

Genealogy, Graves, and Global Networks: Exploring the Hadrami Diaspora in the Indian Ocean

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Abstract: Engseng Ho's *The Graves of Tarim* provides a comprehensive exploration of the Hadrami diaspora across the Indian Ocean, tracing its mobility, identity formation, and the pivotal role of genealogy in shaping its sociocultural and religious fabric. The book investigates how graves, as sites of pilgrimage and identity, serve as enduring links between migrating communities and their origins, transforming notions of place, belonging, and legacy. Ho examines the diaspora's transnational networks, rooted in patrilineal descent and genealogical traditions tied to Prophet Muhammad, revealing how these frameworks facilitated cultural transmission, legal practices, and social cohesion. Through an analysis of historical texts and personal narratives, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between mobility and stasis, exemplified in practices like pilgrimage, marriage patterns, and the evolving role of kafa'a in maintaining lineage integrity. The work situates the Hadrami diaspora within the broader discourse of global mobility, challenging Eurocentric frameworks by illustrating how non-Western societies fostered transregional connections long before modernity. The significance of graves and the movement of individuals and texts is emphasized, showcasing how these elements shaped hybrid identities, and sustained diasporic networks. Ho explores the socio-political impacts of the Hadrami diaspora, including its integration into

the courts and spiritual leadership of various Indian Ocean polities, underscoring its resilience and adaptability across shifting imperial contexts. By examining key historical transitions—such as the rise of Muslim empires, the shifting trade routes, and the diaspora’s role in new Muslim polities—Ho weaves a narrative that connects individual biographies with macro historical processes. The book ultimately offers a nuanced understanding of how the Hadrami diaspora negotiated identity, belonging, and continuity across space and time, contributing to the broader field of transnational and diasporic studies.

Keywords: Hadrami’s, Tarim, Ayadarus, Adeni’s, Hadramawt, Tariqa 'Alawiyya, Ba'Alawi', Habib Nuh al-Habshi, Ahmad al-Junyad, Shafi, Muwallads, Kafa

Introduction

Engseng Ho’s *The Graves of Tarim* provides a rich and nuanced analysis of the Hadrami diaspora, originating from Hadramawt—a historic region in present-day Yemen—situated along the South Arabian coast. The Hadramis, known for their strong sense of identity and interconnected social structures, dispersed across the Indian Ocean, creating intricate transnational networks that spanned centuries. Through an interdisciplinary lens, Ho explores the mobility of this diaspora, emphasizing the centrality of graves and genealogy in shaping their collective identity.⁹⁹ Graves, as Ho argues, hold profound significance in diasporic contexts. For migrants, the location of burial often eclipses the place of birth in symbolic importance, serving as both a physical endpoint and a metaphorical origin for future generations. These sites not only memorialize the dead but also act as enduring points of connection for the living, anchoring a dispersed community to shared histories and lineages. For those separated from their families by migration,

⁹⁹ Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. xix-xx.

visiting ancestral graves provides a tangible link to their origins, forging continuity across time and space.¹⁰⁰ At the heart of Ho's study lies the concept of genealogy, which he examines as a multifaceted framework encompassing moral, philosophical, historical, and legal dimensions. The Hadramis carried their genealogical traditions across the Indian Ocean, integrating them into diverse cultural and religious landscapes. This genealogical transmission became a cornerstone of their identity, reinforcing ties to patrilineal descent while adapting to new environments. Through an analysis of lineage, Sufi practices, and historical texts, Ho brings the Hadrami diaspora into sharp focus, addressing its historical 'absence' by making its presence felt within the broader narrative of global and transnational history.¹⁰¹ This introduction frames the Hadrami diaspora not merely as a community of movement but as a dynamic network sustained by shared genealogical and cultural practices. By weaving together, the personal, religious, and political dimensions of Hadrami lives, Ho's work offers a compelling exploration of how diasporic identities are constructed, transmitted, and transformed over time.

