Rethinking Diasporic Returns

Ḥaḍramī Trajectories in Indonesia’s Religio-political Field

Ismail Fajrie Alatas | ORCID: 0000-0002-9344-668X
New York University, New York, NY, USA
ifalatas@nyu.edu

Martin Slama | ORCID: 0000-0002-2860-9382
Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria
martin.slama@oeaw.ac.at

Abstract

This article calls for a rethinking of the concept of diasporic return in light of contemporary religious and political developments in Indonesia. It does so by exploring two modalities of diasporic returns, namely, re-embedding and re-encountering, neither of which necessarily involve transnational travel or any notion of an ancestral homeland, but both of which are nevertheless important to the process of diasporization. Based on ethnographic observation among the Ḥaḍramī diaspora in Indonesia, the article follows the biographical becoming of two nationally prominent figures who had been estranged from their diasporic community. The article traces how these two figures have returned, whether inadvertently or by choice, to the Ḥaḍramī diasporic identity and community. The two cases point to the porosity and contingency of diaspora as both a subjective position and a social formation that enables its members to exit and enter in various ways. They also exemplify forms of diasporic return that unfold in and through, but are not reducible to, national politics. Comparing the two cases and tracing their connections reveal the possible entanglements between diasporic and national politics in Indonesia’s religio-political field that have hardly been recognized by observers of Indonesian politics and religion. By developing the notion of diasporic re-embedding and re-encountering to complicate diasporic return, the article unravels the more complex, politically grounded and ambivalent relations that dynamically form and transform an Indian Ocean diaspora and its relationship to the Indonesian nation.
Returns are part and parcel of diasporas. They constitute a special form of mobility, and yet they entail much more than geographical or physical movement. Obviously, the heightened mobility that marks an increasingly interconnected and economically integrated world (Appadurai 1996; Inda and Rosaldo 2007; Sassen 2007) have spurred and eased physical returns (Alatas 2016; Osella 2013; Osella and Osella 2006), notwithstanding the economic and political apparatuses that continue to constrain transnational movements (Feldman 2011; Ong 1999). Nevertheless, returns cannot, and should not, be reduced to physical movements, whether momentary visits to, or permanent resettlements in, an ancestral homeland. Ritual performances staged by members of a diaspora in the host land, for example, may be meaningfully construed as a form of a non-physical crossing to the homeland (Johnson 2007). Promotion and use of a long-forgotten ancestral language in a multicultural and multilingual context where diasporic groups have resided for generations—like Sanskritized Hindi among Indo-Mauritians or Yiddish among European and American Jews—can also be understood as a kind of return to, and performance of, diasporic belonging.\(^1\) It is also the case that returns are not restricted to members of diasporic societies. People with diasporic and non-diasporic backgrounds alike embark on return journeys, typically by (re)visiting their hometown or places where their (grand)parents had lived, to rediscover or uncover individual biographies and family histories that can illuminate larger social and historical phenomena (Bartov 2007; Eribon 2013; Sands 2016).

Yet for many diasporas, notions of return to an ancestral homeland are particularly significant and ethically charged, decisively informing collective memories as well as moral and political imaginaries.\(^2\) For members of many diasporic groups ‘the homeland’ is central to their actual or imagined returns, and it is this form of geographic return as being constitutive of processes of identity maintenance that is a recurrent theme in the existing scholarly literature.\(^3\) Without wanting to downplay the significance that homeland imaginaries can have for diasporas, in our perspective this focus on the homeland in the

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2 Freitag 2003; Ho 2006; Johnson 2007; Daswani 2013; Jacob 2019; Schiocchet 2022.
study of diasporic returns can be rather limiting. Based on our observations in Indonesia among descendants of migrants from the Ḥaḍramawt valley of South Arabia who have become more localized or forsake their diasporic identity, we call for a rethinking of the concept of diasporic return that can do justice to the more complex and ambivalent relations that make up diasporic belonging. We do this by exploring two modalities of diasporic returns, namely, re-embedding and re-encountering, neither of which necessarily revolve around the notion of an ancestral homeland but both of which are nevertheless important to diasporization (Eisenlohr 2006), that is, the constitution and enactment of diasporic identity and belonging.

Re-embedding points to a longer process of self-conscious return through various strategies and practices that would enable previously estranged actors to nest themselves in, and become identified with, a particular diasporic social framework, narrative, and identity. Re-encountering, on the other hand, is a momentary and often inadvertent meeting of actors with their diasporic peers without any concomitant attempt at reintegration, although they may become identified by members of the diaspora and other spectators as such. While re-encountering tends to occur as a momentary event that does not usually lead to the establishment of an enduring social bond, such encounters may have socio-political consequences that can last long after the event. We therefore propose that what is important about diasporic return is not necessarily physical movements to an ancestral homeland, but practices of re-embedding or re-encountering, both of which can take place not only during a physical journey to an ancestral homeland but also in a local or national context without any need to travel abroad. Importantly, both modalities of diasporization tend to occur as subtle performatives, without necessarily involving the explicit articulations that are often found in most forms of identity politics. Indeed, their subtleties have rendered the ideological and sociological work they do unrecognizable to many observers.

To question the return–homeland nexus is to go against a relative scholarly consensus regarding the constitutive traits of a diaspora. The most obvious of these traits is the dispersion of a group from an original centre to two or more sites, together with the retention of collective memory about, and nostalgic identification with, the homeland.4 Added to this is the maintenance

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4 Butler 2001; Brubaker 2005; Cohen 2008; Tölöyan 1996; Van Hear 1998. While most of the literature on West African diaspora and the Black Atlantic has moved away from the notion of ancestral homelands and developed more dynamic notions of cultural and identity formation (Gilroy 1993; Hall 1990), most studies remain wedded to the centrality of the notion of ancestral homelands. Even in the case of African Americans, the notion of the ancestral
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of relations—whether social, economic, cultural, or religious—to the homeland (Lekon 1997; Levitt 2001). Such relationships with the homeland, in turn, shape the experience of the diaspora in the host land. As a result, a degree of distinction, separation, and even alienation from the mainstream community is often seen as another important trait of a diaspora (Chan 2018). It follows that full assimilation or the severance of ties to the homeland may lead to the weakening, and ultimately disappearance, of diasporic identity.5 In contrast, we argue that the case of the Ḥaḍramī diaspora and their positioning in the interconnected realms of religion and politics in contemporary Indonesia necessitates a rethinking of the return–homeland nexus. This, in turn, allows us to decentre the question of space, memory, and nostalgic identification that has long anchored discussions of diasporas, opening up alternative modes of diasporization that are intricately tied to concrete challenges and the possibilities that emerge amidst national power struggles. As will be shown below, the Ḥaḍramī diaspora in Indonesia comprises certain components that have become more integrated into the majority population. They include older families who have been thoroughly localized as well as modern Indonesian nationalists who actively opted to forsake their Ḥaḍramī diasporic identity. In this article, we observe the contemporary developments of these segments by comparing two of their prominent representatives: the chairman of the Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu' tabarah an-Nahdliyyah (jatman, Association of Recognized Sufi Orders) Habib Luthfi bin Yahya (b. 1947) and the governor of Jakarta (2017–2022), Anies Baswedan (b. 1969). While both pursued their education and careers by relying on networks that were not Ḥaḍramī or otherwise ethnically defined, they have both recently experienced diasporization, whether intentionally or otherwise, through the processes of re-embedding and re-encountering.

