MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM
IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE
For my parents, Roshan and Shariq Alavi
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I first became familiar with the Arabic script as a child in the north Indian city of Lucknow. Although I could not read Arabic, I learned to read the script, because I was taught to read the Koran by rote. My teacher was a maulvi who came home every morning to read the Koran with me. In the evenings I studied Persian and Urdu, written in the nastaliq script, from my grandmother. My afternoons were spent in the local Catholic missionary school, where I learned English from an Irish nun.

Lucknow is the modern capital of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Indians today associate Lucknow with the courtly culture of Awadh. The city, which is situated by the River Gomti and boasts elegant architecture from a past era, also played an important role in the violence that ensued during the uprising of 1857, an important event that shaped the lives of the men whose stories I will draw on in the following pages. Hindi, written in the devanagari script, is the state language in Uttar Pradesh, and I learned that too. As I moved from one culture to another, from the sounds and cadences of one language to another, from the shapes of one writing system to another, in the course of a single day there seemed to be no apparent contradictions. I registered the differences. But they were collectively an integral part of my little world.
One of my childhood frustrations was that I could never make my cultural world fit into the territorial and political contours of nation-states as marked in geographical maps. My childhood world was both wildly cosmopolitan and disappointingly parochial. Although I was multilingual, my ability to move from one place to another was rather limited. I was no globe-trotting jetsetter—nor, really, were most Indians during the 1960s, a time when international tourism was within the reach only of the elite few. Was life experienced similarly by Indian Muslims in an earlier time?

This book is an attempt to understand the cultural world of Indian Muslims in the Age of Empire. I have tried to place Indian Muslims in the interconnected and vast Asian continent that was both carved up and sewn together by the Western Empire. Moving beyond binaries such as nationalism and imperialism, the Muslim umma and the European empire, Islam and Christianity, or simply the East and the West, I want to show how the cultural universe of Muslims was actually shaped. British, Ottoman, and imperial networks encouraged the creation of a pan-Islamic global public sphere. I call this the new Muslim cosmopolis. Forged at the crossroad of empires, the Muslim cosmopolis had a scripture-oriented core and a politically reformist shell inspired by Ottoman tanzimat—the administrative and constitutional reforms introduced between 1839 and 1876 to modernize the empire. European imperial tools—steamships, the telegraph, the printing press—made the quick circulation of ideas within the Muslim cosmopolis possible.

At the heart of the imperial assemblage that framed Indian Muslim lives stood the key figure—the individual. In this book, I have consciously shifted our focus away from hazy state policies and administrations and foregrounded the individual. The trajectories of the five lives we will follow reveal that pan-Islamism depended more on imperial networks than on the caliph. The book traces pan-Islamic networks forged by émigrés who made use of earlier merchant and Naqshbandi Sufi routes that linked the Ottoman world to Mughal India. It shows how these early modern Muslim connections intensified due to the support they received from European empires. The dependence on the British and Ottoman Empires lent an intellectually and politically reformist hue to this
book’s Naqshbandi Sufi protagonists. The book elaborates on the successes of individuals as they made imperial borders porous in an age when international law hardened political boundaries. In the chapters that follow, the spotlight is on the underbelly of empires where Muslim cosmopolitans were most active. From this unusual location, Indian Muslims questioned the straitjackets of religious and territorial identities that British rule tried to impose upon them. At the same time, individual actors exploited British imperial networks to build pan-Islamic connections that would one day outlast the empire itself.

What did it mean for Indian Muslims to be part of this new global Muslim community? This is a question that is rarely answered in the current literature, which tends to emphasize an unending clash between nationalism and pan-Islamism in Muslim South Asia. Those who did not participate in the overdetermined clash, such as the five Muslim men whose careers I follow, fell off the pages of history. History did not seem to be able to make sense of such characters. This, then, is the story of what happens offstage, off the page, where a new Muslim network was born in the aftermath of 1857—buttressed by European empires, yet resolutely opposed to them.
Muslim networks in the nineteenth century
Soon after the mutiny-rebellion of 1857 that shook British rule in India, Haji Imdadullah Makki, the Muslim holy man from north India, took refuge in the house of his disciple Rai Abdullah Khan, a zamindar in the Ambala district. Wanted for his role in the 1857 unrest, he was on the run from the British police, who were hot on his trail with an arrest warrant. As he sat hiding in a small shed next to Rai Sahib’s horse stable, the police zeroed in on him. On the pretext of buying a horse, they ordered that they be let into the stable and the adjoining shed. Rai Sahib shuddered as he envisaged the penal consequences he would face if the holy man were discovered in his house. But when the door was unlocked, all that the police found there were a prayer mat spread out on the bed and a water pot with water for drinking and ablutions. There was no trace of Haji Imdadullah Makki. Rai Sahib was visibly moved by this supernatural deed of his revered guest. The police made some inquiries and left, apologizing for the inconvenience they had caused Rai Sahib. When a much-relieved Rai Sahib reentered the shed, he found Haji Imdadullah sitting on his prayer mat, completing the last recitation of his prayers.¹

A few days after this incident, Imdadullah bid a tearful adieu to his disciples and fellow scholars and started on his journey to Mecca,
where he wanted to seek permanent refuge. From the Punjab, via Pak Patan, Hyderabad, and Sindh, in western India, he reached the port of Karachi. Here he boarded a ship to escape to Mecca.2

In the 1860s, his fellow scholar Maulana Jaffer Thanesri, also convicted of supplying money and men to the 1857 rebels, was not as lucky. He was convicted, arrested, and deported to the penal colony in the Andaman Islands. He described his journey to the Andamans as follows:

After two days we were made to board a pedal boat on the river Sindhu, 5 Kos from Multan. We sat in rows with our shackles and handcuffs . . . and reached Kotarsi. From here we boarded a train to Karachi . . . After a week in Karachi we got into a sailing boat called Baglah to go to Bombay. The first thing that struck us was the sea and a range of ships.3

According to Thanesri, the port at Bombay was like a “jungle of ships.”4 He noted:

The ship that carted us from Bombay to the Andamans was owned by the English . . . its entire staff of orderlies and officers were white. And none of them understood Hindustani. The only interlocutor was one Anglophone convict called Motilal Babu. The English spoke only to him. I did not understand a word of English. There were separate diets for the Muslims, Hindus and Punjabis. There was dry fish, rice and lentil for the Muslims, gram for the Hindus, and wheat bread for the Punjabis.5

His excitement on seeing the sea and myriad ships at the Bombay port became one of the most electrifying moments of his journey. Thanesri was surprised to find that the ship had Muslim orderlies. He was not at all surprised when in his words, “They showered us with utmost hospitality when they realized that we were religious scholars.”6

At about the same time, a very revered scholar, Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi, similarly hounded by the police for his 1857
anti-British activities, made a successful escape to Mecca. He, too, had an arrest warrant issued for him, and an award of Rs.1,000 was offered for anyone who gave information about him. He disguised himself, changed his name, and left on foot from his home in Kairana, near Meerut, for Delhi and then proceeded to Surat. From there he took a sailing boat to Jeddah. His huge estate in Kairana, where both his family and workers lived, was confiscated by the British and put up for auction.

The British clampdown on Muslim men of religion after the 1857 mutiny-rebellion saw many fugitives like Imdadullah Makki, Thanesri, and Kairanwi sail across the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal to escape the arm of British law. Since the 1830s, the port city of Bombay had become a popular gateway to Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul for scores of Muslim notables and religious scholars. As these men fled India following the northwest frontier disturbances that had made the British suspicious of men of religion, ships from Bombay carted them across the Indian Ocean to Ottoman cities. In the decades that followed 1857, many fugitive scholars with arrest warrants avoided Bombay for fear of being caught and instead boarded ship from Surat. But those that did visit Bombay were mesmerized by its charm. Its sailing ships excited them, and the sheer scale and number of docked ships waiting to depart intimidated them, invoking the metaphor of the jungle. Additionally, they were worried about the direction of the wind, which determined whether these ships would even be able to sail across the Indian Ocean. On board, the Muslim orderlies of the English ship owners introduced them to the new dynamics of the British-Indian relationship.

Crossing the seas was hazardous as well as enchanting. It transformed lives for good. The ships that carted these Muslim holy men and religious émigrés offered them the material experience of travel in the Age of Empire. Sea journeys afforded them access to the long-standing mercantile networks between the Ottoman and British Empires. These networks, though increasingly controlled by the diplomatic efforts of legal and political experts, intersected with the web of brokers, agents, entrepreneurs, pilgrims, and holy men, as well as the families of religious scholars. The journey across the Indian Ocean familiarized them also with imperial fault lines,
particular as enacted in anti-British protests in Jeddah and Cairo, and also with Islamic intellectual hubs in the Mediterranean world, all of which they tapped to further their agendas and widen their political vision.

The fact that the imperial networks that connected British India with Ottoman cities facilitated much of this port life made the ship itself the conduit to the new and exciting world that was being forged between empires. Its importance as a critical connector that lent a special agency to the individual was heightened by the conjunctural moment at the end of the century—a moment that brought existing commercial links between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean worlds in close correspondence with shared anti-British sentiments, and at the same time elicited a call for individual moral reform to meet the challenges of the age.

The easy mingling of the seafaring cultures and the religious, economic, and political networks that were specially visible at harbors and ports is an apt metaphor for the cosmopolitanism that each of the émigrés that this book discusses embodies—each in his own specific way. Harbors and ports from where émigrés departed (like Bombay, Surat, and Karachi on the western coast of India) and cities where they relocated (Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul) are the obvious sites of this conjuncture. Within India, the penal colony at the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, where the arrested convict émigrés were lodged, constituted the eastern, sea-facing site of their cosmopolis; and the rugged northwestern frontier bordering Afghanistan, where many of them collected to strategize, constituted its nonseafaring end. It is across these sites that scholar fugitives and unlucky convicts constructed a vast cosmopolis, both within India and in the interstices of the British and the Ottoman Empires. This book explores the specific kind of cosmopolitan sensibility that defined this new cosmopolis, which was itself sustained by international trade and the economic networks that stretched across the Indian Ocean.

It details the making of this sensibility via the stories of five Indian Muslim men of religion who were on the proverbial “wrong side” of the 1857 mutiny-rebellion against British rule in India. These included a famous Moplah rebel of Arab origin and Sufi background
in the Malabar region of south India accused of murder and rioting in the 1852 Moplah revolt; two clerics known for their provocative public debates with Christian missionaries on matters of religion; the nawab of the princely state of Bhopal, accused of writing seditious religious literature; and a rabble-rouser reformist activist from the Punjab. Condemned as “outlaws” or “fanatics” by the administration, they escaped from India and moved across the Indian Ocean world. Once outside the borders of British India, their stories fell off the pages of South Asian history. This book picks up where other stories end and shows how the 1857 experience moved across empires via refugees and émigrés. It picks up their trail as they dispersed and networked across various imperial fault lines in the decades that followed 1857.

It analyzes their journeys as they traveled out of India, either literally or in their imagination, and paused at the Asian intersections of nineteenth-century empires. The constellation of the British and Ottoman Empires is viewed as an “imperial assemblage,” and it provides the context within which to study Muslim interconnectedness as forged by these émigrés. Bringing together their biographies, written reflections, journeys, images of the port city and of their lives on the ship, intellectual networks, and imperial politics, the book highlights the ways in which “runaways” carved out a Muslim cosmopolitanism at the cusp of the British and Ottoman Empires.

This cosmopolitanism was partly “traditional” in that it derived from the Koran’s precepts and from the prescriptions of the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet), it invoked the Islamic principle of consensus to reconcile cultural differences among Muslims, and it positioned itself in the “Islamicate” centers of Cairo and Istanbul and in the Islamic heartland of Mecca. However, this cosmopolitanism was also “new” because it built on an Ottoman imperial vision as articulated in the global aspirations of Caliphs Abd-al Aziz (r. 1861–1876) and Abd-al Hamid II (r. 1876–1909), who were the patrons of many of these Indian émigrés. And it used the printing press and Ottoman intellectual energy as deployed by the reformist bureaucrats and moderate ulema in response to the political and financial crisis faced by the empire. The reformists advocated political and moral reform in sync with contemporary ideas of science, reason, and rationality.
These men, ousted from the core of the empire by Abd-al Hamid II, who had little patience with them, located themselves in its Arab provinces, where most Indian émigrés landed. At the same time, Muslim cosmopolitanism also remained dependent on British imperial webs, transportation systems, and modes of communication and information dissemination. This transimperial cosmopolitanism was articulated as a cultural and civilizational view: a universalist Muslim public conduct based on consensus in matters of belief, ritual, and forms of devotion.\textsuperscript{10}

This cosmopolitanism was unique because it conceptualized the Muslim cosmopolis as an intellectual and civilizational zone that transcended political borders, territorial confines, and cultural particularities. And yet its protagonists were very aware of its imperial framing. They sought to encompass the “imperial assemblage” within their capacious global cosmopolis. Self-driven and career oriented, its creators were individuals who were well aware of its specific socioeconomic dependence on imperial networks and the imperially framed commercial world that sustained them.

This cosmopolitanism was neither pan-Islamic in a caliph-centric way nor entirely anti-British. Its protagonists were as much a part of the Ottoman liberal reformist circles as they were aware of their dependence on imperial networks. Indeed, it was the entanglement of the Muslim cosmopolis and world empires that made this cosmopolitanism attractive to Caliph Abd-al Hamid II, who used it as the bedrock of his pan-Islamism. It was neither inspired by Western Enlightenment, nor was it a component of secular, “colonial modernity.” This was a cosmopolitanism of the age of empires that had its own claim to a universalist ethics and even notions of hospitality (\emph{pace} Kant), but based on Islamic scripture and a \emph{tanzimat}-inspired notion of proper public conduct, and embedded in nineteenth-century imperial politics and economic frames of reference. It at once transcended imperial borders in unconventional ways and yet was derived from them. Indeed, it did not reject entirely the territorial borders that continued to define the identity of its protagonists. This is precisely why the twentieth-century nation-states that altered both international commerce networks and recast the imperial terrain in new avatars offered a space where elements of this
cosmopolitanism could linger, waiting for the right moment to ignite. Indeed, it soon became the basis of a global Muslim sensibility that competed with the increasing power of the idea of the nation in the period of high nationalism. Hence we may think of it as the basis for or the prehistory of the idea of transnationalism in the twentieth century.

The “Indian Arab” and the Muslim Cosmopolis

The book begins the story of its transimperial actors with the Arab diaspora in India that emerged between the British and Ottoman Empires and that contributed to the making of the Muslim cosmopolis. Labeled by the British as “Indian Arabs,” these individuals carved out an ecumene between British and Ottoman societies, exploiting to their advantage the imperial rivalries and fault lines of the time. They forged intellectual and political webs between empires and made imperial borders porous.

Diaspora studies centered on South and Southeast Asia have looked at immigrants in these regions from Iran, Afghanistan, and the Hadramawt area of the Arabian Peninsula. These wide-ranging studies have enriched our understanding of the premodern trans-Asian “cosmopolitan” world that was knitted together by merchants, warriors, scholars, and Sufi saints. Identities were hybrid, fluid, multiple, and contingent on the specific dynamics of diaspora societies.11 Most diaspora scholars view the European colonization of host societies as having fissured the premodern cosmopolitan world. As colonial regimes “ordered” societies into a legal-political format, the identities of immigrants were strained as they delinked from their cultural matrix. They were increasingly defined in distinct ethnic terms.12

But were immigrants in the nineteenth century mere pawns in the hands of colonial powers that refashioned their host societies? Did colonial categorizations and ethnic markings sever their wide trans-Asian connections? Was an imposed “indigenization” from above the only option for them? Or did they continue to operate in the trans-Asian region but in new roles as transcultural “diplomats,”
“brokers,” and people who used their new ethnic marking to further their own ambitions?

This book looks at some of these issues as it tracks down Muslim men of Arabic extraction or orientation, located in India, for whom the Indian government constructed the novel category of “Indian Arabs.” At one level, this categorization was a forced indigenization from above. It marked their difference from Indian society in terms of their ethnic uniqueness. Itinerant Arabs were suspect in British India for various reasons: they allegedly preached a reformist form of conservative Islam; they were seen as Ottoman subjects; and most important, they maintained links with the world outside, nurtured global aspirations, and did not correspond neatly to the legal definition of the Indian subject. Indian Arabs unmindful of British attempts to territorially root them continued their forays outside India, which they in no way viewed as contravening their subject status within India. Indeed, they considered their unique trans-Asiatic legacy emblematic of the connected histories of the British and Ottoman societies.

The case study of Sayyid Fadl, a fugitive from the Malabar region of south India, shows how in the late nineteenth century these Indian Arabs used the new imperial networks—the transportation and communication highways—and tapped into imperial rivalries to spread their own networks across Asia. They kept their scripture-based core intact and cannibalized the repertoire of “modern” empires to carve out an ecumene that stretched across the British and the Ottoman Empires. Far from being pawns or the unsuspecting victims of the forced indigenization of their British masters, such men made careers using both the old and the new referents that connected the Western empires in Asia. They maintained their stake in the older kinship, trade, commerce, and information networks, which had from the premodern age knitted together the political economies and cultures of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean worlds. But they cleverly used the new imperial networks as well. The nineteenth-century trans-Asian rivalries between Britain on the one hand and Russia, Persia, and the Ottomans on the other proved particularly useful for them. They cashed in on the fear psychoses of the British administration in India and used imperial
fears and anxieties to further their careers. Also noteworthy was their engagement with the new bargaining chips that functioned as liaison points between empires: the office of the political resident and that of the consul. The story of Sayyid Fadl shows how the use of the new while holding on to the old allowed these men to subvert British efforts to tame them. By the late nineteenth century, they had spread their networks across Asia and had forged global links.

Their networks flourished because British colonial rule benefited from them. The fact that these runaway “Indian Arabs” and “fanatics” were British subjects gave the administration official sanction to meddle in their trans-Asian affairs. At one level, British interest in them was couched in the more genuine concern for the activities of British subjects overseas. But the monitoring of their activities and the intervention in their affairs also provided entry points into the larger imperial politics that framed them. Particularly significant was the issue of British interference in Ottoman rights to sovereignty in the trans-Asian region. The British countered the Ottoman claim to political sovereignty in the region by voicing their concern for the “Indian Muhammadan subjects” located in their territory. Their protection of the Indian Arabs went a long way in denting the pan-Islamic undertones of Ottoman political sovereignty.

Muslim Cosmopolitans on the Move

Chapter 1 lays out the intellectual environment in post-Mughal India that made individuals migrate and become crucial connectors in the imperial assemblage. It maps the specific intellectual context that powered the movements of such émigrés. Most of these men traced their intellectual genealogies to the Delhi Naqshbandi Sufi Shahwaliulla. They interpreted his eclecticism and compromise between the Sufi Ibn-i-Arabi’s inclusive wahdat-ul-wajud (unity of being) and Sirhindi’s conservative wahdat-ul-shahad (unity of existence) to refashion their lives. Many of them collected at the northwestern frontier and fashioned their activism in tandem with the Sikh, Afghan, and Persian societies that they accessed with ease.
The last of these multilingual gentlemen legatees of the Mughal Empire aspired to careers outside Hindustan when the going got tough for them in British India. They wished to forge Muslim unity across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean world so as to set up an alternate cultural imperium that would challenge the Western predominance in the region.

This global thrust was a consequence of the Mughal crisis and the readjustment of the Mughal scholarly elite to British rule. What facilitated their mobility was the legacy of global networks forged during the thirteenth century by Naqshbandi Sufis, networks that had in fact knitted together early modern empires. Mughal India was very much integrated in these networks, which stretched across Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Arab world in the Indian Ocean area. Sufis and texts straddled the Indo-Persian and the Ottoman cities with ease. In the fifteenth century, Abd ur Rahman Jami of Herat (1414–1492), one of the finest commentators on Ibn-i-Arabi, was widely read and popular in both the Ottoman world as well as in India. His status as an “honorary Ottoman” in the sixteenth century was confirmed when Taskoprizadet (d. 1561) included him in his biographical compendium of Ottoman scholars. And evidence of his Indian following is indicated by the fact that the Arabic translation of his Nafahat al-UNS was prepared by an Indian Naqshbandi scholar, Taj al Din Zakariya Dehlavi (d. 1640). Indeed, by 1802, Khalid Naqshbandi, of Kurdistan in north Iraq, who boasted of the influential madrasas and networks he had established throughout Ottoman society, visited the Delhi madrasa of Shahwaliulla and studied with his son, Shah Abd-al Aziz. The significance of India in this global Naqshbandi network was again evident when Sulayman Sa’duddin translated Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani, the Persian work of the Indian Naqshbandi sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, into Ottoman Turkish in 1751. Such movements of Sufi intellectuals and texts underlined the intellectual ferment that welded together early modern empires.

Naqshbandi global networks facilitated the mobility of Mughal legatees in the aftermath of 1857. And Shahwaliulla’s legacy of consensus and compromise, in the context of a diverse Indian society, became an asset in their relocation in Ottoman cities. Indeed, they
exported their accretive Shahwaliulla tradition to the Mediterranean world and wrote consensus literature with greater confidence from the security of their new location. Indeed, cities like Istanbul, with a tradition of producing consensus literature in the context of the growth and social diversity that characterize urban centers, allowed them to write uninhibitedly about the unity of the umma, or community. Their integration into the Mediterranean world was evident in the circulation of many printed Arabic and Ottoman Turkish translations of Indian Naqshbandi literature originally written in Persian. An Ottoman Turkish translation of Sirhindi's *Maktubat* was published in Istanbul in 1866, and Muhammad Murad al-Manzalawi’s Arabic translation of the same text, *Maktubat al-Durar al-Maknunat al-Nafisa*, was printed in the city in 1899.

Because they were multilingual gentlemen, the Indian émigrés were able to carve out an intellectual niche for themselves in the Arabic-speaking Mediterranean world. They were proficient not just in Mughal Persian, but in Arabic as well as in the north Indian vernacular Urdu. This gave them an edge over others in an age of unprecedented mobility. It made it easy for the last of these gentlemen scholars to straddle the Indo-Persian Urdu-speaking societies and the Middle Eastern Arabic world with ease.

The book’s subsequent chapters use the biographies and written reflections of people living and moving between empires to bring the individual to the forefront of the discussion of the making of Muslim cosmopolitanism. This archive also enables a rare insight into the workings of imperialism. It reveals how official borders were made porous by the initiative of individuals who used the infrastructure of modern empires to intensify and make more pronounced the earlier Naqshbandi global connections. The hitherto untold tales of fugitive mullahs and runaways as they negotiated imperial fault lines and borders reveal the workings of imperial politics from below—an aspect that remains ignored in mere political economy analyses of imperialism. Indeed, the book retells via individual tales the story of imperial politics and the making of a cosmopolitan sensibility across its assemblage.

Current scholarship on modern Indian social and cultural history has moved beyond both a nation-state-centric colonial-nationalist
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frame of analysis and a metropolis-centric imperialist historiography. The influential subaltern school of South Asian history has brought the nationalist frame closer to the local peasant societies, and C. A. Bayly and other revisionist scholars have narrowed the gaze on the interstices of the state and society to unravel the nuances of British rule. In recent years, the history of modern India has increasingly been of interest to empire studies. Historians of the British Empire have brought the colony and the metropolis into the same analytical frame and argued that colonizers and colonized were mutually constituted. They have argued for a more complex understanding of imperialism as it unfolded in Asia and Africa by focusing on the “webs of empire” as they intersected across Britain and its controlled territories. Imperial history has also focused on the individual as the key connector between the multiple spatial sites of empire. David Lambert and Alan Lester, Maya Jasanoff, and Dane Kennedy have focused on “imperial careers” across empire, bringing colonized spaces and the metropolis into the same analytical frame without privileging either. Others have highlighted the potential of the biography to become the archive for writing global history.

And yet in the “new imperial” history of empire, despite the stress on the spatial mobility of the individual and the salience of “global moments,” the canvas remains the British Empire and its preoccupation with the tightening of its imperial borders, via land surveys, scientific knowledge, cartography, consular webs, official postings, unprecedented bureaucratization in governance practices, and documentation networks. This “hegemonic” frame of empire is accepted as a fait accompli and shapes models of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and global history. Indeed, the historiographical myopia is not only geographical but also racial: the individuals with careers usually all end up being Britons—with a few obvious exceptions.

This book shifts the focus away from the British territories and puts the spotlight on the interstices—the overlapping space between British and Ottoman societies. It argues that the contours of global history need to be redrawn at the porous intersection of the British and Ottoman Empires. It questions empire-based global history and puts the spotlight instead on a world shaped by networks forged
by émigrés who were beyond imperial control. It rewrites global history by focusing on British subjects (rather than Britons) as key individual players who by virtue of their roles at the imperial interstices are able to offer refreshing insights into the working of empires from the inside. Indeed, the very careers of transimperial subjects who straddled imperial regimes, either physically or even in their imaginations, problematize selfhood and identity, political subjecthood, and religious affinities. Transimperial subjects who invoked knowledge of their parent territory and used kin, religion, and ethnic networks in host regimes were the critical connectors between empires. They became part of imperial politics, exploited the institutional overlaps in competing regimes, cashed in on political rivalries, and shaped their own careers, marking borders where none existed and undoing the established political and legal boundaries. This larger politico-cultural and socioeconomic context between empires is the canvas on which the role of transimperial subjects as agents of change in the long history of imperialism stands out.

Chapters 2 to 6 foreground the individual in the connected histories of the Ottoman and British Empires, writing the story of imperialism from below. They narrate the stories of individual Muslim careers so as to decenter both the European narrative of imperial expansion as well as the Eurocentric way of studying cosmopolitanism as a constituent of colonial modernity and Enlightenment ethics. Each of these chapters puts the spotlight on an individual scholar: Sayyid Fadl, Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi, Maulana Imdadullah Makki, Siddiq Hasan Khan, and Maulana Jafer Thanesri. These men are the cosmopolitan actors of the book—men who moved across the imperial assemblages and used the imperial knowledge, strategies, and rivalries of the nineteenth century to their advantage. They carved out a spiritual and civilizational space between the British and the Ottoman Empires and projected it as their cosmopolis. Here, they articulated a cosmopolitanism that was in sync with the reformist and scientific spirit of the times. This was a cosmopolitanism that forged widespread Muslim connectivity. It derived both from British as well as Ottoman commercial, transportation, counselor, communication, and print networks. Indeed, imperial networks offered the base on which earlier forms of Muslim
connectivity and its repertoire of knowledge and communication skills were easily grafted: diplomacy, kinship ties, and the writing of commentaries on Islamic theological works and its sacred texts. Their lives detailed here offer a fresh perspective on politics and society in the high period of Indian nationalism and global imperialism. They draw our attention to a global history that does not necessarily correspond to the contours of the British Empire.

While this connective-history methodology of looking at global history is pioneering for the study of the “Age of Empire,” it is not so novel for historians of the early modern world. Shifting the focus away from Portuguese and Spanish imperial strides in the sixteenth century, the Ottomanist Giancarlo Casale has argued that the period was the turning point where Ottoman and Mughal global aspirations and political maneuverings made the political history of the century a wider-ambit “world history.” Others, like Cemal Kafadar, critique the nationalist and simplistically ethnic Turkish identity narratives of the early Ottoman Empire by locating early modern Turkish self-representations in the elastic and competing physical and cultural geographies of the Eastern Roman Empire—Rum. These shifting and competing notions of the lands of Rum produced a layered identity for the Turks that mirrored the global reach of their empire. It defied the later simplistic nationalist narratives of reified Turkish identity often produced in response to the globalization drives of the twentieth century. Other early modernists have focused on the individual as a key connector who laid out the contours of the global imperial gaze, made transimperial connections possible, and produced layered cultural and ethnic identities. Natalie Zemon Davis, for example, examines the writings of al-Hasan al-Wazzan, the sixteenth-century North African traveler and diplomat from Fez who was captured and presented to Pope Leo X in Italy by a Spanish pirate. Davis argues that al-Wazzan’s work reflects his negotiation of two cultural worlds: he used techniques taken from the Arabic and Islamic repertoire and combined them with European elements to carve out a niche for himself between two rival imperia. In the process, he made simple ethnic representations of his identity problematic. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanym have argued that South Asian studies should
focus similarly on connected histories as mediated by individuals who traveled to India from the European, Iranian, Central Asian, and Ottoman worlds, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{32} For Europeanists, the pioneering work of Natalie Rothman is significant as it makes a strong critique of studying early modern European history without also examining the crucial institutional, political, and cultural overlaps with Europe’s border-sharing neighbor, the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{33} And Mana Kia and Stefan Reichmuth have similarly pointed at careers in the early modern Iranian world and at the case of the eighteenth-century Arab intellectual Zabidi, respectively, to reflect on the workings of an embracive non-European worldview that has often been ignored in our predominantly British- and European-centric global history map.\textsuperscript{34}

For modern Indian history, it was Leila Fawaz and C. A. Bayly who first offered the conceptual frame for studying nineteenth-century identity formation and politics in the larger geopolitical and sociocultural interstice of British and Ottoman imperial rivals. They pioneered the idea of viewing the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean interstice as the locale in which to study the wider history of nationalisms in the Age of Empire. They focused on the imperial networks of the steamship, the printing press, and the telegraph, along which, post 1850, nationalism was “globalised.” Borders were redefined and reworked and identities reformulated as individuals negotiated the interstices between the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia.\textsuperscript{35} Later, Sugata Bose invited us to view the Indian Ocean as the interregional arena that bridged the geographic and conceptual gulf between the British and the Ottoman Empires and enabled people to move across imperial formations. His Indian Ocean exploration makes us rethink issues of patriotism and nationalism from the viewpoint of the diasporic public sphere.\textsuperscript{36}

This book picks up the lead of this recent scholarship to capture the making of Muslim cosmopolitanism as émigrés from British India sought refuge in the Ottoman world at a moment of acute political crisis. It takes its cue from Dutch and Middle Eastern scholars who have begun to study imperialism and nationalism via porous borders that were negotiated both officially and surreptitiously by individuals. The hugely influential thesis of Eric Tagliacozzo on the
“porous borders” between the Dutch Indies and the British-controlled territories that made contraband smuggling a major avenue for making careers and forging identities has revealed the limitations of working within the official frames of empires. Tagliacozzo’s thesis highlights the role of the individual in studies that explore the history of imperialism bottom-up. Within the field of Middle Eastern studies, Julia Clancy-Smith’s study of contraband economies in nineteenth-century Tunisia and Algeria reveals a “subterranean world of transactions running counter to the aims of imperial states—and to those of North African elites.”

Her case study examining the remarkable career of Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi—an Ottoman Mamluk of Circassian slave origins who was posted in Tunis and who rose to become the major “modernist” reformist intellectual and educationist of French Tunisia—is revealing. It shows the potential of the individual in brokering empires and shaping society and politics from the shadows of empire.

Making a similar case for South Asian history, this book shows that individuals made impervious borders porous, dented claims of foolproof paper tiger empires, and shifted action to the shadows of empire, where they used imperial politics to their advantage. Chapter 2 shows how Sayyid Fadl played the rules of extraterritoriality in very unconventional ways. His interesting life, which straddled British India, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and Istanbul, reveals the significant role ethnically marked and legally stigmatized Muslim subjects could play in shaping both British India’s relations with its Muslim population at home as well as its politics with its Asian imperial rivals abroad.

