselytization (*da'wa*).
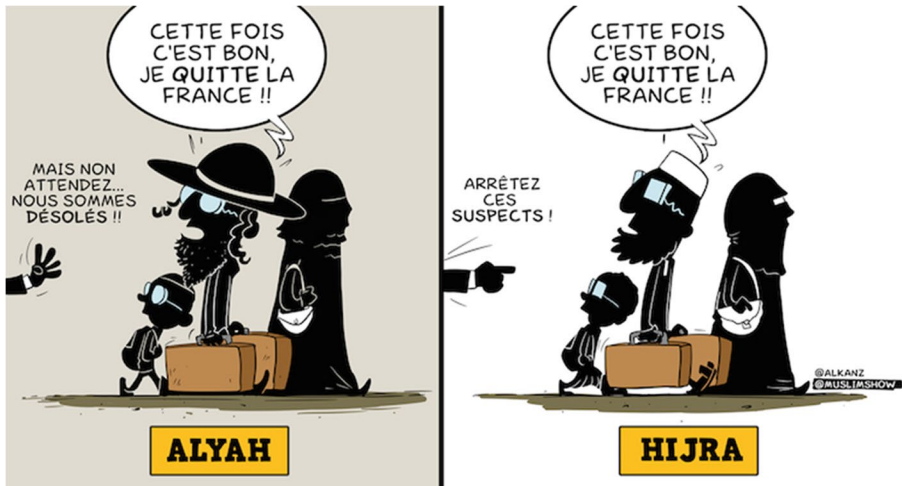
With the emergence of the nation-state, the notions of *dar-al-harb* and *dar-al-islam* as well as the permissibility to travel to non-Muslim lands to settle there, came to change. In a well-known article on the matter, Masud (1990) describes how this dimension of *hijra* gradually altered across the nineteenth and twentieth century, as Muslims travelled to non-Muslim countries for their education or employment (1990:42). This new social and demographic reality, which saw the expatriation of a significant number of Muslims to the West, also resulted in a new series of debates. The latter culminated in new scholarly interventions that pushed for a new understanding of Europe as a *place of settlement*. At this juncture, Europe was designated as *'dar-al-shahada'* (space of testimony) or '*dar al-amn*' (space of security). Uriya Shavit (2018) analyses, for instance, how a number of prominent scholars, like the influential Egyptian Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, legitimise the presence of Muslims in the West by highlighting proselytization as an essential part, and justifier, of the Muslim migratory experience. By drawing analogies with the first *hijra* of Muslims to Abyssinia (A.D 613–615) who sought shelter and refuge with a Christian monarch against the hostilities they were facing in Mecca, scholars like Al-Qaradawi underline the continuities that exist between the first generation of Muslims and today's European Muslims (Shavit 2018:378). The creation of Muslim-based initiatives like the *European Council for Fatwa Research* as well as the solidification of the so-called'minority fiqh' or *fiqh-al-aqalliyyat* eventually came to spur this theological normalisation of Muslims in the West (see also Caeiro 2011).

In recent decades, the question of *hijra* has emerged again as a burning issue in the scholarly conversation. In the continuation of the renewed securitization of Islam after 9/11, and the presence and emergence of militant groups, the term *hijra* has gradually turned into a marker of seclusion, and in some cases radicalization.[4] Over the recent years, the term has also come to be linked with the departure of

---

[3] Alan Verskin traces how the notion of *hijra* first became invoked within Maliki *fiqh* on the verge of the Reconquista. He explains that the earliest fatwas on the *hijra* were pronounced at a moment when scholars realized that the territorial gains by the Christians in the Iberian peninsula would be long-lasting. Even then, however, he notes a reluctance by scholars to resume the call for hijra, as this was believed to have been abrogated by a hadith of the prophet (Verskin 2015: 41–42).

[4] This perspective is, for instance, promoted by militant groups such as '*takfir wal hijra*' which have been around since the 1960′s before being equally adopted more recently by ISIS.