Observing these two cases allows us to develop a more nuanced and multifaceted concept of diasporic return—one that decouples the notion of return from physical travel or an ancestral homeland (Ryang and Lie 2009). Both cases provide windows into what diasporic return may actually look like in practice, notwithstanding the absence of an explicit articulation of identity. This, in turn, enables us to expand the semantic field of the concept of diasporic return homeland bears at least some significance, as attested by the popularity of heritage tours to Africa (Campbell 2006).

5 While nostalgic identification with an ancestral homeland is central to diasporization, such emotional ties do not necessarily result in the desire for permanent return (Appadurai 1996). The point is rather the maintenance of emotional ties to an ancestral homeland that in turn makes returning to that homeland—whether physical or otherwise—morally significant, even if it is not actively pursued.
and include dynamics that are grounded in, and intertwined with, the religious and national politics of the host land or what we call, in a Bourdieusian fashion, Indonesia’s religio-political field, which is a realm of power characterized by competitive positioning, where religious credentials and political influence are mutually traded. As illustrated below, Ḥaḍramī figures, with their diasporic background representing Arabness, which in Indonesia is often associated with Islam (Mandal 1997; Lücking 2021), fulfil the prerequisites needed to occupy important positions in this field. This is only possible because in Indonesia a thoroughly delineated secular political space does not exist, which means that—contrary to Bourdieu’s theorization—a clear distinction between ‘the field of power’ and the ‘religious field’ (Bourdieu 1991:31) cannot be drawn, as these are co-constitutive. Using the notion of the religio-political field, in turn, opens up the possibility of comprehending religious, diasporic, and national manoeuvres as processes that may unfold simultaneously without one being reducible to another.

Given Habib Luthfi’s and Anies Baswedan’s high status in Indonesia’s religio-political field, it is not surprising that so far the dynamics we present in this article have primarily been analysed in terms of national political manoeuvres (for instance, Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018; Hadiz 2019), without being recognized as forms of diasporic return. On the other hand, Indonesia’s religio-political field has also been read as partly influenced by transnational dynamics, including Saudi Arabia’s exportation of Wahhabi theology (Chaplin 2014; Hasan 2007), the contemporary rise of China and its struggle for global economic dominance (Fitriani 2018; Novotny 2010), and the United States’ attempt to strengthen ‘democracy’ and cultivate ‘moderate Islam’ in the wake of 9/11 (Ibrahim 2018; Umar 2016). What is absent from these works, and which we aim to provide, is an approach to Indonesia’s religio-political field that takes into account a much older but enduring form of transregional connectivity, such as that embodied by diasporic actors (Ho 2006). A corollary aim of this paper is therefore to provide an alternative reading of contemporary Indonesian political dynamics through a diasporic lens. By viewing diasporic politics from the perspective of religio-political struggles on the national level and conversely, national politics from a diasporic perspective, the analyses we present in this paper call for a revisiting of diaspora and its relationship to the nation.

1 Diasporic Movements as Returns

Writing about the BāʿAlawīs, that is, Ḥaḍramīs who possess elaborate genealogies going back to the Prophet Mohammed and follow endogamous mar-
riage rules (kafāʾa), Engseng Ho distinguishes between two kinds of gender-differentiated diasporic return. He writes, ‘while daughters were required to return to origins in a genealogical sense, in marriage, sons were encouraged to return in a geographical sense, as part of the journey of education and inculcation of the moral virtues’ (Ho 2006:223). Ho’s notion of geographical return follows the dominant paradigm of diaspora studies that privileges physical movement to the homeland. In contrast, what he calls ‘genealogical return’ transcends this paradigm in so far as return is not associated with travel to and (temporary or permanent) presence in the homeland, but with the organization of intra-group relations through marriage. As such, it is more akin to the modality of diasporic return that we call re-embedding. Yet, we differ from Ho in that we would not primarily apply diasporic re-embedding to Ḥaḍramī women. One could even argue that Ḥaḍramī women born in BāʿAlawi families and marrying BāʿAlawi men never left the group and thus do not return but remain in the group with their marriage. Instead, as will be shown below, diasporic re-embedding can be fruitfully used for cases where Ḥaḍramis who have lost or abandoned their genealogical connections attempt to return to their diasporic group through practices that affirm their ancestry even without explicit articulation.

The two cases discussed in this article comprise dynamics of return to one’s diasporic community that urge us to rethink the notion of return in the study of diasporas. Comprehending these dynamics allows us to grasp the porosity and contingency of a diaspora that enables its members to exit and enter in various ways. Diasporic belonging, including the directions along which diasporic people are supposed to return, has too often been posited as a stable and pre-defined phenomenon. The biographical becoming of those who are born into diasporic families is perceived to be conditioned by their diasporic upbringing, language socialization, networks, and circles of family and friends that, in turn, shape their identity and consciousness (Baquedano-López and Figueroa 2014; García-Sánchez 2014). The successes of diasporic actors are often attributed to the perseverance of diasporic ties that link them to different localities, thereby functioning as sociocultural capital that provides them with a compet-

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6 That two men, Habib Luthfi and Anies Baswedan, but no women have reached influential positions in Indonesia’s religio-political field is of course not coincidental. Although there are examples of Indonesian women of Ḥaḍramī descent who are active in politics and others who have become Islamic preachers, the gendered socio-cultural conditions in this field as well as in the Ḥaḍrami communities make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to follow Habib Luthfi and Anies Baswedan into Indonesian elite circles by engaging in similar forms of return, which are the main concern of this article.
itive advantage over others (Ho 2006; Ong 1999). While this pattern is evident in numerous cases, focusing on such examples obstructs from view the cases of diasporic actors—like Habib Luthfi and Anies Baswedan—who have been able to realize themselves outside the purview of their diasporic circles, or those who attempt to leave behind or even disown their diasporic identity. These cases are significant in that they illustrate the ways in which diasporic actors do not necessarily seek to reproduce their diasporic identity and belonging. Many choose to integrate themselves thoroughly with their host country for various reasons, enabling them to achieve and enjoy positions that are usually occupied by representatives of the majority population and assume roles that are inaccessible to their diasporic peers. Equally important are cases whereby diasporic actors who have developed themselves outside of their diasporic communities choose to re-embed themselves in, or inadvertently re-encounter, diasporic circles. By demonstrating the manifold ways in which diasporic returns can unfold, these cases point to the contingency and instability of diaspora as both a subjective position and a social formation. Often, such cases accentuate modes of politics of belonging that stand in marked contrast to explicit forms of identity politics.

We do not want to suggest, however, that these movements of leaving and entering a diasporic community take place without frictions. Communities maintain boundaries, and the crossing back into a diasporic community for those who are estranged can be accompanied by considerable difficulties, even if one’s genealogy has its roots within the group to which one apparently does not belong anymore. At the same time, diasporic returns can occur under conditions that ease boundary transgression and re-integrations. Whether returns are characterized by a long process of mastering delicate intricacies or by the sudden crumbling of seemingly unsurmountable boundaries, the roles of the actors involved can vary greatly. Ranging from displaying a strong will to re-embed oneself in the diasporic community, which can also result in failure, to an inadvertent re-encounter that is the outcome of highly contingent socio-political constellations and power asymmetries, this social process can happen in accordance with, or against, the initial intention of the returning actor.