The mid-nineteenth-century “global moment”—famously known as the era of worldwide revolts that rocked imperial cities ranging from British Delhi, Agra, and Meerut to Ottoman Jeddah, Cairo, Damascus, Alexandria, and Tunis—offered a tailor-made occasion for mobility and transimperial support. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Muslim émigré scholars who made the most of the opportunities that emerged in the “age of revolts.” They operated at the cusp of empires, negotiated imperial fault lines, made borders porous, and shaped the history of imperialism even as its heavy fist impacted them. This larger ambit of spatiality and the imperial littoral renders
weak the claims of both the British “new imperial histories” and the nationalist narratives to offer wide analytical frames, even if they expand their ambit from the core-periphery confines to the larger analytical frame of the “webs of empire.” It also makes the claim that the history of the British Empire is the paradigmatic history of the world look very hollow.

The lives examined here, when taken together, show how what can be called the “spirit of 1857” played out in a global context. Very much like the diasporas of Loyalists in North America who used the defeat of 1776 and the spirit of 1783 to carve out global careers that were self-driven and diverse and that both mirrored and shaped the complexities of the British Empire, the 1857 émigrés also used imperial highways of communication and shaped imperial politics, stamping it with what we can call the “spirit of 1857.” The life and times of each actor in the book show that 1857 may have been a war lost for the rebels but that it generated not simply a widespread anti-British mood but also a public debate on the interpretation of religious scriptures and tradition and discussions on individual authorship, literary styles, appropriation of scientific inquiry, public service, and definitions of loyal subjecthood. It brought home the value of new forms of communication technology like the telegraph and the printing press. The conjuncture of new communication technology and political revolution also meant that 1857 became global news in a very short time.

As news of this cataclysmic event spread globally across the telegraphic cables and via steamships and newspapers, its impact was felt in other British colonies. Responses varied and triggered many new debates on power relations between the colonies and London. Jill Bender explores the career of Sir George Grey, the British colonist in the Cape Colony who sent troops and help to colleagues in India to quell the rebels without London’s permission. His independence triggered official debate on the relations between imperial career diplomats and the government. Later, in New Zealand, he tried to curtail and control the Maori locals using the Indian experience of his colleagues who handled the aftermath of 1857 with proven highhandedness. Again, Britain had to handle the Irish nationalists who, inspired by 1857, mobilized against British rule.
Britain and its colonies were not the only sectors that felt the heat of 1857. Its tremors were felt also in the Russian Empire. Czar Alexander II tried to exploit this moment of British weakness for his own imperial designs in Persia and India. More importantly, discontented subjects in the Ottoman cities of Tunisia, Cairo, Damascus, and Istanbul were inspired to get into political action by Hindustani émigré rebels as well as by news items on the Indian unrest published in national dailies. The rebels of 1857 and runaway militant Sufis in Egypt (like the Sufi Ahmadullah Shah, who was prominent in the 1857 revolt in Lucknow, or Shaykh Ibrahim, also a militant Lucknow Sufi, who settled in Asyut in north Egypt) lent to Ottoman territories the Indian anti-imperial experience. Such rebels, to use Juan Cole’s phrase, “fought 1857 in Egypt.” They and their literature continued to be welcome in Egypt in the two decades leading up to the fall of Egypt to the British in 1882.

Indeed, 1857 precipitated a moment of unprecedented connectivity between the Ottoman and the British worlds. Indian Muslims, dislocated during the mutiny-rebellion, were at the forefront of this connectivity. They experimented with educational, political, reformist, and social packages that were being tried out by subject populations in the Ottoman Arab and African provinces in a period aptly called the Age of Revolutions. The Ottoman bureaucrat scholar and Tunisian intellectual Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi’s *tanzimat*-inspired reformist “Fundamental Pact” was perfected in 1857, and his educational project inspired the Indian educationist Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. This made it more than evident that at certain moments in the long nineteenth century, the ideas and actions of career brokers such as Tunisi could have global resonance.

In the intellectually agile postmutiny context of political and moral reform in India, it was no surprise that news of Khayr al-Din, in distant Tunisia, became more relevant than at any other time. This conjunctural moment ensured that Tunisi’s 1867 major Arabic work on constitutional reforms, *Aqwam al-Masalik li Ma’rifat Ahwal al-Mamalik* (The Surest Path to Knowledge of the Condition of Countries), written with an eye to an audience in the European and Ottoman world, impacted Indian reformists as well. The Indian educationist reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, located in distant
introduction

Aligarh and Delhi, found Tunisi’s ideas compelling. Given the range of languages into which this book was translated, and the large number of Ottoman and European cities in which subsequent editions of this book were published, its ideas reached India in no time. The commercial and intellectual links between India and European and Ottoman circles must have enabled this transmission with ease: the book was serialized in Istanbul newspapers, and a shorter introduction to the book—muqaddima—penned by Tunisi soon had French, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, and English translations for a widespread audience. Tunisi’s career revealed the critical role such individuals played in the connected histories of empires spread over diverse geographies.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was impacted by these Ottoman reformist ideas even if he remained steadfastly located in India as a loyal British subject. But there were others, like the protagonists of this book, who experienced such currents firsthand as they relocated themselves in Ottoman cities. Such fugitive scholars became the principal carriers of the “1857 mood” outside British India. Paradoxically, the “spirit of 1857” only firmed up in the decades that followed the crushing of the mutiny-rebellion. In this period of increased surveillance, the expanded print culture and transport facilities not only sustained the public debate on freedom and the intricacies of empire, but enabled migration and exported the 1857 mood to the Ottoman territories.

Ottoman caliph Abd-al Aziz and his successor Abd-al Hamid II, driven by their own imperial ambitions, hosted Indian émigrés and energized their networks. Muslim émigrés used their new location and royal patronage for their own careering. They emerged as cosmopolitan actors who pushed the umma to unite as a universalist civilizational force at the intersection of empires. This constituted their cosmopolis. The coming together of the Muslim cosmopolis and world empires offered a perfect global canvas that made pan-Islamic networks inviting for Caliph Abd-al Hamid II, and not only for reasons of piety. Muslim émigrés exported their brand of cosmopolitanism back to Hindustan via immigrant traders, scholars, pilgrims, and publishers who maintained a steady link between British India and the Ottoman cities. The cosmopolitanism nurtured between
the two empires hugely impacted seminaries and Muslim politics in India. Its principal craftsmen, the Hindustani émigré scholars, made the most of their location at the cultural melting pot of Mecca to reach out to both their intellectual peers back home as well to the wider audiences outside the British territories.

Chapters 3 and 4 put the spotlight on two fugitive Muslim scholars—Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi (1818–1900) and Imdadullah Makki (1817–1899)—who escaped to Mecca in the aftermath of the mutiny-rebellion and used Istanbul’s hospitality and imperial rivalries, as well as the anti-British sentiment in the region, to create their own political space in the area. Imdadullah used his new location in Mecca, tapped its long history of intellectual and economic connections with South Asia, and exploited the mid-nineteenth-century “imperial moment” to fashion his cosmopolitanism as an urbane civility based on universalist Muslim virtuous conduct. This conduct was derived from both the Islamic scriptures and its tradition of consensus. He invoked Islamic consensus to bring the local diversities of practice and custom onto one platform. The public conduct that he advocated was the standardized version of varied customs and sectarian traditions; also noteworthy was its outward-looking scientific orientation, which characterized the Ottoman reformists of the time. While he tapped into this Ottoman legacy, he also brought his own Naqshbandi brand of inclusiveness to bear on the region. This enabled him to carve out an intellectual niche for himself.

His teacher and close associate Kairanwi similarly grafted his cosmopolitanism—itself a unifying, universalist, civilizational entity—onto the imperial networks that framed his new geographical space in Mecca and Istanbul. Chapter 3 shows how he used to his benefit his position in Mecca as well as the city’s earlier contacts with Indian Naqshbandis to fashion a cosmopolitanism that had the scriptures as its base and that was informed by a very tanzimat-inspired pragmatic and scientific outlook. This cosmopolitanism offered a readymade template for attracting Muslims as it stretched as a discursive civilizational space between the British and the Ottoman Empires. It offered an alternate civilizational world with which to counter the British imperial design. Thus Hindustan
continued to be Kairanwi’s main focus even though he located in Mecca and had a global orientation. Intellectual ideas, disseminated via books from Hindustan, sustained his cultural ecumene. His newly founded madrasa, Saulatiya, and its students and scholarly productions played a pivotal role in sustaining his intellectual and political world. The madrasa became the nodal point from which books written in India circulated, via itinerary teachers and students, in the Hijaz, the Ottoman Arab provinces, and as far as Southeast Asia.

These chapters show how Indian cosmopolitans gravitated to Istanbul primarily for the advantages that it offered as the fulcrum of temporal power. Their moves made it clear that the caliph was also viewed as the sultan of an exceptionally vast and religiously and ethnically diverse subject population. His clout derived from his political significance and not merely from his perceived spiritual position. His non-Muslim Greek and Armenian Christian subjects may have variously viewed the Muslim identity of the sultan. But there was no doubt that the empire had an international reputation for ethnic and religious inclusion even when Sultan Abd-al Hamid II, for reasons of political expediency, waved the caliph card and pushed to the fringes the tanzimat reformists who lent a legal frame to inclusion. Not only did the Ottoman sultan have Greek and Armenian bureaucrats, but his Christian delegates also defended his civilized rule during the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions. This international image of tolerance and accommodation explains the drift toward Istanbul of Muslim cosmopolitans like Kairanwi and Imdadullah, who fled from British tyranny. They flocked to Ottoman cities to strategize their moves in tandem with the liberal intellectual currents and with the support of its globally influential Muslim sultan. On his part, Sultan Abd-al Hamid II viewed émigrés from British territories as potential assets in his imperial designs. He was always welcoming to them.

The spirit of 1857 fired the Muslim imaginary and made even those who could not physically escape to the Ottoman world connect to the intellectual and civilizational cosmopolis between empires. Chapter 6 focuses on Maulana Jafer Thanesri (1838–1905), who spent eighteen years as a convict at the penal colony in the
Andaman Islands (1866–1884) for leading a group of rebels in Delhi during 1857. On his release, he relocated and established himself as a scribe in the Punjab administration. Unlike Kairanwi, he did not manage to escape to the Ottoman territories. But this did not stop him from envisaging a Muslim cosmopolis stretched across empires. The mutiny located him at the intersection of the British imperial networks and its cultural web as reflected in the power of the English language, British styles of decorum and conduct, and the Islamic intellectual imperium. The latter became more accessible than before because of the growing networks of transportation, communication, and print culture that were increasingly available to subject people. Thanesri’s idea of homeland (mulk) developed as he straddled these worlds with ease—not physically but via news from visitors, literary productions, and other communication avenues available to him because of his status as a British convict in the Andaman penal colony. The chapter shows how his imaginary straddled empires and how he envisaged an embrace civilizational space that spilled out of British India. Because he exhorted Muslims to unite globally, he posed a challenge to the colonial regime. Thanesri’s brand of cosmopolitanism and his sense of self as a member of a larger world—rooted firmly within and yet reaching outside British India—remained dependent on imperial networks. This made his responses to the British presence more than a narrow anticolonial political struggle. Indeed, the interplay of both the imperial and Indo-Arabic repertoires shaped his Indo-Persianate sense of self and complicated his nuanced struggle against British rule.

Imperial Cities and Muslim Cosmopolitans

This book brings the Ottoman imperial cities that offered refuge to 1857 Muslim fugitives center stage in the discussion on the making of Muslim cosmopolitanism: Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul. Via the study of individual careers located in these cities, the book shows how in the Muslim perspective such non-British-controlled centers called the shots in determining the course of global politics and world history. Shifting the gaze away from London and the British
imperial centers such as Delhi and Calcutta, the book proffers a new
definition of the global as something that was non-British or non-

Eurocentric.

Azyumardi Azra portrays the Ottoman-controlled cities, Mecca
and Medina, as epicenters of Muslim intellectual networks that
knitted together the religious scholars of the British, Dutch, and
Ottoman Empires. These were sites where the moral and cultural
reconfiguration of Muslim thought and vision was attempted via
fresh interpretations of the Hadith tradition.52 This had a long his-
tory going back to the thirteenth century. But the nineteenth-
century challenge of Western imperial expansion intensified this
urge for moral reform. Egyptian and Indonesian scholars in Mecca
contributed to the trend as they too sought to reconcile differences
between different intellectual currents within Islam and looked for
remedies for the ills of their respective societies. They brought tex-
tual Islam, as represented in the Prophet’s tradition of the Hadith
studies, and Sufi Islam, as represented in the varied tariqas or broth-
erhoods, into close union.53 Indian reformists located in Mecca were
also part of this endeavor for moral reform. Indeed, the Mecca-based
Indian reformists trained many of the scholars from the Dutch
Indies and Ottoman Egypt. For instance, Sibghat Allah, the Indian
Sufi scholar who exported to the Arab world both the Shattariyyah
and the Naqshbandi Sufi orientations that reconciled the Shariat to
Sufi practice, had students (including Ahmad al Shinawi) from Cairo
as well as scholars from Acheh.54

Michael Laffan’s description of the Jawi or Indonesian scholarly
ecumene that originated in the city reveals the agility of Mecca’s
intellectual life. The two seventeenth-century Jawi scholars in
Mecca, Ibrahim al-Kurani and Ahmad al-Qushashi, trained a host
of students in one popular form of jurisprudence associated with
Imam Sha’fai—the Shafi jurisprudence. They reconciled this form
of juridical tradition to mysticism.55 This trend only intensified in
the nineteenth century with the specter of “modern” empires looming
as a grave civilizational challenge to the Muslim world. Banten
in Java and Acheh in Sumatra became the feeders for intellectual
migrants in Mecca. Muhammad Al-Nawawi of Java, who migrated
to Mecca in 1855, represented one such reformist neo-Sufi case in
point. Ahmad Khatib, who landed in the Hijaz in 1881, was initiated into the Naqshbandi order, and studied with the Meccan cleric Ahmad Dahlan, was another such case in point.

Similarly oriented migrant scholars from Istanbul, Cairo, and Delhi were present in Mecca, and collectively they made the region an intellectual hub. Their location in Ottoman-controlled Mecca, where they enjoyed the patronage of Caliph Abd-al Hamid II, known for his welcoming stance toward transimperial Muslim scholars, also exposed them to the global aspirations of the Hamidian imperial vision. Their cosmopolitanism emerged as a neat balance between the Arab intellectual thrust toward the scriptures and the Ottoman reformist pull toward a scientific “modern” orientation with its Hamidian imperial frill. They attempted to unite the community, or umma, as a civilization that was both rooted in scripture and embedded in imperial networks that crisscrossed the Ottoman and British Empires. Indeed, these nineteenth-century networks, grafted as they were onto earlier connections forged by scholars, Sufis, and traders, enabled Muslim cosmopolitanism to reach out to societies across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean world.

Chapters 3 and 4 bring out the critical role of Mecca in the making of Muslim cosmopolitanism. Chapter 3 reflects how on reaching Mecca, Kairanwi discovered that the city already had a rich Indic intellectual legacy that laid the groundwork for a Hadith-centric reconciliation of mysticism and jurisprudence. This enabled him to extend an embracive arm that stretched across the imperial divide to unite the umma as a civilizational force. At the same time, he was lucky that the anticaliph resentment in the city—which grew as pilgrims and travelers suffered Hamid’s inept administration—gave him a much-desired conduit through which to ally with the caliph’s political adversaries and intellectual critics. He used these adversaries to bargain for concessions from Istanbul and to cushion his fugitive existence. Indeed, he used them to access Caliph Abd-al Hamid II and in turn use him to his advantage. The collapse of the constitutional tanzimat reforms in the 1830s had been followed by the coming together of religion and a scientific, forward-looking reformist project in many of the African and Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Students, bureaucrats, and religious scholars
impacted by this post-
tanzimat effort to bring religion back onto the agenda of “secular” reform critiqued the caliph as they tried to make sense of the political and financial crisis of the empire. Caliph Abd-al Hamid II had shunted many reformists, including the Salafis, out of Istanbul and away from the core of the empire. The Salafis collected in the Arab and African provinces, and their presence created the perfect political and intellectual terrain for similarly oriented Indian reformists like Kairanwi. Not surprisingly, Kairanwi’s own efforts were hugely informed by the intellectual energy and activity of the caliph’s adversaries—the “modernist” reform that was emanating from the Arab and African provinces of the empire (Cairo, Syria, Lebanon, and the Hijaz). Indeed, he lent his voice to their political critique of the caliph so as to make himself recognized in the intellectual circles of Ottoman society. At the same time, he continued to use Caliph Abd-al Hamid II as a patron whose association offered him clout vis-à-vis both the British and the local Hijaz administration, which was under Ottoman rule.

Chapter 4 reveals how Mecca also became a crucial site for Imdadullah’s cosmopolitanism. The connected worlds of the British and Ottoman Empires offered an arena of new possibilities, which Imdadullah used at Mecca. From the vantage point Mecca offered, he developed his relationships with his intellectual peers in Hindustan, connecting with and influencing them in new and complex ways. The chapter discusses the making of several of his texts in Mecca in close intellectual consultation with his colleagues in India. His peers visited Mecca under different pretexts and carted his manuscripts back home for revision and publication. His literary productions reveal his unique thought process in bringing Muslims together around a standardized mode of conduct.

Indian scholar émigrés and their ideas also found wide appeal and circulation in the intellectual circles of Ottoman Cairo. Juan Cole and Michael Laffan have highlighted the emergence of nineteenth-century Cairo as yet another intellectual metropole where the role of Islam in carving out the “modern world” became a hot topic of scholarly discussion. The famous cosmopolitan Persian scholar-traveler Jamaluddin Afghani and his student Abdul used the Cairene intellectuals’ Parisian intellectual experiences to advocate
positivist and rational, moral, and political reforms that centered on the individual self and that were in sync with the Koran and the Hadith. They argued that this would unite Muslims as a civilization across the globe. This echoed the reformist ideas that were being voiced in Mecca by the post-*tanzimat* Salafi intellectuals and by Indic-impacted Indian reformists Rahmatullah Kairanwi and Imdadullah Makki.

The nineteenth-century Indic reformist idea about the rational individual who legitimated science and reason with scriptural sanctity and offered an inclusive political platform rubbed shoulders in Cairo with the Hamidian imperial vision of modernity. Abd-al Hamid II, his overtly Islamic profile notwithstanding, leaned on the politically pragmatic reformist project of the liberal intellectuals and the moderate ulema that brought religion and scientific rationality together. Ottoman and Indic reformists also shared this predicament with their Southeast Asian counterparts in the city. And for each one of them this sentiment could either spill into nationalism or else spread out of territorial borders and carpet itself across the imperial divide to weld together the Muslim global cosmopolis. In the case of the Jawi intellectuals in Cairo, it boiled down to a form of nationalism.\(^5^9\) Jawi intellectuals trained in Mecca, like Ahmad Khatib, sent their sons to Cairo to shape this intellectual project of national unity. But after the fall of Cairo to the British in 1882 the city also became the epicenter of Malay and Indonesian intellectuals who stopped here en route to the Hijaz and worked out new ideas of Jawi unity as a nationalist project.\(^6^0\)

The protagonists of this book show that for the Indian émigré scholars Cairo was a center for articulating more than a simplistic anti-British nationalism. The city was different from Mecca as it carried the political legacy of its rebel Ottoman military commandant and self-styled *khedive* (independent ruler), Muhammad Ali (1769–1849), who had strived to establish the regional autonomy of Egypt and the surrounding areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. He had wanted to break away from the Ottoman Empire and emerge as the leader of an independent regional power. His economic, educational, and political reforms had sought to establish state monopolies and had looked toward France and the Western model of
enlightenment for inspiration. His political aspirations had been cut short by the Ottoman Empire. Yet Cairo remained both a seat of liberal reform as well as a hotbed of regional aspiration that posed a political challenge to the Ottomans throughout the long nineteenth century. The lasting legacy of Muhammad Ali was the very relaxed intellectual climate in Cairo, where Islamic reform was most closely aligned with scientific reason and rationality. Indian scholar émigrés used Cairo’s reformist and revolutionary energy to spell out a more ambitious transimperial civilizational space for Muslims. They hoped that this space would compete with the formidable British and Ottoman imperia that carpeted the region.

Chapter 5 looks at Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832–1890), nawab consort of the begum of the princely state of Bhopal, who was an important figure in the scholarly circles of Cairo. His books, with their transimperial gaze, fit in well with both the anti-British political mood as well as the reformist sentiment in the city. He was not in the good books of the British administration and was accused of seditious writings. Despite being under surveillance, he did not escape from India. He did not feel the need to do so. He was not convicted in any court of law and had the advantage of his royal connection. Although he was located in India, he nonetheless plugged into and contributed to Imdadullah and Kairanwi’s transimperial cosmopolitanism. His intellectual ambit extended to Cairo.

He used the challenges and opportunities of nineteenth-century imperialisms and reconfigured them to suit his own particular interests. The new imperial and maritime world of his age firmed up the earlier intellectual contacts between Hindustan and West Asia and expanded his long-distance reach. He used his Indo-Persianate intellectual legacy, his regal family connections, as well as imperial networks to construct an embracive cosmopolitanism that straddled the British and Ottoman Empires. The chapter shows how this scripture-based cosmopolitanism, energized by his literary productions, connected to the civilizational ambits of Imdadullah Makki and Rahmatullah Kairanwi in the Ottoman territories. It shows, moreover, how this cosmopolitanism contributed to the growing strength of the notion of universalist Muslim public conduct and how this conduct emerged as a welding force across empires. Siddiq
Hasan fashioned his own “international relations” using his distinct Arabic learning and gentlemanly status. He connected to trans-Asian intellectuals by flaunting this special status. His reformist ideas found resonance in the anti-British and religiously surcharged atmosphere of Cairo. With his knowledge of Arabic and his reformist religious training, his books became part of the Cairene intellectual circles. Scholars from Cairo and Mecca sent their sons and students to Bhopal to train with him.

The careers of Muslim intellectuals like him, when viewed from outside the lens of the influential British Empire and its cultural and intellectual ambit, raise questions about the definition of what constitutes nineteenth-century global history when considered solely from the vantage point of British imperial history. His career brings to the fore the multiple imperial centers outside British-controlled territories, which became defining hotspots of action in the age of “modern” empires. Chapter 5 thus argues that being outside cultivated “Britishness” offered greater space for maneuvering. Siddiq Hasan’s long reach to imperial centers like Cairo in the Ottoman territory revealed the crucial role of cities outside the British Empire in calling the shots in world history. The lives captured here thus enable us to understand the new contours of world and global history as articulated from the Ottoman imperial centers of Istanbul, Mecca, and Cairo. In the imperial assemblages of the late nineteenth century, Arabic rather than English was the universal lingua franca. The knowledge of Arabic offered a longer rope to connect with Muslim subjects of other imperial powers, the Dutch and the Ottoman in particular.

The careers charted in this book fill very important lacunae in Ottoman studies as they highlight the role of Istanbul and other imperial cities like Mecca and Cairo in the fashioning of a non-European model of modernity. Ottomanists have paid little attention to the critical role of their imperial centers in carving out an alternate “modern” world. The incorporation of nineteenth-century Ottomans into the world economy, albeit as a peripheral partner, has been suggested as their early brush with the “modern” economy. If so, it was one that led to the “peripheralisation” of the Ottoman empire as older networks, the ethnic and religious
equations that sustained them, and the connections with political class were radically altered. This peripheralization thesis has been hotly contested.

Tom Reiss has highlighted how the “modernism” of nineteenth-century Istanbul was reflected in its racial and ethnic mix—its nightclubs, mosques, and literary societies—which endeared itself to Jewish Orientalists (including, notably, Arminius Vambery) who earned the honorific of pasha from Sultan Abd-al Hamid II for their scholarly services in the city. Indeed, the post-*tanzimat* modernism reflected in their writings encouraged later Jewish Orientalists like Lev Nussimbaum, a Russian *émigré* Jew in Istanbul, to lament the death of the empire in the wake of the single-minded nationalism of the 1920s. And yet so struck was he by the modernity of Istanbul that he adopted the exotic yet “modern” Muslim-prince identity and later converted to Islam in the Ottoman Embassy in Berlin in the final days of the empire (1923).

The new works on Ottoman modernity critiqued the Western-style modernity projects of political elites. But they kept religion out of the new models that they offered. This book picks up the lead from Selim Deringil, who introduced Islam into the political reform of modernity with a discussion of Caliph Abd-al Hamid II’s project of social engineering. This forced people to subscribe to a normative standard of values that were a mix of old notions of loyalty to the caliph and new migrant notions of loyalty to the country (*vatan*). Traditional religious motifs and vocabulary, alongside an emphasis on science and progress, went into the making of the Ottoman modernity project. The post-*tanzimat* education system propagated such hybrid ideas and claimed Islamic origins for them. The making of the new Ottoman subject showcased Istanbul and other cities as symbols of Ottoman modernism.

The protagonists of this book fit into the Islam-driven modern imperial vision of the late nineteenth century that appropriated moral and political reform and attributed to it Islamic origins and history. Indeed, the experience of Indian reformists fit into the Hamidian project of social engineering—and that explains Hamid’s constant invitation to all the protagonists of this book to help in his project. Indeed, Kairanwi became a royal guest in Istanbul on
various occasions, and as Chapter 3 shows, wrote one of his most influential books, *Izharul Haq* (The Truth Revealed), which articulated his cosmopolitanism, in Istanbul under royal patronage. Even when he returned to Mecca, his brother remained in the city as the librarian of the imperial library. Chapter 2 shows the famous Moplah Sayyid Fadl’s wide-ranging intellectual and political contacts in the upper echelons of Istanbul society. And both Imdadullah Makki and the nawab consort of Bhopal, Siddiq Hasan Khan, were widely read in Istanbul, as they were in other Ottoman imperial cities like Cairo.

**Cosmopolitanism Hijacked?**

This book offers a unique take on the nineteenth-century global embrace of Muslims. It brings 1857 fugitive men of religion, who located in the Ottoman territories or else remained confined within the surveillance structures of British India, center stage to the creation of Muslim cosmopolitanism. It argues that the transimperial networks they created were a response to the “official nationalism” sponsored by the British Empire that imposed territorially rooted subject identities and borders in Asia via the passport, census and land surveys, and legal and consular regimes. Over the decades, Muslim connections shaped and acquired a momentum of their own as individuals harnessed both the experience of the Indo-Persianate cosmopolitan gentleman and the long tradition of commercial and intellectual contacts between Hindustan and the Middle East to the new imperial highways of communication and print capitalism. Careers of individuals like Siddiq Hasan, Rahmatullah Kairanwi, Imdadullah Makki, and others discussed in this book show that Muslim cosmopolitanism was entrenched in the challenges and opportunities offered by nineteenth-century imperialisms. It was constituted of individual attempts to reconfigure these imperialisms so as to better align them with self-driven particularistic interests.

Historians of the British Empire have shown through the study of individual careers that the British imperial experience and its intellectual legacy and networks continued to guide careers and had crucial postcolonial trajectories. But what is less known is that the
individual-driven Muslim cosmopolitanism also left a compelling legacy that continues to shape the politics of the contemporary Arab Muslim world.

The cosmopolitanism of the multilingual, Indo-Persian Mughal elite, with its Arabic scriptural core and “modern” orientation, could spin out of control and be used by political elites for their vested interests. In the twentieth century, the Wahabi-oriented Muslim regimes in Saudi Arabia hijacked it and used its scriptural core to spin a hardened version of Islam. Its most obvious ramification was the leveling of its multilingual character and the spread of a narrowly tailored, exclusive Wahabi reformist tradition across the Islamic societies of twentieth-century nation-states. Madrasa Saulatiya, established by Kairanwi as the center of an embracing reformist Islam with a strong Indic intellectual strand, is today the center of disseminating a very purist form of textual Islam that is patronized by the Abd-al Wahab-impacted Saudi ruling house. The new predicaments of the Arab world and the looming American challenge of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries both intensified the Arabicization of the eclectic Muslim cosmopolis and hardened its core at the expense of its tanzimat-inspired modern orientation. And in classic dialectical fashion, the American war against Wahabism has only served to strengthen (and ideologically tighten and globally elevate) that which it fights. And yet, as the recent spurt of Muslim responses in the “Arab Spring” shows, the fringe was never completely extinguished. Across the globe, it continues to connect and inspire Muslims waiting for the right moment to ignite.
Most of the Arabs living in India were from Hadramawt, Yemen. They traced their genealogies to Tarim, which was known for its long-standing tradition of Islamic learning, and whose residents included ulema, Sufis, and sayyids, many of whom had overseas links. The region had a long history of migration to Africa and Asia: people would leave Hadramawt to engage in trade, to seek work as soldiers, or to spread Islamic learning.\(^1\)

During the sixteenth century, members of the sayyid families established hospices in several Indian Ocean regions. In India their presence was marked in Delhi, Gujarat, Deccan, and Malabar. They soon established themselves as influential ulema in Indian society because of their Arabic learning and their association with the sacred sites of Islam.\(^2\) However, it was not uncommon to find Arabs in multiple roles: as traders, as warriors, and as Sufi saints.

In the late eighteenth century, Haiderabad, in the eastern Deccan region, became the center of large-scale Arab immigration. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the city attracted Hadramis both from within India and from Yemen and had an Arab population that
surpassed that of any other Indian province. They enjoyed high positions in the administration of the nizam as soldiers, mercenaries, and scholars. For instance, al-Sayyid al-Mujahid Abd al-rahman ibn Muhammad al-Zahir became the jamadar in the nizam’s irregular forces. Sayyid Ahmad al-Aydarus (1899–1962), rose to become commander in chief. And Habib Aydarus set up a school for Islamic studies at Nanded.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a large body of Arabs were domiciled in the Haiderabad state. The nizam had a considerable force of Arab soldiery that traced its origins to the Hadramawt region. Arabs moved with ease between Haiderabad and their homes in the Hadramawt area of southern Yemen. Many came to Haiderabad to work, and then would send money to their families as well as visit the Hadramawt area to invest in land and property. Salaries and remittances always flowed back and forth. Family networks were tapped to get fresh recruits for the nizam’s army. Many Arabs settled and married in the Deccan. Their descendants were called Mowullud. Such Indian Arabs forged strong bonds between the Deccan and the Hadramawt areas. Their links with Hadramawt meant that they were also naturally drawn into the factional politics and wars in their homeland.

Haiderabad had four different classes of Arabs: those enrolled in the regular levies of the native government and who had undergone military training; undrilled members of the Arab infantry who were in the service of the government; guards entertained by amirs and private persons throughout the country; and, finally, those who were not in anyone’s pay at all. According to Sir Salar Jung, the prime minister of the nizam, there were more than eight thousand Arabs in the state. Most of these were Deccani born. The Malabar region too boasted several influential Hadrami families, such as that of the famous Sayyid Alawi and his more famous son Sayyid Fadl (1823–1901), who preached Islam and gained notoriety for rebelling against the British. In the following section, we will discuss Sayyid Fadl’s interesting career as a marked “Moplah rebel,” considering it as an example of how these Arab immigrants used British paranoia and trans-Asian rivalries and threats to further their careers.
The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 enabled the British to exert firmer control over Persian Gulf commerce. For instance, Britain now controlled Qajar Iran’s export and import trade, which was integrated, albeit in a subordinate way, in the global economy. However, later in the century Britain felt the heat as its imperial rivals—Russia, Germany, and the Ottomans—enticed Iran, Baghdad, and other Asian powers to build railways so as to recapture and control trade in the Persian Gulf. Britain turned its attention toward the southwest rim of the Arabian Peninsula as imperial contestations over the Persian Gulf ports intensified.

Britain now wanted to control not just the Gulf but also the entire rim of the Arabian Peninsula from Bab al-Mandab to the Gulf of Basra. Two events signaled the beginning of the larger political net that Britain intended to spread in the Arabian Peninsula region: through clandestine deals with Mubarak al Sabah of Kuwait, the kingdom of Kuwait was brought under British protection; and in 1889, through a brutal takeover, Bahrain was also brought under British protection. These areas were significant as they had important harbors and ports for the lucrative slave trade. But they were also attractive because they were arenas where the relatively weak Ottoman political sovereignty could be dented, and thus they offered huge political dividends. A proactive Britain hoped to tame the ambitions of Russia, Germany, and France as it secured “treaties of protection” with the smaller emirates that dotted the rim.