Mobility and Question of Identity

Engseng Ho discusses how scholars have traditionally associated mobility with 'modernity' and often linked it to the rise of Western societies. Claude Lévi-Strauss termed Western societies and individuals as historically 'hot,' signifying their open, adaptable, and dynamic nature, while non-Western societies were considered 'cold' in contrast. In recent anthropological developments, there has been a shift to acknowledge the historical mobility of non-Western societies and cultures. This new anthropology of mobility reintroduces the idea of progress, which was

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Andrew Shryock, Review of *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 1, (Winter 2007), pp. 265-270.

previously discarded, particularly in the context of technological mobility and its obsession with speed. For a long time, societies, cultures, and religions have exhibited mobility, involving intricate interplays between absence and presence in various dimensions like tactile, visual, auditory, affective, aesthetic, textual, and mystical. Engseng Ho illustrates this concept through the event of the destruction of the grave complex of Abu Bakr al- 'Aydarus' in Aden on September 2, 1994. Al- 'Ayadarus was known as the patron saint of Aden, and his tomb attracted thousands of patrons during the city's annual festival. This incident is closely connected with the Hadrami diaspora, a mobile diaspora that predates Columbus's journey to America and was present in places like Calicut on the pepper coast of India before Vasco da Gama's arrival.¹⁰² The Adeni's mobility was notable as he travelled from Tarim, Hadramawt, to Aden in 1484, where he played a significant role in the city's commercial and religious activities. He also travelled to regions like Ethiopia, Mecca, Medina, and northern Yemen, spreading the influence of Islam. Other members of his lineage migrated across the Indian Ocean to East Africa, Western India, and Southeast Asia, with the graves of these individuals becoming pilgrimage sites with shared rituals and liturgical manuals. Visiting graves has been a common practice in Islamic societies, where it shapes the boundaries between Sufis and their fundamentalist detractors. The graves became sites of contention among transregional and international constituencies. The place of death, rather than birth, became more significant for these individuals, creating representational value. Additionally, by gaining modern education and qualifications over generations, members of this lineage became cabinet members of the southern secessionist state.¹⁰³ Therefore, the attack on the Adeni's tomb was

¹⁰² Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

an attack on his identity and his lineage. In the discourse on mobility in history, land is seen as unique because of its immobility, which carries the potential for moral transformation. However, this transformation can be viewed with scepticism, as it may serve as a channel for corruption or personal gain. In diasporic societies, mobility is encouraged and often signifies movement toward moral development. Mobility expands the field for resource and power exchange. The discourse of mobility serves to represent and objectify movements, which can be channelled, controlled, diverted, and debated. Over the past five centuries, the Hadrami diaspora across the Indian Ocean has developed a powerful discursive tradition, leading to the prominence of individuals and families with Hadramawt origins in various economic, political, religious, and intellectual roles in Eritrea's history. They have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and shared ethical values, enabling them to accumulate capital, build power, and exert influence in Eritrea. They have adeptly navigated through different regimes, including the Ottoman Empire, Khedival Egypt, Italy, Great Britain, and Ethiopia, using their abilities to adapt and succeed. The Hadrami diaspora embarked on journeys across the Indian Ocean, ushering themselves into what contemporary historians often refer to as the world or global history. In stark contrast to the Europeans, whose primary motivation for movement was conquest and trade, enforced through naval monopolies, the Hadramis fostered extensive connections with the diverse communities of the Indian Ocean region, primarily in domains falling under the broad umbrella of religion. These voyages left behind a distinct trail, etched by the presence of mosques, tombs, and educational institutions. Some have even termed this network of pathways as a Sufi order, known as the Alawi Way.¹⁰⁴

104 Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 20-29.

Grave as Pilgrimage Site

In Engseng Ho's book, he refers to these graves as sites of pilgrimage, which are often located along the paths of Hadrami diasporas' movements. These graves serve two essential purposes. First, they facilitate the movement of people, who have various reasons to travel, resulting in diverse itineraries and durations. Second, these pilgrimage sites are intricately connected to the movement of texts, including pilgrimage manuals and prayer litanies compiled from other sources. These texts link the names of saints to one another, much like how the voices of reciters and prayers echo the names of these individuals at the gravesite. Engseng Ho's perspective on pilgrimage sites suggests that they serve as places of return for those who have migrated. Each return is unique, as every journey away and back differs, bringing new experiences to these locations. While these pilgrimage centers may not readily reveal their secrets when viewed through the usual lenses of politics and economics, they are better understood as places of enrichment and growth. 105 Pilgrimage to Hadramawt primarily revolves around the tombs of Bā'Alawi saints and scholars. The Bā'Alawī, recognized as direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, have migrated around the Indian Ocean, spreading their Sufi tradition, the Tariqa 'Alawiyya. Central to this tradition is the veneration of the Bā'Alawī's pious ancestors. For Bā'Alawī living abroad, traveling to Hadramawt constitutes a diasporic return. Bā'Alawī scholars have also framed these journeys as pilgrimages, which broadens the concept of Hadramawt from a point of sayyid origin to a more diverse place with many families and histories. 106 Engseng Ho also mentions the tomb of the Prophet Hud, which has become a significant pilgrimage site and one of the largest annual pilgrimages in Hadramawt.