2 Divergent Genealogies and Visions

Before proceeding to our analyses of the two cases, the provision of some background information regarding the Ḥaḍramī diaspora in Indonesia is in order. The Ḥaḍramī diaspora in Indonesia can be generally divided into two seg-
ments: the BāʿAlawīs, that is, those who claim direct descent from the Prophet Muḥammad and the non-BāʿAlawīs. While in the Ḥaḍramawt the non-BāʿAlawīs can be further divided into different strata, from scholars and tribesmen to artisans and urban dwellers (Cameline 1997), among Ḥaḍramī communities in Indonesia such differentiations usually do not carry significant valence. As far as Ḥaḍramīs in Indonesia are concerned, it is the BāʿAlawī and non-BāʿAlawī distinction that remains in currency and which is particularly relevant for the analysis we present in this article.

Acknowledged as the direct descendants (Ar: sayyid, pl. sāda) of the Prophet Muḥammad, BāʿAlawīs have settled in the Ḥaḍramawt valley of the South Arabian peninsula since the tenth century. While BāʿAlawīs had long emigrated from the Ḥaḍramawt and settled in various areas around the Indian Ocean, it remains unclear when they began to settle in Southeast Asia. What is clear is that by the eighteenth century, BāʿAlawīs had become integrated into prestigious local Southeast Asian kin networks, taking on prominent roles as court advisors, religious teachers, judges, merchants, ship owners, seafarers, and even sultans. Seen as descendants of the prophet Muḥammad who came from the central lands of Islam and were connected to broader religious and trade networks stretching across the diasporic space of the Indian Ocean (Walker and Slama 2021), the BāʿAlawīs enjoyed a high level of prestige in diverse localities and are endearingly referred to as and addressed by the honorific habib (Pl. habāʾib), meaning ‘beloved.’

Historically, there were at least two trajectories of physical and social mobility for the BāʿAlawīs in Indonesia, usually following a period of study in the Ḥaḍramawt and other centres of Islamic learning such as the Hejaz. The first involved taking on full-time positions in Southeast Asia, such as becoming judges or religious teachers in formal educational institutions sponsored by local rulers, aristocrats, or the Ḥaḍramī mercantile elites. The second centred on the activism of the BāʿAlawīs as Sufi masters, teachers, preachers, and prayer leaders in local mosques and prayer halls (langgar), whilst simultaneously being involved in mercantile activities. Some of these BāʿAlawīs were able to attract a large following among the local population and were subsequently able to establish their own mosques or zāwiya (Sufi centres) (Alatas 2021; Kaptein 2014). Revered as religious scholars and Sufi masters during their lifetimes, some gradually became recognized as saints/friends of God (awliyāʾ Allāh). Mausoleums were built over their tombs and annual commemorations

7 For a useful comparison with the roles of the BāʿAlawīs in East African and Malabari societies, see Bang 2003; Bang 2014; Jacob 2019; Khalidi 1987; and Walker 2017.
(Ar. ḥawl), some of which have continued to attract large crowds, were instituted in their honour.

In the early twentieth century, the Sufi teachings and the privileged status of the BāʿAlawīs became the object of criticism by several Islamic modernist organizations, most notably Al-Irsyad (founded in Batavia, what is today Jakarta, in 1914 as the Jamʿiyat al-Irshād wa-l-Īslāḥ al-ʿArabiyya). Dominated by non-BāʿAlawi Ḥaḍramīs and inspired by modern Middle Eastern Islamic reform movements, Al-Irsyad promoted progressive educational reforms, social equality for all Muslims, and a return to what they perceived as the pristine form of Islam (Mobini-Kesheh 1999). With the establishment of Al-Irsyad, the non-BāʿAlawi Ḥaḍramīs entered Indonesia’s Islamic landscape in an institutionalized form and with enduring consequences. Especially on Java, Al-Irsyad became their home base for various social and religious activities that were carried out independently from the BāʿAlawīs. Moreover, the organization’s insistence on social equality and their demand for the eradication of practices deemed illegitimate innovations (bidʿa)—including veneration of saints and visiting their graves—enraged senior BāʿAlawī scholars, leading to a prolonged rift within the Ḥaḍramī diasporic community of Southeast Asia (De Jonge 1993; Mandal 2018). This rivalry was felt particularly strongly in the major Arab quarters of Java, where one can find Indonesia’s biggest Ḥaḍramī communities up to the present day. Ideological tensions between BāʿAlawīs and Irsyadis can still, from time to time, erupt into open polemics (Slama 2014).

At the same time, these Ḥaḍramī communities have also been the locus from which attempts were launched to overcome this rift. In 1934, a group of young Ḥaḍramis of BāʿAlawi and non- BāʿAlawi backgrounds pledged loyalty to the—at that time still solely imagined—Indonesian nation, and founded the Persatoean Arab Indonesia (Indonesian Arab Union), which subsequently became the Partai Arab Indonesia (pai, Indonesian Arab Party), thereby breaking with the older generations of Ḥaḍramīs who regarded the Ḥaḍramawt as their homeland.8 The pai advocated the full integration of Ḥaḍramīs into Indonesia’s nationalist movement and later, after independence had been achieved, into the nation state. Consequently, the party dissolved itself after 1945, with its members joining other Indonesian political parties, particularly Islamic ones. Moreover, the pai stood out for its self-criticism in its questioning of Ḥaḍramī traditions, including gender roles and the internal hierarchy of the community (De Jonge 2009). The pai was particularly aimed at bridging the divide between BāʿAlawi and non-BāʿAlawi Ḥaḍramīs, and it did...

so not by finding solutions in the realms of genealogy and theology but by defining Indonesian nationalism as a common ground for all Ḥaḍramīs that had migrated to, or had been born in, the former Dutch colony.

Note, however, that despite their ideological differences, these various groupings of Ḥaḍramīs in Indonesia share one important character, namely, a combination of cosmopolitanism and resolute localism, making them into what Ho (2006:31) describes as ‘local cosmopolitans’. They were embedded in local relations and networks but simultaneously maintained connections with distant places. As migrants or descendants of migrants, Ḥaḍramīs in Indonesia often identify themselves with the host land as much as with their ancestral homeland. One entailment of this local cosmopolitanism is that Ḥaḍramīs tend to see themselves as both affines (Ho 2006) and ‘natural leaders’ (Mandal 1997) of other Indonesian Muslims. What this means is that fighting alongside, or on behalf of, other Indonesians for various local, national, or ‘native’ causes is part of their diasporic performativity, as several historians working on Ḥaḍramī diaspora in other parts of the Indian Ocean have shown (Bang 2003; Jacob 2019). This historic trope is important to bear in mind, as it helps us to make sense of the current participation of Ḥaḍramī Indonesians on the national political stage. Actions performed and claims made by Ḥaḍramī figures tend to be about religion or indigenous rights as opposed to ethnicity or diasporic belonging. But we should not lose sight of the fact that those very actions and claims made by Ḥaḍramīs on behalf of other Muslims are forms of a diasporic performativity. Consequently, diasporization and active participation in national politics can be conceived not necessarily as two opposing dynamics but rather as one and the same process facilitated by the co-constitutive nature of Indonesia’s religio-political field.

The nationalism of the PAI, however, delinked this trope of local cosmopolitanism, insofar as it sees resolute nationalism and diasporization as mutually exclusive. This, in turn, expedited processes of Ḥaḍramī diasporic disembedding, that is, of disassociating oneself from one’s diasporic community. Local cosmopolitans became increasingly seen as not adequately patriotic. Becoming Indonesian was the order of the day and not maintaining one’s Ḥaḍramī identity, although the latter did not disappear and even experienced a revival in the 1990s (Alatas 2016; Slama 2005). Yet this modern form of diasporic disembedding, which was (ideally) accompanied by a re-embedding in a national community, had been preceded by older processes through which Ḥaḍramīs lost their standing in their diasporic community or their Ḥaḍramī identity altogether. After all, being local cosmopolitans entails the risk of becoming too localized. In addition to repeated intermarriages over several generations, ideological-cum-religious factors have played a role in this from early on (Berg
1989 [1886]:138). Especially among BāʿAlawīs, not adhering to their Ḥaḍramī Sufi tradition can easily result in a process of diasporic disembedding that is difficult to reverse, precisely because that Sufi tradition was what linked Ḥaḍramīs living across the Indian Ocean to their ancestral homeland. This leads us to the first of our two cases that we want to discuss in more detail.