Fig. 1 (Source: ©   Al-Kanz 2015) (https://www.al-kanz.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/alyah-hijra-muslimshow-alkanz.jpg)

approximatively five thousand European Muslims to Syria in the aftermaths of the civil war in 2012 and 2013 (Alloul 2019). As is also discussed in the contribution of De Koning in this special issue, such a perspective has contributed to a securitized take on *hijra* which largely builds upon the presumption that politicised assertions of Islam in the public sphere hold a potential treat for social cohesion. As argued by Fadil et al. (2019, see also Kundnani 2014) this view came to be institutionalized over time in public policies around radicalization. An illustration can be found in the cartoon (Fig. 1) below which compares the public response to the *Aliyah*, the emigration of European Jews to Israel, to that of the *hijra*. Whereas in the case of the *Aliyah*, the public largely responds by being alerted to the antisemitism that might cause these departures ("please wait, we are sorry!"), in the case of *hijra* it becomes promptly observed as a suspicious move that is need of surveillance ("stop these suspects!").

This perspective is equally echoed by a number of scholarly accounts that have tied the "call for the hijra" with a process of radicalization or Salafism (Adraoui 2017; Olsson 2014; Zegnani 2018), and its subsequent instrumentalization by militant groups such as ISIS (Uberman and Shay 2016). An example of such an approach can be found in the work of Mohamed Adraoui (2017) who takes *hijra* as an entrance point to study Salafism. The question of *hijra* is thereby reduced to an "ideal of rupture" (2017:650), his interlocutors' adoption of the term as symptomatic for an anti-systemic view that is typical for Salafism.[5]

---

[5] For example, one of his informants, a French woman who moved to Jordan and expresses her gratitude of being able to raise her daughters according to a pious lifestyle (with the veil) without worrying about the social services taking them away from her, and his other informant, called M, talks about the difficulties of leading a pious lifestyle and the fear for hostilities. These experiences of marginalization are stigmatization are, however, not considered by the author as motivators for their migration. In so doing, however, his informants' experience of stigmatization in France become downplayed
.

The papers in this special issue depart from the above mentioned take on *hijra*. Rather, the different contributions seek to adopt a perspective on this concept that comes to mark and inscribe *hijra* in a migratory trajectory that is articulated in relationship with the Islamic tradition. This undertaking opens up a new understanding and view on mobility and migration which accounts for the structuring role of religious imaginaries while at the same time situating and locating them within a distinct political and moral economy of mobility.

Hijra and the migration-religion nexus

As noted by Cory Anderson, to the extent that religion is brought into the study of the migratory experience, it is rarely seen as a "motivator" in (or signifier of) the migration process (Anderson 2016:387–88).[6] Instead, religion is seen as a social infrastructure in post-migration communities or primarily read through the lens of the integration of migrants into the host-societies. Scholars of migration have indeed largely neglected religion as a 'resource' in the broadest possible sense: as a discursive formation, as a corpus of texts and narratives, as basis of ethical practices and aspirations, etc. Two notable exceptions are worth mentioning briefly: pilgrimage and diaspora.

Drawing on a Turnerian analysis (Turner and Turner 1978), pilgrimages are primarily apprehended as exceptional devotional forms of mobility, by virtue of the liminal space they enable and the *communitas* that is fostered and shaped around that experience (Coleman 2002; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Fedele 2009). Such an analysis of pilgrimage often draws on a Christian perspective on the phenomena, where pilgrimages often represent a *voluntary* act of devotion. This differs, for instance, from the *hajj* where, as Barbara Metcalf reminds us, going to Mecca is considered an essential and mandatory component of Muslim faith (Metcalf Barbara 1990: 89). The *extra*-ordinary lens through which pilgrimages are analysed tends, furthermore, to reinforce a (secular) viewpoint that contrasts mobility and migration as motivated by material concerns vis-à-vis a religiously saturated perspective on pilgrimages. The different papers in this special issue explicitly challenge such a dualistic conception. They highlight how in *hijra* the quest for 'spiritual excellence' is at the same time always also embedded within specific material constraints. A focus on "religion" in relationship to migration and mobility therefore also always raises the question as to how this connects with a quest for recognition, dignity or material welfare, or lack thereof.