British interest in the southwest rim of the Arabian Peninsula brought it in direct contact with Arab traffic across Asia. This region, as we saw above, had a history of entanglements with the political economy and geopolitics of India. The Hadrami diaspora that originated from here was linked to India via trade, family ties, saints, and politics. British Indian subjects of Arab Hadrami origin had family, property, and emotional and political investments in this area of the Arabian Peninsula. The connection of the Hadrami Arabs to India offered Britain a readymade justification to intervene in the region, ostensibly to protect the interests of its Arab Muslim subjects. The Bombay government used the pretext of concern for Muslim subjects of Arab origin to legitimize its active involvement in the region. Its administrative ambit was extended to cover the
Gulf so as to oversee and protect British interests in the region. These interests included the monitoring of its Muslim subjects of Arab origin whose lives were inextricably linked with the development of the Arabian Peninsula's politics. The Bombay government and British Muslim subjects in particular thus became the chief agents via whom British imperial rivalries were played out in the Arabian Peninsula.

The Bombay government emerged as the chief player in this imperial plot. Indeed, in 1839 the surreptitious way in which it signed a treaty with the “illiterate” Lahj tribal chief of Aden, wrested the harbor from Ottoman control, and brought the area under its protection aroused international condemnation and concern. Both the Ottomans and the Russians were outraged at the entry of Britain into the already hotly contested arena of Asian imperial rivalries. The British presence was marked by the creation of the new office of a political resident at Aden who would oversee British interests in the region. As the years rolled by, he was invested with increasing power to interfere and mediate in the affairs of the Indian subjects caught in Arabian feuds. Critics accused Britain of trying to control the waterway and convert it into its exclusive preserve, and of ignoring the fact that the whole Arabian side of it was under Ottoman sovereignty. And they were not wrong. It was the issue of Ottoman political sovereignty that had brought Britain into the region. Indeed, the “Mahomedan subjects” became the medium via which British imperial rivalries with the Ottoman played out.

By the late 1880s, British political designs had become so blatant that the Ottomans were forced to react. In this period of economic depression, they did not invest in a fleet or an armed presence to counter British designs. Instead, because they were near bankruptcy, they leaned on the authority of the caliph. They tried to influence Indian Muslims via caliphal authority. The British reacted by asserting their political sovereignty based on their stated aim of protecting Indian Muslim interests.

Muslims of Arab origin who lived in India became the main agents by whom Britain was set to play out its imperial rivalries with the Ottomans. The Bombay government was chosen to be at the vanguard of this engagement. Its long administrative arm reached
Arab tribes in Muscat, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula. Its political agent at Aden monitored tribal activities. For instance, as early as 1823 a large group of Arab tribals of the Beni Boo Ali Arab clan had been deported to India to be lodged at the Bombay prison because they had converted to “Wahabism” and posed a serious menace in the Muscat region. They were therefore physically removed and shifted to Bombay to prevent their damaging doctrine from spreading in the Arabian Peninsula. As it happened, most of them died in prison of cholera and smallpox.13

But during the late nineteenth century, British attention zeroed in on the movement of Arabs between the Haiderabad region of the Deccan and the southwest rim of Arabia. British interest in their movement and routes began to create fissures in the Arabs’ vibrant trans-Asian cosmopolitan culture, which, as we have seen, went back to premodern times. The Hadrami Arabs in their capacity as soldiers, merchants, scholars, and saints had a long history of interaction with Haiderabad. We saw above how their movements as well as their intellectual and emotional investments in the Deccani state of Haiderabad enriched its political culture.14 All this was set to change.

The British administration coined the new category of the “Indian Arab” to describe the problem of the huge number of Arabs—both immigrant and Deccan born—who resided in the Haiderabad region and who had families and connections in Arabia. This categorization was accompanied by the negative stereotype that singled out Arabs as the cause of all corruption and lawlessness in Deccani society. This negative casting aimed in no small measure to mark their difference with the native Deccani society that framed their lives and identity. According to Charles B. Saunders, the resident at Haiderabad, the Arabs not in the service of local polities were the “most truculent and dangerous specimens of humanity.” But together with those in the service of the nizam they could, he claimed, be used as a formidable irregular force. This was because they were, as he put it, “hardy, fanatical, fond of plunder and equally regardless of their own lives and the lives of others.”15 They could—along with the Rohillas, Baluchis, and Africans who also lived in Haiderabad—inflict heavy losses on their enemies. They had an art of digging
vaults or rifle pits in the center of streets and squares in which they could ensconce themselves in relative safety. And they were armed with a variety of weapons: matchlocks, powder horns, rifles, pistols, swords, spears, daggers, and knives. It was a well-known fact that Sir Salar Jung had a useful body of organized Arab infantry in his service. They were kept separate from the regular army of the state about twenty-four miles from Haiderabad in a village called Mahesaram.

Saunders was of the view that Arabs had grown roots in Haiderabad also because it provided them with opportunities for quick money-making, often through fraudulent means: “They roll property, lend money at enormous rates of interest, and indulge in all kinds of petty and illicit traffic with the result of growing rich and respectable fast.” Indeed, the nizam’s government itself had often borrowed large quantities of money from them. Saunders pointed out that many influential members of the community had risen to favor in the service of the nizam or his minister. Chiefs like Ghalib Jang, Mukaddam Jang, Barak Jang and his half brother Al Bin Umar were some cases in point. In fact, it was because of the large amounts of money that Arabs had loaned to the local government and the influence of many members of the Arab community that the extreme step of deporting the “whole race” from the Deccan was postponed. Saunders noted that the British resident as well as the nizam’s minister were tired of the “plunder of towns and villages” by roving groups of Arabs. But the outright deportation of Arabs was prevented due to the entanglement of the Arab community itself in the larger running of the nizamat.

Starting in 1872, special identity passes were issued to Arabs to mark them out as separate from Deccani society. Measures were taken to restrict the hitherto unrestricted entry of Arab immigrants. Earlier immigrants could sail to Bombay without any documents and on arrival obtain a pass from the police commissioner and British resident in the city. This document permitted them to move onward to Haiderabad. But beginning in 1872, the permission of the Haiderabad government, conveyed through the British resident posted in the city, as well as the sanction of the political agent at
Aden became the prerequisite for any travel to India. Initially, these regulations were difficult to implement. They remained limited to matters of policy. In practice not a single Arab ever applied for a passport via this method. Saunders was convinced that the introduction of the new railways in the region facilitated the illegal immigration of Arabs into Haiderabad.20

Arabs, as Ottoman subjects, resorted to obtaining passports from the Turkish consul general at Bombay in order to enter India and move toward Haiderabad. The police officers at Bombay did not recognize these as valid documents and instead looked for permission letters from the political resident at Aden. Even though a passport system for foreigners moving in India was not in force in India, the Foreign Department had adopted some restrictive measures for Arabs moving to Haiderabad because, as one official put it, “When they come they tended to stimulate and keep alive feuds of their fellow tribesmen in Southern Arabia.”21 The government of India reiterated these rules each time the Ottoman consulate complained about the harassment of Ottoman subjects by police officers in Bombay.

There was little or no support for such regulations from the nizam. He was not in favor of any restrictions on the movement of Arab immigrants. He saw them as an integral part of Deccani society. Indeed, he saw them as men of status because of their association with the sacred sites and the language of Muslims, and therefore he maintained that they required no special identification. In fact, in 1890 he strongly resisted any move to equate the Arabs with the Rohillas—who needed passes from police officers at the entry point of every new territory they visited. The nizam agreed that passes should be issued for Arabs seeking to enter British territory. But he drew the line when it came to Haiderabad because he recognized the special status of Arabs as critical players in the political economy of Haiderabad; and he regarded them as doubly valuable because of their origins in the “sacred soil of Arabia.”22 He remarked in a letter to the resident at Haiderabad: “The Arabs on the other hand who are generally wealthy men and hold the highest ranks in the army hold jagirs and mansabs, are held in esteem by the
Government and with regard to the connection which Mahomedan have with the sacred soil of Arabia, the Arabs are held by all the Mosalman sects in veneration and esteem.”

However, toward the beginning of 1880s a new concern cropped up: this was the exodus of the Arabs from India, with “treasure and military stores,” to their own country. It was by monitoring Indian Arabs when they returned to their home countries and participated in the politics and society of the Arabian Peninsula that the British obtained an entry point into the region. The returning Hadrami, now a marked Indian Arab, was a British subject. He became the agent through whom Ottoman political sovereignty, which in this period of economic crisis leaned heavily on the caliph, could be effectively countered. The concern for the Indian Arab also became an important medium through which the nizam’s political economy and power could be challenged.

It was quite evident that arms, money, and recruitment supplies from Haiderabad were being used by Indian Arabs and other ambitious Arab residents, who tapped their networks to fight factional wars in southwest Arabia, particularly in Makulla and Shehr in the Hadramawt area. Some Arab chiefs with contacts in India were trying to emerge as independent rulers of these estates and wished to be treated like the independent regional princes of India. The influential Jang brothers (Barak and Nawaz) in the government of the nizam were one such important case in point. The Jang brothers and other ambitious Arab chiefs shifted British attention away from their intrigues within India and more toward their activities outside. As the British viewed it, the affairs of these men outside India were being sustained by Indian contacts—Indian Arabs who had returned to their home countries—and thus had a bearing on developments in India.

The involvement of Indian Arabs in Arabian feuds provided the British with a legitimate excuse to intervene in the region and to fight its Asian rivals in a backhanded way. Here, British political sovereignty—which hinged on the protection of Indian Muslim interests—competed with caliph-centric Ottoman political sovereignty. Muslim subjects of Arab origin caught in the middle of the imperial crossroad of competing sovereignties benefited as they
made the most of both. As these two sovereignties competed, the conduits for communication and contact between India and southwest Arabia only strengthened, both as a consequence of British efforts to monitor “Indian Arabs” and as a result of the activities of these men themselves—who relied on money and labor from Indian contacts to fight their battles in Arabia. Moreover, Indian potentates, like the nizam of Haiderabad, took sides and pressured the Bombay government to aid their Arab protégés.

Makulla and Shehr, two very important port cities in southwest Arabia bordering Yemen in the Dhofar area, are important cases in point. Both were riveted by battles for power and control as they were very important depots for the lucrative slave trade that moved from eastern Africa via Jeddah to the Western world. Makulla was also an important coal depot. Therefore, the British and Ottoman stakes in these cities were high. Indian Arabs who nurtured political ambitions could exploit imperial rivalries in the region and carve out a niche for themselves. Barak Jang Bahadur, an influential member in the nizam’s service, had a brother in Shehr, Nawaz Jang, who had ambitions of ruling the port city and taking over Makulla as well. His career became a cause of concern for the British. They wanted to have the sole right of monitoring and controlling Nawaz Jang’s activities, as this offered them a point of entry into the larger theater of European empires that included Ottomans. When they stepped in to help Nawaz Jang, they did not want his brother Barak Jang or the nizam to have any role in the wars at Shehr. Thus Nawaz Jang became the key player in the imperial rivalries in the region. Indeed, his entanglement with the political economy and culture of Haiderabad as well as with the geopolitics of the Arab region made him the ideal individual around whom British-Ottoman and British-nizam politics could be played out.

In 1877, Salar Jang, the nizam’s minister, admitted to a close contact between one of his officials—Barak Jang—and his brother in Shehr, Nawaz Jang. The latter, while flaunting political ambitions in the Shehr region, maintained his Deccani links as he continued to occupy a position in the Arab force in Haiderabad as well. It was widely believed that Nawaz Jang depended on payments from Indian Arabs, as they pumped money into the Arab economy, and
on arms from Haiderabad in order to pursue his political ambition of becoming the sultan of the port city of Shehr and to expand into Makulla (which was under British protection) on the Hadramawt coast.

Initially, the British mounted pressure on the nizam’s minister, urging him to ensure that his colleague Barak Jang would sever all ties with Haiderabad. The minister deflated the pressure by arguing that his colleague did not know of the political ambitions of his brother, Nawaz Jang. Barak Jang, he argued, thought that his brother was merely residing in Shehr with his elder brother Abdulla—who was the chief there. Despite repeated pleas from the British, the nizam refused to take action against Barak Jang. Under further pressure, he agreed to remove Nawaz Jang from the rolls of the Arab force in Haiderabad.24 He also warned Barak Jang to refrain from fanning his brother’s political ambitions. The nizam was reminded of the prohibitory orders in force in the Hadramawt region preventing any attacks on Makulla. He asked Barak Jang to comply and to send any related information he might have so that more explicit government orders could be issued if required.25

Barak obviously refuted all charges against his brother, especially one concerning money ($30,000) and men that Nawaz allegedly had received from Haiderabad. He asked for an inquiry to uncover the truth. He alleged that it was in fact the chief of Makulla and his tribal allies who were wreaking havoc in Shehr. Repeated requests from Shehr to the British agent at Aden to stop these attacks had gone unheeded. Indeed, the British had pledged not to interfere in the matter. In his efforts to resolve the problem, Barak appealed to the British sense of justice.26 The British on their part reiterated their concern about the flow of money and material supplies from Haiderabad to Shehr. At the same time, they again pledged their noninterference in the region. In the same breath, the British resident stated that the political agent at Aden could, if he desired, “mediate or intervene with friendly advice” for the settlement of the dispute.27

Indeed, the British resident at Aden was the nodal point for the representation of British interests in the region. But his intervention in local disputes had the effect of fissuring the cosmopolitan
trans-Asiatic world of Arab immigrants. His presence signaled an abrupt disjunction in the well-knit world of the Hadramis, a world in which they had straddled multiple Asian regions with ease. Their resistance to the tearing apart of their world came in the form of their insistence that the nizam of Haiderabad rather than the British resident at Aden solve their disputes. Barak Jang encouraged this sentiment and urged that the Haiderabad political setup—the government of the nizam—be central to any resolution. He thus underlined and reaffirmed the links between the Deccan and the rim of Arabia, as well as the long reach of Britain’s Muslim subjects. He felt that the British suffered from amnesia or lived in denial of the historic politico-economic ties that knitted southwest Arabia to the Deccan—and that even if they recognized the connection, they wanted to sever it. He also felt that his personal status would rise if the nizam’s government were involved in the Arabian entanglements. But his plans failed, as the nizam did not back him. The nizam urged him to sack Nawaz Jang—to remove him from the official roll of the military force—and also to sever all connections with him as per the orders of the British government. 28

The British were incensed at the temerity of Nawaz Jang and other Indian Arab subjects who wished to become independent rulers outside British territory and yet retain their rights in India, maintaining family ties, managing property, and retaining travel privileges. British notions of territorial-framed subjecthood and neat ethnic categorizations had no space for such extraterritorial forays of subject people. Indeed, their official categories created fissures in a hitherto cosmopolitan premodern world where to be Hadrami as well as Deccani posed no problem. Indeed, the porous borders and the fluid and well-knit political economies of the premodern world encouraged multiple identities. While this seemed natural to Indian Arabs, it was unacceptable to the British government.

But the Indian Arabs too held on to their world and were unwilling to give in just yet. Nawaz Jang, backed back by his brother in Haiderabad, Barak Jang, played hide and seek with the political agent at Aden, buying time and seeking permission for a visit to Haiderabad. He said his visit was necessary as he wanted to round up his affairs there and bring back his family to Shehr. 29 He stated
that he only wanted to profit from the gains he had made in the war with Makulla and had nothing against the British. But his explanations did not satisfy the British. An angry British resident, Sir R. Meade, suggested that if Barak Jang wanted to retain an authoritative position in connection with Shehr he should withdraw from his current position in Haiderabad. C. B. E. Smith, assistant resident at Haiderabad, held a similar view: “The evils of the state of things will be enormously increased if [Arab Indians’] leaders occupy the position of independent chiefs in Arabia, and a political association is thus established between Haiderabad and that country which may lead to serious difficulties and complications in the future.”

At the same time, Barak Jang was also warned by the resident that only the political agent at Aden and the British resident there would mediate and that Nawaz Jang should report only to them and submit his case only to them. He was reminded that the Haiderabad government was no intermediary in the Arabian disputes, even if it was interested in the affairs of their people. Throughout the 1870s, Francis A. E. Loch, the political resident at Aden, reported that Barak Jang would not cooperate either by submitting the case of his brother to the resident or by making his brother accept the mediation of the resident. For his part, Barak Jang hedged: he was always more inclined to involve Haiderabad in the resolution of the dispute and wanted the British resident at Haiderabad to intervene, but he also suggested that Nawaz Jang visit Haiderabad to explain his case.

Even as Nawaz Jang and his brother resisted British attempts to crack their connected worlds, they did not hesitate to make the most of the imperial highways and the new forms of connections that they offered. And this was possible because Nawaz Jang tied his foreign relations into the international power games of “modern” European empires. And thus despite almost disowning Nawaz Jang for challenging their political sovereignty, the British were happy to use him to dent Ottoman political sovereignty in the region. And Nawaz Jang, sensitive to this British imperial agenda, was happy to play along as long as it suited his purpose. Aware of British imperial interests in the region, he underlined the fact that he had rejected friendly overtures from the Ottomans as well as from the rebel
Moplah chief Sayyid Fadl—the self-styled chief of Dhofar who was hostile to the British.\textsuperscript{32} This did not stop British demands that Nawaz Jang relinquish his official position in the nizam’s service, restrict his visits to Haiderabad, and have his family return to Shehr. They wanted him to sever all ties with India as a consequence of his becoming an independent chief of an Arabian state. Yet these demands did not stop the British from using him in their trans-Asian political games. Thus in November 1877 the British used Nawaz Jang’s services to get information about the real deal between Sayyid Fadl and the Ottoman government.\textsuperscript{33} And while they used Nawaz Jang, they were also happy to extend him help in his political fights. They offered him assistance in his local battles and feuds for supremacy in Shehr. They agreed to prop him up as the chief agent over his brother in the city.

Notwithstanding the neat ethnic categorization of Indian subjects, the harsh reality was that Indian Arabs were part of the wider imperially embedded Muslim networks that knitted together Western empires in Asia. The British recognized the connect between the “Mahomedan population” in India and the wars in the southwest Arabian Peninsular rim. In 1878, Loch, the political agent at Aden, wanted the Shehr-Makulla dispute to end and offered British help to the latter because, as he put it, he did not want these disputes to have “ripplers effect in the Muhammedan population in India.”\textsuperscript{34} Paradoxically, there was at one level an acceptance of the connect, while at the same time administrative acumen and the demands of governance in India required that it be ignored. It was considered politically expedient that the British ask for the severing of relations between southwest Arabia and India. And yet people like Nawaz Jang who connected the two worlds were both a liability and an asset. As an Indian Arab, Nawaz Jang could be used to counter the claims that the Ottomans had a monopoly over Muslims both in India and elsewhere. But in order to justify interventions in his affairs, the British had to legally frame him as an Indian subject; this meant that he had to be delinked from his larger ancestral moorings and his life and career in his homeland, which stretched beyond India. Significantly, the interventions of the British political resident in the disputes of Shehr and Makulla amounted to
intrusions in what was basically the Arab rim of the Ottoman territory. These interventions happened with the aid of Indian Arabs, like the Jang brothers, who were mediators between the British and Ottoman imperial rivals. Indeed, meddling in their affairs increased the clout of the resident. But if Loch depended on such “little men” to gnaw into Ottoman political sovereignty, the Ottoman government (the Porte) also leaned on them for support. Loch was concerned that the Porte would use Sayyid Fadl—the deported Indian Arab Mopilla rebel from southern India—as their agent to counter British endeavors. After all, the events in Makulla offered an ideal imperial flashpoint of the sort that career brokers like Fadl loved to exploit. Loch’s fears were aggravated on news that Fadl was in Istanbul, and more important, that at the request of the nakib of Makulla the port town had been placed under his supervision. Loch’s report was that Fadl was on his way to Makulla. Such imperial contests offered a boost to the careers of middlemen like Nawaz Jang and Fadl.

In the late nineteenth century, the British campaign for the suppression of the slave trade diminished the authority of slave merchants and notables in the region. It made the independent Arab chief vulnerable. This was the best time for British intervention in the region. It is no surprise that in the 1870s their political agent at Aden was encouraged to take an active interest and mediate in the affairs of the Indian Arabs. This also meant it was a boom time for middlemen like Nawaz Jang, who could now play a useful role in furthering British politics vis-à-vis the Ottomans. The Bombay governor, Richard Temple, also thought this was the time to extend help to the chiefs and buttress the power of the agent at Aden and that of the Bombay government itself. It was widely believed that Ottoman expansion in the southern rim of Arabia could be controlled by propping up independent Arab chiefs—with Indian connections—like Nawaz Jang. His kingdom, Shehr, was seen as a potential ally. The British drew their confidence from their experience with a similar independent Arab state—Makulla—that had been “saved” by Loch, the political agent at Aden, from Turkish troops. Since 1878, Makulla’s allegiance to the British had been complete. But the British always viewed with concern the slightest
vacillations of Makulla toward any other political power, including the British ally Muscat. Indeed, it was Nawaz Jang’s invasion of Makulla that triggered British intervention in his affairs.

The Shehr-Makulla dispute paused with a British-induced two-year truce. In this period, Barak Jang agreed to have the Aden resident serve as mediator. But he also was able to have introduced a clause that allowed him to appeal to the Bombay government if he was not satisfied with the outcome of the case. This was his last-ditch effort to balance his flexible extraterritorial politics with the more territorially rooted system that the British were putting in place in India.

In 1881, the English were once again actively involved in the affairs of these two port kingdoms because the chief of Shehr—a figure they supported and to whom they had given a military title because of his critical role in their imperial rivalries in the region—attacked the port of Broom and wrested it out of the control of Makulla. A truce was called through the intervention of the British resident at Aden, and the chief, or nakib, of Makulla was asked to pay the Shehr chief $5,000 yearly. Makulla agreed to the British diktat, but its chief was not keen to let his enemies, the Al Kaieti tribes, take over Broom. The port town was then forcibly taken over by the British and an agreement was signed between the Kaieti tribals and the British; this agreement bound all members of the Kaieti family “not to sell, mortgage or otherwise dispose of the least portion of the territories now or hereafter subject to the Kaitie family—above all to any foreign power.” A second agreement made it obligatory for the Kaieti family to pay to the ousted nakib of Makulla, at the request of the British government, “such sum as they determine,” the necessary funds being made available by the payment of a lump sum (from $100,000 dollars available in the government treasury, controlled by the British), which was to be kept aside for the nakib. By intervening in Broom affairs, the British became the arbiter of disputes in what was basically Ottoman domain. This was a political gain that also carried with it the baggage of related problems.

The followers of the deposed nakib of Makulla became a liability to the British. While the sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Bargash, offered
The “Indian Arab” and the Tale of Sayyid Fadl

refuge to the nakib and his family in his country, he did not want the nakib’s followers and slaves. And since it was dishonorable for an Arab to abandon his retinue, the nakib could not accept the invitation.\textsuperscript{40} As the British ship carrying this troupe—which included about seven hundred people—docked at Aden, the Bombay government panicked. It was determined not to let this Arab retinue disembark there. J. B. Peile, the acting chief to the government of Bombay, was so eager to ship these people out of Aden that he suggested they be “shifted back in dhows to Makulla and the Jemadar told to protect them” until a home was found for them.\textsuperscript{41} Loch, also worried about the outbreak of cholera in the region, implemented a dispersion plan. He boarded the members of the retinue in eight buggalows and sent the fleet to anchor off Little Aden. The remaining followers of the nakib were moved to Huswah. Out of these, seventy were sent back to Makulla, twenty were allowed to remain in Aden, and 550 migrated on their own to Lahej. The sultan of Lahej welcomed them, as many of these men were good farmers. Others were slaves with families whose labor could also be used in farming; some slaves were also employed as soldiers. One hundred and fifty of the 550 followers entered Aden and dispersed.

Of the settlement money left with the British by the chief of Shehr, the nakib was given Rs. 5,000 in cash. A sum of Rs. 16,500 of the settlement money had been used to pay for food for the retinue while they were docked in Aden. Loch took another Rs. 30,000 from the settlement money, in payment for six buggalows. He concluded that the remaining Rs. 166,000, if invested in the government, would give the nakib an income of Rs. 500 per month.\textsuperscript{42} Loch regretted that the nakib, in violation of his promise, had finally landed with a portion of his followers in Zanzibar—much to the chagrin of the sultan.\textsuperscript{43} But he was confident that he would not let any help flow from the British side to the nakib. He enforced a blockade in the region to prevent the nakib of Makulla from obtaining any supplies and, what was more important, “to stop anyone landing especially Sayyid Fazl.”\textsuperscript{44}

The temerity of the resident in intervening and hoisting a British flag in both Broom and Makulla after the truce was noted with disdain and alarm in the Arab press. News items protested his
intervention, as these areas were part of Ottoman territory. They were particularly incensed when it was decided that in any future fights the resident at Aden would have the last word. The Arabic newspaper *Burham*, published in Alexandria, noted in its issue of 6 October 1881 that the British had seized Broom. It observed, “[The British] hoisted their flag there and at Makulla, where they store coal, although they are not ignorant of the rights of the Porte in the Arabian Peninsula which contains many Holy places consisting of the Hijaz.” The newspaper lamented that this was not the only instance of this kind. It regretted that “they have done many others like this, the remembrance of which brings burning in the heart.” It blamed the aggression on the resident and expressed its hope that the “English government [would] agree with [their] opinions and blame the resident for his interference in affairs in which he ha[d] no concern.” It appealed to the Porte to take notice of the resident’s actions and to pay heed to the governor of Makulla, who, it said, had “asked the Ottoman government with a ‘firman’ [for] a flag to be hoisted in this country.” The British officers remained alert to the “contingency of the Turkish flag being hoisted at Makulla and Broom.”

As tempers flared, the Indian Arabs increasingly became key players in the imperial contestations around Shehr and Makulla. They dipped their fingers in these muddy waters and made the most of imperial fault lines. They played critical roles as middlemen brokers. Their actions established vast Muslim networks in the shadow of the imperial infrastructure. The Jang brothers had enabled the British to set foot on the fringes of Ottoman territory in the Arab Peninsular rim. But intervening in the Jangs’ affairs also put the British on the trail of another Indian Arab: Sayyid Fadl. Pursuing Sayyid Fadl allowed the British to enter into the politics of the gateway to Istanbul: the Hijaz.

In 1881, it was widely believed in British circles that Sayyid Fadl—the Indian Arab the British had deported to the Hijaz in 1852 for inciting peasant rebellion in Malabar in southern India—was in Istanbul. Indeed, he had been chosen by the Porte to be stationed at Makulla to counter British political sovereignty in that port town. Loch, the resident at Aden, reported in a letter to the Bombay
government that he had news that the Porte had appointed Fadl as governor of the Hadramawt region, in which Makulla and Shehr were located. Loch further noted that with an eye to assert its own power in the region through Fadl that the “Motasarif at Hodeida had been directed by the Moshir of Taiz to salute Sayyid Fadl on his arrival [there].”

A series of telegraphs regarding Sayyid Fadl that were sent between the Aden residency and the government of India’s Foreign Department indicate the importance Britain attributed to the “little men” in imperial politics. Their movements were continuously tracked. Through telegraphs, Loch was in touch with merchants in Jeddah, who reported that Fadl was still in Istanbul. His son, located at Mecca, had said that his father would leave for the Hadramawt area only after “Haj Eid.” Loch was worried because at the same time it was rumored in Hodeidah that Fadl had actually left Istanbul for Yemen, “with instructions to enquire into the administration of that country and of the Hadraumat.” In another communication to the Bombay government, Loch reported that he also had heard that the Porte was in touch with Fadl via telegrams and was keeping him informed of political moves in the area. Loch indicated that Fadl had been “asked to halt at whatever place the telegram [might] reach him and there await further instruction.” C. Gonne, chief secretary to the government of Bombay, summed it up best: “The only orders at present given with reference to Sayyid Fadl are that in common with all others he shall not be permitted to land at either of the blockaded ports.”

Sayyid Fadl (1824–1901)

Sayyid Fadl, the outlawed fugitive Indian Arab, played the British and Ottoman rivalries to his advantage. His interesting life—which took him into India, Arabia, and Turkey—shows the significant role ethnically marked and legally stigmatized Muslim subjects could play in shaping British India’s relations both with its Muslim population as well as its European imperial rivals in Asia. It also reveals the vast networks such individuals could establish between empires,
thereby making hollow the claims of these empires to have fool-proof borders.

Sayyid Fadl’s own son, Sayyid Ahmad Fadl, recorded the life and times of his father in an important book called *Al-Anwarul Nabwiyyat-wal-Asrar ul Abadita* (Light of Prophet and Secrets of Hadith). Expressing his deep desire to produce a written genealogy and history of his family, Sayyid Ahmad Fadl remarked that he was “keen to record the famous events (ahwal) of his father’s times so that they become part of history.”

According to this biography, Sayyid Fadl Alawi ibn Sahl Pukoya Tangal (1824–1901) was born in Malabar in 1824. He was the son of Sayyid Alawi (1749–1843), who had migrated from the Hadramawt area into the Malabar region of southwest India at the age of seventeen. Sayyid Fadl’s father, Sayyid Alawi had joined the Alawiyya *tariqa* (a Sufi order) established in Malabar by two Alawi leaders, Muhammad Hamid al Djafri and Sheikh Hasan al Djafri. The Alawiyya *tariqa* originated outside Hadramawt in the Iraq region; from there migrants brought it to Tarim in southern Yemen. From Iraq the *tariqa* picked up the ideas of Prophetic descent and an organized Sufi way, and made them its defining features. Sayyid Ahmad Fadl offers a genealogy that traces the family to Imam Husain and his father, Hazrat Ali. To this were added the local customs, rituals, and the saint culture of Tarim. The Alawiyya *tariqa* thus constituted an amalgamation of traditions picked up in the course of its journey across the Middle Eastern world. It flowered in the mosques, shrines, music, and landscape of Tarim. As it came to be identified with Tarim, the region was slowly converted from the Alawis’ “destination,” as Enseng Ho has put it, “to the seat of their origin.”

In the thirteenth century, the shifting of trade routes in the Indian Ocean from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea area enabled the expansion of the Alawiyya *tariqa* out of Tarim into the larger trans-Asian diaspora. The shift to the Red Sea opened new trading zones, linking cities in fresh ways all the way from China to Europe. Significantly, the key players involved throughout the Asian areas of this route were Muslim merchants who operated from Muslim polities: Alexandria, Cairo, Jeddah, Aden, Cambay, Calicut, and Pasai. This route thus quickly became identified with Muslim merchants
and states. Enseng Ho has shown that this transcultural Muslim ecumene and its cultural exchanges were crucial to the formation of the Alawi way both at home and in the diaspora. Trade links enabled the mobility of religious scholars and ideas as well. Scores of immigrants settled in India. But they continued to have contact with their homeland—and not just hypothetically and genealogically but physically. For instance, some of them, like Sayyid Jifri or Jufri Tangal, returned to Arabia and became muftis in Mecca.