3 Diasporic Return as Re-embedding

Habib Muhammad Luthfi b. Ali bin Yahya (b. 1947) is one of the most influential Muslim scholars in contemporary Indonesia. Born into a BāʿAlawī family that has lived in Java for seven generations, Habib Luthfi is a famous preacher and a master (murshid) of the Khālidī-Naqshbandī and Shādhilī Sufi orders. Since 2000 he has been the chairman of the Association of Recognized Sufi Orders in Indonesia (JATMAN). Considered by many of his followers as a living saint, Habib Luthfi’s scholarly and saintly fame attracts people from all walks of life to seek his advice on myriad issues, from Islamic law, ethics, politics, and business to arcane problems that demand a spiritual resolution.

While most BāʿAlawī scholars in contemporary Indonesia are the students of older BāʿAlawī scholars, Habib Luthfi studied under Javanese scholars. He attended a Javanese pesantren (Islamic boarding school) before embarking on a life of peregrination to study under many Javanese scholars. His principal teacher was the Khālidī-Naqshbandī and Shādhilī Sufi master Abdul Malik b. Muhammad Ilyas (d. 1980) of Purwokerto (Central Java) under whom he studied for more than a decade. Malik initiated Habib Luthfi into both the Khālidī-Naqshbandī and the Shādhilī Sufi orders and appointed him a master of both orders. As Malik’s successor, Habib Luthfi inherited his teacher’s disciples and is authorized to initiate more people into both orders.

Coming from a thoroughly localized Ḥaḍramī family, attending a traditionalist Javanese pesantren, and living with Javanese scholars in different localities shaped Habib Luthfi’s ability to engage and interact with the broader Javanese society that usually lies outside the parochialized social circle of most Ḥaḍramīs in Java. His competency in several local languages and his early exposure to Javanese scholarly networks prepared him to build alliances that proved vital to his preaching career. Over the years, he has successfully expanded his followings by preaching in different locales while building vast networks that tie

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9 JATMAN was founded in 1957 as an autonomous body (badan otonom) of the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia’s biggest Islamic organization that claims more than fifty million members.
him not only to Java’s traditionalist scholars and their followers but also to
government officials, military leaders, and business elites. Indeed, he owes his
influential position to his ability to bridge these heterogeneous networks, align-
ing them into efficacious constellations, and his perseverance in ascending the
ladder of Indonesia’s biggest Islamic organization, the traditionalist Nahdlatul
Ulama (NU).

Notwithstanding his national prominence, Habib Luthfi’s authority as an
Islamic scholar and Sufi master remains to a large extent unrecognized by
his fellow BāʿAlawīs, whether in Indonesia or in the Ḥaḍramawt. This is due
primarily to his educational trajectory that diverged from the trend of most
BāʿAlawī scholars. While Habib Luthfi’s formative education prepared him to
build durable networks among the Javanese, which have been key to his suc-
cess, in the eyes of most BāʿAlawīs, Habib Luthfi’s local education at the hands
of Javanese scholars was simply inadequate. Equally problematic for his Bā
ʿAlawi peers is his initiation into the Khālidī-Naqshbandī and Shādhilī orders,
instead of the BāʿAlawī’s own Sufi order, the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya. To comprehend
why this is seen as troubling, we need to understand how the master-disciple
relationship, as practised among the Sufis, involves genealogical adoption, in
this case, the genealogy of a Sufi initiation (silṣila) as opposed to a bloodline
(nasab). Silṣila connects Sufi disciples to their master (shaykh or pīr), all the way
to the founder of the order, and ultimately to the Prophet Muḥammad. Being
a disciple of a Sufi master involves a renunciation of former ties and surren-
dering oneself to the master. In exchange for disciples’ loyalty and attachment,
the master provides them with support and protection (Hammoudi 1997:96–7),
as well as a silṣila, thereby incorporating them into a distinct spiritual fam-
ily. In this sense, adoption of another silṣila by a BāʿAlawī may be seen as
a betrayal of one’s diasporic identity precisely because the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya
serves as the framework of diasporic ties and solidarity that engender moral
relations between Ḥaḍramīs living across the Indian Ocean and their ancestral
homeland. As Ho (2006:28–31) makes clear, the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya has for long
dominated the Ḥaḍramī diasporic representations, encapsulating discourses
that mobilize places, texts, and persons in meaningful narratives of travel and
diaspora.

Habib Luthfi’s adoption into the Khālidī-Naqshbandī and Shādhilī silṣila and
his subsequent role as the master of both orders was the foundation of his reli-
gious authority. Owing to the popularity of both orders among Indonesians,
Habib Luthfi was able to become widely recognized, thereby opening up poss-
sibilities that were not available to his fellow BāʿAlawīs. Unlike other BāʿAlawī
scholars, Habib Luthfi’s religious authority was built through his adoption of a
non-Ḥaḍramī silṣila, his reliance on non-Ḥaḍramī networks, and his mobility
outside Ḥaḍramī diasporic circuits. This, in turn, delegitimized him in the eyes of his fellow BāʿAlawīs. To win their recognition, he needs to re-embed himself in the Ḥaḍramī silsila of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya. Indeed, he has been preoccupied with this project for close to two decades.

Interestingly, Habib Luthfi’s strategy of re-embedding revolves around building the tombs of so far six of his little-known ancestors in different locations in the central and western parts of the island of Java. At each of these sites, Habib Luthfi instituted annual commemorations (ḥawl) attended by thousands of the Sufi master’s followers. These commemorations afforded Habib Luthfi with the ability to publicly introduce his entombed ancestors through sermons that present them as scholars, saints, and masters of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, despite the lack of corroborative textual records. He speaks of his ancestors in ways that resonate with the biographies of successful local-cosmopolitan BāʿAlawī scholars and saints found in the canonical biographical encyclopaedias (tarājim)—a success built on the combination of scholarship, sanctity, mobility, vast transoceanic networks, and the holding of strategic leadership positions in particular localities. By building the mausoleums of his little-known ancestors and organizing commemorations in their honour, Habib Luthfi has been able to re-embed himself as a lineal successor of an old but forgotten BāʿAlawī saintly lineage. This, in turn, allows him to present himself not only as a master of the non-Ḥaḍramī Khālidī-Naqshbandī and Shādhilī Sufi orders but also of the Ḥaḍramī Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya that he inherited from his forefathers. This strategy of re-embedding can be further adduced from the changing prayer manual prescribed by Habib Luthfi to be used by his disciples. Prior to 2006, Habib Luthfi assigned the Naqshbandī-Khālidī and Shādhilī manual, al-Ṭarqīb al-uṣūl li tashīl al-wuṣūl (Guarding the fundamentals to assist the communion) composed by his teacher Abdul Malik. In 2006, however, Habib Luthfi composed his own prayer manual, entitled Awrād al-ṭarīqa al-shādhīliyya al-ʿalawiyya (Litanies of the Shādhilīyyā-ʿAlawiyya Order). By rebranding the Sufi order he represents as a combination of the Shādhilīyya and the ʿAlawiyya, Habib Luthfi has been able to re-embed his non-Ḥaḍramī silsila and the authority that comes with it in BāʿAlawī silsila and diasporic narratives.