These issues have also been tantamount in the literature on diaspora, about which Cohen (2008:175) noted that "the major social science and historical literature on diasporas is organized along ethnic and religious lines". Unsurprisingly so, perhaps because of diaspora's origin in the Jewish tradition, this term was adopted in the course of the nineteenth century by the African American community in signifying its predicament of forced migration. It is noteworthy in relation to our exploration of

---

[6] See also Werbner (2002 (1990)) and Bava (2011).

hijra that this broader take-up comes about at a time of emergent 'Zionism' among the Jews in Europe, when also early black activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey not only articulated the Black predicament in terms of biblical/Jewish narratives of traumatic dispersal and insecurity, of living cut off from one's sense of identity, oppressed by an alien ruling class, but also link it with concrete plans and projects – such as Garvey's *Black Star Line* – of Black people returning to their African ancestral lands (see Gilroy 1987). Unlike its neglect in the pilgrimage literature, diaspora studies often enunciate the socio-economic and material dimensions of the diasporic predicament either situated in a discourse of return (Safran 1991) or practices of transnational exchange and connectivity (Werbner 2000). Finally, what brings diaspora interestingly close to *hijra* is that it appears to constitute a metapragmatic awareness of 'living inside with a difference' (Clifford 1994:308), of building displaced relational networks (Gilroy 1997) of place-making strategies (Becci et al. 2017). In the case of *hijra* this special issue proposed to capture these dynamics in terms of an "ethics of dwelling" steeped in Islamic imaginaries and repertoires in which migration/mobility are valued as stepping-stones to self-realisation and world-building.

In order to account for the significance of the concept of *hijra* it is, therefore important to situate it within a distinct Islamic horizon wherein migration and mobility are positively valued (Casewit 1998; Marsden 2009; Werbner 1996). Migration and mobility hold indeed a particular status within Islam, as the escape from religious hostility, as entailed in *hijra*, is only one of the various forms of mobility the Islamic tradition acknowledges. Other types of mobility, such as pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) or travelling in the search of knowledge (*rihla*), have also held a longstanding status (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990b). Sam Gellens notes, in this respect, that travelling is understood as a "meritorious activity", as it is not only connected with the expansion of the Muslim world from the seventh century onwards, but equally seen as an act of worship when done in the pursuit of the improvement of one's faith and knowledge (El Moudden 1990; Gellens 1990:53). Saritoprak also highlights how mobility, within the Islamic cosmology, complements its universal view on the world as belonging to God. Mobility is thereby read in the prolongation of a spiritual detachment from this world, as the result of a continued quest for spiritual excellence and growth which might result in the necessity to relocate (Saritoprak 2015:49, see also Casewit 1998:118).

A central question that we seek to investigate, therefore, is whether and how the imaginary of *hijra* motivates, structures or inspires the experience of migration and mobility, thereby drawing on a specific understanding of reasons to migrate (push-factors), a particular set of aspirations and preferred destinations. This means understanding, on the one hand, how the imaginary of *hijra* entails a distinct geographical topography (what are the countries one performs *hijra* from and to?), as well as the particular eschatological view on life and death that might inform their mobility trajectory. Such suggestions can be found, for instance, in the contributions of Vroon-Najem and Moors. In their paper, their interlocutors diverged over the precise signification of *hijra* and whether moving to a Muslim majority country was a necessary and sufficient condition. Whereas some would challenge that idea, thereby highlighting the fact that a spiritual uplifting can be gained within the European setting,

for others it necessarily implied an outward mobility from the European context and with the correct religious intention. In the case of De Koning on the other hand, who worked with Dutch Syria volunteers, *hijra* implied both a geographical departure from the Netherlands as well as an ontological, ethical and epistemological break with Europe, which he understands as "a protest for an alternative that is more just and satisfying" (this issue).

