One of the best expositions of Hijrah is found in the writings of Shehu Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817). Shehu views the Prophetic sunnah of Hijrah in the traditional religio-legal framework and throws into relief its ideational value for the Muslim polity. There are two main points in Shehu's contribution to this doctrine. First, he views Prophet's Hijrah as a normative sunnah. Second, he refutes the view that the normativeness of this sunnah ceased with the Prophet himself. Besides the treatment of the subject in his other writings, Shehu discusses the doctrine of Hijrah more fully in the book under review: Bayan Wujūb al-Hijrah 'alā al-ʿIbād... (Statement about the Duty of the People to Migrate). The book has been edited, annotated and translated by Fathi Hasan al-Maṣrī.

It is the ultimate irony that the editor and English translator of such an eminent work has failed to appreciate Shehu's contribution. Consequently, his analysis and criticism of Shehu's conception of Hijrah are nothing more than a futile exercise in oversimplification and academic insensibility.

Dr. Masri refuses to see any similarity between the Prophet's Hijrah (620) and Shehu's migration from Degel to Gudu (1804). According to him Shehu was "obliged to exploit all possible avenues for the success of his Jihād". (Introduction, p. 6) According to
him, Shehu allegedly misquoted and misinterpreted the earlier authors such as Ahmad Baba. (p. 12, 13). He even doubts Shehu's integrity as a scholar by questioning his reference to books which, according to Masri, never existed. (13). He condemns Shehu's method of reasoning as well. According to him Shehu limits himself to the Qur'an and Hadith and does not cite any authority from fiqh to support his views on hijrah (p. 26). Masri questions comparability of Shehu's Hijrah with that of the Prophet as follows:

"The Hijrah of Shehu is paralleled in Sokoto sources with the Hijrah of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina. But in actual fact it was quite different from that of the Prophet, not only because the Fulani in Hausa Land were accustomed to frequent migrations from one place to another, but mainly because the Prophet had fled secretly the night it was planned to kill him and he was pursued by his enemies till they lost the trace of him. In the case of the Shehu, it was no secret that he would leave Degel for Gudu and the preparation for the move took over a month......The way this migration was undertaken shows that the Shehu was not in a strong enough position to resist the power of Gobir at that particular time. The hijrah therefore must be seen partly as a way of mustering his community". (p. 11 emphasis by the reviewer).

Masri, thus refutes any parallelism between the two Hijrahs. Firstly, because the Prophet's Hijrah was secret and the Shehu's was not. Secondly, Shehu's hijrah was designed to muster his strength. He elaborates this point further on the following grounds:

i. Shehu's hijrah was directly connected with his plans for Jihād. The migration of his followers was necessary for the supply of provision and of warriors.

ii. Shehu's followers were scattered in different places, the Hijrah brought them together at one place.
iii. Hijrah meant defiance against Hebe rulers. (26)

Although Masri does not say it in so many words yet he implies that the Prophet's hijrah had no such designs. Perhaps he means that the main objective of the Hijrah of the Prophet was to escape from the persecution in Mecca, and hence it is not a normative Sunnah as perceived by the Shehu or in the Sokoto literature.

Shehu's second main argument that Muslims are duty bound to abide by the sunnah of the Hijrah even today is also criticised by Masri. He says:

"Shehu does not quote any fiqh authority on the obligation of Hijrah. He only quotes al-Wansharisi (1507), otherwise quotes from the Qur'an and Ḥadīth." (p. 26)

In our view the main cause of misunderstanding the Hijrah lies in its conception and translation as fleeing. At best one can count it as one of the connotations of the word ḥajm. Its primary meaning is to cut off friendly relations with someone. To "abandon" or "withdraw" are its secondary meanings. To "escape" or "flee" are fringe connotations in its semantic field. Montgomery Watt observes, therefore:

"Thus ḥidjra properly speaking does not mean 'flight', as it has been traditionally translated but connotes primarily the breaking of ties of kinship or association". (E. I. III, 366).

Apart from the dictionaries, the best evidence can be found in the Quranic usage. In the Qur'ān various derivates of the word Hajr have been used.

The word Hajar has been used to mean to 'reject' (xxiii: 68), to 'shun' (LXXIV: 5), to 'depart' (XIX: 46), or to 'banish' (IV: 33, XXV: 30). It is the derivative 'Hājara' (XLIX: 9), II: 218, III, 195) and 'Muhājir' (IX: 101, 118, XXXIII, 6, XLIX, 8, LX: 10,
VIII: 72) which might sometimes mean to "flee". In fact M. Pickthtal does translate it as such, and even defines the term Muhājirūn (IX: 100) as "the fugitives from Mecca to Al-Madinah". A brief analysis of the verses however, shows that it is only an interpretative translation and is not justified by the Quranic context. Firstly, the sentence hājārū is most often combined with Jāhādū. To translate them as "They fled and waged war" does not properly suit the context. 'Flight' implies to run and escape from some danger and it is not a suitable description of a person who is going to wage Jihād. The verse III: 195 mentions the persons who are blessed with the rewards of paradise. They are the ones who 'fled', "were driven forth from their home" and "suffered damages for my cause", "they fought and were slain". In fact these are two different categories: Those who were driven forth are involuntary migrants while the others are voluntary migrants. Both merit reward, yet the first ones simply because of their migration and Jihad, while the others because of the damages they suffered, although they had not undertaken migration by their own will. In fact the Qurʾān does not use the word "hājārū" for them; it describes them instead by "wa ʿukhrījū", a passive tense.