While Habib Luthfi’s strategy of building the mausoleums of his ancestors and instituting saintly commemoration in their honour is a form of diasporic re-embedding, such acts unfolded in Indonesia’s religio-political field characterized by competitive positioning through the mutual exchange of religious and political leverage. Thus, part of this diasporic re-embedding is an attempt on Habib Luthfi’s part of presenting his ancestors as anti-colonial, local-cosmopolitan Sufi warriors who took part in the struggle against Dutch colonialism alongside well-known Indonesian national heroes like Prince
Dipanegara. They are also presented as the teachers of reputable Javanese scholars and royals.\footnote{See for example: ‘Pemkot Semarang gelar haul Habib Hasan,’ Tribunnews, 1-3-2018, available at https://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2018/03/01/pemkot-semarang-gelar-haul-habib-hasan (accessed 20-7-2019); ‘Pembangunan makam Habib Diyakini dongkrak potensi wisata Semarang,’ Kompas, 17-1-2019, available at https://regional.kompas.com/read/2019/01/17/19182921/pembangunan-makam-habib-diyakini-dongkrak-potensi-wisata-semarang (accessed 15-7-2019); ‘Ditemukan makam Guru Kiai Soleh Darat,’ Radar Semarang, 15-3-2017, available at https://radarsemarang.com/2017/03/15/87233/ditemukan-makam-guru-kiai-soleh-darat/ (accessed 3-2-2018).} In this sense, Habib Luthfi’s diasporic re-embedding is inseparable from—though not reducible to—his attempt to create a prestigious space for himself and his ancestors in Indonesia’s national narrative that, in turn, allows him to participate in the contemporary religio-political field from a privileged position. In short, the mausoleums and saintly commemorations built and organized by Habib Luthfi in honour of his ancestors are simultaneously acts of diasporic re-embedding and national positioning. This case thus points to how diasporic return does not necessarily revolve around the conception of an ancestral homeland, and instead may take the form of a genealogical re-embedding intertwined with the religious and national politics of the host land.

While so far the response to this self-conscious strategy of diasporic re-embedding has been tepid at best, it may be the case that, as time goes by, Habib Luthfi will be able to garner more recognition from his fellow Ḥaḍramīs. For non-Ḥaḍramī Indonesians, however, Habib Luthfi ultimately remains a Habib. It does not matter for them whether he is accepted or not by his fellow Ḥaḍramīs. In fact, one can say that his identity as a Habib, coupled with his belonging to non-Ḥaḍramī Sufi orders that are popular among Indonesian Muslims, work together to produce a more convincing figure of authority compared to most Ḥaḍramī scholars. Despite this recognition from the broader Indonesian Muslim community, Habib Luthfi continues to subtly re-embed himself in the Ḥaḍramī diasporic framework through rituals and performatives such as those described above—rather than the explicit expressions that usually accompany the conventional mode of identity politics—in the hope of gaining the recognition of his fellow Ḥaḍramīs. Such recognition is exactly what has been garnered by Anies Baswedan, who enjoys a high standing among Ḥaḍramīs in Indonesia today due to his exceptional career in the realm of politics, and not religion, which makes his case—at least at first sight—quite different from that of Habib Luthfi.
Diasporic Return as a Re-encounter

Anies Baswedan is one of Indonesia’s most popular politicians. He stems from a highly regarded, non-BāʿAlawi Ḥaḍramī-Indonesian family that has been well-known not only within the Ḥaḍramī community but also among society at large since the late colonial era. His grandfather, Abdurrahman Baswedan, was one of the founders of the aforementioned PAI. Due to his activism in the PAI, Abdurrahman Baswedan managed to enter the circle of Indonesia's nationalist leaders, becoming a member of the Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (BPUPKI, Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence), a political body established under the Japanese occupation. After Indonesian independence, Abdurrahman Baswedan was appointed as vice-minister of information. He also joined the reformist Islamic Masyumi Party after the PAI had been dissolved, in accordance with its ideal that Ḥaḍramis should fully integrate into Indonesian society (De Jonge 2004; Suratmin and Kwartanada 2014). In November 2018, he posthumously received the title of national hero (Pahlawan Nasional).

Following his parents, who both were academics at universities in Yogyakarta, Anies Baswedan initially pursued a career in academia. He studied economics at Yogyakarta’s Universitas Gadjah Mada (Gadjah Mada University), one of Indonesia’s most prestigious academic institutions, where he also joined the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Muslim Students’ Association). He then moved to the United States to pursue an MA at the University of Maryland and a PhD in political science at Northern Illinois University. Only two years after finishing his PhD in 2005, he was appointed rector of Universitas Paramadina (Paramadina University) in Jakarta, an Islamic private university established by Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005), one of Indonesia’s leading Muslim intellectuals who had advocated an understanding of Islam that values tolerance, democracy, and pluralism. In this position, he was able to strengthen his networks in Jakartan elite circles, which formed the basis of his meteoric rise in politics. In 2014, he made a crucial step forward by joining the presidential campaign of Joko Widodo, the then governor of Jakarta. After the latter had won, he was rewarded with the position of minister of education and culture.

Up to this point, both his academic and political careers showed no signs of any reliance on Indonesian Ḥaḍramī networks. When one of the authors of this article interviewed him in November 2007, shortly after he had become rector of Paramadina University, he said that at the time when he was a student in Yogyakarta, the Ḥaḍramī organization Al-Irsyad opened a branch in the city. He was not happy with this development because for him, student cities like Yogyakarta provide opportunities for young Ḥaḍramis to engage with
other Indonesians beyond their community. He worried that the presence of Al-Irsyad would lead young Ḥaḍramīs to mainly engage with other Ḥaḍramīs, just as they, he insinuated, do in their hometowns. Echoing the nationalist ideology that once had been propagated by his grandfather and the PAI, he was opposed to ‘creating a small Pekalongan, a small Cirebon’, or ‘a small Ampel’—referring to major Arab quarters on the island of Java—in Yogyakarta.11

As we have outlined so far, Anies Baswedan’s biography very much corresponds with the ideals of Ḥaḍramī assimilation that have been handed down in his family since his grandfather became an Indonesian nationalist. Such ideals posit the need for Ḥaḍramīs to become fully nationalized; this contrasts with the older and more ambiguous Ḥaḍramī ideals of local-cosmopolitanism. Baswedan’s main network was that of the HMI, which allowed him to reach the position of rector of Paramadina University, an institution geared towards urban, English-speaking, and internationally minded clienteles. At that time, he embodied a certain degree of Western-oriented cosmopolitanism, though one that differs from, and does not rely on, older Ḥaḍramī diasporic cosmopolitanism. It is thus not surprising that during the period leading to his appointment as minister, his being of Ḥaḍramī descent was never a public issue. Indeed, it was never even accentuated.