Understanding whether and how *hijra* structures one's migratory experience, furthermore, also implies accounting for how one's ethical aspirations structure and inform the experience of mobility. Rearticulating one's lives and experiences as Muslims in the West through the notion of *hijra* can infuse an ethical component to this migratory experience, as also noted by Werbner (1996) in her early description of Pakistani Sufis in Britain. She describes how, for the adherents of the *tariqa* (order) of the *Naqshbandiya*, their presence in Britain becomes inscribed in a spiritual journey that is equated with the *hijra* of the prophet from Mecca to Medina. The double-process of "spatialization of Islam" and "Islamisation of a non-Muslim space", and which occurs through the building of mosques or ritual processions in the streets, enable a spatial inscription and domestication of the new, British context (Werbner 1996:179). Such an observation is also consonant with the contribution of Evers who describes how her French Muslim interlocutors are involved in a process of "carving out Muslim spaces" in the context of France. She shows how mobility for her interlocutors entails a socio-geographical and spiritual dimension, as it involves a geographical and social mobility (i.e the adoption of new habitual practices like speaking French without an accent), that are also understood as part of their spiritual growth. A similar process is also at play in the contribution of Nina Ter Laan, who in her ethnographic study with Dutch and Belgian converts who relocated to Morocco, demonstrates how an aesthetics of modesty in their home-making practices is imbricated in an mechanism of distinction that is both social, cultural and ethical (being a modest Muslim). The dialectical view adopted in this special issue is one that seeks to propose a complex take on how *hijra* becomes turned into a distinctive marker - in the sense of Bourdieu (1979) - to index and determine one's ethical positionality as well as one's migratory journey. A central aim of this special issue is, thus, to unfold the way in which this reliance on *hijra* comes to redefine the migratory experience, because, although many people move constantly today, "not all movements are equally meaningful and life-shaping" (Salazar 2016:285).[7]

The ethics and pragmatics of *hijra*: religion and the everyday

Attending to whether and how *hijra* operates as a distinct register in the migratory experience among Muslims, presupposes a particular understanding of how ethical considerations and religious norms relate to one's everyday conduct. Over the past two decades, a debate has ensued in the anthropology of Islam about how

---

[7] We are grateful to Jaafar Alloul for his comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paragraph.

to investigate and analyse the imaginaries and practices that Muslims consider as part of their religious ethos. Building on the notion of Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1986), this debate emerged from a growing awareness around the need to take into account how our interlocutors signify pious conduct as an ethical self-fashioning practice (such as wearing a headscarf, see Mahmood 2001). Calling on anthropologists to take Islam seriously rather than considering such acts (only) in instrumentalist terms, engendered highly innovative scholarship about ethical concerns among pious Muslims, their engagement with the Islamic tradition, their practices of self-cultivation, and their refashioning of bodily dispositions, also in settings that may not be conducive to such practices, both in the Middle-East (Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005), as well as in Europe (Fadil 2019; Jacobsen 2011; Jouili 2015). This focus on Islam has evoked critical responses that argue that such an approach has put too much attention on the religious lives of Muslims. The main argument that informs this critique is that it foregrounds the experiences of the most (strictly) religiously observant Muslim subjects, thereby disregarding other trajectories or other aspects of Muslims' ethical lives that are non-religious and/or informed by doubt and ambivalences (Al-Mohammad and Peluso 2012; Dessing et al. 2013; Schielke and Debevec 2012; Simon 2009). This has enabled a call for a more sustained focus on "the everyday" in the anthropology of Islam (Marsden 2005; Schielke 2010). Whereas opinions may differ on the desirability to focus on particular categories of Muslims and particular sets of practices, we disagree with how this focus on "the everyday" suggests a divide between 'religion' and 'life' (Deeb 2015; Fadil and Fernando 2015). In other words, such assumed duality brings us back to a perspective that considers the everyday, historically the privileged site of analysis for anthropology, as non-religious.

In accounting for *hijra* and its invocation in the migratory aspirations and experiences of Muslims the different papers of this special issue seek, firstly, to propose a complex perspective on this question. The aim of this special issue is not to suggest that *hijra* accompanies every journey of European Muslims who are contemplating the possibility of leaving Europe, or who have already done so. As the different contributions show, the motivations to migrate are complex, and cannot solely be reduced to simply a matter of *hijra*. As stated before, even when people use the term *hijra*, for native speakers of Arabic it also can have a non-religious meaning; simply translating as migration. However, the term *hijra* also has gained an important symbolic weight as an Islamic term for many Muslims. For those who signify making *hijra* in Islamic terms (e.g. "*faire la hijra*" in French), it signals a particular pious disposition and a desire to actively inscribe one's migratory journey within the Muslim tradition, and to redefine the latter as an act of faith. Furthermore, a mobility endeavour can be initially conceived as a form of *hijra* but may become re-signified over time. Conversely, it can start off as a migratory quest for a new experience and gradually become redefined in spiritual terms, or the language of *hijra* can remain absent altogether.