105 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

106 Ismail Fajrie Alatas, 'The Poetics of Pilgrimage: Assembling Contemporary Indonesian Pilgrimage to Hadramawt, Yemen', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 58, no.3, (July 2016), pp. 607-635.

Additionally, he discusses the grave of a Hadrami sayyid, Habib Nuh al-Habshi, in Singapore, noting that the building housing the grave resembles a Hindu chandi more than a Muslim saint's tomb. This site attracts pilgrims from various regions, including Malays, Hadramis, Arabs, Chinese, and Indians. The distribution of such graves across the Indian Ocean showcases the diversity of visitors, emphasizing that the diaspora cannot be understood solely in ethnic terms. Engseng Ho also highlights the efforts of Ahmad al-Junayd, a member of the sayyid lineage, in transforming Tarim from a mere destination to an origin. He confronted various challenges, such as family quarrels, foreign rules in Tarim, and the upkeep of ancestral sites. His work aimed to make Tarim a place of return, and he authored manuals, like "Salve for the Sickly," for visiting the graves of Tarim. These manuals guide proper actions to turn the visit into a pilgrimage, fostering a sense of community. In this context, the graves serve as meeting points for mobile texts and individuals, and resolute localists like al-Junayd find meaningful work in maintaining and investing in these places. Burial, as per al-Junayd's manual, initiates the process of return, grounding and fixing the value of these locations, whether for mobile or sedentary, foreign, or local individuals.¹⁰⁷

Marriage Pattern and Dilemma of Muwallads

Engseng Ho's exploration of the Hadrami diaspora underscores the profound significance of genealogy, as illuminated in two seminal texts by Abd al-Qadir al-'Ayadarius and Muhammad b. Abi Bakr al-Shilli. In 'The Travelling Light Unveiled,' al-'Ayadarius intricately weaves genealogy into a multifaceted tapestry of places, dates, and individuals, entwined with esoteric, mystical dimensions from God's earliest creations. This narrative delves into how genealogy, through conquest, marriage, concubinage, and various modalities of exchange, assimilated with the self-

¹⁰⁷ Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkley, 2006), pp. 195-199.

conceptions of diverse peoples, transcending the boundaries of sayyids and non-sayyids, Arabs and non-Arabs. Conversely, al-Shilli's 'The Irrigating Fount' transforms genealogy into an exoteric science of law, serving as a moral guide that determines permissible marriages, inheritance distribution, and obligations of visitation and aid. Al-Shilli explores the gendered dynamics within Sayyid lineage marriages, where men can marry non-sayyids, but women face restrictions. This asymmetry, favouring the expansion of the sayyid community, particularly through the identification of children with the father's line, facilitated the diaspora's self-reproduction and growth, despite its initial male migration.¹⁰⁸ The migration of the diaspora led to the evolution of genealogies, holding two crucial dimensions. These genealogies not only facilitate tracing origins but also foster new connections among communities of diverse backgrounds, fostering mutual relations through shared family and religion. This dual nature involves a coexistence of closed and open aspects, particularly in terms of patrilineal and matrilineal ties within the framework of kinship. Gender asymmetry plays a central role, where the successful integration of these aspects' hinges on the control of women's choices in marriage. The underpinning theory for such control is found in canonical texts composed abroad, exemplified by al-Shilli's legally infused genealogy/biography, "The Irrigating Fount." This interplay of closedness and openness is not a static tension but a dynamic process of signification, exerting discursive control over an expanding sphere of exchange rather than rejecting or stifling it. In this sense, a diaspora offers distinctive ways of delineating the movements of individuals and overseeing the myriad comings and goings across space, time, and culture.¹⁰⁹ Ho delves into the issue of kafa'a, which surfaces in the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 152-53.