Referring to the situation of Mecca, there were some persons who remained behind in Mecca and did not migrate to Medina. Apparently they were not in danger. Yet the Qurʾān enjoined them to migrate:

"Lo! Those who believed and left their homes and strove with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah, and those who took them in and helped them; these are protecting friends, one of another. And those who believed but did not leave their homes, ye have no duty to protect them till they leave their homes."

One can conclude from the Quranic context only this that the hijrah or migration is not necessarily related to 'protecting one's life' and hence to flee from danger. Otherwise the Qurʾān would not reprehend those who did not migrate.
"They will say: we were oppressed in the land. (The angles) will say: was not Allah's earth spacious that ye could have migrated therein? As for such, their habitation will be hell, an evil journey's end", (Al-Qur'ān, IV: 97)

The Qur'ān exempts only those men, women and children who do not have the means and are unable to devise a plan and are not shown a way". (IV: 98)

On the other hand to flee from any danger and to migrate without an objective does not constitute hijrah in the Qur'ānic terminology. When the Jews plotted against the Prophet to force him to migrate from Medina, he resisted. In the words of the Qur'ān:

"And they indeed wished to scare thee from the land that they might drive thee forth from thence, and then they would have stayed there but a little after thee". (XVII: 76)

We have seen that in the Qur'ānic usage, not only that the word hijrah does not always mean fleeing, but it is also associated with Jihad, contrary to Masri's conception who finds this association only in Shehu's book. Let us now turn to examine the event of Prophet's Hijrah. If it was a flight and if it was not connected with Jihad, one need not deny the fact that there was an attempt on Prophet's life in 622, but one must not also overlook the fact that this attempt was not the cause of his migration. It was made when he was scheduled to migrate to Medina on that day. The Meccans would have been happier to know of his migration and would not have prevented him from doing so and the Prophet would have declared it openly, like some of his companions, had the Meccans not considered Hijrah a threat to their position in the Arabian Peninsula. The facts that the Prophet kept his plans secret, the Meccans made an attempt on his life on the night of his departure and pursued him on his way to Medina to bring him back, only prove that Meccan were desperate to prevent his Hijrah. In other words his Hijrah was the cause for their attempt on his life, not vice versa.
To understand why the Meccans wanted to prevent the Prophet from migration we must look at the context in which the Hijrah took place. It was a few years after the Prophet's declaration of his mission that the Meccans boycotted the Prophet and his clan Banū Ḥāshim from 616 to 619. It was soon after this period that Islam got its converts from Medina and in 621, the first pledge (bayʿah) with the people of Medina took place at 'Aqabah. In some sources it is called a "pact of Hijrah" because immediately after this pact the Muslims in Mecca were enjoined to migrate. In fact, as illustrated by the story of Mujāshi and Mujālid, for a long time, a pledge with the Prophet was believed by the new converts to mean a pledge of Hijrah.

One year later in 622 the second pledge at 'Aqabah was concluded. According to Ibn Iṣḥāq the Prophet took the pledge from the Medinian Muslims in the following words:

"I take your pledge that you will fight to defend me as you will defend your women and children".

Ibn Hishām calls this pledge "bayʿat al-Ḥarb" (the war pact). The full text of the pledge is reported by Bukhārī on the authority of ʿIbādah b. al-Ṣāmit, a companion of the Prophet. After reporting the text ʿIbādah adds: "it was a "bayʿat al-Ḥarb." When the contents of the second pledge came to the knowledge of the Meccans they tried to intervene. They could not get hold of the leaders or members of the pact. They could only capture Saʿd b. ʿIbādah on his way to Medina. He was beaten and molested but was released on the intervention of Muṭʿim b. 'Adī.

Between these two pledges most of the Muslims in Mecca had migrated to Medina. On the conclusion of the second pact Abū Bakr also started preparing for Hijrah. But the Prophet asked him to postpone until both could travel together as the last of the migrants. It is obvious that if the Prophet was departing Mecca because his life was in danger, he would have
done so at the first available opportunity. He was not only delaying his own departure but was also asking his close associate to postpone till the end.

From the above we may conclude that Prophet's hijrah was not a 'flight'. It was a political manoeuvre and the Quresh saw in it a threat to their political position in the area. They left no stone unturned to prevent Prophet's migration yet the Prophet succeeded in outmanoeuvring them. In the words of the Qur'an:

"And when those who disbelieve plot against thee to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but Allah (also) plotteth; and Allah is the best of plotters" (viii: 30)

The event of Hijrah is so characteristic of the Prophet Muhammad that he and his followers were known by this appellation among his contemporaries. In fact this was known in the ancient scriptures as a sign of his mission.