In 2016, however, his fate began to change, which, as it turned out, also had its consequences for his relationship to the Ḥaḍramī community as well as the public perception of his Ḥaḍramī background in general. After he lost his position as minister of education and culture, he became a candidate for the governorship of Jakarta. This gubernatorial campaign was fateful for Baswedan in several respects. He ran against the incumbent, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly called Ahok, an Indonesian of ethnic Chinese background, who was the vice-governor of Jakarta until 2014 when Joko Widodo, the then governor, was elected president. Ahok was held in high esteem by many Indonesians due to his uncompromising stance against corruption and his ability to make Jakarta’s notoriously inefficient bureaucracy more effective, resulting in visible urban development. However, he was also a controversial figure among some Muslim groups, not least because of his ethnic Chinese background and his being a Christian. In September 2016, he made a statement that marked the beginning of the end of his political career. In front of a Muslim audience, he

11 Interview with Anies Baswedan at Paramadina University, Jakarta, 8-11-2007, conducted by Martin Slama. Pekalongan and Cirebon are cities with a sizeable Ḥaḍramī population on the north coast of Central and West Java respectively; Ampel is the name of the Arab quarter of Surabaya, Indonesia’s second-largest city, where Sunan Ampel, one of the nine Islamic saints that are popularly known as having introduced Islam to Java, is buried.
referred to a verse of the Qur'an that was used by his opponents to argue that Muslims are only allowed to choose a Muslim as a leader, which Ahok saw as an attempt ‘to fool’ the public. His speech was recorded and published on the official YouTube channel of the government of Jakarta. Moreover, a shortened version of it that made his statement appear to be directed against the Qur’an as such went viral on social media. Protests followed quickly. On 2 December 2016, one of the biggest demonstrations in Indonesia’s history took place at Jakarta’s Medan Merdeka (Merdeka Square). In allusion to that date, the demonstrators became known as the 212 movement and continued to hold rallies against the governor. Ahok was then accused of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison by an Indonesian court in May 2017, shortly after he lost the election against Baswedan.12

The whole election campaign was certainly one of the most bitterly contested in Indonesia’s history, with identity politics taking centre stage. A particularly big role was played by the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defenders Front), a group of vigilantes with a nationwide presence, led by Habib Rizieq Shihab, an Indonesian BāʿAlawī preacher. The Islamic Defenders Front claims to combat vice in society but has become a political player on its own in Indonesia, entering (often rather temporary and unstable) alliances with other political forces (Bamualim 2011; Petrů 2020; Wilson 2015). Not only in Jakarta but also in other cities in Indonesia, the leaders are often Indonesians of Ḥaḍramī descent (particularly BāʿAlawīs), while its members are Muslims of various ethnic groups who can often look back to their previous careers as petty crooks and, in particular, street thugs, and continue to resort to violence in their actions carried out as members of the FPI. Unsurprisingly, Shihab used the Ahok case to boost his popularity and managed to rise to become one of the leaders of the anti-Ahok campaign, which became increasingly appealing to those middle-class Muslims who had had reservations about the governor from early on.

As Ahok’s contender, Anies Baswedan suddenly found himself in the same boat as not just the Ḥaḍramīs of the Islamic Defenders Front but also other Ḥaḍramī scholars—many of whom were educated in the Ḥaḍramawt and other Middle Eastern countries—who supported Shihab’s cause. For many, the new political bloc that Baswedan became aligned to embodies an Islamic ideo-

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logy that is perceived to be at odds with the vision of cosmopolitanism and inclusivist Islam advocated by the elitist Paramadina University and its intellectual founder Nurcholish Madjid. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the cosmopolitan character of this political bloc, constituted as it is not only by local grievances but also by globally circulating ideas of Islamic revivalism and solidarity, visions of an interconnected Muslim world, diasporic networks, and older Ḥaḍramī narratives of local cosmopolitanism. Indeed, figures like Shihab resonate with older local-cosmopolitan Ḥaḍramī figures in that his populist discourse revolves around Islam and indigenous rights instead of focusing on Arab ethnic identity or Ḥaḍramī diaspora. Such claims, made by markedly visible Ḥaḍramī—for instance, a Habib—on behalf of other Muslims, are forms of a diasporic performative that reinforce the trope of Ḥaḍramīs as affines and natural leaders of indigenous Muslims. This diasporic performative is easy to miss without adequate familiarity with Ḥaḍramī diasporic narratives.

Of no less importance was that Jakarta, and in fact the whole nation, could witness a Ḥaḍramī, namely Habib Rizieq Shihab, campaigning for another Ḥaḍramī, that is, Anies Baswedan. At the same time, Baswedan’s popularity rose in Indonesia’s Ḥaḍramī community at large, where more and more Ḥaḍramīs considered him as ‘their’ candidate, whether they resided in Jakarta (and were eligible to vote) or not. Thus, what initially began as an election campaign for one of Indonesia’s most prestigious political offices resulted in an—initially inadvertent—re-encountering of Baswedan with the broader Ḥaḍramī community. Moreover, when Baswedan realized that the FPI was able to mobilize beyond its small core constituency and might actually be useful to gather additional votes, he visited its headquarters and gave a speech there in the presence of Shihab. For this appearance, Baswedan was heavily criticized, as it was widely seen as a betrayal of what he was standing for so far, namely a pluralist, tolerant Indonesia that holds education in high esteem and rejects violence.

However, the FPI and the politics this organization stands for pulled Baswedan even closer to the 212 movement in which it was a central player. This is particularly true for the period of Indonesia’s presidential campaign in late 2018 and early 2019, when President—and former Ahok ally—Joko Widodo was

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13 The position of governor of Jakarta is popularly (not officially) referred to among Indonesian politicians as R13 (Republik Indonesia 3). R1 and R12 are the car plate codes of the official vehicles of Indonesia’s president and vice-president respectively. They are thus popularly used as metonyms for both the president and the vice-president. While the car plate code for the governor of Jakarta is B1 (referring to Jakarta 1), the governor is often referred to in informal conversations as R13. This shows how prestigious this office has become in popular political imagination, particularly since Jokowi’s career trajectory from being the governor of Jakarta to the president of Indonesia.
running for re-election against the former general Prabowo Subianto and his running mate Sandiaga Uno. The latter was also Baswedan’s running mate and served as vice-governor of Jakarta until he became the vice-presidential candidate. In light of this political constellation, it is not difficult to guess whom the leaders of the 212 movement supported. When they organized an anniversary demonstration on 2 December 2018, it was Baswedan as governor of Jakarta who was in the position to grant permission for the gathering at Merdeka Square again. Moreover, it was also expected that he would give a speech there, addressing the crowd that two years prior had rallied for him, an expectation which he duly fulfilled. The relationship between Baswedan and the Ḥaḍramīs of the FPI thus can be seen as a series of re-encounters that started during the gubernatorial campaign and has not (yet) come to an end since that time. Re-encounters with Ḥaḍramīs of the FPI, in turn, paved the way for subsequent re-encounters with other Ḥaḍramī scholars, including those who frequently visit Indonesia from the Ḥaḍramawt. As governor, Baswedan often welcomes visiting Ḥaḍramī scholars from the Ḥaḍramawt, even those who are known to be unsympathetic to the FPI. He gave permission for Merdeka Square to be used for the purpose of hosting a sermon by the famous preacher from Ḥaḍramawt, Habib ʿUmar bin Hafiz, which was attended by thousands of people. While the use of the square for such a purpose was banned during Ahok's governorship, Baswedan reversed that policy, even personally attending the event to formally welcome Habib ʿUmar. The encounter between Habib ʿUmar and Baswedan was not only an encounter between the governor of the Indonesian capital and a visiting foreign scholar; it was also a re-encounter between a Ḥaḍrami Indonesian and his fellow Ḥaḍrami from the ancestral homeland. A gubernatorial performance has simultaneously become a diasporic performance. In this sense, Baswedan’s encounter with the Ḥaḍramī community, FPI or otherwise, opens up the stage for the re-enactment of the Ḥaḍrami diasporic trope of local cosmopolitanism that envisions diasporic actors as local/national leaders without disavowing their diasporic identity and belonging.