Making *hijra* is therefore, for many a profoundly social phenomenon. As shown in some of the contributions, the aspirations and possibilities to make *hijra* are not an open field, but are structured by a variety of factors, such as kinship or marital

relationships, opportunities for employment, a political climate that allows being the kind of Muslim one aspires for. For many, what matters is that one moves to a particular environment where it is easier to live the desired Muslim life, to become part of a particular socio-cultural circle where one feels a sense of belonging or to raise their children within an appropriate environment away from a feeling of persecution. These relational ethics become very apparent across all contributions, but appears explicitly in the meanderings of Al-Korani's principal respondent, Hanna, who would find in the Islamic institute *Al Noor* and in Dubai a new form of spiritual kinship, thereby highlighting the inter-subjective components of her spiritual journey. Yet these attempts at "community-making" were not always continuous. Many were also faced with the force of cultural habits in their everyday religious and non-religious life, confronted with the contradictions inherent in the notion of a deculturized Islam. This is the case, for instance, both in the contribution of Ter Laan as well as in the contribution of Vroom-Najem and Moors. Kinship relationships, mainly the presence of the family of the husband, was often a key reason to relocate to a particular Muslim-majority country. In the case of Ter Laan's contribution, her interlocutors' frustrated attempts to rebuild a sense of home – an 'other' lifeworld – in Morocco through an "aesthetics of sobriety", contrasted with what we could term as an "aesthetic of opulence" which they experience in Morocco and which symbolizes, in this paper, an absence of spirituality. Such a sense of disenchantment can also be found in the paper of Vroon-Najem and Moors, whose interlocutors were disappointed in their quest for spiritual fulfilment in their new locations. Whatever the beginnings of making *hijra*, their experiences may gradually clash with their imaginaries and aspirations, in some cases engendering disappointment or a sense of failure (Beekers and Kloos 2018).

In accounting for the invocation of *hijra* in one's migratory trajectory, we are, furthermore, interested in the ways in which this term becomes *indexically* invoked by our informants in order to frame or situate their migratory experience within a trajectory of spiritual self-improvement. This means that we do not so much see *hijra* as a 'motivator' than as a *signifier*. The intensity of the religious signification of making *hijra* differs indeed across the different papers gathered in this special issue. Whereas some are highly motivated and framed their departure almost exclusively in terms of fulfilling a religious obligation (see the contributions of Evers, de Koning or Ter Laan), for others this was less clear-cut, with references to a preference to live in a Muslim environment in which it would be easier, or simply more self-evident to practice one's religion (*adhaan*, dress etc., see the variety of positions of Vroon-Najem and Moors' interlocutors). Furthermore, the extent to which *hijra* can be invoked, and whether one's migratory trajectory can be properly framed as a form of *hijra* is itself the object of continuous ethical deliberation. Attending to these deliberations, leads us to inquire into the type of aspirations *hijra* invokes, and how the latter impact on, and are impacted by, our interlocutors' migratory experiences. This dilemma is particularly at the heart of Hanna's narrative, Joud Al-Korani's principle interlocutor, and her back-and-forth journey between the UK and Dubai. Divided between the possibility for spiritual growth in Dubai and the family-obligations in the UK, she finds herself continuously torn and interrogating the sincerity of

her motivations and presence in Dubai and whether the latter is not simply a way to escape her care-obligations in the UK.

As the various contributions indicate, the religious signification of making *hijra* is neither stable nor static, but always in process. It is contingent, rather than linear, and equally echoes transformations and changes in one's ethical commitment. By attending to these ethical deliberations, one of the central aims of this special issue is therefore to inquire into the type of aspirations *hijra* invokes, and how the latter stands in a continuous tension with the experienced realities of the migratory endeavour. One can, furthermore, rightfully question to what extent a desire for *hijra* can exist in its 'pure form', as this quest is also always imbricated within a particular political and sociological context. Drawing on Eickelman and Piscatori (1990a) seminal work on the matter, we therefore consider *hijra* as a key term in a vocabulary that shapes and is shaped by Muslims' experience while at the same time exercising caution "in assuming that common items of vocabulary constitute a shared language through which ideas of self, society, responsibility, justice and so on shape and express social experience" (1990b:19). In these authors' understanding, this means attending to how a language or idiom that belongs to the Muslim discursive tradition becomes invoked in order to constitute an Islamic specificity to the experience, whilst at the same time paying attention to the idiosyncrasies in the ways these terms are being deployed and appropriated, as well as to how they stand in relation to non-Islamic terms, for as Eickelman & Piscatori add: "After all, in any given context there are a number of non-Islamic terms and concepts used by Muslims which equally shape and express ideas such as these" (idem).