It is along these networks of trade and ideas that the family of Sayyid Fadl thrived. They bridged these routes and made careers as transcultural men who manipulated the politics of this trans-Asian world. The family represented one of the many cases of Hadrami religious men who moved to India during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to become teachers and scholars of the Shafi jurisprudence. The Zamorin welcomed them, and many set up institutions of learning in Malabar even as they maintained their ties with their home. Indeed, many received honorific titles—like Tangal—from the Zamorin and rose to positions of high status in local society. Fadl’s father, Sayyid Alawi, headed the tariqa in Malabar after the death of the founders, the Alawi brothers. Sayyid Alawi is considered one of the greatest saints of Malabar due to his learning, piety, and miraculous deeds. He was also the founder of many mosques in Ernad and Walluvanad. His shrine at Mambram became a site of pilgrimage and rituals that ranged from individuals being blessed as shahids (martyrs) after an act of violence to being celebrated once they had died in the cause of Islam. The shrine soon became a pilgrimage site, and the Fadl family its patron saint. Presiding over its many rituals gave the Fadl family a level of authority akin to that of the local clergy—the ulema. Sayyid Fadl was thus born into this religiously influential family. As an adult, he was quick to use these contacts to politically mobilize Muslim peasants to violent yet religiously sanctified protest against their British-supported Hindu landlords.

In 1852, the Indian government, on the recommendation of Malabar commissioners Henry Conolly and Thomas L. Strange, deported Fadl to the Hijaz. He was so penalized for allegedly having incited Muslim peasants to violent protest against the British land tenure system
and its beneficiaries, the Hindu landlords. Later Fadl was also accused of being complicit in the murder of Conolly.\textsuperscript{64} In the Hijaz and later at Istanbul, he thrived on a huge trans-Asiatic network of contacts. He is identified in British records as the “Moplah rebel,” an “outlawed fanatic,” and a “seditious wahabi.” He nurtured the political ambition of becoming the independent ruler of Dhofar, a semi-independent region in southwest Arabia whose tribes accepted the political sovereignty of the sultan of Muscat. This brought him in close contact with the Ottoman government, which he hoped would support him with an eye on extending its own control in southwest Arabia. These plans predictably brought him into confrontation with the British, who viewed his involvement in the area as an Ottoman ploy to challenge their hold in southwest Arabia.

Caught at the cusp of two imperial rivals, Fadl made it his career to play on their fears, phobias, and political ambitions. His career blossomed because it corresponded with a new phase of trans-Asian tension among imperial powers: Britain, the Ottomans, and Russia. In the late nineteenth century, the pre-Crimean War (1856) bonhomie between the British and the Ottomans was fading and giving way to anti-Ottoman sentiment in London. The defeat of Russia in the Crimean war considerably lessened what had been the escalating Russophobia in British minds, and thereby decreased the political relevance of the Ottoman Empire. For many years the Ottomans had been British allies, mainly because the British feared the Russians. The Ottomans were seen as a bulwark against Russian expansion. The loss of a key European ally was bad enough for the Ottomans, but worse was to follow on the domestic front. The late nineteenth-century \textit{tanzimat} reforms that aimed to find a place for the Ottoman Empire as a “secular” polity in the league of European nations triggered a serious backlash. Both in the core as well as on the fringes of the empire the removal of religion from government and the introduction of uniform laws and equality for all gave rise to ethnic nationalisms and upheavals that pitted bureaucrats (the Porte) against the imperial court (the sultan).\textsuperscript{65}

Both the internal and external problems fragmented the central administration. This led to corruption, as decentralization, coupled with weakened institutions, enhanced the power of governors and
military commanders in the outlying provinces of the Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. As the economic crisis loomed, the tussle between the bureaucrats and the imperial court intensified. Riveted by internal and external problems, the Ottoman gaze shifted sharply from its core Levant area to the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. Much of this area had always been under the indirect governance of the Ottomans—left to local governors (sheriffs) with little central control and scant official attention. But if the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made the area very attractive to European and Asian powers, the Ottomans too turned to it for their own advantage. This region attracted their attention more than before as they battled the conservative backlash at the core and ethnic nationalisms in the eastern European part of their empire.

This new arena of imperial contestation became what we might call a dealing ground for Fadl, who was above all a transcultural broker. He used the Ottoman and British tensions to further his ends. While he tried to negotiate the best deal for himself with these trans-Asian imperial rivals, they saw him as a transcultural broker and middleman whose wide networks and contacts they could tap to further their ends. In the process Fadl became an important transcultural figure whose career and writings embodied the larger trans-Asian ramifications that Indian outlaws could bring to politics.

He wrote some nineteen tracts in Arabic during the course of his lifetime. These ranged from religious ones, to political exhortations in support of the caliph, to ones more socially embracive that were written to glorify the Alawiyya Sufi tariqa. In other words, his writings reflected the wide canvas of his operations. Thus the two texts he wrote while in Malabar, The Fundamentals of Islam and Learning to Avoid Unbelievers, reflected his purist and exclusionist beliefs that sanctified the kind of violence that he was inciting at that period in Malabar. Later works written from Istanbul on the Alawi tariqa and his father’s miracles were more inclusive. Out of these two, the Tarikat al-Hanifa (first edition published circa 1878; second edition published 1899) and Tanbih al-Ukala (1881) are more politically opportunist. Located in Istanbul, where he enjoyed royal patronage, he refers to Abd-al Hamid II as the caliph of Islam. In Tanbih
al-Ukala, at the bottom of each of the first eighteen pages he cites two traditions about the need to obey the caliph. He states, “Whoever despises the Sultan is despised by God. Whoever betrays the Sultan is betrayed by God.” In the margin on page 13 he says that to “obey Sultan Abdul Hamid is religiously necessary for he is the Caliph of God on earth.”

The “Runaway Arab” as the Transcultural Broker

In separate studies, Stephen Dale, K. N. Pannikar, and Conrad Wood have focused on Sayyid Fadl’s Indian career in the Malabar district of modern-day Kerala (1824–1852). They see Fadl more in the mold of a pan-Islamic visionary who, like Jamaluddin Afghani in north India, had a focused anti-British stand based on a pan-Islamic ideal. These studies see both him and the British commissioners who evicted him from India, Henry Conolly and Thomas L. Strange, as being single minded in their agendas: the latter saw Fadl as the disrupter of peace, and the former was convinced that his agenda was to uproot the British-supported Hindu landlords and land tenures in Malabar.

Fadl’s career after 1852, when the Indian government deported him to the Hijaz (from where he moved to Istanbul), reveals that his mission was not that simplistic. Fadl’s pan-Islam was neither simply Muslim welfare oriented nor merely caliph fixated, anticolonial, and anti-European. It was also not necessarily linked to any exclusive identity at cross-purposes with territorial nationalism. Ayesha Jalal has compellingly established that pan-Islam and territorial nationalism coexisted, as in the case of Afghani. But brokers like Fadl moved beyond these issues to embed their pan-Islamic activism and identity in trans-Asian networks that derived from imperial politics and commerce. Fadl built a symbiotic relationship between trans-Asian European empires and the Muslim cosmopolis. Examining his career enables us to move beyond thinking of the cultural empire of Muslims and Western political and commercial empires in terms of a simple dichotomy. The Asiatic careers of transimperial subjects like Fadl show that the wide contacts that these men had in various Muslim societies across Asia were neither consistently
anti-European nor territorially patriotic. These men were also not exclusivist to the extent of advocating the establishment of a universal caliphate.\textsuperscript{71} Bereft of any explicit political agenda (such as promoting territorial nationalism or Muslim universalism) and operating totally within a late nineteenth-century historical context of imperial rivalries, such men were at best opportunistic. They effectively embedded their international relations within those of imperial powers in order to carve out a trans-Asiatic niche for themselves.

Thus Fadl made the most of the tensions generated both within and between “modern” empires as large parts of Asia came under European colonial influence. Like most individuals coping with the European presence, Fadl too tapped into the Muslim normative theory that privileged the caliph as the temporal and spiritual head. Indeed, his fellow Hadramis displaced from their homeland had tended to lean on Ottoman help to legitimize their hold on foreign soil. Michael Laffan has shown how Hadramis in colonial Indonesia leaned increasingly on the Ottoman caliph to create a niche for themselves in Indonesian Muslim society. They needed the caliphal shoulder as they were marginalized as “foreign Orientals” both by the Dutch and by local Muslims, who were not impressed by their claims to Arab sayyid superiority.\textsuperscript{72} Fadl too used the caliph in similar self-aggrandizing ways.

Unlike theorists and intellectuals who combined territorial nationalism with Islamic universalism to fight imperialism, Fadl remained noncommittal to both. He moved across the Muslim world from Acheh to Morocco, Egypt, Hijaz, and Turkey, tapping not just the normative imaginary of Muslim subjects but playing also on similar sentiments of Asian rulers—like the caliph—who had huge political ambitions. Indeed, he played with the global ambitions of Britain as well when he urged it to step in as the overseer of Muslims. Thus Fadl tuned his own individually driven international relations to those of “modern” empires and carved out a vast trans-Asiatic ecumene.

The transimperial cosmopolis that he carved out flourished because imperial powers depended heavily on his networks. Indeed, they leaned on him because he could be an asset to their diplomatic
maneuvering—a skill that he himself perfected at the consulates. Indeed, his role as a professional broker ensured that Fadl, despite being stigmatized as a “fanatic” and an “outlaw” by the British commissioners in Malabar, was never completely discarded by them. They realized his potential and leaned on him heavily to navigate the politics of the transimperial Muslim world empires that he very aptly represented. Similarly, the Ottoman government—at a time when it was in the midst of serious domestic upheavals brought on by the financial crisis—was keen to use him as its agent to negotiate its international relations. Fadl’s career and his amazing trans-Asiatic contacts reflect the operation of a Muslim cosmopolis that was propped up on trans-Asiatic networks of diplomacy, brokerage, kinship, and the profits of trade. The intellectual underpinning of this grid lay in the Arab version of Islam that venerated the holy texts as well as in people who were linked to the sacred genealogy of the Prophet and who had contacts in the sacred geography of Arabia. This intellectual underpinning was not simplistically caliph-centric. Fadl’s slippery movements across Asia were successful because he moved beyond the caliph to seek help for his Asian careering. As Ayesha Jalal has shown, there never was any consensus on recognizing the caliph as the undisputed head of the Islamic umma. Indeed, his status, even in normative Muslim thought, became increasingly ambiguous, as traffic to his territories increased and Muslims experienced hardships under his rule. As colonial regimes improved travel as well as contact between Muslim subjects and the Hijaz and Istanbul, Muslims’ hopes that the caliph would become a global leader were dashed. And the inability of the caliph to match up to the expectations—indeed, the fantasies—of Muslims provided the perfect vacuum that career middlemen like Fadl rushed to fill. Fadl tapped into the international relations of imperial powers and used their networks and strategies rather than looking to the caliph for help.

In the late nineteenth century, the Arabian Peninsula was an ideal ground for runaways like Fadl for other reasons as well. In this period, the Ottoman gaze had shifted away from the Levant and toward the Arabian lands. Sultan Abd-al Hamid II (1876–1908), after his success in the Russo-Turkish war, turned his back to the
West and concentrated on Asia as a new arena in which to realize his political ambitions. Faced with the conservative reaction to the “secularizing” tanzimat reforms, and the loss of territory to European powers later in the century, he made the caliphate and “back to Islam” the pillars of his rule. By promoting himself as the center of religious-political authority for Muslims throughout the world, he hoped to entice Muslim subjects of European powers to recognize his authority. He turned his political gaze to the Hijaz, and in particular to its neighboring Ottoman territories, and to Istanbul—important sites for these Muslim subject populations. And as these Muslim subjects of European regimes became the focus of Fadl’s attention, he hoped that the regimes would be cautious in their policies toward the Ottomans.

The diversion of the Ottoman gaze into Asia was not good news for either the British or the Dutch colonial regimes. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had made this region attractive to European powers. Predictably, the area soon became a hotbed of imperial tensions and competing political sovereignties. It was here that the European powers, the Ottomans, and the Arabian polities competed over “Muslim subjects,” seeking to showcase their benevolence for Muslims globally and to earn dividends locally. In addition, the Indian Muslim population in the area drew the interest of the Indian government to the Arabian Peninsula. Ironically, Fadl proved to be an asset in Britain’s imperial politics in the region.

Fadl’s “outlawed” status notwithstanding, he was a highly prized “Mahomedan subject” and “Indian Arab” whose transimperial profile and wide influence was both despised and used by the British. His many trans-Asian contacts—located across the region from Acheh in Indonesia, to India, to Morocco, and to Istanbul—made him an ideal “subject” over whom Ottoman and British political sovereignties and contested claims of “responsibility” for Britain’s Muslim subjects could be both tested and showcased. At the same time, Sayyid Fadl, well aware of the imperial contest over his identity, subjecthood, and transcultural reach, made the most of his unique context. He furthered his career and became the independent ruler of Dhofar and maintained his administration, exploiting the trans-Asian imperial rivalries over him. When eventually
ousted from Dhofar, he played an even more central role as a broker. In this capacity, he often assumed greater significance than the consular staff, who were constrained by ethical codes of conduct. Fadl’s extraterritorial ties had yet greater influence, for they put in place a vast network that was later open to use by a range of ideologues across Asia.

Sayyid Fadl as the Ruler of Dhofar

In 1876, Sayyid Fadl occupied Dhofar and declared himself its ruler, claiming the sanction of the Ottoman government for his rule. Dhofar was a tract of country in Hadramawt, in Yemen, not far from Shehr where, as we have seen, Fadl had played the role of a mediator. Dhofar exemplified how the trans-Asian networks worked, with myriad players that ranged from imperial powers to tribal chiefs. Sayyid Fadl’s remarkable journey—born and brought up in a Malabar Sufi family of Arab descent and rising to become an independent ruler of an Arabian principality, a leader who commanded respect in both Meccan and Istanbul high society—was enabled by the connections he forged early on between British and Ottoman societies. And he established these connections using imperial networks as well as his religious and kinship ties.

Ironically, the imperial rivals—Britain, which claimed him as her subject; the Ottoman government; and Mecca, the fulcrum of spiritual power—were all complicit in building Fadl’s exceptional political career. He first acquired power in the region by taking advantage of tribal feuds in which he intervened on the invitation of one faction— the Al Ghurrah—to “settle” matters. He had met his hosts at Mecca, where the *haj* pilgrimage was a meeting point not just for spiritual camaraderie but also for sorting out political matters. Loch, the political resident at Aden, later expressed the view that Fadl had used his Sayyid descent and his Sufi spiritual upbringing to make himself appealing and credible in the eyes of the local tribes, even though he was an outsider. At the same time, Fadl’s propaganda about his alleged proximity to the Porte and their approval of his political ambition reinforced the popular impression that he was a
man of influence in the region. Loch in fact had wanted a British
to dock near Dhofar so that the people who had been “deceived”
into believing him would get a real sense of how the world outside
regarded him.76

Loch’s misgivings notwithstanding, Fadl consolidated his hold
by playing politics with the feuding tribes in the region. He used
the people of Dhofar to fight the Garah Bedouins of the inte-
rior. He also extended his influence over the Mahrah tribes for
a considerable distance westward. He ruled over the entire Al
Ghurrah tribe, which was located between Daurghot to the west
and Rasmus to the east. Inland, about three days’ journey from the
coast, there were about 3,500 members of this tribe who also
acknowledged him as their ruler. The Al Kathiris, numbering about
2,000, in the northern frontier of the Al Ghurrah, also acknowl-
edged his rule. But the independent Al Kathiri tribe, with about
3,000 members and occupying the country up to the confines of
Soor, did not acknowledge him. He had no contact with the tribes
eastward of Dhofar. The Bedouins did not acknowledge him either.77
Once he consolidated his hold in the region, he made the town of
Salahah his capital.

Dhofar had immense agricultural potential. The area produced
gum, olibanum, myrrh, aloe, and cotton. The annual production of
olibanum was valued at $30,000. Dhofar also produced wheat, bajri,
jowari, and pulse sufficient for the wants of the people. But expertise
was needed to exploit it to the fullest. Fadl tried to use his trans-
Asian contacts to do just that. For instance, the country had an
abundance of rubber trees but no one who knew how to make rubber.
Fadl asked his wazir, Sayyid Abdul Rehman bin Hosain bin Sahl, to
go to British India and bring back people who knew the procedures
for the manufacture of rubber. Similarly, eager to earn commercial
profits, he sent his wazir to Bombay to urge the British government
in India to send their steamers to dock at his ports once a month as
they moved from Aden to Bombay. He was also happy to negotiate
with European companies for these benefits. And as an inducement
for the British agent at Aden to agree to this arrangement, he said
that if the amount of freight on each shipload of cargo did not
amount to $200, he would pay that sum regardless. And in the event
of the freight exceeding that amount, all of it would be paid to the shipping company. Indeed, D. F. Carmichael, the chief secretary to the government of Madras, reported that he had information that Fadl was “turning his attention to the useful development of the resources of the country [Malabar].” He had obtained specimens of minerals as well as manufactured products from Malabar, articles such as “stone axes, coconut scrapers, arrow root cloth etc.” Carmichael was happy with this development and in fact felt that “it was quite unnecessary and indeed undesirable that he should be disturbed.”

Fadl relied on profits from trade at the harbors that dotted Dhofar. He charged an ad valorem duty of 5 percent on all imports and exports at each of the ports. There were about sixty civil and military persons scattered in various villages who acted as tax collectors. It was also reported to Loch that even though people resented paying this tax they paid because, as he put it, the “Sayid [was] considered a learned man” in the area. Indeed, Fadl’s wazir always referred to him as a “saint” and a “holy person, especially when he was urging someone to pay heed to him.

Fadl loved to play on the “holy man” card. He relied on various versions of Islam for state-building. Indeed, he used it as it suited him best to further his temporal ambitions. Thus in 1877 when he found that people were suffering from a scarcity of food, rising prices, and economic hardships because of the spread of a fatal disease in the cattle and because of drought conditions, he explained it to the people in religious terms. He said that had they paid the two and a half percent alms in accordance with the precepts of the Koran they would have been saved from these troubles. Using this religious card, he went on to benefit economically as he began collecting alms from the people. The use of this religious ploy also helped him stall the march of some of the distressed who were looking toward the sultan of Muscat to come and rescue them. Following the Islam of the Koran and the Hadith to the letter, Fadl ended up imposing on the people a very austere and monist form of Islam—associated with the Naqshbandiya Sufi order in India—which offered no space for alternative modalities like magic and sorcery. Thus in 1878 some eighty individuals of the Al Ghurrah tribe—
Fadl’s main supporter—were imprisoned on charges of practicing magic. In accordance with the narrow juridical interpretation of Islamic law, they were put to torture until they confessed.\footnote{84}

Fadl faced tribal opposition, very much like the case of the more famous Naqshbandi Sufi warrior of the northwest frontier—Sayyid Ahmad Shahid—who earned the wrath of the frontier tribes once he began to impose on them his monist Islam–driven political culture. Indeed, the Al Ghurrah—to this point his hosts and loyal supporters—were so incensed by the torture of their members on charges of practicing magic that they revolted. A few of their leaders assembled at Morbah and arranged a meeting of the tribe at Thakah. They agreed to test the waters by committing small outrages in order to ascertain if any steps would be taken to prevent such acts. First they killed some twenty to thirty head of cattle, which went unnoticed. Finally, they took the extreme step of slaying one of Fadl’s she-camels. Fadl was sufficiently provoked and clamped down on them heavily.\footnote{85}

Again, very much as with Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, antagonism with the tribals also developed because Fadl began to interfere in their tribal political economy. Thus, for instance, at the heart of his conflicts with the Al Ghurrah tribe was the digging of a canal in order to water his fields. This meant diverting a river to his advantage. The angry Al Ghurrah tribe rebelled, as their lands were deprived of water supply. They were suppressed. But Fadl never again dared to reopen the channel for fear of provoking their anger.\footnote{86}

However, despite the reaction of the Al Ghurrah tribe, Fadl did not meet the same brutal fate as Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of the northwest frontier.\footnote{87} This was largely because Fadl played on his trans-Asian contacts, his loose idea of an extraterritorial grid, which in this case encompassed his propaganda about the support he had from the Porte as well as his friendly overtures to the British. And thus tribes like the Al Kathiris stood by him. The Al Kathiri tribals were smaller in number than the Al Ghurrah. They thus allied themselves with Fadl out of self-interest and supported him. They remained steadfast in their support because he had convinced them that he had the support of the Porte.\footnote{88} However, the clash of the
tribal notions of temporal power with those upheld by Fadl became Fadl’s ultimate undoing. His reliance on his extraterritorial contacts also backfired.

The rival tribal chiefs looked to imperial powers in the region to garner support against Fadl. Since he had flaunted the idea that he had Ottoman support, they turned to Britain’s ally, the sultan of Muscat, to protect them from Fadl’s atrocities. They hoped to cash in on British-Ottoman rivalries to further their ends. The chief of the Al Kathiri tribe, Awadh Bin Abdulla Sayid Bin Mobarak ul Shamfari ul Kathiri, appealed to Loch’s translator, Saleh Jaffer, for help. He detailed Fadl’s atrocities toward the Al Kathiris and how they in turn had dethroned him and driven him away. But Awadh Bin Abdulla said he was afraid of Fadl’s Ottoman connections and feared his return. He wanted the British to send them a cannon, a gunner, ammunition, powder, lead, and some money so that they might defend themselves and their subjects. He said that the English would obtain a reward from God for these “favors they would do to the Musalmans.”

The sultan of Muscat was always willing to play upon any fears the tribal chiefs had about Fadl’s huge trans-Asian influence, especially with regard to the Porte. He never failed to remind the chiefs about his misconduct in Malabar, his lies and deceptions and his expulsion from India because of his conduct. The sultan reiterated that Fadl’s “present doings [were] in accordance with his habits.” With these warnings he once again affirmed that Dhofar and its people were under his protection. In 1879, when Fadl was on one of his many trips to Istanbul, some local chiefs urged the sultan of Muscat to move into Dhofar. He obliged. And this resulted in Fadl’s formal expulsion from his kingdom.

Soon after, the sultan of Muscat swiftly moved in his people and put in place his administration. He sent two officers to Dhofar to assist the sheikh in restoring order. One of them, Suleiman bin Sowey, was to remain at Dhofar as vali (governor), of course with the approval of the chiefs. He was later replaced by another man, Mussullim bin Bedwee, who was familiar with Dhofar, having lived there earlier. The new vali was asked by the sultan to undo the damages inflicted on the tribals by Fadl. These included reduction of custom duties, repair of irrigation canals for the use of the people,
and the utilization of the collected revenue in Dhofar, rather than being remitted to Muscat.93

The expulsion made Fadl a permanent fixture in Istanbul. Once located in the city, he exploited the global aspirations of Sultan Abd-al Hamid II to be regarded as the caliph of the Muslim world. He tailored his international relations to that of both Britain and the Ottomans to further his interests. At the same time he never stopped cashing in on his high sayyid status and kinship ties to spread his net far and wide.94

Sayyid Fadl’s Cosmopolis

Premodern Asian empires (Russia, Ottoman, and Mughal) had ambassadors posted in each other’s courts to maintain diplomatic ties. At the same time their news writers—the akbari nawis—fanned out in society and kept their ears to the ground so that they could report on a range of matters to their parent courts.95 In the nineteenth century, benign court ambassadors gave way to European and British consuls and vice consuls with special rights and privileges, as the “modern” empires reworked international relations within new norms of responsibility and accountability. In this period of heightened trans-Asian commercial and political contact—contacts mediated by Europeans—special amnesties or favors had to be offered to facilitate economic and political cooperation. This was the “capitulatory era” of favors granting economic, commercial, judicial, and personal liberties to foreign nationals who traveled, traded, and resided in the vast trans-Asiatic Ottoman, Russian, and Indian territories. Consuls soon began to give away these rights and privileges to their protégés. The protégés served as guardians, governors, and judges of their consular districts.96

The British consulates assumed fresh significance in Ottoman territories like the Hijaz, where British and European Muslim subjects from South and Southeast Asia milled around on a daily basis, formed permanent enclaves, and congregated in large numbers annually for the haj. The consulates emerged as critical sites where the Ottoman, Arabian, and European empires competed over
Muslim subjects, each using these subjects to reveal a new, benevolent face to the world. This was a way to dent each other’s political sovereignty. At the same time, the consuls acquired immense political powers, engaging in surveillance and espionage, as the pilgrim traffic to the Hijaz made the region “suspect” in the European imagination as a place of anti-West “sedition” and “intrigue.” They carried on political espionage by hiring Muslim vice consuls and dragomans.97

Britain had a range of consuls and vice consuls scattered all over the Hijaz, Aden, and Istanbul. It spent vast amounts of money in maintaining them and their network of agents—the dragomans. These were interpreters and translators who were often locally recruited and who operated through their contacts across trans-Asia. They protected British interests and aided the administration in non-British territory. But these middlemen also played an important role in projecting the benevolent face of the government to the Muslim population in India. Thus in 1882 when Abdur Razzack was appointed vice consul at Jeddah he was seen as a multiedged sword. The creation of the new position of the vice consul itself was meant to showcase British concern “in providing protection and aid to its Muslim subjects performing pilgrimage to holy places of Arabia.” The appointment of a “trustworthy” Muslim to that post further underlined the trust that Britain placed in its Muslim subjects.98 But Muslim vice consuls were also tools via which “trustworthy information” about global Muslim networks was tapped and “public opinion” molded. The secretary to the government of India clarified to Razzack the nature of his job as follows: “Her majesty’s Consul at Jeddah to whom you will be subordinate may wish to avail himself of your assistance in obtaining trustworthy information regarding the course of affairs and of public opinion in Mecca and neighboring places.”99

Vice Consul Zohrab’s report on the establishment of the consulate at Jeddah laid out the priorities of this office. He enumerated his duties as being both political and commercial in nature. They included suppressing the slave trade and assisting and protecting Muslim subjects on pilgrimage. But it was his political duties that he unabashedly privileged. Predictably, these centered on surveillance
of runaway Muslim “fanatics” and mutineers, all of whom, according to Zohrab, had found refuge in the Hijaz. He wrote: “The Hijaz harbors many men who having become obnoxious to the government of their own countries have sought refuge in the province. Many of the mutinous of 1857 escaped in this manner the punishment they merited. These political refugees should be all discovered and their activities and movements watched.”

The diplomatic privileges enjoyed by the vice consuls were bound within certain rules and ethics related to extraterritoriality and accountability. Thus, for instance, Zohrab clarified that he had to work within the parameters of the sheriff of Jeddah’s administrative rights and privileges. He observed: “The Consul had to be in constant correspondence with high sheriff since his correspondence bears more of a political character. To watch the actions and movements of suspected persons who have made the hijaz home. And to watch course of events in his province which besides being under a dual government is disaffected and is attached to the rest of the Empire by a thread so weak that the slightest shock will sever it.”

In contrast, the politics of a broker, such as Sayyid Fadl, appeared remarkably seamless and free from responsibilities and accountability. And this immediately made Fadl an asset to imperial actors even though the political rhetoric that defined him as a “fanatic” and “outlaw” continued. This was more than evident in the first few British reactions to Fadl’s meteoric rise.

A Khojah merchant (from the western coast of India) who traveled the trans-Asian grid that stretched across India, Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula, North and East Africa, and Istanbul visited Dhofar in 1876. He reported to the translator of the political agent at Aden on the excellent administration of Sayyid Fadl. He was struck by the remarkable administration of justice in Dhofar that was dispensed by Fadl’s son Saleh with ease. Commenting on the popularity of Fadl within Dhofar, as well as his wide influence and outreach, he said that one faction of the feuding tribal chieftains of Dhofar had met Fadl in Mecca while on pilgrimage and had invited him to “settle the district.” He noted that Fadl also indicated to him his wide transimperial contacts: Fadl had said that even though he had no idea why the British government was always inquiring about
him, he did know that he had the sanction of the Ottoman sultan for his new administration.102

This report on Fadl, which represented him as the independent ruler of Dhofar operating with Ottoman sanction, created alarm in British circles. The Foreign Department at Simla urged the secretary of state for India to confirm with the Porte if Fadl’s claim was correct. W. F. Prideaux, the political resident in the Persian Gulf, conveyed to the government the sultan of Muscat’s counterclaims regarding Fadl’s status in Dhofar. Even though Prideaux himself was not convinced about Muscat’s claims, he was nevertheless appalled at the temerity of one of their “outlawed” subjects in becoming an independent ruler in southern Arabia.103 It is significant that it is from this moment of Fadl’s self-proclaimed independence that British records dropped the “Moplah priest” identifier and begin to refer to Fadl as a “dangerous wahabi,” a “dangerous fanatic,” and an “outlaw.” Indeed, Prideaux found him more despicable than the “Wahabis” when he said that Fadl, “whose tenets go far beyond Wahabeeism, and whose aims and views are, if I may use the expression, those of an ‘irreconcilable’ to Christianity and British rule, cannot but prove prejudicial to British interests in south Arabia.”104

And yet so significant and crucial was the role of middlemen like Fadl that Prideaux was against any move that would antagonize permanently the “dangerous fanatic.” He therefore negated and questioned all claims of the sultan of Muscat and urged the government of India to move cautiously and refrain from aiding the sultan of Muscat in reestablishing his suzerainty over Dhofar. In 1877, he wrote: “The presence of the Moplah priest Sayyid Fadhl in that district is objectionable for many reasons; but the influence of that religious leader will probably expire with his life; while the troubles attendant on the sovereignty of Muscat being involved with the rights of the Chiefs of Hadramant would in all likelihood be perennial . . . [The chiefs] would probably resent any active efforts on the part of Sayyid Turki to assert dominion over them.”105 In 1877, the Foreign Department informed Marquess of Salisbury, the secretary of state for India, that they saw no reason why they should support the claims of the sultan of Muscat over Dhofar.106
And yet Loch, the political resident at Aden, wanted some action in the form of stationing a British vessel near Dhofar so that the tribes Fadl had deceived into believing in his widespread influence would begin to doubt his claims. Loch was of the opinion that British pressure on the Porte to clarify their stand on Fadl would also help dent Fadl’s authority, call his bluff, and “go far toward checking the formation of a hotbed of religious fanaticism—strongly imbued with intensely inimical feelings toward the British government in India.”

Loch understood very well that Fadl had developed his trans-Asiatic contacts and legitimated his rule in Dhofar by his dependence on imperial networks. Loch wanted to send a signal to Fadl’s clientele that Fadl’s claim of wielding clout with the British was unfounded. He thus always declined to respond to Fadl’s requests for help on the seas against Ottoman ships. By tracking his movements and proposing to station a government vessel in the neighborhood of Dhofar, Loch hoped, as he put it, to “undeceive the Arabs of Dhofar and Morbat regarding the position held outside of Arabia by their self-elected ruler.”

Indeed, C. V. Aitchison, secretary in the Foreign Department, went a step further and thought even the stationing of a British vessel would add to Fadl’s self-proclaimed status and importance in imperial politics. He suggested that it would be good if the resident at Aden from time to time were to let the Arab tribes know, as he stated in a letter, that “the British Government can hold no communication with an outlaw from British territories, who, if he were to return, would be liable to detention as a prisoner.”

Luckily for Loch and Aitchison, a tribal uprising in Dhofar, supported, as we noted earlier, by the sultan of Muscat, resulted in Fadl’s eviction from the region a few years later.