The relationship has in fact been complicated by another variety of movement and return. In April 2017, FPI leader Habib Rizieq Shihab came under increasing pressure by investigations of the Indonesian police that resulted in his flight to Mecca. Only in November 2020 he returned to Indonesia, where Anies Baswedan was one of the first politicians who visited him in his house in Jakarta, a manoeuvre that simultaneously fits into both national and diasporic politics. In December, Rizieq was arrested by the police and confronted with various legal violations, including not adhering to Covid-19 social-distancing measures. On 30 December 2020, the FPI was banned by the Indonesian government. These latest developments certainly do influence the re-encounters
of Rizieq and his Ḥaḍramī associates with Baswedan. However, it is rather unlikely that they will result in the end of Rizieq’s political activities and thus of his relationship with Baswedan.

These re-encounters, however, have left a lasting mark on Baswedan’s image as a politician who initially entered politics with a very different message, as the following episode shows: On 24 July 2019, Anies Baswedan met Surya Paloh, one of Indonesia’s influential media tycoons and chairman of the Partai Nas-Dem (National Democratic Party), so far a stable pillar of Joko Widodo’s ruling coalition with a clear nationalist agenda and strongly opposed to any kind of Islamism. The meeting was widely interpreted as a first attempt to sort out possibilities for cooperating in the 2024 presidential elections, when Joko Widodo will have completed his second term and will not be allowed to run again. In the press conference that followed their closed meeting, this was actually not denied but only downplayed by stressing that Baswedan will focus on Jakarta first. Yet, in an interview with the weekly magazine Tempo, Paloh also emphasized other points that did not wholly reflect the amicable atmosphere that was displayed to the public during the press conference. He stated that in their meeting he had ‘reminded’ (mengingatkan) Baswedan of the importance of ‘pluralism’, of his ‘background as an intellectual’ and of ‘his father and grandfather’s struggle for the nation’.14

That such words about Baswedan could enter Indonesia’s political discourse was completely unthinkable only a few years ago, when he was rector of Paramadina University and, after that, minister of education and culture, allowing him to embody the legacy of the PAI and his grandfather. By saying these words, Paloh certainly touched a raw nerve, that is, Baswedan’s continuous re-encounters with particular representatives of the Ḥaḍramī diaspora that impede any attempts to return to his previous role as committed pluralist under the umbrella of Indonesian nationalism. Yet Anies Baswedan’s political career is not only characterized by this particular, increasingly problematic series of re-encounters, which brings us back to Habib Luthfi and the day on which Baswedan assumed office in Jakarta. Considering what happened on this crucial day allows us to fully develop our analysis of the dynamics of Ḥaḍramī returns as forms of re-embedding and re-encountering that occur in and through Indonesia’s religio-political field.

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5 Crossing Trajectories

So far, we have presented Habib Luthfi bin Yahya’s and Anies Baswedan’s trajectories in Indonesia’s religio-political field as two completely separate life stories. In reality, however, their trajectories crossed several times, especially during the Jakartan gubernatorial election campaign, when Baswedan frequented Habib Luthfi in the latter’s residence in Pekalongan. While these visits were much less recognized by Indonesian media than his interaction with the FPI, they were significant in several respects, and the close relationship between the two figures became apparent when, on 16 October 2017, Anies Baswedan was sworn in as Jakarta’s new governor. Prior to leaving for the presidential palace where the inauguration ceremony was to take place, Baswedan went to see Habib Luthfi in his Jakarta residence to ask for his blessing. The governor-elect was dressed in the formal, white officer suit worn by Indonesian governors and district heads on ceremonial occasions, complete with a black tie and gold shoulder marks. Modelled on the military formal suit, the uniform comes with a black peaked cap with golden embroidery, crowned with Indonesia’s national emblem, the Garuda Pancasila. Baswedan carried the cap in his right hand. As he was about to leave, he politely handed the cap to Habib Luthfi. The Habib took the headgear, recited some prayers and solemnly put it on Baswedan’s head.

This informal but solemn gesture resonates with the recognizable rituals of benediction known to the Ḥaḍramīs and the wider Indonesian Muslim community. Among Bā ‘Alawīs, it is reminiscent of the ritual of the placing by a senior scholar of a special kind of turban on the head of a student who has completed his studies or on the head of a bridegroom before departing for his wedding. In all of these cases, the question of who gets to place the headgear on the recipient is significant, as it points to a position of authority. Here we have a nationally prominent Ḥaḍramī Sufi master, whose authority has not been properly recognized by his fellow Ḥaḍramīs, crowning a Ḥaḍramī Indonesian star politician who once kept a distance from, but is now ensnared in, the Ḥaḍramī diasporic community and its concomitant identity politics. This act illustrates how the two figures, who had been involved with different modes of diasporic return, came to reinforce one another. While during the gubernatorial campaign Baswedan played on his diasporic identity and was fiercely supported by his fellow Ḥaḍramīs, including Bā ‘Alawi figures like Habib Rizieq Shihab, it was Habib Luthfi who in the end got to ‘crown’ the Ḥaḍramī governor. As such, the ritual served as a culmination of their diasporic returns and reaffirmed their diasporic identities. But the question of who gets to place the headgear on the recipient is not the only significant point to consider. Equally important
is the question of what the headgear symbolizes. In this case, what was being placed on Baswedan’s head was the formal service cap of a governor, a headpiece that carries the emblem of the republic. This suggests that while the ritual served to reinforce the diasporic identities of both actors, it also served to reaffirm their Indonesian identity and national stature. Thus, the act can be read as a simultaneous reaffirmation of diasporic identity and Indonesian national leadership, be they spiritual or political. Here, the dynamic of diasporic returns becomes intertwined with the effort to claim Indonesian national leadership to create another performative iteration of Ḥaḍramī local cosmopolitanism.

Nevertheless, Habib Luthfi’s and Anies Baswedan’s diasporic returns remain incomplete and ambivalent. After all, these two figures have never assumed the roles of the typical representatives of their respective BāʿAlawī and non-BāʿAlawī Ḥaḍramī communities. As we have pointed out above, the recognition of Habib Luthfi’s religious authority among BāʿAlawī religious figures in both Indonesia and the Ḥaḍramawt is still limited. His re-embedding efforts have not yet fully transcended the boundaries that distinguish the circle of BāʿAlawī religious figures from other Islamic authorities in Indonesia. It is a return that is still en route and has not yet resulted in a definite arrival. Similarly, Anies Baswedan’s diasporic return remains incomplete precisely because the temporality of his re-encounters mainly unfolds in the shifting and highly contingent realm of electoral politics. The initially inadvertent re-encounter with the FPI evolved into a series of diasporic re-encounters that might continue but might also stop due to changing political constellations. Yet this is not the only re-encounter that we want to highlight here.