In attending to the complex ways in which this *hijra* is experienced, embodied and lived by pious European Muslims, our aim is to equally account for how questions of ethics and piety become materialised and enacted within and throughout the migratory experiences. While the notion of 'ethics of dwelling' helps us to consider the above range of issues involved in the acts of relocation and dwelling otherwise, we further suggest to situate and unpack these acts within the regimes of diversity and mobility that Muslims experience, resist or renegotiate. Hence, we seek to locate these experiences in contexts where migration and mobility are enabled, motivated or blocked by various political and economic forces, dominant and dominating categorisations of people along lines of religion, race, and class, experiences of alienation in the European context and aspirations and desires for upward social mobility and wealth. Focussing on the multiple significations of *hijra* for those Muslims in Europa who are considering to move, have done so, or have given up on it, enables us to engage with how to think the religious and non-religious together as part and parcel of the everyday lives of those who consider themselves committed Muslims. We focus on the significance of their imaginaries of making *hijra* and how this relates with their broader engagement with the Muslim tradition. In a sense, such an examination of *hijra* that is equally rooted in the everyday experiences of Muslims, entails a plea for sustained fieldwork, for a willingness to listen to how interlocutors signify and analyse their own ethical lives, and to recognize how notions of self and society are always simultaneously structured by a profound commitment to co-building and attuning a world and a self, a quest for coherence, inconsistency and contradictions, whether they are religious or not.

References

Adraoui, M.-A. (2017). La Hijra Au Service D'un Projet De Rupture Intégral Dans Le Salafisme Français. *Ethnologies Française, 4*(168), 649–658.

Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, S. A. (1996). The Islamic conception of migration. *The International Migration Review, 30*(1), 37–57.

Al-Mohammad, H., & Peluso, D. (2012). Ethics and the 'rough ground' of the everyday. The overlappings of life in post-invasion Iraq. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 2*(2), 42–58.

Alloul, J. (2019). Can the Muhajir speak? European Syria fighters and the digital un/making of home. In Fadil, N., de Koning, M., & Ragazzi, F. (Ed.), *Radicalization in Belgiium and the Netherlands. Critical perspectives on violence and security* (pp. 217–244). London: IB Tauris.

Anderson, C. (2016). Religiously Motivated Migration. *The Sociological Quarterly, 57*(3), 387–414. https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12139.

Arnaut, K., Lafleur, J. M., Fadil, N., Mandin, J., & Alloul, J. (2020). Leaving Europe: new crises, entrenched inequalities and alternative routes of social mobility. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 18*(3):261–269.

Asad, T. (1986). *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington: Georgetown University. Occasional Papers Series. Center For Contemporary Arab Studies.

Bakhtaoui, C. (2019). *Soumaya, L'histoire Vraie (Qui Dérange) D'une Citoyenne Française*: Bondyblog. https://www.bondyblog.fr/author/chahira-bak/ (Consulted 31/10/2020).

Bava, S. (2011). Migration-religion studies in France: Evolving toward a religious anthropology of movement. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 40,* 493.

Becci, I., Burchardt, M., & Giorda, M. (2017). Religious super-diversity and spatial strategies in two European cities. *Current Sociology, 65*(1), 73–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116632030.

Beekers, D., & Kloos, K. (2018). *Straying from the straight path. How senses of failure invigorate lived religion*. New York: Berghahn.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La Distinction. Critique Sociale du jugement*. Les Editions de Minuit.

Bracke, S. (2011). Subjects of debate: Secular and sexual exceptionalism, and Muslim women in the Netherlands. *Feminist Review, 98*(1), 28–46.