British misgivings of him notwithstanding, neither Fadl nor the imperial powers were willing to sever relations with each other. Indeed, they lived a mutually beneficial existence, relying on each other in their efforts to dig their heels deep into trans-Asian politics. If Fadl’s ecumene depended on imperial politics, the fact that “modern” empires were leaning on him was equally striking. Indeed, the dynamics of imperial politics, and particularly those between Britain, Russia, and the Ottomans, shaped the career of Fadl in no
small measure. After all, he lived during the post-1856 Crimean War period when British attitudes toward the Ottomans had shifted from friendship to antagonism; as discussed above, anti-Turkey sentiment had escalated in London because of diminished Russophobia following the Russian defeat at Crimea. The loss of this key European ally went hand in hand with the *tanzimat* reforms of the period. These were intended to get the empire good press and allies in Europe by uniting the empire around a nondenominational “secular” and inclusive ideology, one that emphasized being Ottoman rather than Muslim. A universal law and equality for Muslims and non-Muslims were the cornerstones of this new identity—as was the idea of integrating an older form of constitutionalism, as reflected in the effort to consult community leaders in decision making. The *tanzimat* reforms had their shortfalls: they triggered ethnic nationalisms in the peripheries of the empire and added fresh dynamics to the already fragile link between the Ottoman center and the periphery. They threatened also the religious lobby, which demanded Islamic constitutionalism with Islamic jurisprudence at the center of any uniform law.

This internal turmoil was compounded not just by the loss of Britain as an ally but also by the additional need to combat Britain’s increasing influence, especially after the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal in what were Ottoman fringes: Yemen and the Persian Gulf and southern rim of the Arabian Peninsula. These areas, already seething with ethnic nationalisms or at the least influenced by them, offered a fertile ground for British intervention. Indeed, internal and external pressures created a vicious cycle of problems. The fear of Britain gave legitimacy to rulers like Abd-al Hamid II who wanted to bring back Islam as a unifying force and to undo the progress brought about by the reforms. In the 1880s, Abd-al Hamid II brought back Islam as a legitimating ideology to check the rising tide of ethnic nationalism. He hyped the pan-Islam card and used it to unite the empire. This back-to-Islam propaganda suggested that Ottoman power should lean on caliphal authority rather than on economic or political might. This imagined political significance of the caliph had more takers outside the Ottoman Empire than within it. Particularly susceptible were the British and Europeans. Indeed,
Abd-al Hamid II played and manipulated British fears of a globally embracing caliph to further his own political ambition.  

Sayyid Fadl’s career as a transcultural middleman was framed in this larger trans-Asian context, when the Ottoman gaze was shifting away from the Levant and into the hitherto peripheral areas of empire: the Arab Peninsula and the Persian Gulf areas. This brought it into a head-on collision with British political ambitions in the region. Fadl developed his international career in this imperial interstice. He played imperial tensions to his advantage. Even when he was living in Istanbul (after his expulsion from Dhofar), he maintained his contact with the British resident in the city. In 1880, the British resident in Istanbul, in a letter to the Marquess of Salisbury, reported his meeting with Sayyid Fadl and made note of the friendly overtures Fadl had made toward the British. In fact, Fadl had said that he was desirous of establishing commercial relations between Dhofar and India and in drawing British shipping to his ports. But most noteworthy was his praise of the British government in India as an exemplar of the “respect” and “justice and protection” it offered to the Muslims. Fadl said he brought to the notice of the Ottoman sultan the British niceties and familiarized him with the efficient redress mechanisms for Muslims that operated in India. He urged the sultan to follow the British model in Istanbul. It has been argued that such overtures by Fadl were meant to please the British so that they could help him reclaim Dhofar. But his political ambitions far exceeded the control of Dhofar. Fadl was playing the part of a transimperial broker. This promised huge dividends in the age of imperial rivalries—an age when the caliph, Abd-al Hamid II, nurtured global aspirations and projected himself as the sole custodian of Muslim interests. This brought him into direct conflict with Britain, which had its own global appetite.

The fact that Fadl was consciously playing on these imperial tension zones was clear as he made his overtures to the British from Istanbul. In Istanbul, Fadl sought political legitimacy for his rule in Dhofar from the Ottoman caliph. Fadl had in fact come to Istanbul after his ouster from Dhofar to renew a farman that would legitimize his authority in his kingdom and bring him firmly under Turkish political sovereignty. He was also in need of additional
troops—which he hoped to get from the Ottomans—in order to manage his affairs effectively in his kingdom. But that did not stop him from complaining to the British ambassador at Istanbul about the Omani governor at Dhofar who had hoisted the Ottoman “red flag with a crescent.” Playing on the anti-Ottoman sentiment of the ambassador, Fadl asked for his help to recapture Dhofar and fly “the national flag of Dhofar, green with a pentagonal centre.” According to Fadl, this was the best way to counter the red flag. Again, even while he leaned on the British, he relied also on Ottoman support to reoccupy Dhofar. He egged on the Ottomans to help him as a way of reclaiming their own political sovereignty, which they had lost to the British puppet—the sultan of Muscat—who now presided over Dhofar.

In 1886, with the tacit approval of the Ottoman caliph, Fadl attempted to reconquer Dhofar. This campaign was led by Fadl’s son Sayyid Muhammad Fadl. He tailored his father’s policy of cultivating international relations to the global aspirations of the Ottomans so as to expand his trans-Asiatic networks. He used both the imperial networks as well as his father’s influence in the upper echelons of power in Istanbul to spread out his political ambit toward Dhofar. According to T. S. Jago, the British consul at Jeddah, initially Sayyid Muhammad was denied permission by the Turkish governor general, Usman Pasha, at Jeddah, to proceed to Dhofar. But he had traveled from Istanbul to Jeddah to complete this job for his father. Interestingly, Sayyid Muhammad used the latest mode of speedy communication between Jeddah and Istanbul—the telegraph—to get in touch with his father in Istanbul. Fadl pulled rank and used his contacts in Istanbul to pressure the governor general to allow his son to proceed to Dhofar. And once permission was granted, his son used the imperial transportation networks and boarded a British pilgrim ship—filled with “indigent pilgrims”—with “an armed party and military stores” to be conveyed to Dhofar. This was a clever move because the presence of so many pilgrims on board made action difficult for the British and provided Sayyid Muhammad with a bargaining chip.

A weary sultan of Muscat appealed to the British for help. His wali at Dhofar was ill equipped to handle Sayyid Muhammad. He
feared that a successful reconquest of Dhofar would lead to “fresh disturbances.” The British government was sympathetic to the sultan’s request, as Fadl’s family had the political clout with which to reestablish Ottoman political sovereignty. A string of telegraphic communications between the political resident at Aden and the Bombay government revealed how seriously the British government viewed this attempt to reconquer Dhofar. And this was because they viewed Fadl as a middleman broker whose reconquest of Dhofar was in effect an effort to restore Ottoman political sovereignty. A troubled Loch reported that the pilgrim ship carrying Sayyid Muhammad had four hundred soldiers on board and that it intended to arrive at Rasoot. The ship, the Metapedia, was loaded with arms and ammunition, and the Bombay government asked the resident at Aden to stop it from leaving the port. A. G. F. Hogg, the political resident at Aden, searched the vessel and found arms and ammunition of European manufacture, as well as Arab matchlocks, swords, and daggers. But the government agreed that the detention of the ship was “embarrassing,” as the Metapedia was full of indigent pilgrims. Nevertheless, the ship was detained on the grounds that it had no doctor on board. The pilgrims grew mutinous due to the delays and for want of rations, so the ship was supplied with 3,500 rations in accordance with the manual for guidance of officers of ships carrying pilgrims in the Red Sea. Using a pilgrim ship for political ends paid dividends for Sayyid Muhammad. The problems regarding the pilgrims on board indicated that he had made a clever move. Significantly, even while cleverly using imperial networks, Sayyid Fadl never let go of his own repertoire of family, kinship, and soldiering contacts to establish his sway in the region. His retinue included one hundred Arab soldiers who formerly had been in the service of the sheriff of Mecca and whose unit had been recently disbanded, as well as sixteen family members and personal attendants of his father, Sayyid Fadl.

No number of excuses from Sayyid Muhammad that he was on way to Dhofar to repair the watercourses there satisfied the British. Further telegrams from Loch indicated that Sayyid Muhammad intended to “establish himself at Dhofar under the [authority of]
Porte.” The political resident in the Persian Gulf was most worried about Sayyid Muhammad’s use not just of imperial highways but also of a British pilgrim ship. This was viewed as the ultimate use of the imperial repertoire of resources—in this case, used by Sayyid Muhammad to carve out his own transimperial niche. The resident wanted Sayyid Muhammad to be immediately “prevented from proceeding in a British vessel to Dhofar.” He recommended that Fadl be sent back to Jeddah, as his “filibustering expedition under British flag” would create the false impression “of the countenance of the British government to the proceeding.” The tension only eased when the resident at Aden reported that the Metapedia had been searched and “a large quantity of arms and ammunitions seized.” Section 26 of the Arms Act was invoked, and the resident reported in a telegram that Sayyid Muhammad “elect[ed] to land but ha[d] not decided regarding his destination.” Hogg, the political resident at Aden, decided to keep Sayyid Muhammad on Flint Island until he made up his mind about his return to Jeddah. British apprehensions about Sayyid Muhammad playing the broker for the Ottomans was confirmed, as Hogg reported, when soon after electing to land he “declared himself an officer of the Turkish government sent specially to rule Dhofar under the Porte.” Sayyid Muhammad stated that he possessed firearms and orders to the above effect. Both Sayyid Fadl and his sons Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Sahil Fadl continuously moved between Jeddah and Istanbul, playing on the imperial rivalries and networks that framed this region. As they carved out their family’s career as middlemen they exploited fault lines, switched sides, and caused considerable unease to imperial powers.

The British government was particularly incensed by their moves. Yet it never hesitated to use Fadl if it suited them. Fadl made use of the British critique of the caliph. This changed his profile in British eyes from a dreaded “outlaw” to a useful Muslim subject whose authority was used to sanctify their critique of the caliph. Even as he leaned on the Ottomans for legitimating his power he made it clear to the British resident at Istanbul that he had come to meet him because he was skeptical of the future of the Ottoman Empire:
according to him, it had a good pasha but a corrupt administration. It was significant that he viewed the British as the preferred political sovereign in the Muslim world in the likely event of the Ottoman collapse. He noted in a letter that “the condition of the Turkish Empire was very critical, and in the event of a general collapse taking place he wished to have the friendship and to be under the protection of England, to whom all the Arabs looked as a just and righteous power.” What is significant, however, is that by faulting the Ottoman sultan in his duties as the caliph (which Fadl defined specifically as offering “justice and impartiality to all classes of his subjects”) and by praising the British government on precisely these fronts, he questioned Ottoman claims to be the overseer of Muslims globally. Indeed, the critique of the Ottomans as “failed caliphs” as far as overseeing the Muslim populations of the world became the key trope in Fadl’s interlocution with the British. Fadl’s son Sheikh Seid Sachel [Sahil] Effendi, who carried a letter from his father to the British resident in Istanbul, reiterated his father’s “devotion to England.” Fadl emphasized in particular his “admiration for her rule in India.” This was a country, he felt, where “the Mahomedan populations were treated with the most perfect justice and impartiality and were perfectly content with their state.”

This compliment was in fact an indirect indictment of the Ottomans for failing to deliver on this front. But this did not mean that all was lost for Fadl as far as the Ottomans were concerned. In the same breath, Effendi revealed the honors and status that his father enjoyed at the Ottoman court and the powerful influence he wielded over the sultan. At the same time, he also was quick to add that Muslims like him were attached to the British not only because the civil and religious rights of Muslims were so well protected under them but also because of the English government’s sincere friendship toward the Ottoman Empire, the only “refuge of Islamism on account of the caliphate and of the protection of the saints which the latter has under its care.” This “balancing” diplomacy—which both used and critiqued the caliph—was to become the signature of career transimperial subjects like Fadl.
Debating the Caliph

Fadl’s remarkable balancing act also indicated how well he was entrenched in both the British and the Ottoman worlds. Indeed, his views on the caliph resonated across the imperial divide, where Muslim subjects debated the “ideal caliph” profile. This was particularly true in the Hijaz, which was the melting pot of ethnic groups who gave the region its cosmopolitan veneer. Indeed, the huge Muslim congregations in the area, enabled by the discovery and expansion of the steamships and railways, gathered there because of the sacred geography of Mecca: pilgrims and visitors were attracted to the area because of the tales of the Prophet as a saint, his miraculous powers, and the therapeutic healing properties of the water from the holy fountain at Mecca (zamzam). This conjunction of modernity and enchantment that brought Muslims from all over the world together produced a lively debate on both religion and politics. This was bound to happen as the congregation itself had formed as a result of the efficient management of Islamic pilgrimage by “modern” empires.

The debates on politics had both territorially framed as well as transimperial resonance. Predictably, they spilled into the religious arena. And this indicated once again the centrality of religion in technology and in capitalist-driven “secular” modernity, both of which had enabled people in such large numbers, wearing the identities of territorially stamped subjects, to congregate. People discussed their experiences of living as colonial subjects with their country cousins—people they rarely met in such large numbers back home. They compared their lives and circumstances to subject populations of other empires. But they moved beyond their own experiences to discuss the caliph and commented on his performance as the “protector” of all Muslims. Indeed, it was their journey to the caliph’s own seat in Hijaz that made him a subject of physical scrutiny and review. Paradoxically, this close experience of the caliph’s administration was enabled by European powers who facilitated travel to Mecca for their Muslim subjects. The failure of the caliph to discharge his temporal responsibilities disappointed
pilgrims from around the world. His inefficient officers and the hardships in Mecca made pilgrims doubt his claims to lead Muslims globally. Debates on the ideal caliph became a hot topic of discussion in the Muslim congregation at the Hijaz.

Debates regarding the ideal caliph were not new. Ever since the inception of classical empires, philosophers, political theorists, and jurists engaged with the issue in different contexts. The premodern concerns had revolved chiefly around the ethnic origins of the caliph: the Arab versus the Turk debate. These concerns continued even when Muslims lost political sovereignty to European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In India this disjunction increased the symbolic significance of the caliph in normative Muslim thought. He began to be perceived, more than ever before, as the spiritual head of the umma. Indeed, the new technologies that enabled speedier transportation and communication created a fresh set of contingencies that pushed the old debates in new directions. The debate now was about who would be the ideal overseer of Muslim interests in the new world order of “cosmopolitan modernity” as represented in the Hijaz. This was the site where religion, politics, and technological advancements had an interdependent existence.\textsuperscript{136}

As the Ottoman caliph was reviewed, his monopoly was challenged, and not only as a result of the upsurge of ethnic Arabs in the Hijaz. Rather, this challenge grew out of a new conjunction that developed in the late nineteenth century, one that brought Islam and capitalist-driven modern nation-states, represented by their Muslim subjects, face to face at imperial intersections like Mecca. The challenge that European nation-states posed to the caliph only intensified, as every year the crowds in the Hijaz increased, drawn there by additional means of transportation and medical facilities, as well as by the offer of travel documents being offered by colonial regimes who had tasted the profits of haj management.\textsuperscript{137} The Ottoman caliph, as represented by his corrupt staff in the Hijaz, paled in comparison to the protective overtures of the European colonial rulers toward their subjects. The bajis of British India as well as those from the Dutch East Indies shared their views on Ottoman corruption. The caliph increasingly seemed inept in his administration—apathetic and inefficient.\textsuperscript{138}
In the late nineteenth century, the caliph’s management was up for criticism in every possible account of the Hijaz. For the Indonesians and Malays, the corruption and inefficiency of his administration diluted their misgivings about their own Dutch colonial rulers. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, the German convert who penned in detail his observations on the Hijaz, noted that the disillusioned Jawabs “obey the officials of the local government . . . often directly contrary to the wishes of the population. But here they are Moslems and fear Allah . . . The illustrious power of the [caliph’s] government however displays itself much more brilliantly in Constantinople than in Mekka.”

In Java, Muslim secret societies mushroomed. These societies liaised with Medina-based societies that were calling for the removal of the caliph, as, they claimed, he had “forfeited by his bad government and his indifference to true Musalman interests all claim to the support of his coreligionists.”

The Indian critique of the caliph’s performance frames British reports not just on pilgrim traffic but also on general affairs in the Hijaz. From Zohrab, the British vice consul in Jeddah, complaining about the Ottoman officers’ apathy toward stopping slave trade to the more detailed tirade about Ottoman officers by his successor, Abdur Razzack, the litany of grievances is endless. Razzack wrote copious reports detailing the hardships of Indians on account of corruption in the caliph’s administration. Reporting on the cholera epidemic of 1882 and the inefficient ways of quarantining pilgrims by the Turkish government, Razzack noted: “A great deal of heart burning exists at the enforcement of this quarantine, and many a future pilgrim will be put off coming to the haj until better times.”

Complaining about the failure of the Porte to provide good ventilation, latrines, and luggage storage facilities, he remarked that the Indian pilgrims were appalled and disillusioned by the sultan of Rum (Constantinople). He felt that many more would have loudly complained about this once they returned to India “but ha[d] not added their voices to swell the charges from apparent sympathy with the Turkish government.” Indeed, Razzack was so obsessed with his critique of Ottoman corruption and apathy that he saw even their positive gestures in a negative light. Thus he felt that Osman
Pasha, the vali of Hijaz, who had made efforts to improve the water supply to Jeddah, had done so not out of concern for people but “from a desire to perpetuate his name, his ambition being excited by a proposal emanating from his adulator to call such an aqueduct by his name.”

Razzack was infuriated that the officers of the grand sheriff were extorting pilgrims. They not only picked on Indian pilgrims but on the Malay and Javanese as well. He demanded the refund of pilgrim money unduly taken on the pretext of taxation of their goods, camel hires, and so forth. Ottoman custom officers refuted these charges on the grounds that only goods brought by pilgrims for purpose of trade were taxed. In 1893, Mohammad Arif, collector of customs at Jeddah, argued with Razzack, claiming that “the enormous amount thus imported is well known to experienced persons like yourself and to exempt these imports from duty would be to deprive the holy places [Mecca and Medina] of their revenue . . . and it is well known that with the exception of the Javanese all pilgrims sell in the streets and markets of this place whatever provisions they bring with them.” As these charges and refutations flowed, Razzack became involved in a heated tirade against the grand sheriff of Mecca, whom he accused of encouraging corruption for his personal gain. In 1894, an angry Razzack protested the reinstitution of the post of Sheikh ul Mashaiekh, who took over the job of arranging camel hires and steamers for all pilgrims. He was suspicious of the corrupt incumbents who currently held this post: Yousuf Kattan, deputed for Javanese and Malay pilgrims, and Hassan Daood, deputed for the Indians. He felt both were corrupt and worked as agents for the sheriff, who, he maintained, was complicit in the illegal profits they made by overcharging pilgrims for camel hires. With statistical evidence in hand, he complained about their “brutality” and “inhumanity” to British subjects and demanded their dismissal.

The critique of the caliph foregrounded his role as the Ottoman sultan as well. It brought to light the fact that notwithstanding his spiritual authority he had failed in his managerial and administrative duties as the sultan who supervised haj pilgrim sites. European nation-states encouraged public discussion of the caliph as the failed sultan. They contrasted his performance to their own relatively
efficient management of pilgrims. Indeed, their freshly discovered technologies in disease control, printing, and transportation (especially steamships), revolutionized connections to the Hijaz. As pilgrim traffic increased from the territories under their control, the European nation-states stood out as patrons of their Muslim subjects. They competed with the Ottoman sultan in the management of pilgrims and deflected attention from his spiritual persona by highlighting his poor performance. On the basis of his shoddy track record as the overseer of Hajj pilgrimage, they urged people to ask what constituted an ideal caliph. As the temporal powers of the caliph were embedded in religious claims it was indeed religious authority that was being discussed in a public space, a sphere that itself was produced by the “modernizing” drives of European nation-states. The good caliph was now seen as one who was not merely a symbolic spiritual mascot but one who displayed managerial skills. This new definition of “caliph” opened the doors for many contenders.

The debate about the caliph was steered in a new direction with the coming together of technological advancement and the European political management of spirituality. As efficiency, benevolence, and proficiency became the new yardstick by which to judge the caliph, the race for his position became very competitive. Compared with the mismanagement and corruption of the caliph’s government, the “modern” European nation-states seemed beacons of light and hope. The Ottoman caliph in his role as the administrative overseer of Muslims paled when compared to the European colonial masters of Asian Muslims. Nation-states were quick to lap up this sentiment and used the welfare of Muslim subjects as a ploy to advance their domestic political agenda. Thus, Abdur Razzack’s bleeding heart, showering concern for all pilgrims, was the perfect mascot for British concern for the well-being of Muslims globally and Indian Muslims in particular.

Even though initially European states favored the demand for an Arab caliph, their support of him in this case was different because it did not involve older ethnic tensions that were derived from the perceived superiority of the Arab race. Instead, the Arab sheriff’s privileged genealogy notwithstanding, he was the preferred caliph
also because he was perceived to be a better, less corrupt, and more efficient manager and overseer of Muslim material interests. Now that so many Muslims physically visited Hijaz, the real rather than the imagined efficacy of the temporal and spiritual head of Islam was up for scrutiny. In other words, the conjunction of the modern capitalist infrastructure and of European management of religion and the sacred space of Islam posed new challenges and offered new competition to the temporal and spiritual head of Muslims. The Arabs were the preferred substitutes. But there was nothing to stop the European modern nation-states from joining the race.

In the new climate, the demand for an Arab caliph was the loudest. Some British intellectuals invoked the old debate about the ideal caliph, which was based on the ethnic origins of the holder of the office: the Arab versus the Turk. They used Islamic history and “tradition” to argue that precedent dictated that the caliph had to be from the elite Quraish Arab tribe to which the Prophet belonged. In 1877, Neil B. E. Baillie, the author of several books on Muslim law, spoke at the Royal Asiatic Society, where he declared as “Kharejite heresy” the acceptance of a Turk as the caliph. He sent his paper to the lawyers of Bengal and the Northwest Provinces for a ratification of his position. But within Muslim circles the debate about the caliph was not due merely to matters of ethnicity, genealogy, or sacredness. Such issues had become irrelevant as the Muslim imaginary acquired physicality via the infrastructural networks of the European nation-states. For the Muslim subjects, the debate about the perfect caliph was about his administrative efficacy. Such demands now had a trans-Asian resonance, given the relatively greater connectedness and shared experience of being a Muslim that the cosmopolitan modernity of contemporary nation-states had enabled. Thus, for instance, in 1881 an influential Javanese pilgrim reported from Java that people in his country were disenchanted by the “bad government” of the caliph and his “indifference to the Musalman interests.” The people “disliked” the caliph and felt that “he had forfeited all claims to the support of his coreligionists.” The pilgrim added that the people were certain of the caliph’s “speedy fall” and the takeover of his empire by the Russians. The Javanese concluded that people were dissatisfied not just with the current
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pasha, Abd-al Hamid II, but also with the sultans who, he said, had “for some years past governed Turkey.” The Javanese pilgrim alluded to the fact that his disillusioned countrymen had been in communication with a “widely extended” secret society “embracing Musalmans of all nationalities” that was based in Medina. Its object was to restore the caliphate to the Arabs of the Hijaz. Abdullah Pasha had created the society when he was the sheriff. The present sheriff, Abdul Mutalib, was not on its rolls. The society had a ritualistic regimen to ensure that its members would be welded into a firm group. Each member on admission had to swear on the tomb of the Prophet to maintain secrecy and to promote the objects of the society.

Such secret societies, with their trans-Asiatic connections, created an anticaliph mood across Asia. The societies were very political in nature. And they created a peculiar dilemma for the European nation-states: how to control the public sphere produced by the religion-centric modernity, a sphere that they themselves patronized. Thus, although the anticaliph discussions in the societies were to be encouraged, the dilemma was where to put a halt to these discussions. Of particular concern to the British was the “exchange of opinions to discuss plans to criticize the action of European governments and form combinations to resist the supremacy of the Christian powers.” Not surprisingly, the British vice consul in Jeddah was asked to keep an eye on the trans-Asian activities of such societies.

Private Careers and Imperial Politics

Secret societies were the product of “secular” modernity and its brush with spiritualism and enchantment. Propped up by the information and technological boom of the period and sustained by the rapid movement of men, money, and ideas, they best represented the centrality of religion in things “modern.” According to the consulate reports, these were suspicious zones of sedition where pan-Islam as a religious reaction to European influence was perfected and the search for a global leader of the umma launched. And yet
these were also the arenas where the caliph was critiqued and the brokers who decentered him given a free hand. The extraterritorial nature of these societies was anathema to the British consulates. And yet there was an acceptance of their many uses. Indeed, it was a challenge to curtail their networks, to tame them and at the same time keep them alive.

Zohrab, the British vice consul, took the surveillance of Muslim networks very seriously, as he was convinced that they were dangerous and that there was no other country offering “such security and facilities as the Hijaz” for political discussions. He was convinced that whereas in any other country such a large congregation of Muslim representatives from all over the world would attract public attention and thus provoke fear in the minds of delegates, this was not the case in the Hijaz. Here, as he noted in a letter, politics was discussed “without fear of betrayal” and strategies were developed to resist the European “Christian powers”—even if the congregation was ostensibly a religious one. Zohrab’s correspondence reflected commonly held fears within the British administration about the haj pilgrimage. And these fears, even though exaggerated, were not entirely unfounded. It was well known that many “rebels” from the 1857 mutiny-rebellion in India had found refuge in the Hijaz. Zohrab was of the view that any such “political refugees” who might stir up trouble be identified and their “activities and movements watched.” The Foreign Department also believed that most of these men, including, for instance, Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi, were “merely tools in the hands of others,” that is, of other powers.

It is significant that Zohrab continued to stereotype these societies as cradles of pan-Islam, even though some of them were explicitly anticaliph and pessimistic about the establishment of global Islamic rule. In 1879, Zohrab reported on the functioning of another secret society from Mecca, which, like the one in Medina, was said to have communication with “every Musalman community throughout the world.” This had on its agenda the replacement of the inept caliph by someone more capable of protecting Muslim interests. Zohrab was confident that its literature—which exhorted Muslims around the globe to overthrow both the rule of Christians and that
of the caliph—had heavily influenced the anti-British revolt in Algeria. The society was definitely pro-Arab and composed of sheikhs, mullahs, and sheriffs. An important item on its agenda was to “withdraw from the Sultan his title of the temporal head of the Mussalman faith.” The society was troubled by the failure of the caliph to establish a good administration and couched its tirade against him in vitriolic rhetoric that accused him of colluding with the Christian powers in the Crimean War (1853–1856). The society wanted the caliph to quit because it claimed that his new allies were the European powers (Britain and France) with whose help Russia had been defeated in the Crimean War. They saw him as a puppet in European hands and thus insisted that “he could not continue to be the true representative of the Prophet.” That mantle, they argued, must be laid on other shoulders.\textsuperscript{156} Zohrab was pleased with the anticaliph agenda of the society, even if he feared its anti-European stance.

Indeed, so intense was the anticaliph mood in these societies that they also discussed the shifting of the temporal seat of Islamic power from Istanbul to Damascus. Damascus was, however, not found suitable to be the “future seat of the head of Islam” on the grounds that it was not a “safe” place because it was “in easy reach of European influence.” Medina was preferred as the “center of faith” because of its remoteness from Europe and above all because of the “sacredness of the city and the purity of its Musalman character.”\textsuperscript{157} Similar reports of global Muslim networks that discussed alternate spaces locating the seat of Muslim temporal power, and alternate candidates for holding that seat, streamed in from Dutch subjects in Mecca and from Turkish officers in the region. One such officer told Zohrab that the Turks were aware that the authority of the sultan was now only nominal. He predicted, on the basis of bazaar gossip picked up by his wife, that “grave events” leading to a massacre of Turks would soon take place in Arabia. The officer had sent away his family to Istanbul anticipating trouble.\textsuperscript{158} Indeed, local agents informed Zohrab that the caliph was considered so unacceptable in Arab areas that if “he dare[d] to suppress the trade [in slaves] there would be serious trouble.” But if the high sheriff, the spiritual head, did so, the Bedouins and others would obey him and carry out
his wishes without any resistance. The Arabs, the officer added, “hate[d] the Turks.” But they “venerate[d]” the high sheriff.\textsuperscript{159}

These ideas posed a peculiar dilemma for the government of India. It welcomed the critique of the caliph that these societies generated, because through their cross-border contacts they were able to take that critique onto a global stage. At the same time, the government was always fearful of such discussions slipping into anti-European sentiment. The government responded through its effort to “tame” the loose public sphere that had produced such discussions. It found that the transimperial brokers, like Fadl, were particularly handy to perform this job. And it closely monitored middlemen, like Fadl, who straddled the Asiatic networks of secret societies, pilgrimage routes, and commercial highways. It tapped them for information, and their ideas on Muslim societies and the caliph were selectively picked up and given a new spin.

Thus, for instance, the British played on those anticaliph sentiments articulated by Fadl that suited them. They popularized Fadl’s scandalous suggestion that the British could do a better management job than the caliph as the overseer of Muslim interests. Indeed, they aimed to be the European front-runner in this race for the new caliph, even if it meant being an overseer without the title of the caliph. They allied themselves closely with the sheriff at Mecca as the din for an Arab as the preferred choice for the caliph gained momentum globally. The sheriff was the ideal ally as he was the fountainhead for this new pro-Arab caliph sentiment. During the 1880s the British saw the Arab alliance as critical to pulling Hijaz out of Turkish control and bringing it into their own ambit. They were convinced that the political dividends earned by insinuating themselves as the overseer of the sacred lands of the Muslims was the best way to dent Ottoman political sovereignty.\textsuperscript{160} This would catapult them instantly to the position of the global protector of Muslims. They also saw this as a good way to bring the government closer to its Muslim population in India.

On his part, the sheriff of Mecca, very much like Fadl, hoped to personally benefit by supporting the global aspirations of imperial Britain. He had his own axe to grind and was happy to support the British as the global Muslim overseer as this was the way he could
get rid of Turkish rule. Indeed, he was even willing to use his reli-
gious authority to sanctify the new role of the British as the “the
firm friend and able protector” of Muslims all over the world.
Indeed, the experience of the British administration in India and
the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Indian Muslims were show-
cased to market the idea of the British being the best overseers of
the Hijaz and thereby of the Muslim world. The sheriff was report-
edly keen to send his emissaries to war-torn Afghanistan in the
1880s so as to explain to the Afghans the ways in which Britain’s
Muslim subjects all over the world enjoyed equality with all other
religions. He asserted, therefore, that the “Musulman religion
requires for its support the aid and protection of England—the only
power that places all religions on an equality, and protects all without
distinction.” Indeed, he was said to have taken his stand to the
extreme when he willingly announced to those Afghans who opposed
the English that “he as the Religious Head of the Faith, declares
him to be an opponent of the faith, in other words a traitor to his
religion.”

Zohrab, the British consul at Cairo and Jeddah, urged the British
to cash in on the sentiments of the sheriff, to help him oust the
Turks and then to establish their own influence and protection over
the Hijaz. He argued that this strategy had immense political divi-
dends—as the sheriff and the Hijaz were the path to the heart of the
Muslims globally. He was convinced that this was the only way
England might get “supreme influence over the whole Mussalman
world.” Zohrab attributed the positive image of Britain in the
Hijaz solely to the effective handling of its “Muslim subjects” who
were located there. This new role of “protector” picked up in the
1870s when the brief friendship between Russia and Turkey rekind-
led Russophobia in British official circles. And thus Muslim sub-
jects who had left India became the crucial site from which Britain
envisioned launching its career as a protector of global Islam. Zohrab
often compared the relative benefits enjoyed by Britain’s Muslim
subjects to their other coreligionists in the area, as for instance,
when he claimed, “Ninety percent of the Arab population would
vote for the separation from Turkey. The majority of the inhabitants
of the towns have visited either India or the Straits Settlements and
are thus able to judge from compassion and form an opinion on what the government they live under ought to be.” He underlined further the favorable sentiments in the area when he reported that the Arabs, tired of Ottoman corruption and the instabilities it caused to their lives, were keen on becoming British subjects and obtaining new passports. According to him they were willing even to live in India if this was the only way to become subjects of the empire. In reply to his query of how the “holy land could pass to the stranger and unbeliever,” he was told, “It would not be to the stranger but to the real friend of the Mohamedan, and as in India so in the Hijaz the Mussalman would be more free to exercise his religion, and it would be more venerated than it is under the Turk.”