¹⁰⁹ Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 197-198.

marriages between sayyids and non-sayyids in the Arab community of the Netherlands East Indies. The ensuing notoriety and opposing fatwas between 1905 sparked a jurisprudential dispute, leading to the issuance of a fatwa called kafa, emphasizing the sufficiency, equality, and suitability of a spouse for a sharifa. This resolution, while initially addressing unions between Arab sharifas and non-Arabs, transcended race and focused on genealogy as a comprehensive and precise framework for evaluating individuals.¹¹⁰

The Hadrami diaspora's history across the Indian Ocean unfolds as a captivating saga of secrecy, exaggeration, and grandeur. Descendants of the Prophet, revered and marrying princesses, ascended to leadership roles in Muslim states across Africa, India, and the Malay Archipelago. The diaspora positioned itself as a worthy competitor for native affection, emphasizing noble lineage and contributing to the ruling echelons of various societies. The moral concerns surrounding muwallads, offspring born of foreign mothers, are explored within the context of patrilineal genealogies. These genealogies, expansive enough to accommodate matrilineal dimensions, enabled transcultural travel, linking places like Surat and Mecca back to the origins in Hadramawt and Tarim. Daughters were expected to return genealogically through marriages aligned with kafa, while sons embarked on geographical returns akin to pilgrimages for education and moral development. Despite the poetic records, family histories, and travelogues documenting muwallads returning to Hadramawt since the late nineteenth century, challenges persisted. Engseng Ho draws from oral history, particularly interviews with individuals like Ali from Indonesia, highlighting hurdles such as passport issues. For muwallads, obtaining a Yemeni passport based on their genealogy proved easier, reinforcing their connection to the Hadrami class. A significant obstacle faced by muwallads was the struggle with a sense of home. Many, especially those brought to Hadramawt in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

their teens or later, expressed dissatisfaction and a desire to leave. Sensitized to the dissonance between their upbringing elsewhere and their new, often unwelcoming, environment, muwallads grappled with a sense of alienation. This sentiment, intensified by limitations on job opportunities due to their noble lineage, perpetuated their ambivalence toward Hadramawt.¹¹¹ In conclusion, Engseng Ho's comprehensive exploration of the Hadrami diaspora unveils the intricate interplay of genealogy, cultural dynamics, and legal frameworks shaping the history and challenges faced by this unique community across the Indian Ocean. The diaspora's ability to navigate these complexities reflects the resilience embedded in its genealogical roots, despite the hurdles encountered by muwallads in their quest for a sense of home and belonging.

Conclusion

Engseng Ho's book delves into a fascinating exploration of the Hadrami diaspora across the Indian Ocean, tracing their integration into various regions over generations. The study draws on two significant works by Hadrami sayyids, namely al-Adyarus' "The Travelling Light Unveiled" and al-Shill's "The Irrigating Fount," shedding light on the crucial role of genealogy. It emphasizes the heightened importance of the place of death in the lives of migrating communities, as it becomes intertwined with individual identity. The book underscores the significance of graves in migrating communities, establishing how the deceased can connect with family and friends through visits to these resting places. It delves into the importance of inscriptions on gravestones, highlighting how names on these stones serve as a catalyst for conversations between visitors and the departed, transforming graves from silent monuments to interactive legacies. A pivotal theme explored is the parallel journeys of individuals and texts across the ocean, particularly among the Hadramis, especially the sayyids. The practice of bringing texts as letters of

¹¹¹ Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 223-229.

introduction during travels, starting from the sixteenth century, is discussed. These Hadrami texts not only facilitated movement but also bore historical consequences, creating hybrid versions influenced by Arabic genres. The book delves into the creation of new Muslim polities across the Indian Ocean due to shifts in long-distance trade routes. The transition from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea brought Hadramawt and Aden into greater contact with Egypt, the Hejaz, and India. This shift resulted in the emergence of a transoceanic world for Islam, characterized by a common allegiance to the Shafi school of Islamic law. The simultaneous rise of the Ottoman Empire, Safavid dynasty, and Mughals in India in the age of gunpowder intensified commercial and political relations in the western Indian Ocean. This period saw the creation of new Muslim states with the arrival and incorporation of foreigners into positions of rule and influence. Port cities, especially Gujarat, served as pivotal nodes for exchanges between these empires. The book elucidates the role of Hadrami Sufis in Gujarat, serving as spiritual patrons, leaders, and state officials. It explores the changing roles of religious adepts, such as Ulugh Khan, Rayhan Badr al-Din Jahangir Khan, Sharwan Khan, Ghalib Khan, and Bijli Khan, shedding light on their diverse contributions and influences.¹¹² In essence, Engseng Ho's work unravels the intricate tapestry of the Hadrami diaspora, intertwining individual journeys, textual legacies, and the geopolitical shifts that shaped the Indian Ocean world of Islam.

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¹¹² Engseng Ho, *The Grave of Tarim*, (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 99-107

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