Caeiro, A. (2011). The making of the Fatwa. The production of Islamic legal expertise in Europe. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 155*(juillet-septembre 2011), 81–100.

Casewit, D. S. (1998). Hijra as history and metaphor: A survey of Qur'anic and Hadith sources. *The Muslim World, 88*(2), 105–128.

Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology, 9*(3), 302–338.

Cohen, R. (2008). *Global diasporas: An introduction*. London: Routledge.

Coleman, S. (2002). Do you believe in pilgrimage. Communitas, contestation and beyond. *Anthropological Theory, 2*(3), 355–368.

Deeb, L. (2015). Thinking piety and the everyday together. A response to Fadil and Fernando. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 5*(2), 59–88.

Dessing, N. M., Jeldoft, N., Nielsen, J. S., & Woodhead, L. (2013). *Everyday lived Islam in Europe* Ashgate Surrey.

Eade, J., & Sallnow, M. J. (1991). *Contesting the sacred: The anthropology of christian pilgrimage* London: Routledge.

Eickelman, D. F., & Piscatori, J. (1990a). Social theory in the study of Muslim soceities. In Eickelman, D. F., Piscatori, J. (Eds.), *Muslim travellers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (pp. 3-25)*. London: Routledge.

Eickelman, D. F., & Piscatori, J. (1990b). *Muslim travelllers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination*. London: Routledge.

El Moudden, A . (1990). The ambivalence of rihla: community integration and self-definition in Moroccan travel accounts 1300–1800. In Eickelman, D. F., Piscatori, J. (Eds.), *Muslim travellers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (pp.69-83). London: Routledge.

Eule, T. G., Loher, D., & Wyss, A. (2017). Contested control at the margins of the state. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(16), 2717–2729. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2017.1401511.

Fadil, N. (2010). Breaking the taboo of multiculturalism. The Belgian left and Islam. In Vakil, A. & Sayyid, S. (Eds.), *Thinking through Islamophobia. global perspectives* (pp. 235-250). Columbia: New York University Press.

Fadil, N., & Fernando, M. (2015). Rediscovering the "Everyday" Muslim: Notes on an Anthropological Divide. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 5*(2), 59–88.

Fadil, N. (2019). The anthropology of Islam in Europe: A double epistemological impasse. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 48,* 117–132.

Fadil, N., de Koning, M., & Ragazzi, F. (2019). *Radicalization in Belgium and the Netherlands. Critical perspectives on violence and security*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Fassin, D. (2011). The social construction of otherness. In Bonjour, S. & Rea, A., Jacobs, D. (Eds.), *The others in Europe* (117-125)*.* Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

Favell, A. (2016). *Philosophies of integration: Immigration and the Idea of citizenship in France and Britain.* Berlin: Springer.

Fedele, A. (2009). From christian religion to feminist spirituality: Mary Magdalene pilgrimages to La Sainte-Baume, France. *Culture and Religion, 10*(3), 243–261.

Gellens, S. I. (1990). The search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies: A comparative approach. Eickelman, D. F. & Piscatori, J. (Eds.), *Muslim travellers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (pp. 51-65). London: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (1987). There ain't no black in the union Jack'. In Gilroy, P. (Ed.), *The cultural politics of race and nation.* London: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (1997). Diaspora and the detours of identity. In Woodward, K. (Ed.), *Identity and difference* (299-345). London: Open University.

Grillo, R. (2010). Contesting diversity in Europe: Alternative regimes and moral orders. *MMG Working Paper 10–02*.

Hage, G. (2009). *Waiting out the crisis: on stuckedness and governmentality*. In G. Hage, ed. Waiting. Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, pp. 97–106.

Hirschkind, C. (2006). *The ethical soundscape. Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Jacobsen, C. (2011). *Islamic traditions and Muslim youth in Norway*. Leiden: Brill.

Jouili, J. (2015). *Piouis practice and secular constraints. Women in the Islamic revival in Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kundnani, A. (2014). *The Muslims are coming. Islamophobia, extremism and the domestic war on terror*. London: Verso Books.

Mahmood, S. (2001). Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival. *Cultural Anthropology, 16*(2), 202–236.