Zohrab’s agent in Mecca also reported that the sheriff had obtained the sanction of the ecclesiastical department—the ulema—in exchange for his friendly overtures toward and favorable opinions on the English. Thus, for instance, the ulema approved of the British conduct in the Afghan war and praised it for being “generous” and the Afghans as being “treacherous.” The sheriff was of the view that Mecca was the ideal forum from which one could determine what was the best European nation-state. Mecca was the city where Muslim subjects from all the European colonies gathered and compared their experiences as subject people. Invariably, the British Muslim subjects seemed happiest. They always expressed gratitude at the “freedom they were allowed in the exercise of their religion, the manner in which they were treated and the way their interests were protected.” They found the British government neither unjust nor oppressive.

The ball did not stop there. British consuls in Jeddah contrasted the exceptional protection of their Muslim subjects and the relatively better conditions in which they lived in Hindustan to their misery in the Ottoman-ruled Hijaz. They also highlighted the anti-caliph sentiment of the secret societies and the critique of the caliph by brokers like Fadl. It helped the British game plan if Indian Muslim subjects appeared as beleaguered subjects in the Hijaz—people who had invested in its economy and yet received harsh treatment. Consuls in Jeddah hoped that the care for their subjects in the Hijaz would not only improve their pro-Muslim image globally, but also
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earn dividends back in India. Time and again Abdur Razzack, the British vice consul in Jeddah, highlighted the contribution of Indian merchants in improving the water canals of the Hijaz, an achievement that had gone a long way in improving the sanitation of the city. In one of his many detailed reports on the 1882 cholera epidemic in Mecca, Razzaq praised Hajis Abdullah Arab and Abdul Wahid Wahdana, merchants from Calcutta, for their “personal efforts and liberality for such a blessing as the water which now runs through the Zobeidah Aqueduct.” He was of the view that but for this aqueduct the water of the city would have been so unclean that it would have led to disease. Razzaq strongly refuted the charge that cholera had come to Mecca via a passenger ship, the Shelley, which had sailed from India. He underlined that the analysis of the epidemic in Calcutta had shown that it was related to sanitation and hygiene. And because the Indian merchants had contributed to cleaning the water system of Mecca “the entire Mahomedan world should be grateful to the Indian merchants in Mecca and elsewhere” for their generous donations that made it possible for the clean water to flow in the Zubaida Aqueduct.168

Indeed, merchant Seth Abdul Wahid and his colleague Mirza Amir Beg not only donated lavishly but also located themselves in Mecca, where they supervised the construction at the aqueduct site as well as coordinated donations from Muslim notables and commercial elites of India. People from as far as Meerut in the Northwest Provinces sent large amounts of money to them. In 1880, one Sheikh Ilahi Baksh of Meerut wanted the consul at Jeddah to ensure that his donation of Rs. 10,000 was not being misappropriated at Mecca.169 Subsequent investigations revealed that the merchants had a well-administered committee and an establishment consisting of people from Hindustan with whom they worked. A well-trained, educated person from Roorkee, in the Northwest Provinces, assisted Abdul Wahid with the accounts. They were also assisted by a supervisory committee of “gentlemen from Hindustan now resident in Mecca.”170

The showcasing of Muslim subjects such as the Calcutta merchant Abdul Wahid not only projected the image of Indian Muslims as beleaguered heroes but also put the spotlight on the benevolent
and considerate attitude of the British government toward Muslims of the world. And this brought the British government into direct contest with the Porte. Indeed, taking on the Porte was one of the main reasons for British interest in the Muslim cause. Thus in 1884 a difficult situation arose: Abdul Wahid, an Indian Muslim, was recognized by the Porte for his services in cleaning up the canal system at Mecca and was honored by being awarded the Order of the Osmanieh, fourth class, by the Ottoman pasha. The Indian government refused him permission to accept the award. This was a clear case of competing imperial claims over a subject. Such competitions over immigrant subjects were significant as they indicated how imperial rivalries were fought over Muslim subjects who straddled frontiers and cultures using the very imperial networks that clashed over them. But this mutual dependence of Muslim trans-Asian networks and “modern” empires was also the key to the longevity of both parties.

Muslim rulers and notables were also important donors for various philanthropic projects in Mecca. And they too constituted critical sites of imperial contestation. Thus, in 1885 the nawab of the Muslim princely state of Rampur in northern India contributed Rs. 70,000 for constructing an extension from the Zubaida Aqueduct to the city of Manna so as to supply it with fresh water. Indeed, the nawab also promised a contribution toward improving the supply of water to Jeddah by extending the Zubaida Aqueduct to the city. He made that contribution contingent, however, on the vali also collecting money locally from the inhabitants of Mecca and Jeddah. Abdur Razzack showcased the philanthropy of such elite Muslim subjects of the British Empire and underlined the deep connection between Britain and Muslims globally. The Porte was quick to strike back.

The Porte reacted to increasing British influence on its “Muslim” constituency by calling on Indian Muslim notables and community leaders to support its endeavors. Thus in 1896 it sent emissaries to Rampur to “test the feelings of native Muhammadan states.” That year the commissioner of Rohilkhand reported that a Turk calling himself Hashim Effendi had arrived at Rampur. He claimed to be the emissary of the Porte and tried to establish contact with the
nawab so as to “test” his feelings toward the Porte. In this particular instance he was supposedly snubbed by the nawab.173

Indeed, the expanding British influence in the Hijaz consciously spilled from “benevolence” and concern for its Indian Muslim subjects to a cautious tilt toward the larger Muslim constituency of the caliph. This of course was a sensitive game, as the Porte was always ready to strike back. For instance, Abdur Razzack had proposed to establish a hospital in Jeddah or Mecca for pilgrims; discussions of his proposal centered on the suspicions that such an act of philanthropy would trigger in the Porte, since the hospital would find it impossible to limit its medical services only to Indian Muslims. In a report, Razzack described his concerns, noting,

while it would not be advisable to reserve the affording of relief only to Indians as it would lead to race distinctions not proper in a country where all are of one caste and creed . . . and it would be difficult to draw the line between the Indians and Arabs, Turks and Blacks who form the majority of the inhabitants of these places . . . it might lead the Turkish government to show a susceptibility proportioned to the amount of influence which the British Government is likely to obtain by the supplying of a desideratum which would be gladly welcomed by all classes of people, rich and poor, Indians, Arabs Turks and all other nationalities which congregate during the haj.174

Razzack was afraid of incurring the wrath of the Porte, which might then obstruct the project. He therefore suggested a relatively “quiet and unostentatious” alternative: medical help could be offered to Indian pilgrims at their own quarters and lodging houses. He demanded that he be provided additional native Muslim doctors to help him if he had to move around with his chest of medicines. He toyed with the idea of establishing a dispensary, rather than a hospital, as it would be low profile, and, he hoped, would create fewer objections from local authorities. But he feared that even this would be looked “upon with an envious eye,” as he phrased it, “by one or two Turkish doctors who are here, as they would be to some extent thrown into the shade when the dispensary became popular.”175
the end he advocated the least ostentatious method, which was working from his house offering “semi-private” relief and medical help free of cost to those who came there. He was of the view that since it was “invidious to make distinctions between Indians and other races in the distribution of such a charity or medicines and medical advice,” this “semi-private” unit of his, even if attended by Turks, Africans, and Arabs, would not provoke too much reaction from the Porte as it would not be loud and bold in its statement.

However, the government of India was more shrewd in its planning. It wanted the hospital to be established to display its benevolence, but it also wanted to piggyback on the efforts of Muslim notables and the “wishes of the richer Indians.” Responding to Razzack’s report, the government made it clear that these influential Indian Muslim notables could help to overcome the objections of the Porte and at the same time make it possible for the sheriff to be brought on board. The government was also willing to contribute liberally to such a hospital, if rich Indians were willing to take the initiative and first provide financing. Nor did it have objections to the creation of a dispensary at Razzack’s residence. The secretary to the government of India made it clear that while the government was all for increasing its influence and showing its benevolent face in the Hijaz, it did not want to “lose prestige” if permission for setting up the hospital or dispensary was denied by the Porte. Thus, it wanted to bring on board influential Indians in Mecca who had collected money for such a hospital, rich notables in India, and the sheriff. Indeed, it wished to use them at the forefront of its mission. And this again showed how the conflation of imperial international relations with the global aspirations of Muslim émigrés was crucial to the development of Muslim trans-Asiatic networks. Indeed, it showed the imperially embedded nature of such networks.

Fadl and the Imperial Contest over Muslim Subjects

Imperial rivalries offered amazing possibilities to Sayyid Fadl. The imperial contest over Muslim subjects, the challenges posed by
Muslim secret societies, the positive sentiment toward European nation-states generated by poor Ottoman rule, and the debates over Islam’s spiritual and temporal head in the international public domain energized Fadl and brokers like him.

In 1880, Fadl created a stir in British circles when *Al Jawaiib*, an Arabic newspaper from Istanbul, reported that the sultan of Turkey had bestowed on Fadl the honorary title of “wazeer.” The Aden residency suggested that the government of India might “deem fit to take further steps in drawing attention to Port of the antecedents of Fazl.” News about Fadl was carefully scrutinized in British circles—and there was plenty of information on him. He had built enough clout for himself at critical imperial cross-sections, like the Hijaz, to be always in the news. A newsletter of 1880 created further concern when it reported that Istanbul had granted him a pension and asked him to live in Mecca for good.

The same year he jumped into the contentious arena of British and Ottoman efforts to monopolize influence over Muslims globally. He aligned himself with the Ottoman pasha, and wrote in a lofty tone to the sultan of Muscat, who had driven him out of Dhofar. As he described his planned return to Dhofar to rectify the un-Islamic conspiracies and intrigues that had resulted in his overthrow by the tribes, his tone was that of an Islamic monarch. He not only legitimated his self-styled Muslim leadership by claiming to have the support of the Ottoman sultan but said that he was proceeding to Dhofar “with the orders of the Sublime Porte.” He mapped his individualized international relations onto Caliph Abd-al Hamid II’s foreign policy. Like the caliph, he referred to Istanbul as the “Empire of Islam.” He informed the sultan of Muscat of his arrival in Dhofar and ended his letter in a tone reminiscent of Caliph Abd-al Hamid II, who had projected a Muslim image of himself globally to deflect attention from his domestic crises. He concluded, “And I ask of God prosperity for myself and the Mussalmans.”

In 1888, he created a stir in British official circles with the news that he had brokered a deal between the Porte and some Indian Muslim merchants of Bombay who lived in Medina. The former had offered to influence the Indian *hajis* not to use any other steamships except Turkish ones to travel to Mecca. This was seen as a way
of denting British commercial interests in the region. A Bombay merchant, Abdullah Arab Moonuffer, who had originally lived in Bombay but had recently become a Turkish subject and now resided in Medina, visited Istanbul. Here, he used Fadl’s influence to reach out to the sultan and proposed that if he received the sultan’s sanction and help he could, he claimed, “induce the head of the Mahommedan community in India to advise their co-religionists not to come on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and [not] to take passage in any but Turkish steamers.” These, he argued, could be dispatched by the Porte to Bombay and Calcutta for transporting pilgrims.182

Abdulla Arab, working in conjunction with Fadl, was not content with only sabotaging British commercial interests. He also hinted that he could help in restoring the waning authority of the caliph as the spiritual head of all Muslims. He proposed that Indian pilgrims once in Turkish ships should be “considered under the protection of the Turkish Government and treated as its own subjects.” Abdulla Arab played on the sultan’s wishful thought that his authority as the caliph drew all Muslims to him, despite his corrupt administration and apathy toward their problems. He convinced the sultan that British Indian subjects would happily become subjects of the Porte, since, as he described it, “they would be glad to be under the special protection of the head of the Muhomedan religion and would have nothing to do with the British government until their return to India again.”183

Of course, this latter suggestion impressed the sultan as it fed his political appetite to be called the “Caliph of the faithful.” His reputation, due to his corrupt officials, had suffered a severe beating in the Hijaz region. And in the late nineteenth century, the Hijaz, rather than the Levant, was critical to the Ottomans commercially as well as politically. Indeed, the political significance of the Hijaz was great given the Porte’s desperate efforts to hold on to its “world power” status by projecting the caliph as the global overseer of all Muslims. Hijaz, with its location as the central meeting point for Muslims, was the Porte’s window to the world. The might of the fledgling empire, increasingly based on the caliph’s authority rather than on a burgeoning economy, could be showcased from here to the larger Asian and European world. The Ottoman sultan thus
happily agreed to send Turkish steamers and extend protection to Indian pilgrims if Abdullah Arab could first go to India and obtain the cooperation of the chiefs of the Muslim community there. Sayyid Fadl, with his wide network of contacts in India, supplied him with letters of introduction addressed to the all-important Muslim heads of regional states, and Abdulla Arab proceeded with these to Bombay.

A clearly alarmed British Foreign Office appealed to the government of India for help: “[We] trust,” it stated, that “the Indian government will take such measures as they may think proper in dealing with this man . . . his object is not only to deprive British shipping of Indian pilgrim traffic but to undermine the influence of the British government with its Mahomedan subjects in India.”

But if Fadl encouraged the sultan’s political ambition and tuned his international relations to it, he also provided grist for British propaganda on the pasha as the “failed caliph.” He wished to benefit also from the British imperial mood in the region, and fanned their aspiration to lead the Muslim world. Thus, for instance, the British were quick to latch on to Fadl’s critique of the caliph and his suggestion that they could be better managers of Muslim interests. They saw his critique as symptomatic of general Muslim discontent over poor Ottoman administration, a trend that was conveyed to them by their consuls, like Zohrab, who closely monitored secret societies in the Hijaz area. Fadl’s suggestion that Muslim interests could be better protected by the British in the wake of Ottoman collapse was a welcome one, even if it came from a “fanatic Mahomedan.”

Indeed, it was such deft diplomacy that made the “fanatic Mahomedan” slip into the role of the respectable transimperial middleman with ease. It also entrenched the Asiatic networks of such middlemen in imperial plots and rivalries. The British encouraged Fadl to continue to work within the niche he had carved out for himself as a trans-Asian middleman. Indeed, the British resident noted in a letter that he saw Fadl so fully in the role of a middleman and broker that each time the latter wished to meet he thought it might have been “suggested by the [Ottoman] Sultan.” He always emphasized to Fadl that his government wished the Ottoman sultan well only because of its concern for the “well being of Muslims and the cause
of Islam.” On his part, Fadl claimed that the British were concerned about Ottoman maladministration and the sultan’s failure to deliver to the Muslims as their caliph. The resident wanted Fadl to convey these thoughts to the sultan. He observed, “If he [Fadl] gave such counsel [about Ottoman maladministration] to the Sultan, and they were followed he would be rendering good service to His Majesty and his people as well as to Islam.” The resident reiterated the significance the British gave to the well-being not just of its Muslim subjects but of Islam generally and noted that they were concerned that the Ottoman Empire was failing in its duties of being the Muslims’ overseer. He wanted Fadl to communicate this to the sultan, saying in so many words, “Should the opportunity occur if he would repeat to His Majesty what I had said.” Fadl was only happy to be an interlocutor and replied that “his majesty had frequently spoken to him of me as his true friend, and of England as his best ally.”

Indeed, the “outlawed Malabar rebel” and “fanatic” Fadl thrived on his role as a transimperial interlocutor and middleman between the British and the Ottoman Empires. He exploited the international relations of imperial powers even as he continued to rely on his core repertoire of religion, kinship, and rank. He used his sayyid card—his direct descent from the Prophet—to legitimize his self-styled authority to comment on the failed caliph and to suggest his replacement. At the same time, he plugged into British Ottoman tensions over the control of the southwest rim of Arabia—the Dhofar region in the Hadramawt. He almost brought Britain and Turkey onto a collision course with his claims that he had Ottoman backing to reassert his hold over Dhofar—from which he had been expelled by the British ally, the sultan of Muscat. The British supported the sultan of Muscat’s political sovereignty in the region. And even though they had their doubts about his hold over Dhofar they were generally unforgiving of any Ottoman intervention into his territory.

Indeed, the India Office always feared that the Porte was inclined to use Fadl in the Arab area “as an agent.” Thus, for instance, Fadl’s claims that the Ottomans would help him with ships and troops to reestablish his hold over Dhofar in the Hadramawt area
were viewed by the India Office as a ploy by which the Porte would extend Ottoman sovereignty over the region using Fadl as their agent. Even though the British did not entirely support the claims of the sultan of Muscat, who had wrested back Dhofar from Fadl, they were with him on this issue. This was because they were suspicious of Fadl and saw him as the conduit for Ottoman political expansion.

Fadl combined his traditional repertoire of skills with those of “modern” empires to fashion his international career. He used his religious sayyid card to project an image of himself as someone who embodied all the virtues of an ideal Muslim leader. This helped him launch his career as the “ideal” consultant in Asian politics. He understood that what enabled his success as an ideal ruler was that he offered a unique model of Asian Muslim politics. His political model involved reaching out to the highest reference point—the caliph—but extended also to include customary Arab law and jurisprudence. Thus in 1880, while urging the sultan of Muscat to give Dhofar back to him, he argued his case by using his ideal Muslim ruler card. He invoked both Arab jurisprudence and Turkish political authority to argue that he was best suited to rule Dhofar. He lent to Istanbul the signature of a sacred space normally associated with Arab lands. He called it the “Empire of Islam” and invoked the religious authority associated with it to strengthen his claim over Dhofar. Thus, in contrast to the misgivings he usually expressed about the caliph’s maladministration, he now reported that “news with respect to the Empire of Islam both private and public [was] in every way satisfactory,” and that he had brought his case to be reviewed in Istanbul, as that was the locus for justice that was binding on all Muslims.

And yet while he was seeking justice in the “sacred” house of the Turkish caliph, he delved also into Arab custom and law for legitimacy. He invoked his regard for Arab custom and law as the defining agents that would ensure the Islamic way of social harmony. As he built his political career, he drew on and combined both Ottoman and Arab reference points of authority. He claimed that he had always been a vali of the Ottomans in Dhofar, had raised the Ottoman flag in his kingdom, and had maintained good neighborly
relations with Muscat as per Arab customs and laws of good governance. The combination of Ottoman political sovereignty and Arab jurisprudence ensured his “gathering together under one banner . . . the disjointed (different sects) of Islam.” He represented himself as the leader of all Muslims and said justice for him and restoration of his kingdom of Dhofar was his objective as he asked of God prosperity for “[him]self and the Musalmans.”

And yet the British saw him as the archetypal transcultural middleman, who could negotiate for them with the Ottomans, the Arabs, and the Indians. But he was to be handled with care as they remembered him, after all, as the “dangerous intriguer,” the “Muhammedan fanatic,” and the “Moplah rebel.” They always viewed his moves as important, as they believed that these had significant repercussions on the policy shifts of the Turkish government in other parts of Arabia. In a letter sent to the Foreign Office, the government made its intentions clear: “The Government of India appear to attach importance to Sayyid Fadl’s proceedings which have indeed some bearing on those of the Turkish government in other parts of Arabia. Lord Cranbrook would be glad if Sir H. Layard were instructed to report to her Majesty’s Government such further information as he can obtain in regard to them and to the relations which exist between the Porte and the Sayyid.”

In 1881, the India Office was alarmed at rumors that the Porte had nominated Fadl to serve as the new sheriff of Mecca once the existing occupant died. They were shocked at the temerity of the Porte to so elevate an “Indian outlaw.” However, this rumor was soon quashed by the revelation of the sheriff’s brother, Rafik Pasha, who lived in Istanbul. He pointed out that only members of two chosen families—the Auwn and the Zed—represented in one case by Auwn Pasha and in the other by Abdul Mutalib, the present holder of the office, could be elevated to the post of sheriff. This of course disqualified Fadl, and consequently British fears about him abated. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the Porte had appointed him to the rank of mushir—a position higher than that of grand sheriff. This proved detrimental to Fadl as it infuriated the sheriff and made him his enemy. Yet it helped in the larger games that the Ottoman rulers were playing over Fadl, as they used him to
settle scores and conduct their diplomacy with the British. This appointment was, in the words of the British resident, “actuated by a feeling against England.” Fadl was, after all, a middleman without whose trans-Asian contacts imperial rivalries would have lost their sting.

And sure enough, Fadl’s friendly and encouraging overtures toward the British as he brokered between them and the Ottomans only complicated matters for the Porte and made it anxious. In 1878, Fadl caused a stir in Istanbul when he sent an appeal to Loch at Aden. Fadl noted that he appreciated the efforts Loch had made to extend British administrative control to those parts of the Arabian southern rim where the Ottomans had failed to provide any effective control. He spoke in particular about the ships flying Turkish red flags. These ships were unregistered and had owners who claimed Arab descent; the ships visited free ports and engaged in loot and plunder. These big ships also ransacked small ships (bog-galows) that had themselves wrecked and plundered goods. Fadl complained that ships with Turkish flags “even sell those whose skin is black.” Engaging his diplomat skills at their best, he expressed his concern over British intervention in this part of Arabia: it would, he said, “lead to the advantage of the High Government in the latter dominion where it does not organize any government, as the peninsula of Arabia; and we thank the English Government for offering its good offices and exertions in the advantage of the High Government Turkish nation.”

Fadl was always happy to broker for the Ottomans even as he kept his communication and relations with the British intact. He not only negotiated for the pasha with the British but with other Asian sovereigns like the sultan of Muscat or the Arab chieftains of the Hadhramawt as well. Indeed, he helped whet the huge political appetite of the Ottomans. And this was also his way of furthering his own political fortunes. In 1879, Fadl proposed to the Ottoman sultan that four thousand troops and three vessels of war be placed at his disposal. He said that with this force he would help establish the authority of the pasha both in the Hadhramawt region as well as in Muscat, after dislodging the control of the Muscat sultan. Both the Hadhramawt area as well as Muscat were crucial arenas for Fadl,
as he had earlier established himself as an independent sultan in Dhofar—a Hadramawt principality—known to be under the sovereignty of Muscat. The sultan of Muscat of course had disputed his claims and had reasserted himself as the sovereign of the region. Fadl played on Ottoman political ambitions in order to further his own ends in the region. He hoped to put Muscat and the Ottomans onto a collision course and then reap the benefits.

The Ottoman sultan was so smitten by Fadl’s plot that he was ready even to name the Ottoman governor of the Hadhramawt region once it came under his control. But the geopolitics of nineteenth-century trans-Asia were very interdependent, involving many rulers and overlapping political sovereignties. It was difficult for Fadl to have a clear path to achieving his political goals. In Ottoman-controlled Hijaz, the British had as their ally the Arab sheriff of Mecca. His brother, Sheikh Oun, lived in Istanbul and belonged to the inner circles of the sultan. The sheriff intervened and quashed Fadl’s plans. He asked his brother, Sheikh Oun Rafik Pasha, to warn the Ottomans about Fadl. He brought to the notice of the Ottoman ruler the grave political dangers he was making himself vulnerable to if he followed Fadl’s plans. Echoing British views and conveying their veiled threat to Turkey, without mincing words he warned the Ottomans that “Sheikh Fadhl was a dangerous adventurer, that he would be quite unable to carry out his promise of even reducing Hadramawt, and much less Muscat, and bringing them under the authority of His Majesty, and that any attack by the Sheikh on the dominions of the Imam of Muscat with Turkish troops would inevitably lead to serious complications between England and Turkey.”193 This had the desired effect, and no troops or warships were ever supplied to Fadl.

But Fadl was too important a broker to be dumped for good. In Istanbul Fadl was no ordinary visitor or clandestine spy. Instead, he flaunted his high status—his sayyid card—and was the royal guest of the sultan and stayed in the house of the imperial chamberlain, Osman Bey.194 His regal reception on his arrival in Istanbul made headlines in the local press and caused much anxiety to the Bombay government, who monitored his every move. Francis Loch, the political resident at Aden, was quick to report to Bombay the details
of the welcome Fadl had received in Istanbul. He wrote: “Captain Mehmet Bey, one of the sultan’s Aides-de-camp, went on board to receive him on behalf of his majesty and he was conducted at once to the imperial villa at Kloiz Kiosk, where he had an audience of the Sultan... he is a guest of his majesty during his stay in the residence of the Imperial Chamberlain Osman Bey.” The resident at Istanbul was urged to confirm the veracity of these reports. But he in turn pleaded helplessness as the sayyid tag that Fadl carried made him a man of status in Istanbul and no one was willing to report on him.

Fadl’s clout in the Ottoman world was not just a matter of British paranoia. It was recorded and propagated by his own son, Sayyid Ahmad Fadl, in his biography of Sayyid Fadl, the *Al-Anwarul*. This text reveals that prior to Fadl’s arrival in Ottoman Egypt one courtier of Pasha Al Khidvi Abbas I told his master that he had dreamed that the clerics of Egypt (Awliya-i-Misr) had set out with lanterns in their hands. On being asked the reason of this spectacle he was told that they were waiting to welcome a visitor who was related to the ashraf-i-Alawi Husaini clan. Al Khidvi said that this dream was a premonition of the arrival of a saint. On subsequent inquiry it was found out that Sayyid Fadl Alawi had arrived in Egypt that very night and was staying in a beautiful locality. Ahmad bin Fadl notes in the biography that Al Khidvi visited Sayyid Fadl Alawi and offered his respect and extended all hospitality. He also wished to know the purpose of his visit. On hearing that he was looking for a place to stay, Al Khidvi asked Sayyid Fadl to chose a palace for himself and his family and also to acquire land for subsistence so that he might live in comfort. Sayyid Fadl was grateful and thanked him. But that offer could not stop him from proceeding to the ultimate seat of Ottoman power—Istanbul. His son records with great aplomb that in Istanbul he was received with great fanfare by Sultan Abd al Majid. This royal reception enhanced his power, and he returned to Mecca in 1865 with added clout. He later proceeded to Dhofar, where he was pronounced its ruler.

His biography notes his return to Istanbul in 1878 after the fall of Dhofar. It details his clout in the city. Here he worked closely with the people in the upper echelons of power and associated himself
with projects that were for the welfare of the people. The sultan invariably accepted his suggestions. Fadl remained involved in pious acts in Istanbul and often went to the valley close to Mecca for solitude and meditation. Often monarchs and rulers of other countries consulted with him on matters of diplomacy. One of his suggestions that is mentioned with pride in his biography is that of introducing railway tracks in the Hijaz area. This helped pilgrims during haj and contributed to the development of the area. His son unabashedly stresses Fadl’s love for the Ottoman caliphate (Daulat-i-Osmania) and how he worked hard to strengthen it. If there was any attack on the caliphate or Islam he felt very bad and prayed to God for help. His son writes that he always claimed that it was entirely possible to combine piety (taqvia) and politics, and that he would give the example of the Ottoman ruler Suleiman the Magnificent to prove his case.

Fadl and Pan-Islam

The British and the Dutch regimes continued to view the trans-Asianic networks of Muslims as “pan-Islamic,” a term that for them meant “anti-European” and “caliph oriented.” Anthony Reid, discussing the Dutch case, has argued that in the late nineteenth century “pan-Islam” connoted a religious reaction to growing European influence in Asia, as well as a quest for a global movement to restore power to Muslims. According to the colonial regimes, all Muslims saw the Ottoman caliph as a global referent for this Islamic leadership. In the case of India, Ayesha Jalal has convincingly argued that pan-Islam was a British phobia—a creation of the Anglo-Indian and Hindu press only. It was based on their usage of the normative Muslim theory that privileged the caliph. The reality, as borne out in the actual lived experience of Muslims, was more contingent on individual action that balanced the symbolic sovereignty of the caliph with Muslims’ own territorially framed lives. This balancing act produced myriad forms of universalisms. We saw above that the discussions in the trans-Asianic Muslim circles were far more complex than that indicated by either Anthony Reid’s analysis or
official British analysis. The increasing contact with the caliph, and the caliph’s power structures, by ḥajīs and visitors to the Hijaz and Istanbul dashed any hope of his providing the promised leadership to the global community of Muslims. Middlemen like Fadl cashed in on these sentiments and used them selectively to bolster their careers. They also tuned their international relations to those of “modern” empires, using imperial fissures and tension zones to insert themselves into imperial politics. They laid out a complex web of transimperial contacts that were imperially embedded, even as they relied on traditional repertoires of religious aspiration, kinship, and rank.

Fadl’s transimperial contacts were expansive. No amount of British monitoring could tame them. In 1880, the resident at Istanbul reported that Fadl was to be feared not only because he had political networks, but because he had commercial webs that he used for his political ends. Indeed, the resident was worried about Fadl’s contacts with English commercial agents in Istanbul, with whom he wished to form a trading company in order to make money. One Mr. Ede, an Englishman in Istanbul, was always suspect in the resident’s eye because of his commercial dealings with Fadl and plans for trading in the Hadramawt area.204

But Fadl had other trans-Asian contacts as well that were equally if not more alarming. Indeed, although these contacts might offer profits from trade, their real benefit to Fadl was in the military labor and diplomatic avenues that they provided. Fadl exerted influence over the vast trans-Asian military labor market as a military entrepreneur who could recruit with ease men from as far east as Aceh in Indonesia, Egypt and Morocco in North Africa, Kabul in Afghanistan, and Istanbul in Turkey; he could also find laborers from among the Arab tribes in the Persian Gulf area and from immigrants from India.

In each of these places, local entrepreneurs via whom he could influence Muslims were tied to him through marriage relations, professional deals, shared tribal affiliation, or Islamic bonds. The well-known rebel Sayyid Abdul Rahman-ul Zahir, the principal instigator of the Aceh rebellion, which in 1876 caused the Dutch government heavy losses in life and money, was an Arab by descent.
He was a Hadrami Arab, who like Fadl had been born in India. Even though settled in Indonesia, he was a regular visitor to the Malabar Coast. Two of his six wives hailed from this region, and one of them was the sister of Sayyid Fadl. Fadl played a critical role in introducing Zahir to the Ottoman officialdom. He emerged as an important individual in Aceh politics who, like Fadl, brokered with the Ottomans to safeguard the interests of the Javanese Muslims. He encouraged the Javanese to experience the corrupt administration of the caliph in the Hijaz, and he punctured their illusions about the caliph’s pivotal role as their global leader. In the process, Aceh’s dependence on Zahir increased and the caliph-centric pan-Islamic bubble began to give way to more embrace, imperially embedded Muslim networks. Transimperial brokers, like Zahir, energized such networks and made them all-powerful.

Zahir was a religious and legal reformer who had reached Aceh in 1864 after interesting stints in Europe, Egypt, Arabia, Malaya, and India. Zahir played the perfect middleman between the sultan of Aceh and the Ottoman sultan at the time of the 1873 Aceh War with the Dutch. He pleaded to the latter for help and protection. Zahir’s sayyid Arab pedigree and his claim to have wide-reaching contacts made him the perfect broker. The Muslims of Aceh believed that by offering them Ottoman protection Zahir could bring them relief from Dutch exploits. Their first reality check of the caliph as a global Muslim leader ended in failure. Muslims were disappointed when a much-enfeebled Ottoman Empire refused help because none of the other major imperial powers were willing to support it.