Baswedan’s re-encounter with Habib Luthfi can also be seen as a mutual re-embedding of both actors in their diasporic social frameworks, despite the latter’s marginal position in Ḥaḍramī religious circles. Just as in the case of his relationship with Habib Rizieq, what matters here is the public perspective of being close to a ‘habib’, a title that is exclusively used by BāʿAlawī Ḥaḍramīs in Indonesia, and thus to a religious figure of Arab descent. In the eyes of the majority population, by meeting and accepting support from Habib Rizieq and by being ‘coronated’ by Habib Luthfi, Baswedan also associates himself with Ḥaḍramī religious authority, thereby becoming re-embedded in a Ḥaḍramī diasporic social framework. At the same time, there is an intra-Ḥaḍramī perspective that has to be explored as well to understand these re-encounters and re-embeddings, which brings us back to the PAI legacy of Baswedan’s family. As stated above, one of the aims of the PAI and Anies Baswedan’s grandfather was to dissolve the tensions between BāʿAlawī and non-BāʿAlawī Ḥaḍramīs in the name of Indonesian nationalism. In a similar vein, it was national politics—and the gubernatorial elections of Jakarta were a truly national affair—that
brought Anies Baswedan in a position to fulfil the vision of his grandfather by becoming an integrative figure for the whole Ḥaḍramī community, seemingly easily crossing the boundaries between BāʿAlawī and non-BāʿAlawī Ḥaḍramīs. This, however, came at the price of losing his image as an integrative figure in society at large, alienating a significant part of the population.

Reading diasporic politics alongside national politics allows us not only to shed new light on the trajectories of Anies Baswedan’s and Habib Luthfi’s diverging and finally converging careers, but also to develop alternative interpretations of the dynamics that characterize the religio-political field in Indonesia today. The gubernatorial campaign of 2016/17 was thus not only a contest between the camp of the president and his opponents or between Indonesia’s pluralist and Islamist forces or between ‘the Chinese’ and ‘the Arabs’, as it was widely interpreted by observers inside and outside Indonesia; it also comprised complex dynamics of diasporic returns that are easily overlooked when one follows conventional discourses. Habib Luthfi’s role as advisor to those who hold the highest political offices in Indonesia—including President Joko Widodo, who appointed him as one of the nine members of the Dewan Pertimbangan Presiden (Wantimpres, Presidential Advisory Council) in 2019—and his willingness to symbolically crown a non-BāʿAlawī Ḥaḍramī, can also be understood against the backdrop of his rather marginal position in the Ḥaḍramī BāʿAlawī community. Similarly, Anies Baswedan’s comparatively easy (though not necessarily easy-going) re-connection with certain representatives of the community can hardly be grasped without considering the PAI history of his family, which not only made re-encounters smoother but, more than that, made him into an integrative figure for the whole community. More than 70 years after Indonesia’s independence, Indonesian national politics thus still can—admittedly under quite different circumstances than in 1945—unite Ḥaḍramīs and simultaneously elevate them to the highest formal and informal positions, making them into local cosmopolitans who enact their diasporic identity and role precisely by speaking and acting on behalf of Islam and the nation. Moreover, today Ḥaḍramī support for a Ḥaḍramī politician can be part of a successful election campaign, even though this campaign rested on initially unplanned re-encounters. And even more remarkable, the same campaign can offer opportunities for furthering projects of hitherto unfulfilled diasporic returns that do not necessarily involve a diasporic notion of an ancestral homeland. In other words, the diasporic politics of Indonesian Ḥaḍramīs can only fully unfold, it seems, when it is embedded exactly in this realm of national politics that allows for diasporic returns in multiple guises, including the conscious re-embedding and the ambivalent re-encounters that we have analysed in this article.
Finally, it is important to note that neither Habib Luthfi nor Baswedan are consciously trying to alter broader ideas of Ḥaḍramī identity and authority. In fact, their actions fit into the long historical trope of Ḥaḍramī identity and authority as affines and ‘natural leaders’ of local Muslims that we have previously discussed. Nor can we say that they are simply using Ḥaḍramī identity and authority to raise their national credentials, as for Ḥaḍramīs the two are often inseparable and in fact co-constitutive. Tapping on to diasporic and national/local identities and credentials is a single process that can encompass diasporic returns and national careers at the same time.

6 Conclusion: Diaspora and the Nation Revisited

We began this article by questioning geographical notions of diasporic return that are centred on the idea of an ancestral homeland as the locus towards which diasporic people’s associations, efforts, and desires for temporal or permanent returns are directed. We argued that diasporic return can take on different modalities that can occur in the host land as part of local or national politics without involving any notion of, or travel to, an ancestral homeland. To fully comprehend the trajectories of the two Ḥaḍramī figures discussed in this article, we have interrupted the homeland–return nexus and expanded the semantic field of the notion of diasporic return by exploring two of its modalities, namely, re-embedding and re-encountering. Re-embedding refers to the self-conscious and actively pursued process of the reintegration of actors into their diasporic community and narrative from which they have formerly been estranged. Re-encountering, on the other hand, is a form of inadvertent meetings between estranged actors and their diasporic peers resulting in momentary reconnections that may develop into, or may be interpreted by others as constituting, a more purposeful diasporic return. In this sense, re-encountering can lead to re-embedding, thereby transforming fleeting and momentary events into a more enduring bond. Similarly, re-embedding may open up the possibilities for subsequent re-encounters. As two modalities of diasporic return, re-embedding and re-encountering do not necessarily involve physical travel to an ancestral homeland, but they also do not preclude such mobilities. In fact, what is important about physical travel to an ancestral homeland for members of a diaspora lies in the ways in which such travels facilitate re-encountering and re-embedding.15 Having conceptu-

15 The importance of physical travel in facilitating re-encounters and re-embedding emerges
ally decoupled diasporic return from transnational mobility or ancestral homeland, in turn, allows us to think about returns that unfold in, and are inseparable from, national dynamics.

By situating diasporic politics in a national, religio-political field and by looking at national politics through a diasporic lens, our analysis complicates the general conceptions of diaspora and the nation and the relationship between the two. In regards to the former, our examples point to forms of diasporization that do not exclusively rest on displacement or migration but that are also connected to processes and practices that can indeed (re)emerge long after migration and localization. These entail forging relationships to a real or imagined origin and positioning oneself in a particular social framework and narrative. Such practices need not involve a temporary or permanent return to the homeland. Instead, diasporization can unfold, as in the careers of figures such as Habib Luthfi and Anies Baswedan, in, through, and as an integral part of, a national religio-political field. Such processes are not seen as problematic, less-patriotic, or less-diasporic to Ḥaḍramīs (aside from the early PAI generation) and instead are recognizable as diasporic returns owing to their resonances with a long history and narrative projections of Ḥaḍramīs as local cosmopolitans.

With regard to the nation, the examples we have discussed contradict cases that point to the tension between diasporic and national politics, or those that suggest diasporic credentials as a counterstrategy to nationalisms.16 The two figures discussed in the article champion Indonesian nationalism without seeing their involvement in national and diasporic politics as contradictory. Both cases indicate an interesting twist with regard to the frequently assumed tension between the nation as the immediate political context of diasporans and the diasporic homeland as a real or imagined entity. The entanglement of nation and diaspora facilitated by the modalities of return that we have explored in this article does not necessarily point to significant frictions. It is this aspect of diaspora and its relationship to the nation that we contend deserves much more attention in the study of diasporas, in the Indian Ocean world and beyond, as well as in the analysis of Indonesian politics. Observing the possible entanglements between diasporic and national politics have allowed us to open up a new perspective into contemporary Indonesian power struggles. This previously uncharted perspective has so far eluded the analyses of observers of Indonesian politics and religion due to their privileging

16 See, among others, Chen 2018; Cohen 2008; Ho 2006; Mandal 2018.
of the nation, Islam, and other contemporary transnational influences (usually posited in statist frameworks) without taking into account the equally constitutive role of diaspora and diasporic politics that can indeed rest on complex, yet subtle, dynamics of return.

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