During the Prophet's journey to Syria, more than 15 years before the declaration of his mission, a Nestorian Christian monk told his companion Maysirah; "He is the last of the Prophets. I wish I were alive when he shall be enjoined to migrate". A Jewish scholar Zubayr b. Baťa used to say: "The ancient scriptures mention a prophet Aḥmad who will migrate to the land of the Qarẓ." Another savant of ancient lore Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl waited for the arrival of a prophet 'whose name is Aḥmad. This city of Mecca is the place where he will be born and where he will be called upon to mission. Thereupon his people will drive him out because they will oppose his message. He shall migrate to Yathrib where his mission will succeed." Waraqah b. Nawfil also confirmed these prophecies about Muḥammad and wished he were alive to witness the event of Hijrah.

In the non-Arabic sources we find the coptic saint Samuel of Qalamūn foretelling of "a people who are migrants (muhājirūn)".
In his studies of Greek Papyri of early Islamic period A. Grohmann finds that earlier designation of Muslims in these sources dating back to 642 is "magaritai". R. Duval and F. Nau, the scholars in Syriac papyri note that in the papyri dating back to 640 the Muslims are called "mahgre" or "mahgraye."

Both of these appellations seem to be Greek and Syriac versions of the Arabic word Muhājir. The authors of Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World argue that Syriac mahgre is a genealogical name for the descendents of Abraham by Hagar. In fact they claim that Islamic beliefs and history are heavily influenced by Hagarism. Their analysis is however misled by their obsession of tracing almost everything in Islam to Hagar, Prophet Abraham's Egyptian wife. They have reduced Islam to be an ethnic cult. On the contrary, if they had taken hijrah instead as a focal point their analysis would have been much more meaningful.

The ethnic affiliation of the word mahgraye is not supported by evidence. In Syriac documents the verb "ahgār" means 'to convert to Islam'. In a Syriac document 'Abdullah b. Darrāj, who was Mu'āwiya's mawlā (charge), is called "mahagraya". If this designation were ethnic it would not be spoken for a person who was not a descendant of Hagar. In fact, one can read in Ibn Khaldūn's discussion of Hijrah that the Bedouines were distinguished as Arabs from the Muhājirūn because the inhabitants of the desert were not required to migrate. In other words "Muhājir" and "A'rāb" were opposed to each other. Salmah b. Akwa', a companion of the Prophet went back to live in the desert during the Umayyad period. Hajjāj reproached him for becoming an Arab. Salmah replied that he was allowed by the Prophet to live in the desert. Furthermore the Bible experts observe that Abraham's wife's name 'Agar' or 'Hagar' was not an Egyptian name. It is a semitic name which "may mean flight or something similar". It is quite probable that she was called Hagar because she migrated with the infant Ismā'īl to the place now known as Mecca. In that case the hijrah is the common reason for both appellations of "Hagar" or "mahagraya".
Now to come back to Masri's claim that there is no similarity between the Prophet's Hijrah and the Shehu's hijrah because the former was a secret flight to save life while the latter was a political manoeuvre, one can see clearly that it is untenable. On the contrary one can see that the Hijrah was considered the most distinct characteristics of the Prophet and the Muslim Ummah by ancient and contemporary records. Unlike exodus and flight it was a political step which was preceded by pacts of war, and which was conceived as interlinked with Jihād.

If one compares Shehu's Hijrah in this perspective of Prophet's Hijrah one cannot fail to notice the parallelism.

First of all there is a similarity between the circumstances that led to Hijrah. According to the Infāq al-Maysūr Shehu's activities were taken as a threat to the political position of the rulers of Gobir. Shehu was persuaded to desist from his preaching. His followers were persecuted. Later, he was asked to migrate. He refused to migrate without his followers. When the Shehu allowed his followers to migrate in smaller groups they were attacked and looted by the rulers. It was under these circumstances that the Shehu took pledge of his followers. According to Muḥammad Bello:

"We gathered together and held a council on our state of affairs. We resolved that it was not befitting our people to be a crowd without a leader. We therefore pledged to obey the Shaykh in happiness and sorrow. He took pledge of obedience to the Qur'ān and Sunnah." (pp. 96-100)

The same event is reported in the Tazʿīn al-Waraqāt, elaborating Shehu's reply to the ruler in the following words:

"The Shehu sent him the message: 'I shall not abandon my community (Jamā'ah), rather I shall abandon your territory. Allāh's earth is wide
and spacious. Thereupon he asked us to prepare for migration. The ruler ordered not to leave the territory but the Shehu defied him and we migrated...." (p. 55).

Let us not, however, underestimate Dr. Masri's invaluable contribution by making this hitherto unpublished Ms available not only in its original language but in its English translation as well. The book has been diligently edited, annotated by comparisons with Shehu's other works, most of them still unpublished.

M. K. Masud