Zahir did not give up easily as he needed to keep his own reputation as a middleman intact. He pulled out an 1850 firman from the archives that declared Aceh as a protectorate of the Ottomans. This was an effective face-saving move for him. The caliph in a very gentle and nonpersuasive way stated that he had political sovereignty over Aceh. This claim was dismissed instantly by Holland. Soon the Porte dismissed Zahir with a minor decoration for himself and a vizirial letter for his sultan that summed up Turkey’s attempts to help Aceh. Zahir thus lost out to the Dutch without substantial forthcoming Ottoman support. Once the Dutch had crushed
his rebellion, they paid him a monthly stipend of $1,000. He was allowed to move and settle wherever he liked. The Ottoman bubble had been burst, but Zahir had successfully shifted the discussions away from the importance of the caliph as the savior, to middlemen brokers such as himself. In Penang and Singapore, the Muslim community followed the developments in Acheh with interest. In both settlements, financial and material help for the Achehnese and for men like Zahir who could broker for them was always forthcoming.  

As the focus turned to middlemen like Zahir, the British also shifted into an alarmist gear. After all, Zahir was Fadl’s brother-in-law. It was clear that Fadl’s networks extended via his family ties into Dutch Indonesia as well. In 1879, Brigadier Francis Loch, the political agent at Aden, reported his visit to the area and his journey to Mecca, where he proposed to stay for a year. Loch had had news from his residency interpreter, Saleh Jaffer, that while at Aden Zahir had been in touch with Fadl and that he also had with him a huge retinue. Loch feared that as the two shared the same “restless and active spirits and natures” and as they were related in marriage they might pool their men and resources and create a problem in the Dhofar region. Loch, mindful of the “clever” character of these “men of spirit and action,” feared that they might represent themselves as having the support of Turkish troops. This might help Fadl to reinstall himself in Dhofar and make relations between Turkey and England tense.  

The British resident at Istanbul also worried about Fadl’s wide network in India and Afghanistan. He was particularly worried when Fadl’s predictions about “troubles” in India and his convictions about the inability of the Afghan warlord, Ammer Abdurrahman, to maintain himself unaided at Kabul proved correct, as was reported in the press. But more worrisome were of course Fadl’s contacts in India. After all, that was where he had grown up after his father migrated to Malabar from the Hadramawt area. Even though Malabar commissioners Henry Conolly and Thomas L. Strange insisted that they had gotten rid of the Fadl problem by deporting him and his family to Arabia, they could not extinguish his extended family networks in India. Stephen Dale has argued that Fadl’s influence and contacts
continued to shape Muslim politics in India until the early twentieth century. One of the reasons for Fadl’s influence was that in the Hijaz he was in constant touch with visiting Malayali Muslims. The British resident then at Aden, Captain Haines, felt that the deportation of Fadl to Arabia had helped him as it made him a living martyr. He was known to have carried on a correspondence with people in Malabar as late as 1900. Haines also reported that when Fadl was at Mocha (northwest of Aden), Indian Muslims regularly arrived there to do him homage. Later when Fadl shifted to Mecca, the British vice consul reported that he exerted a huge influence on pilgrims from both India and Hadramawt.

And despite Conolly’s claims of having purged Fadl’s family from Malabar, his circle of relatives was far too huge to be completely washed out. In 1881, the commissioner of Calicut introduced to the consul at Jeddah the son of one of his nephews who wished to travel to Mecca. This man, Sayyid Hassan ibn Sayyid Ahmad Jifri of the Putiamaliga house in Calicut, wanted to travel to the Hijaz because his father and other family members there had died of cholera. This desire, of course, would not have discounted the rituals and ceremonies of martyrdom at Mambram that perpetuated and kept alive both Fadl’s and his father’s memory and ideology.

Fadl’s status in India loomed large also because of news as well as rumors of the importance he enjoyed in the Hijaz and Istanbul. Thus, even though Fadl had been deported from India, the security personnel in India understood the clout he wielded in the Hijaz and recognized the networks that connected him throughout trans-Asia. In 1881, Ahmad Gorukul Khan Bahadur, inspector of police in the Madras presidency, who had played a key role in cracking down on the “turbulent population of Malabar”—as a letter from the chief secretary described it—and thereby “incur[ed] the enmity of Syud Fazl the deported priest,” feared for his life as he prepared to make a trip to the Hijaz. He submitted his passport to the chief secretary, asking for adequate provisions for his “personal safety” and “protection” from Fadl. Fully realizing the seriousness of the problem, the secretary promptly forwarded his request to the British consul at Jeddah.
In the late nineteenth century, news of Fadl’s potential and clout as a broker who would protect the interests of the Muslims trickled along with stories about the inept and powerless caliph. The hopes of people shifted from the caliph to intermediaries like Fadl. In 1879, it was widely believed in India that Fadl was in touch with Indians in Istanbul, that he shared their anti-British sentiments, and that at one time had “contemplated going to Afghanistan to oppose the English.” In Istanbul, Fadl found an agile intellectual public sphere. The city had a vibrant community of “runaway” Muslim mullahs, rebels, and renegades of all hues. Much to the chagrin of the British government, they had escaped the British clampdown in India and lived under royal patronage in the city. Indeed, as we will see in the following chapter, Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi was one such case in point. He enjoyed royal patronage as he pursued his scholarly work as well as political activism. The latter derived from his vast trans-Asian contacts established via his many activities: politics, travel, pilgrimage, dissemination of religious knowledge, establishment of seminaries, exercise of miraculous powers, and creation of social welfare schemes for the immigrant populations in the Hijaz in particular. Likewise, in 1880 the resident reported the huge influence Fadl had in Turkey, where mosques were being used as a recruiting ground for him. The resident had seen that in the mosque of Sultan Mehemed a sheikh was preaching that in exchange for Fadl’s assistance in recovering Dhofar, “every Mussulman should arm himself.” Reports of men and money pouring in from Morocco also sent shivers down the India Office spine.

Fadl’s close connections with the Ottoman sultan’s chamberlain, Osman Bey, was of course always a source of concern for Muscat, the British, and independent Arab chiefs, especially because Bey was known to be, as one letter described it, “one of the most fanatical and mischievous men about the Sultan’s person.” The charge of “fanaticism” was something that the British could never wash away as far as Fadl was concerned. And therefore his friendship with Bey was always suspect in their eyes.

The Hijaz, especially Jeddah, was an arena where it was believed that Fadl had many contacts with the Indian population. Fadl’s
son-in-law Abdul Rahman, who frequented Mecca and who was known to be “both active and intelligent,” was particularly instrumental in keeping these contacts alive. And there was always a concern about the extent of influence Fadl had over the Indian population back in India. A detailed memorandum submitted by the British resident in Istanbul to the government indicated that Fadl did have networks and influence in India. The India Office was always asked by officers posted in Istanbul to keep tabs on Fadl regarding his influence on the Muslims of India. In 1880, Fadl’s proposed visit to Mecca to meet with the sheikhs who were gathering there to strengthen the position of the caliph caused alarm in British circles because there were intelligence reports that Fadl would also be meeting with the Indian pilgrims and soliciting their opinions on the caliphate and global issues. The government of India was equally concerned at the links he had forged with the viceroy of Egypt as he garnered support for his claims on Dhofar. Indeed, urgent telegrams were sent in 1880 to the British Agent at Aden and to the vice consul at Jeddah warning them of the seditious character of Fadl, who threatened to visit Jeddah.

From 1880 until his death in 1901 Fadl contributed to the intellectual and political energy of Istanbul and helped establish it as the hub of a vast Muslim network that was both Islamist as well as cosmopolitan. The network was slippery and contingent on the individuals, circumstances, and institutions that used it. Thus Fadl could use this transcultural network to build his political career as an independent ruler of Dhofar. In doing so, he could critique the Ottoman caliph, suggest that the English could do a better job as the protectors of Muslims, but at the same time extol the sultan and his imperial capital—Istanbul. He called the sultan’s territories the “Empire of Islam” and referred to Istanbul as the sacred space of Islam.

Even more striking was his praise of the British, whom he said were better than the Ottoman caliph at protecting the religious and civil rights of Muslims, and his simultaneous urgings to the Ottoman sultan that foreign encroachments on Muslim territory would be stopped, as he was reported to have stated, only by a “union of the people of Islam.” And he announced, “By the aid of this great
cause . . . we shall promote the patriotism of all Mussulmans and gain the admiration and approval of our co-religionists.” 227 This was indeed the best example of the tilting of the global networks toward a caliph-centric pan-Islamism. Indeed, in Fadl’s writings from Istanbul his identification of the caliph as the undisputed head of the Muslim networks was unquestioned. In two of his works, Tarikat al-Hanifa (1899) and Tanbih al-Ukala (1881), he refers to Sultan Abd-al Hamid II as the caliph of Islam and praises his rule. In Tanbih al-Ukala he cites two traditions about the need to obey the caliph. He states, “Whoever betrays the sultan is betrayed by God.” 228

Dale sees Fadl as being influenced by the model provided by Jamaluddin Afghani—the Persian rebel who was a pan-Islam visionary. And maybe the links between them were there. But Fadl was certainly weak on politics and strong on personal aggrandizement. Unlike Afghani, who saw the strengthening of the caliph as an end to his extraterritorial politics, there is no such agenda evident in Fadl’s career. If anything, he and others in his network, like Zahir in Aceh, overshadowed the caliph through their ability to negotiate with the range of Asian and European imperial powers that framed Muslim lives in the period. He was in the end a typical transcultural and transimperial entrepreneur.

And there were many other Muslim British subjects in the Hijaz and Istanbul, many of whom were fugitive mullahs who had reached Ottoman territories as they escaped the British crackdown on them after the mutiny. Of course, like Fadl, all these were grouped together as “outlawed fanatics” by the British. Yet there was no doubt that in the late nineteenth century such outlawed Muslim subjects themselves constituted formidable trans-Asian networks that the British were better off using rather than dismantling if they wanted their political sovereignty in the region to attain the durability and geographical expanse that they desired. Fadl and his network were crucial for the globalization of the concerns held by Muslim subjects. He was revered as a martyr in Malabar even decades after he had been unceremoniously deported from there.

Fadl represented networks that were global rather than simply pan-Islamist in the procaliph manner. This at one level made it easy
for the British to tap their potential. But Muslim networks were slippery. They had the potential to switch gears. Transcultural middlemen like Fadl who energized these networks could become the rabid mullah and the Muslim fanatic when it suited them. For the British and other imperial powers, these were not imagined fears but real dangers of relying on late nineteenth-century Muslim networks. Sayyid Fadl was the best case in point, as was Maulana Rahmatullah in a different kind of way, as the next chapter will unfold.
Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi (1818–1892), the 1857 scholar rebel and close associate of Sayyid Fadl, was born in Kairana in the Muzaffarnagar district of modern Uttar Pradesh. He traced his intellectual genealogy to the Delhi Naqshbandiya Sufi Shahwaliulla and his disciple Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of Rae Bareilly. After an initial stint of home schooling with his scholarly father, Maulvi Khalil Allah, he moved to Delhi and Lucknow. At Delhi his private teachers were Maulana Imam Baksh Sahbai of the Delhi College. In Lucknow he was taught by Mufti Saad Allah. He had contacts and initiations with numerous Chishti and Naqshbandi khangabs (hospices) as well. After the death of his father, he set himself up in Kairana, where he established a madrasa. In 1852, at the time of the Delhi College conversion controversy, he was requested by the ulema to take up the missionary challenge. This gained him political visibility and brought him to the notice of the local administration.

He gained further notoriety in British circles during the mutiny of 1857. He was one of the rebel leaders from Kairana. At the Jama
Masjid in Kairana, every evening the *mujahids*—those people engaged in jihad, in fighting for a good cause—assembled, and before they were given any orders the following announcement was made: “Mulk khuda kaa. Hukm maulvi Rahmatullah ka.” (The country belongs to God. And the orders of Maulana Kairanwi are followed.) Kairanwi’s role in 1857 was therefore quite explicit, and he was on the official hit list. But with the assistance of local Gujjar families he managed to flee from Kairana and escape arrest.\(^3\)

He had an arrest warrant issued for him, and an award of Rs.1,000 was offered to anyone who gave information about him.\(^4\) Kairanwi wished to flee to Mecca. He disguised himself, changed his name, and left on foot for Delhi and then traveled toward Surat. From there he took a sailing boat to Jeddah. In Kairana his huge *riyasat* where his family and workers lived was confiscated by the British and put up for auction.

Kairanwi can be placed in the galaxy of early nineteenth-century Muslim reformists who we discussed in Chapter 1. Like them, he too used the print and the vernacular Urdu to reach out to the Indian masses with literature offering advice, and in particular about individual adjustment to the new British political sovereigns.\(^5\) He was also one of the last of the multilingual gentlemen: he wrote simultaneously in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu with an eye to an audience outside India. Much of Kairanwi’s writings were framed in the late nineteenth-century Salafi intellectual tradition of Ottoman and Arab reformist thought. Indeed, he combined the Indian reformist emphasis on the salience of the individual with the Ottoman Salafi tradition that foregrounded science and rationality as the frame for individual action. In line with the Salafi tradition, he aimed at inclusivity and used the scriptures as an accretive template that could accommodate diversity. And very much in tune with their fears, he was also apprehensive of Western ascendancy and wished to achieve the unity of the Muslim umma across the British and the Ottoman Empires. He urged his audience to embrace science and rationality, as these were integral to their Islamic heritage. According to him, Islamic scriptures had universal appeal across the Muslim world. They were the ideal means by which to level differences and unite Muslims.
Kairanwi’s writing career in India developed during the debates he had with the Christian missionaries on the authenticity and reliability of their religious texts. His main debating partner was one Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–1868), a German evangelical missionary. In several books that he compiled during his public debates with the missionaries in Agra and Delhi, he refuted Pfander’s claim as to the textual superiority and authenticity of Christian religious texts. Instead, he privileged the Koran and attributed to it a permanence and protection from *tabrīf lafzī* (the practice of changing words). The idea of *hifz* (memorizing) and the production of *hafiz i-Koran* (those who had memorized it), made the Koran superior as its embodied nature protected its original form. No human agent could tamper with the text. Indeed, it preserved its revealed innocence for posterity. In contrast, the human agency that produced many textual versions of the Bible, including the Torah, disembodied their revealed knowledge, making it vulnerable to corruption. Most of the books of Kairanwi develop this theme and lay out the endemic connectivity that the Koran lends to its followers. These books bring to the forefront the embodied nature of the Koran, and they showcase it as a global connector, since it lies engrained in the hearts and minds of all Muslims. Kairanwi’s books offer a historicist intellectual underpinning to the nineteenth-century Muslim networks. According to him, his books are exceptional because they are embedded in the Koran. Such ideas were penned first in his books the *Ijaz-i-Iswi* and *Izalatul al-Shakuk*, both of which he wrote in India even before he set himself up in the Hijaz and Istanbul. He developed his ideas further in the *Izbarul Haq*, which he wrote from Istanbul in 1865.

Even before Kairanwi moved out of India, he publicly debated the Christian missionaries in Agra and Delhi and wrote a critique of their texts in his book the *Ijaz-i-Iswi*. This book, written in Persian for an Indian audience, was published in Agra in 1854. It was later translated into Urdu. It deals with *tabrīf lafzī* in the Christian and Jewish books, and underlines their inferior status as compared to the permanence of Koranic knowledge, which is unchanging. Kairanwi argued that Christian and Jewish religious texts had no tradition of *hifz*, which made them vulnerable to change. Kairanwi privileged
the Koran over such “inferior” texts because its contents were changeless and embodied in an unalloyed form in the hearts and the bodies of believers. The Koran was transmitted through their movements and had the unique privilege of being transmitted as a memorized text. The transmission of the Koran by way of individual mobility and word of mouth enabled the establishment of the trans-Asiatic Muslim networks.

Kairanwi’s second book, *Izalatul al-Shakuk* (1853), extended further his argument about Muslim global connectivity. This book was a reply to twenty questions posed by Christians to Muslims. It was written in Urdu so as to reach out to an Indian audience. Indeed, Kairanwi wanted not just the ulema but ordinary people to become aware of the thrust of his public discussions. The book is also known by its other title, *Sawalat Kairanwi*. In its preface, Kairanwi notes that the book was his response to questions published in a Hindi newspaper, challenging Muslims to reply. Initially, he was reluctant to respond to things he had already engaged with in his various discussions (*munazra*) with the Christian missionaries. But he soon realized that the Christians had added more queries to this list and wanted a response from Mirza Ahmad Fakruddin, the son of the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. The emperor passed the list on to him, as he was the best respondent in matters of theology. He had no choice but to pen this book. The issues were of interest to him, and he was motivated to write because the Christian missionaries challenged the Muslims to reply. However, the book did not remain confined to the twenty-questions format, because before its publication not only did the Christians add more questions but Kairanwi participated in the public debates with Pfander in Akbarabad. He thus also included some of that discussion in the book.

In 1,116 pages, the two-volume book defends the Koran as the singular text that offers evidence of the Nabuwat or Prophethood of Muhammad and his ability to perform miracles. And of course it also shows in copious detail the changes introduced in other religious books of the past and present. In the book, Kairanwi separates the questions on the Koran from the questions about miracles and answers them individually. The discussion is triggered by a Christian
query about the Koran validating the miracles of the Prophet. Kairanwi reiterates the salience and exceptional status of the Koran and the Prophet. This is exemplified in their innate potential to establish global connections among Muslims.\(^7\)

**Kairanwi’s Cosmopolitanism at the Cusp of Empires**

Kairanwi’s cosmopolitanism was exemplified in the discursive space that he carved out between empires, a space that showcased Muslims as a civilizational force. He grafted this cosmopolitanism onto the imperial networks that were a feature of his new location in the Hijaz and Istanbul. He used imperial fault lines to maneuver the diplomatic connections between the British and Ottoman Empires to his advantage.\(^8\) His ability to negotiate with both the British and Ottoman consular offices and play them against each other was the best such case in point. In his new identity as a fugitive subject of the British Empire, he became a significant actor in the trans-Asiatic politics of the nineteenth century, a sphere that involved the British, Arab polities, the Ottomans, and the Russian Empire. As he worked his way through the networks of imperial rivalries, he engineered his career by tapping into the Islamic repertoire of communication skills and older forms of Islamic connectivity—the scriptures and the oral tradition through which they were disseminated. In the process, he laid out critical Muslim intellectual networks between the British and Ottoman Empires. The entanglement of Muslim networks with Western empires turned pan-Islamic connectivity away from its caliph-centric orientation. It also made pan-Islam attractive to a range of Ottoman liberals and non-Muslims, even as Muslim networks retained their Islamic intellectual core.

In Mecca, Kairanwi attended the *darrs* (classroom lectures) of Sayyid Ahmad Dahlan, who taught the Shafi jurisprudence. Kairanwi always asked Dahlan intelligent questions, and the latter was so impressed by him that he met him separately one day to find out his background and details. This was the first time Kairanwi had an opportunity to tell Dahlan about his discussions and public debates with Pfander: the Islam versus Christianity debate, the issue of the
1857 rebellion against British rule, and the problems of the Indian Muslims who lived in the shadow of the British raj. This meeting was followed by an invitation to Dahlan’s house the following day. Dahlan asked Kairanwi to set up his own study circle at the Kaaba in Mecca, and had his name included in the list of the ulema of the sanctum sanctorum of Mecca. This not only gave Kairanwi a newfound status in the global hub of Mecca, but it also made his financial situation in the city secure. Soon Kairanwi’s lectures became very popular and his students obtained high positions. He remained continuously in touch with Indian affairs via pilgrims who came every haj season.

Kairanwi’s presence in Mecca predictably drew the attention of the British consulate. After all, he was in British records a marked 1857 outlaw—a mutiny convict against whom there was an arrest warrant. But his dars and later the madrasa he established also alarmed Turkish officials, who feared that if the British continued to be interested in the madrasa, they might make it their point of intervention in the region. Or, the consulate worried, the madrasa might become a nodal point for foreign influence, and as such might oppose Turkish rule in the region. They were not sure what the madrasa’s political orientation would be in the event of an imperial clash of interest.

Thus Kairanwi’s intellectual nest became the flash point in the region where British and Ottoman political sovereignties were poised to assess each other. There were, however, moments when both the British and the Ottoman officials agreed on the suspicious character of Kairanwi’s madrasa. They both viewed it as unacceptable and categorized it as the beginning of a “movement of a stranger who represented an outside country.” Such moments of collective concern occurred when Turkish military men held positions of influence in the Hijaz. Thus at one point the governor of Hijaz Nuri Pasha—a Turkish military man who always remained suspicious of Kairanwi’s madrasa—sent a damaging report on Kairanwi to Caliph Abd-al Hamid II (r. 1876–1909). He had prepared the report in consultation with the British consulate at Jeddah. Kairanwi retaliated by sending his own details to the caliph. Both for intellectual as well as political reasons he received a positive response.
from Abd-al Hamid II, who read both the reports and invited Kairanwi to visit Istanbul. He even asked the governor to arrange for Kairanwi’s travel. Kairanwi reached Istanbul in 1883 via imperial networks—in this case, a network characterized by consular cooperation.

Ottoman reformists were familiar with Kairanwi’s writings even before he visited Istanbul. The news of his debates with Christian missionaries in Delhi and Agra circulated in Istanbul. Indeed, he had visited the city in 1864 on the invitation of Caliph Abd-al Aziz (r. 1861–1876). This Ottoman sultan, with no claims to be the global leader of Muslims, had invited him to learn about his views on the missionary Pfander’s claim that he had defeated him in a religious debate in Agra. And this, as we shall see below, resulted in his writing Izharul Haq while in Istanbul.

However, the second visit, in 1883, was different. This visit was in response to an invitation from Caliph Abd-al Hamid II following a British consular complaint regarding Kairanwi’s dealings in Mecca. The caliph realized that Kairanwi epitomized the entanglement of Muslim networks with Western Empires, and that this lent him immense political value. That is, Abd-al Hamid II was not attracted to Kairanwi merely because of his caliphal duty to Muslims. On his part, Kairanwi too was not interested in Istanbul simply because it was the seat of caliphal power. Rather, the camaraderie that developed between the two men is a case in point of the Ottoman sultan’s attempt to access the imperially embedded pan-Islam networks of Kairanwi, and the latter making the most of the sultan’s interest in reinforcing them.

On this visit, Kairanwi traveled to Istanbul along with the head of the madrasa, Maulvi Hazrat Noor, and his brother Maulana Badrul Islam. In his diary, Kairanwi details the royal treatment he received as he traveled from Mecca to Istanbul, and his royal reception at the hands of the highest-ranking officials, such as Nasim Bey. He also received a khilat (robe of honor) from the caliph and lived as a state guest. He was given Rs. 5,000 (bazar qarash) and the title of payah harmain sharif. When he met the caliph it was quite clear that he was a state guest, not only because of the respect that the caliph had for his scholarship and his status as a ulema of the haram sharif, but also
because he wanted to learn from him the details of British rule in India. Kairanwi wrote in his diary: “The Turkish Sultan shook hands with me and said that he was very eager to hear about my circumstances and that is why he had invited me. And he will talk to him in details [about India and his madrasa] at leisure.”

Kairanwi returned to Mecca after several months of royal treatment at Istanbul. During his stay in the city he was not only exonerated of all wrongdoing but also established a cordial relationship with the caliph. When he departed, he left behind his brother, Badrul Islam Kairanwi, as his permanent contact at Istanbul. The caliph had requested that Badrul Islam Kairanwi remain, and he was in turn honored with the charge of the Hamidiyah library. This is Turkey’s largest royal library, and it had been established by the sultan himself. Kairanwi’s brother was made its director—a great honor. He remained permanently lodged in Istanbul throughout his life.

Kairanwi himself returned to Istanbul several times for discussions. He had a social circle in the city as he had lived there previously, for long stretches, to write his book Izharul Haq. On several occasions he visited the city for eye treatment. On all occasions he was always treated as a state guest. But despite his regal treatment, he always yearned to return to Mecca, where he wanted to breathe his last. Even while in the Ottoman cities, he never let go of his connection to India, and at one time requested to be sent back home just one last time.

In 1883, the British consul in Jeddah received two letters from Kairanwi in which he pleaded that he wished to go back to India. The consulate made inquiries into his case through its dragomans and through reliable Indian agents and found his behavior during his residence in Mecca “perfectly unobjectionable.” They recommended to the government that Kairanwi be allowed to go back to India. Their decision was based on the reports of two Indians in the city, Hassan Johar and Hafizuddin. These men had known the maulana for twelve years, and the consulate trusted them. The consulate said that notwithstanding “his real or supposed share in 1857,” his stint in Mecca had been very uneventful. In a letter, the consulate reported: “[He is] much respected, it appears as a man the morality of whose life is in conformity with his religion . . . he lives
very quietly and has no connection with public affairs religious or political." The consulate was of the view that its act of generosity would be appreciated not just by Kairanwi but also by influential people in Mecca.¹⁵

The government of India denied the request, basing its decision on the report of the government of the Northwest Provinces, in whose jurisdiction Kairanwi’s village Kairana, in the Muzaffarnagar district, was located. They agreed with the secretary of the Northwest Provinces, who reminded them of Kairanwi’s disloyal conduct in the mutiny at Meerut. They noted that Kairanwi had been charged with complicity in the murder of a number of persons whose relatives recognized him, and that therefore the lieutenant governor and chief commissioner could not promise him safe conduct to India.¹⁶ The secretary quoted from the charge sheet he had prepared on the 1857 rebels, noting that Kairanwi had been accused of violence at Thana Bhowan. He was said to have accompanied the reformist Inayat Ali Khan in the attack on the government offices at Shamli. At the time, Khan had been worried about the fate of the large numbers of people locked in the mosque and the camp and had turned to Kairanwi for advice. Khan reportedly instigated Kairanwi to commit violence by commenting, “Pigs must not be suffered in masjid.” The authorities considered this statement tantamount to a sentence of death when the slaughter commenced. As the charge sheet described it, the commissioners had never seen “Muhammadans killing Muhammadans inside their own place of worship.” And according to the charge sheet, Kairanwi was definitely “a leader and instigator.”¹⁷

The government did not want Kairanwi back in India. But they worried about his activities in the Hijaz. They were not content with the Jeddah consul’s favorable report on him. Indeed, they saw him as one of the many spokes in the wheel of “sedition” that operated in the holy city of Mecca. The Foreign Office echoed the fears and anxieties of Zohrab, the Jeddah consul, who saw “Muslim secret societies” brewing trouble for the British all over the Hijaz and beyond. They saw Mecca as the hub of the production and circulation of dangerous anti-British “Wahabi” literature. They feared, as they described it in a letter to the consul at Jeddah, that Kairanwi’s return
would energize “politico-religious movements which starting from the head quarters of Islam would very soon reach the Mahomedans of India.” Moreover, they wanted to “obtain accurate information on the personality, motives and influence of their leaders.” It came as no surprise that their list of “Wahabi” suspects included Maulana Kairanwi. In 1888, H. M. Durand, in the Foreign Department, wanted information about Kairanwi, who, he said, “we have reason to believe is engaged in preaching sedition to and circulating seditious papers among our subjects at the Haj.” He wanted “all available information” about him and about the “motive power which works him if he is merely a tool in the hands of others.”

Kairanwi played on British suspicions about him to insert himself into Ottoman society. From 1864 to 1900 he moved continuously between Mecca and Istanbul (1864–1900) and built his intellectual resources. In Mecca, his focus remained his darrs and madrasa. Kairanwi’s lectures, writings, and madrasa activities provided the intellectual underpinning of his imperially derived cosmopolitanism—a cosmopolitanism that flourished at the cusp of empires. The long reach of his thought was evident when it connected to the larger trans-Asiatic wheel of reforms; these reforms were of both the Islamic and Western radical kind, and they were sweeping through the Ottoman provinces. This intellectual energy, often known as the Arab renaissance, was triggered in Istanbul and its Arab provinces (Syria, Lebanon, and Cairo). Here, during the late 1860s, reformist ulema and bureaucrat scholars reeled under the shock both of the financial crisis and of the obstacles to reform imposed first by Caliph Abd-al Aziz and then by Abd-al Hamid II. These reformers and scholars attempted to understand the imperial crisis, the failed administrative (tanzimat) and constitutional reforms of the empire, and the ascendancy of an autocracy that legitimated itself using caliphal authority. But the reformists were energized by the more immediate threat of Western ascendancy in and around the Ottoman territories, especially after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. Both the moderate ulema as well as reformist bureaucrats who had lost favor in Abd-al Hamid’s Istanbul converged in the provinces (Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt)—away from the Ottoman core—to fashion moral and political reforms that would connect Islamic
societies, unite Muslims globally, and highlight the accretive civilizational heritage of Islam. Privileging this more material, lateral connectivity, rather than the caliph as the normative figurehead, was eventually meant to desacralize autocracy at Istanbul. The reformists in the provinces urged the umma to unite politically and showcase its civilizational heritage: science, modernity, reason, interpretation, and emulation. Differences of Islamic belief and practice had to be subordinated to this new reformist agenda, and the scriptures were chosen as the ideal template with which to unite the Muslims. This resulted in the demystification of the Koran and the Hadith and a generous interpretation of their content so as to accommodate Muslim diversity. It also decentered the caliph.

The return to the scriptures, and reliance on “traditional” or “classical” Islamic principles of consultation, reason, and rationality to interpret them, became the popular route to an inclusive political reform. The reformists argued that science and modernity always had a place in classical Islamic society. These were not borrowed Western concepts. As unity of the umma, with a specific political intent, became their motto, they added commentaries to the scriptures that made the Islamic engine more inclusive. Thus Shihabuddin Alusis in Baghdad added Sufi dialectics and Razi’s natural science to his commentaries on the Koran. Islamic reformists, deeply immersed in scripture, established trans-Asiatic networks that stretched from Syria, Lebanon, and Cairo to Morocco and India. Alusis, for instance, traveled to Cairo and read the exegesis of the Indian scripturalist reformer Siddiq Hasan Khan. He also sent his son to India to train with him. Indeed, these trans-Asiatic reformers all converged in their untiring devotion to the thinker Ibn Taymiyyaah, who emphasized to them the religious and political significance of ijtihad (interpretation and independent judgment), emulation, reason, and revelation.

Through their magazines, journals, and societies, these Islamic reformists had already created a vibrant public sphere in the Ottoman territories and beyond—long before Abd-al Hamid II clamped down on them and on the constitutionalist bureaucrats in the empire who opposed his “back to Islam” policy. Their networks offered a ready ground for reformist Ottoman bureaucrats and Indian men of religion who cared to connect.
The Salafis in the Arab fringes of the empire also found willing allies in the secondary school graduates—products of a secular education. These students became the first Arabicists who allied with Salafis and pioneered movements for educational and political reforms: Arab cultural revival, an inclusive renaissance, political rights, and later autonomy if not independence. Of course, the Salafis and the Arabicists (a group that also included many former Ottoman constitutionalist bureaucrats) both perpetuated as well as departed from each other’s ideas, especially in the context of education. The Salafis advocated reason, rationality, and Sufi doctrine. But they remained more concerned with reforming Muslim belief and practice. On the other hand, the Arabicists were more political and moved beyond belief and practice to urge intellectuals to make their agendas more appealing and to present them in contemporary terms, even if it meant moving beyond the Islamic heritage formula. Nonetheless, they both contributed to create a vibrant atmosphere of change and reform.

Ottoman provinces in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt were at this time the melting pot of reformist ideas of all hues. If Islamic liberalism and ideas of unity swept the region, triggered by the administrative and political turmoil in Istanbul, so too did French ideas of patriotism, which demonstrated how to think of a united Muslim world comprising different nation-states. Also noteworthy was the influence of Western radical politics, which itself urged people to rise across Asia, transcending religious and linguistic barriers, and to unify against the ascendancy of Western capitalism.