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety. The reform of the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marsden, M. (2005). *Living Islam: Muslim religious experience in Pakistan's North West frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marsden, M. (2009). A tour not so grand: Mobile Muslims in Northern Pakistan. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, N.S.*, S57-S75.

Masud, M. K. (1990). The obligation to migrate: The doctrine of Hijra in Islamic law. In Eickelman, D. F., & Piscatori, J. (Eds.), *Muslim travellers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (pp. 29-49). London: Routledge.

Metcalf Barbara, D. (1990)*.* The pilgrimage remebered: South Asian accounts of the hajj. In D. F. Eickelman, & J. Piscatori (Eds.), *Muslim Travellers. Pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (pp. 85–107). Routledge.

Olsson, S. (2014). Swedish Puritan Salafism: A Hijra within. *Comparative Islamic Studies, 8*(1–2), 71–92.

Olwig, K. F., & Paerregaard, K. (2011). *The question of integration. Immigration, exclusion the Danish welfare state*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Roex, I. (2013). *Leven Als De Profeet in Nederland. Over De Salafi-Beweging En Democratie*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Rytter, M. (2019). Writing against integration: Danish imaginaries of culture, race and belonging. *Ethnos, 84*(4), 678–697.

Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, 1*(1), 83–99.

Salazar, N. B. (2016). Conceptual notes on the freedom of movement and bounded mobilities. In Gutekunst, M., Hackl, A., Leoncini, S., Schwarz, J. S., Götz, I. (Eds.), *Bounded mobilities: Ethnographic perspectives on social hierarchies and global inequalities* (283-289). Bielefeld: Transcript.

Saritoprak, Z. (2015). Migration, feelings of belonging to a land and the universality of Islam. In Aslan, E., & Hermansen, M. (Eds.), *Islam and citizenship education* (pp. 45-54). Wiesenbaden: Springer VS.

Schielke, S. (2010). Second thoughts about the anthropology of Islam. *ZMO Working Paper, 2*:1–16.

Schielke, S., & Debevec, L. (2012). *Ordinary lives and grand schemes. An anthropology of everyday religion*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Glick-Schiller, N., & Salazar, N. B. (2013). Regimes of Mobility across the Globe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 39*(2), 183–200.

Scott, J. W. (2007). *The politics of the veil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shavit, U. (2018). Europe, the new Abyssinia: On the role of the first Hijra in the Fiqh Al-Aqalliyyat Al-Muslima discourse. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, 29*(3), 371–391.

Simon, G. (2009). The soul freed of cares? Islamic prayer, subjectivity, and the contradictions of moral selfhood in Minangkabau, Indonesia. *American Ethnologist, 36*(2), 258–275.

Turner, V., & Turner, E. (1978). *Image and pilgrimage in christian culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Uberman, M., & Shay, S. (2016). Hijrah according to the Islamic state: An analysis of Dabiq. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 8*(9), 16–20.

Verskin, A. (2015). *Islamic law and the crisis of the reconquista. The debate on the status of Muslim communities in Christendom*. Leiden: Brill.

Werbner, P. (1990). *The migration process: Capital, gifts and offerings among British Pakistanis*. New York: Berg.

Werbner, P. (1996). Stamping the earth with the name of Allah. In Metcalf, B. D. (Ed.), *Making Muslim space in North America and Europe* (pp. 167–85). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Werbner, P. (2000). Introduction: The materiality of diaspora-between aesthetic and "Real" politics. *Diaspora, 9*(1), 5–20.

Zegnani, S. (2018). Les Carrières Des Jeunes Salafis Des Quartiers Populaires: Entre Radicalité Et Conformisme. *Agora débats/jeunesses, 80*(2018 3), 117–131.

Zigon, J. (2014). Attunement and fidelity: Two ontological conditions for morally being-in-the-world. *Ethos, 42*(1), 16–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12036.

Authors and Affiliations

Nadia Fadil[1] 🆔 **· Annelies Moors[2] · Karel Arnaut[1]**

Annelies Moors
A.C.A.E.Moors@uva.nl

Karel Arnaut
karel.arnaut@kuleuven.be

[1]   Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Research Center, KU Leuven, Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

[2]   University of Amsterdam, Postbus 15509, 1001 NA Amsterdam, Netherlands