Ilham Makdisi has shown the catalytic role that Arab theater in the Ottoman provinces played in triggering a unique kind of moral and political reform; like the religious reformists, it aimed at pushing people to unite across class, ethnicities, and sects. This meant transcending the self and focusing instead on matters of public interest. This movement from the self to public interest was indicative of progress, civilization, and the unification of all types of people—that is, the creation of a social body. This was the beginning of a new radical transnational politics and society, and it was linked to theatrical performances. According to Makdisi, this was yet another ideological route to creating unity and fostering introspection at a time...
when Western ascendancy loomed large in the background. The movement of people across Ottoman provinces—Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon—and the development of a transimperial social bond and a popular culture that went beyond local issues encouraged Ottoman theaters to deal with radical themes. Many actors, like Aziz Eid, were Freemasons and had links with radical intellectuals. They performed plays such as *The Masons* in Cairo. Popular theatrical themes like the French Revolution radicalized thought in no small measure and prepared the ground for the Ottoman Revolution.24

It is worth noting that the scripturalists, the Arabicists, and the radical reformists—all imbued with the idea of trans-Asiatic unity, progress, and civilization—interacted politically and strategically, even if they had their own very different ideological bases and material contexts. Indeed, the pioneer of Arab theater in the Ottoman provinces, Marun al-Naqqash (1817–1855), who introduced the Western literary genre of drama into Arab lands in the mid-nineteenth century, maintained close links with Jamaluddin Afghani, the most radical Muslim reformist of the 1870s and 1880s. Afghani, who above all stressed the principle of unity as a political ploy against Western ascendancy, reached out to universal reference points like the caliph even as he leaned on the non-Muslim support base in India to serve his political agenda of ousting the Western powers from the region. Makdisi shows that Afghani viewed the establishment of an Egyptian theater as the most effective way of promoting radical ideas and raising the political consciousness of the populace.25

Kairanwi used this intellectual moment to harness Indian interests to the trans-Asiatic reformist movement. Indeed, he impacted this movement with some very India-specific reformist intellectual energy—Naqshbandiya Sufi spirituality, whose most characteristic feature was the compromise it offered between the more Sufi-inclined *wabdat-ul-wajud* (unity of being) and the Shariat-inclined *wabdat-ul-shahud* (unity of existence). It attempted to unite diverse Muslim sects and ideologues by bringing together their different literary productions: the Sufi *masnavis*, Hadith texts used in India, and Kairanwi’s own book *Izharul Haq*, which talked about the exceptional historicity, poetics, meter, and rhythm of the Koran.
The combination of the scripture-oriented Naqshbandiya hard line with the more culturally alloyed Chishtiya Sufi outlook had been the defining feature of Mughal political culture. Emperor Akbar, weary of the global networks of the Naqshbandiya across Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire, shored up his social base internally by engaging with and encouraging the Chishti Sufis in Delhi, Agra, and Ajmer. This led to the very Indic practice of multiple initiations into diverse Sufi brotherhoods. Kairanwi, the archetypal Mughal gentleman, was also initiated into both the Naqshbandiya and the Suhrawadiya Sufi brotherhoods. He exported to Mecca this Mughal gentlemanly practice of cultural tolerance and accommodation.

In Mecca, Kairanwi found a rich intellectual legacy; through this intellectual heritage, the groundwork had already been laid for a reconciliation of mysticism and of the scripture-based jurisprudence represented by the Naqshbandiya Sufis. Since the fifteenth century, India had been integral to Naqshbandi global networks, which had connected early modern Asian empires. The popularity in India of Abd ur Rahman Jami of Herat is one example of how the eclectic Indic reformists rubbed shoulders with the Naqshbandis from the Mediterranean Arab-Ottoman world. This interaction only intensified in subsequent centuries and can be seen in the long residence in 1802 of Khalid Naqshbandi of Kurdistan at the Delhi madrasa of Shahwaliulla. At the same time, Indian Naqshbandis also had an impact on the Arab world. During the seventeenth century, South Asian Sufi scholars like Sibghat Allah (from Ahmadnagar and Bijapur in India) and Tajuddin al Hindi (from Gujarat) exported to the Arab world the Shattariyyah and Naqshbandiya Sufi orientations, respectively, which reconciled the Shariat to Sufi tassawuf. Indeed, the translation of their Persian works into Arabic and the introduction in Mecca of the famous Shattariyyah text Jawahir-i-Khamsah of Ghaouth al Hindi went a long way toward producing the “neo-Sufism” that brought mysticism and Islamic jurisprudence together—in both cases by sharpening the focus on the life of the Prophet and his teachings, that is, the Hadith studies. Kairanwi cashed in on this Indic legacy and used the infrastructure of modern Western empires to reinforce the earlier
Naqshbandi-driven trans-Asian, transimperial networks and make them more pronounced.

Michael Laffan argues that the idea of Indonesian nationalism based on a modern Islamic state was conceptualized in Cairo. Both the press and the anti-British political movement in the city created a more conducive environment in which the runaway Javanese Muslims could work out their anti-Dutch activism. Mere caliph-sponsored pan-Islam failed to create the desired anti-Dutch sentiment. The caliph, located in faraway Istanbul, did not fire the Javanese political imaginary or offer the pivot around which to organize their political energy. Things had to happen over and above him in Cairo. In India, exiled “outlaws” in Mecca and Istanbul also deflected pan-Islam aspirations away from the caliph. But unlike the Cairo-based Indonesian runaway nationalists, Indian “outlaws” are hard to categorize as nationalist or even as pan-Islamists. Their aspirations were more global and were oriented toward laying out more diffuse, widespread networks that sprawled over and derived from both Western imperial and older forms of connectivity: imperial rivalries; consulates; print, telegraph, and madrasa networks; the pilgrimage; teachers and students; and public debates, oratory, and written texts. These networks stretched between the British and the Ottoman Empires and constituted the reformers’ cosmopolis. It was here that they carved out their civilizational space to unite Muslims and meet the Western political challenge. Caliphal pan-Islam had little role in the creation of this Muslim cosmopolis.

Kairanwi’s career shows that he contributed to the creation of this cosmopolis and articulated his global aspiration in its discursive space. He desacralized the caliph and scrutinized instead his global reputation as the formidable sultan of an ethnically and religiously diverse empire. British colonial rule helped Kairanwi in this task. Because it enabled large numbers of subject people to travel physically to the Hijaz—where they then experienced firsthand the caliph’s corruption—British rule played a critical role in busting his imagined universal appeal. Kairanwi highlighted the caliph’s corrupt administration even as he leaned on him for help. He then moved in to fill the gap with his vast networks once the caliph had
been exposed and reduced in popular perception to just another indifferent Asiatic ruler. And while Kairanwi played his imperial game, both the British and Dutch governments continued to magnify caliph-centric pan-Islamic fears and paid less attention to the challenge posed by the freshly constructed global Muslim cosmopolis.

Kairanwi also tapped into the tensions within the Ottoman Empire. He exploited the friction between the Ottoman center and its provinces and benefited from the modernist reform that simmered in its Arab and African cities: Cairo, Syria, Lebanon, and Mecca. And yet he continued to claim Caliph Abd-al Hamid II as his patron. This association offered him clout vis-à-vis both the British and the local Meccan administration. He maintained this balancing act because the foreign relations policy of Abd-al Hamid II fit favorably with his own global aspirations. Both aimed at reaching out to the global Muslim society with their message of unity. Azmi Ozcan and Selim Deringil have shown how Hamid's domestic crises—the grave financial crisis, the defeat at the hands of Russia in 1877, and the loss of the Balkans—enabled him to become the protector of Muslim subjects around the world. He used Indian Muslims, in particular, as pawns to influence British policy toward the Ottomans. The printing press both in Turkey and India was mobilized to keep Ottoman issues and the caliph himself continuously at the center of Muslim public discourse so as to pressure the British government to attend to the needs of Indian Muslims.²⁹ Kairanwi benefited from this Ottoman imperial vision. The correspondence of Ottoman foreign relations to his own global agenda helped him to lay out his cosmopolis between empires. The aim of his cosmopolitanism was to unite Muslims globally around the scriptures. But he benefited also from the reformist intellectual energy that simmered in the provinces and shaped the Ottoman imperial project. His madrasa was a micro-cosm of his cosmopolitanism: traditional at the core with its reliance on the Koran and the Hadith, and impacted by the Ottoman-tanzimat-inspired Salafi intellectuals in its orientation. It showcased the making of a social body based on the principles of unity, progress, and civilization, all embedded in the divine scriptures but
reaching out to referents in scientific and technical education, rationality, emulation, and Sufi tassawuf.

Madrasa Saulatiya and the Meccan Reformists’ Indic Stamp

In 1879, Abdur Razzack, the British vice consul, reported that Kairanwi had established a madrasa at Mecca. Kairanwi raised the funds for the madrasa from donations received by people who came for the haj. Initially the madrasa was for Indian children only. It made steady progress, and some distinguished scholars found residence there. Soon, on the intervention of the sheriff, Arab children were also allowed in the madrasa. The syllabus included the Koran, theology, and allied sciences.

Razzack noted that the madrasa and Kairanwi were highly respected not just by “people high and low,” but also by the Turkish governor general of the Hijaz, Halat Pasha. On one occasion the pasha visited the madrasa and “kissed the hands of the maulvi, who kissed him in return, and then shook hands with all who were standing.” The pasha was so impressed by the madrasa and Kairanwi’s involvement in it that he stayed in the institution for several hours and patiently heard the students walk up to him in pairs and recite the Koran. Razzack said that it was a major spectacle and that many hajis also came to see the show. In 1885, Razzack reported that Kairanwi’s private madrasa, which received funds from India, stood out as a beacon of hope and light in the Hijaz region, where the state of education was otherwise dismal. The pasha’s respect for Kairanwi was striking because his government was known for its general neglect of education in the Hijaz. Razzack said the bad state of education was largely due to the apathy of the Turkish government toward learning. He lamented that the high traditions of learning that the region had been known for in the period of the classical caliphates had dissipated rapidly under Turkish rule. The ulema struggled to preserve their knowledge and disseminated it from their homes, from the portals of the haram, or from small private madrasas that they set up on their own.
After arriving in Mecca in the early 1860s as a fugitive from India, Kairanwi soon got involved in the affairs of the *mubajirs* (migrants) in the city. He was particularly incensed at the shoddy treatment they received at the hands of the Arabs, and noticed that there were no proper facilities for their accommodation, livelihood, and religious as well as scientific education. Having himself gone through the rigor of a standardized syllabus in the madrasas in India he was surprised that religious education for the youth in Arabia was unstructured, followed no set syllabus, discouraged any dialogue (as it adopted the *vaaz* or sermon style of communication), and was casual and teacher-centric. Students read grammar, jurisprudence, commentaries, and the Hadith and yet did not show any intellectual sheen. In Arabia the students completed the text *Tafseer Jalaleen*— usually taught in Hindustan in just one year—in seven years. Kairanwi was also bothered by the fact that despite the Hijaz’s reputation as the fountainhead of Islamic learning and as a scholarly center that attracted students and learned men from across the world, there were no facilities at all there either for the intellectual growth or the physical comforts of the *mubajirs*. Also missing were any adequate educational facilities—both vocational and religious—for their children.33

Instead of reforming the existing system, Kairanwi decided to set up his own madrasa in front of the Kaaba. His critique of the intellectual environment of the Hijaz became the blueprint for the madrasa’s objectives. He wanted his madrasa to be the pride of the world—a truly international school that would hire religious teachers proficient in different languages, admit students from all over the world, and boast of a syllabus that covered both religious and scientific education.34 He wanted to set up a vocational school for *mubajir* children, and to this end he held several meetings with a cross section of people. Initially, he started a madrasa called Madrasa-i-Hindi in the mosque of the Kaaba. Here he taught the Koran, the Hadith, and jurisprudence. One of his ardent disciples, Faiz Ahmad Khan, a notable of Aligarh who attended his lectures at the Kaaba, offered the first floor of his big house for the madrasa. The foundation of the madrasa was laid in his house, and an appeal was soon issued for donations. Since the house could not hold all the students, only
those who read the Koran and Hadith were transferred there and the rest continued to study at the original madrasa.35

Kairanwi’s *mubajir*-centric madrasa was bound to be popular with trans-Asian visitors and pilgrims to the Hijaz. Donations came freely from *mubajirs*, visiting *hajis*, and Muslim landed elite in India who gifted their properties in the area to Kairanwi.36 But the largest endowment came from the widow of a Bengal zamindar, Begum Saulat-un Nisa, who in 1882 had inherited the entire property of her husband, Latafat Husain. She had heard of Kairanwi because of his widely publicized debates that had been held in Delhi and Agra with the Protestant missionary Pfander. She agreed to donate lavishly to his madrasa after hearing, during a pilgrimage to Mecca, that there was no other place except this madrasa where the children of *mubajirs* could have a decent education. Using the funds Begum Saulat-un Nisa donated, the madrasa constructed a new building, which was named Madrasa Saulatiya after her.37 However, the funds were exhausted before the most vital feature—water tanks for storing rainwater for drinking and ablutions—was put in place; this worried the begum, who donated even the money she had kept for her return journey to India to address this problem. And once she returned to India she sent fifty rupees per month for the specific purpose of ensuring an adequate water supply for the madrasa students and teachers.38

The madrasa for *mubajirs* fit into the reform initiatives of exiled Ottoman reformists and moderate ulema in the provinces of Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt that we noted in the previous section. Like them, Kairanwi also used the scriptures as the template onto which he was happy to add instruction in science and rationality, both of which had the legitimacy of tradition. Indeed, the Delhi Naqshbandiya Sufi *silisia* (brotherhood) of Shahwaliulla, which had laid out Islamic heritage in similar ways, became the foundation of the madrasa’s curriculum. Kairanwi’s madrasa was unique in the Hijazian context because its syllabus followed the rational-sciences-oriented *Dars-i Nizamiya* education format popular in Hindustani seminaries.39 And not surprisingly, the madrasa soon became the center of the characteristically inclusive India-specific Arabicist grid that was fast enveloping late nineteenth-century trans-Asia.
Most striking of Kairanwi’s contribution was the eclectic intellectual base of the madrasa. This reflected the carryover to Mecca of the Naqshbandiya Sufi legacy, known for its spirit of accommodation and compromise. In Delhi it had combined the individual-centric movement *sirat-i-mustaqim* (the right path or adherence to the Koran and the Prophet) with an emphasis on the significance of the sheikh as the moderator of individual prescriptive practice. Kairanwi carried into Mecca Shahwaliulla and his disciple Sayyid Ahmad Shahid’s intellectual legacy, which tried to compromise with Sufism as long as it was framed within the scriptural prescription. At the inauguration of the madrasa, Kairanwi and his companion Imdadullah Makki read from the *Bukhari sharif* and the *Masnavi sharif*—texts that were popular in Hindustani religious circles that combined monism with Sufi spirituality—but that were relatively less known in the Arab world. Kairanwi was able to introduce the Naqshbandiya tradition into the education system because the region was familiar with this Indic stream of thought.

He also benefited from the fact that the intellectual energy at the madrasa was in tune with reformist Islamic currents, notably the Salafi ideas, which were sweeping through late nineteenth-century South and West Asia. Like the Salafi intellectuals, Kairanwi also combined religious and scientific education. He made the syllabus broad and inviting with a view to forging the unity of the “enlightened” umma. He integrated the study of scriptures with commentaries on law, lessons on *Ilm-i-Hayat* (the planetary sciences), and technical education. He kept pace with the late nineteenth-century Ottoman and Arab liberal reformist stress on combining religion and technical education and introduced technical entrepreneurial skills like craftsmanship (*dastakari*) in the madrasa. He also introduced modern disciplines and areas of learning like *Ilm Al-Riyazi* (knowledge of mathematics), *Ilm Al-munazara* (knowledge of the art of debating), *Ilm Al-mantaq* (knowledge of logic), *Ilm Al-falsafa* (knowledge of philosophy) and *ulum Falkiya* (astronomy). His syllabus showcased the accretive Islamic heritage, which had always accommodated eclectic learning. He made it clear that his innovations were neither Western derived nor an innovation, but well within the realm of acceptable Islamic tradition.
Kairanwi broadened the scope of learning and introduced a sprinkling of learning from all four Islamic schools of legal thought. In contrast to the tradition in Arabia, where the syllabus focused mainly on the Mu‘atta of the legist Imam Malik, he introduced the teaching of a Hadith written by the Shafite legist Imam Bukhari, called the *Bukharisharif* in the Madrasa Saulatiya. In Hindustan, this Hadith is still regarded as the most authentic because it claims to be a compendium of only those sayings and observations of the Prophet that were narrated directly by him to his close companions, and were not passed on via several layers of interlocutors. The introduction of this text into the curriculum of the Madrasa Saulatiya was even more interesting given the fact that Kairanwi himself claimed to be a Hanafite. Along with this, other texts, such as the *Masnavi sharif*, were also included. Lectures on the latter were given at the madrasa by Maulvi Imdad-ul-mulk. Thus, the madrasa included quite an eclectic intellectual spread. It clearly reflected the South Asian seminary tradition of never pronouncing as wrong any of the four schools of law prevalent in India, even though one could claim allegiance to only one of them. In the Hijaz, this eclecticism proved particularly useful, as the idea was to introduce a curriculum that would have trans-Asian appeal. Kairanwi strived to attract the *mubajirs* of all countries, people who spoke different languages and whose diverse religious and worldly requirements had to be accommodated.

The madrasa received a steady supply of books from Hindustan. Taking advantage of imperial networks and the rivalries that energized them, the madrasa arranged to receive books printed in Cairo and Istanbul. And thus a vibrant print ecumene underpinned the madrasa and made it the hub of the trans-Asiatic Muslim networks that Kairanwi had laid out. Books like the *Ruh Nisar* and those penned by Muhammad Ali Monghyri arrived at the madrasa from India. The *Azaltah Alaawaham*, produced in India, was also taught there. Literature from India stamped the Indic seal on the nineteenth-century Arab liberal reform that emanated from the Ottoman provinces in the Middle East. And this Indian seal was characterized by the Shahwaliulla emphasis on compromise and accommodation. Indeed, it was a momentous day when Kairanwi
began his *darrs* on Shahwaliulla’s book *Hajutullah al Baligha* (Detailed Discussion), which talks about the wisdom of the Islamic Shariat and its innate potential to accommodate social and cultural diversity. He also lectured at length on astronomy and on Ibn-Khaldun’s literature. 

Also noteworthy was the inclusion of his own books (published in India and Istanbul), which encouraged a dialogue between Muslims and the Christian world. Much of this dialogical literature grew out of Kairanwi’s debates with Christian missionaries in Delhi, Agra, and Istanbul. Thus his own masterpiece, *Izharul Haq*, a written version of his debate with Pfänder that alludes to the exceptional intellectual heritage of Islam, was on the syllabus. In this text, Kairanwi demystifies the Koran by highlighting its exceptionality in terms of its poetic meter and rhythm, rather than its mere revealed nature. This demystification of the Koran was also meant to make it this-worldly and thus enhance its innate potential to connect Muslims around the world.

Books like *Izharul Haq* were clearly the product of Ottoman patronage of an Indian Muslim. And thus not surprisingly, the British Foreign Office saw the literary productions and print ecumene of Kairanwi not just as seditious but as fully supported by the Ottoman sultan, who, the Foreign Office maintained, was doing so with a view to challenge British political sovereignty in India. In 1888, Colonel Henderson said that his spy confirmed that Kairanwi was summoned a second time by the pasha to Istanbul, “and was instructed to again distribute seditious books among the pilgrims.” He also reported that the sultan advanced him money to establish a press for printing such books. 

Even as Kairanwi depended on imperial networks to sustain the discursive Muslim civilizational space he had laid out between empires, he never let go of the older forms of Islamicate connectivity. Thus, for instance, the Islamic form of connection via the *fann tajveed* (mode of pronunciation), *bifz* (memorizing), and *qirrat* (recitation) became the focus of his attention at the madrasa. He appointed an Egyptian *qari* (reciter of the Koran), a man who had been chosen in the time of Abdul Hamid Pasha as the best orator out of five hundred contestants, to teach his Hindustani students...
the art of Koranic qirrat (recitation). The students picked up the skill fast. One of his Hindustani students, Qari Abdulla, was characterized by the Egyptian teacher as “being the best in the Arab world.” Hazrat Thanawi, of the Deoband fame, practiced his qirrat with guidance from Qari Abdullah. Regular practice made him so perfect that when he recited the Koran crowds collected below his window and people could not make out whether it was his voice or that of Qari Abdullah. The madrasa soon became a center that encouraged students from all over the world to perfect the art of qirrat and use it as a global connector. The madrasa paid special attention to perfecting pronunciation, the art of memorizing, and recitation skills. Most qaris in Lucknow, Bhopal, Deoband, Multan, and other parts of India that are today known for this talent owe their training to Kairanwi’s madrasa.

Madrasa Saulatiya and the Making of Muslim Cosmopolitanism

Kairanwi’s cosmopolitanism had the scriptures as its base and a tanzimat-inspired pragmatic, scientific outlook. It stretched as a civilizational space between the British and the Ottoman Empires. The Madrasa Saulatiya played a pivotal role in keeping its discursive space alive. As we saw above, the madrasa became the nodal point from which books written in India circulated in the Hijaz and the Ottoman Arab provinces. They continued their onward journey to Southeast Asia via itinerant teachers and students who linked the madrasa to the larger Asian world outside. Students played a critical role in the formation of Muslim cosmopolitanism. Kairanwi’s students included his own brother’s grandson—Sayyid—whom he groomed to take charge of the madrasa after his death. But his ambit was not confined to family members. It included learned alims from Egypt, like Qari Ibrahim Saad, a specialist in the Koran, who attended the lectures on the Bukhari Sharif with rapt attention and taught the Koran to the students at the madrasa. His notable students who later fanned out into the world included Sheikh Alqara, Hazrat Qari Abdullah Makki, and Qari Abdul Rahman Allahabadi.
(Hazrat Qari Abdullah Makki’s brother). The reputed teacher from Egypt remained associated with the madrasa throughout his lifetime. Javanese scholars from Southeast Asia attended his lectures, studied at the madrasa, and then went back home to set up madrasas that were similarly oriented. Abue Bakar Djajadiningrat (the informant and close associate of the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who had been deputed in the Hijaz area by his government to study the relationship of the Hijaz to the Javanese) was a Naqshbandiya Sufi who had been educated in the tradition of Kairanwi by one of his students, Abd Allah Zawawi. Djajadiningrat had many Javanese students who were similarly trained. A range of Javanese scholars in Mecca were students of the reformist scholar Sayyid Ahmad Dahlan, who was also Kairanwi’s contemporary and intellectual comrade. Many others from the Indonesian archipelago were influenced by Kairanwi’s scholarship because of their contact with Cairo, where many of Kairanwi’s former students held influential positions. Indeed, many of Kairanwi’s students, such as Sheikh Abdulla Siraj, Sheikh Ahmad Ali Hasan, and others, became muftis, qaris, and teachers in the Kaaba and in other mosques and madrasas in Mecca and Taif, and in the madrasas in Hindustan and Karachi. Branches of the Madrasa Saulatiya were also established in Calcutta. In fact, Begum Saulat-un Nisa went back to Bengal after her haj and established a branch of the madrasa in her village in the district of 24 Parganas. She allocated a part of her estate as waqf property so that the financial dealings of the madrasa and the mosque attached to it would be looked after. She deputed her older brother, Maulvi munshi Abdul Samad, as the mutawali (caretaker) of these buildings. After his death, his son, Munshi Muhammad Abdullah, took over the madrasa.

Significant financial networks underpinned much of this trans-Asiatic intellectual energy. There was always a large number of Indians with property and money in the Hijaz who had influential contacts with Muslim notables back home. Indeed, notables like the nizam of Haiderabad and the begum of Bhopal owned houses in the Mecca-Medina region. They were ever-willing donors. Thus, for instance, the learned scholar Imdadullah Makki, an important student and companion of Kairanwi who also taught at the Madrasa.
Saulatiya, was offered a house to stay in Mecca by the Haiderabad state that owned several properties in the area. Help generously flowed from other sources as well. And thus Imdadullah moved from the nizam’s property when he had a better offer. He eventually decided to take up the offer of one of his Indian disciples, who bought a house for him in the residential area called Hartah Albab. And of course, every year hajis from India flocked to Mecca, made donations, and exchanged religious and political news with the alims of the madrasa. Imdadullah not only met and exchanged news with ordinary hajis, who always visited him in large numbers, but once hosted a feast for a large contingent of ulema from Hindustan.

Kairanwi saw India as integral to the cosmopolitan world he had carved out between empires. He maintained his links with India not merely because of his interest in the anticolonial struggle. Rather, Indian financial, intellectual, and emotional resources were critical for the conceptualization of the embracive transimperial Muslim civilizational space that Kairanwi was helping to establish. Even though he was located in Mecca, Kairanwi was always worried about the future of Indian Muslims and searched for the best way they could cope with their new British rulers. Very much like his contemporary Arab and Ottoman reformists, who energized the Mediterranean intellectual atmosphere while in exile, Kairanwi too saw education as the way to both resurrect and strengthen the accretive civilizational heritage of Muslims. He pledged to make this legacy the core of his brand of cosmopolitanism, even as he depended on important imperial networks to sustain its vast edifice. This was no narrow territorialized anticolonial fight. It was a more ambitious struggle for civilizational survival. He was convinced that Muslim religious, educational, cultural, and historical heritage would be best preserved through a big educational program that combined religious education with scientific knowledge and technical skills.

This sentiment underpinned the expansion of the Madrasa Saulatiya. But Kairanwi exported his educational model to Hindustan as well. Indeed, in 1866 his madrasa became the inspiration for establishing a Sunni Muslim seminary in a mosque in the city of Deoband. This seminary later moved to a new building and became the famous Darul ulum Deoband, which hosted students from all
over the world. Both Kairanwi and his close associate in Mecca, Imdadullah Makki, maintained close ties and contact with all the ulema associated with the early years of the Deoband seminary: Maulana Hazrat Abid Husain, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanatawi, Maulana Zulfiqar Ali, and Maulana Yaqub Nanatawi. Nanatawi, the first president of the madrasa, was his khalifa (spiritual guide and mentor). Imdadullah Makki sent one rupee per month to the madrasa, for an annual payment of twelve rupees.

Kairanwi also maintained a continuous correspondence with the ulema of Deoband, participating in all their intellectual discussions and urging them to stay in India as their “initiatives for the community [ijtimai kaam] were more valuable than their migrating and living in Mecca.” In a letter to Abid Husain in Deoband he reiterated the value of the Deoband initiative: “It is in your interest to stay on in Deoband and serve the madrasa in the way Allah wants you to do.” In another letter, written to Maulana Rafiuddin, he cautioned against corruption creeping into the madrasa in the form of favors or concessions being given to some people. He strictly forbade such favors. At the same time, he was always eager that the Deoband and Saulatiya madrasa at Mecca should work in a spirit of intellectual camaraderie and that they should have student exchanges. He invited the son of Maulana Nanatawi, Maulana Hafiz Muhammad Ahmad, to enroll at Madrasa Saulatiya for further education. He kept in touch with his murids and suggested appropriate religious rituals for them to solve their problems. He referred to himself as a fakeer, allowed his followers to take bait (oath) on him, and via his writings offered one of the most accommodative frames of Islam, aiming to have the widest possible reach.

Kairanwi’s embracive ambit, which, as we have seen, followed the Shahwaliulla formula of striking a compromise between the scriptures and Sufi practice, became his lasting legacy. It was carried forward and articulated most clearly by his student and close associate Imdadullah Makki. Makki wrote eight very important books in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian. Most of them, like his commentaries on the Masnavi Maulana Rum and Ghiza-i-Roob, read like the Sufi texts that aimed at uniting different sects of Muslims—the texts whose goal was to forge transimperial bonds by pitching Islam as an
inclusive philosophy of harmony. Writing in Urdu for a larger audience, Makki talked to people about Satan and his dealings (satan kei waswasa), the defects of the spirit (nafs kei mughalte), and the results of ignorance and backwardness (jihalat kei natayaj). Using different examples, he emphasized the significance of spirituality, which enables one to transcend difference and unite people.

The next chapter details some of the texts that Imdadullah Makki wrote while in Mecca, such as the Faislah Haft-i-Maslah (Verdict on Seven Issues). Written in Arabic and translated in Makki’s lifetime into Urdu, this book focused on seven mooted customs and rituals that caused friction between different sects of Muslims. Makki wanted a consensus on these issues for the sake of forging Muslim unity. In Makki’s view, the moderator or sheikh played a key role in building consensus. Makki combined the monist emphasis on taubid (belief in one God) and the holy scriptures with the Sufi stress on the spiritual leader as the moderator of individual practice. Makki’s discussion of the balance between scripture and Sufi practices that the scripture sanctified became the foundation of the signature lectures that he delivered at the Madrasa Saulatiya. His lectures and books are a far cry from the mujadid (renewer or renovator) reformist literature of the early nineteenth century that, as we saw in Chapter 1, privileged only the holy text and individual interpretation, and ignored the moderator and other Sufi frills.

Istanbul in the late nineteenth century welcomed men of all religions. One of its visitors was the German evangelical missionary Carl Gottlieb Pfander. He was the missionary with whom Kairanwi had already debated in Agra and Delhi. After his stint in India, Pfander lived in England for six years, visited Germany and Switzerland, and was eventually sent to Istanbul by the Bible Society of London to engage in missionary activity. Here, he earned notoriety for publicly referring to his victory in the debates with Kairanwi and other Muslim ulema of Delhi and Agra. He claimed that the Muslims of India were converting to Christianity in large numbers because he had defeated their ulema in religious debates.

The caliph asked his governor in Jeddah to verify from the Indian hajis and visiting ulema if the missionary’s lofty claims were correct. The caliph, Abd-al Aziz, wanted a full report from his governor in
Jeddah. When the governor presented this request to the sheriff of Mecca, Sheikh ul Muslamin, he was told that the chief Indian debater, Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi, was a migrant in Mecca and in a position to verify the missionary’s claim. The sheriff introduced Kairanwi to the governor, who discussed the matter with him and sent his report to Istanbul.

The caliph was also interested in meeting Kairanwi because British complaints about him reached Istanbul regularly. These adverse reports, as we saw above, resulted in his several visits to the city to offer explanations to the caliph. But the most crucial visit happened in 1864, on his receipt of the governor’s report. Kairanwi lived in the city royally and attended the caliph’s gathering every night after the last night prayer. Here, he explained the details of his debates with Pfander. During these close encounters, Kairanwi also related to the caliph the general state of affairs of the Muslims in India, especially after the British clampdown on them after the 1857 mutiny-rebellion. It was in the course of these discussions that the caliph suggested that Kairanwi should relate his experiences and discussions with the missionary in the form of a book. The Turkish administration offered to translate and publish the book in Turkish and other languages.

Kairanwi began to write this book in 1864 in Istanbul. He agreed to live in Turkey until the book was finished. He labored on it night and day and included in it not just the Agra-Delhi public debates but also all the other themes that he had discussed with Pfander. In total, there were five debatable themes. The general thrust of the book was on the obsolete nature of Christianity and the superficial nature of the Bible (Injeel). He completed the book in 1864 in a period of only six months. He titled it *Izharul Haq* (The Truth Revealed) and presented it to Khairuddin Pasha.

*Izharul Haq* laid out the blueprint of Muslim cosmopolitanism. Its production, which had relied on Ottoman patronage, revealed how dependent this cosmopolitanism was on imperial networks. The dedications in the book, to varied individuals, revealed that although Kairanwi was using the caliph’s network to further his own global aspirations, he was by no means ignoring other Muslim networks. Significantly, the book is dedicated to the Arab Sheikh ul ulema of...
Mecca, much to the chagrin of the Ottoman caliph—the amir ul mominin. Kairanwi explained it as follows: “This book is a purely religious service. And thus it should remain free from any worldly interest. Besides, the Sheikh ul ulema himself had asked me to pen down my debate. And I had started my initial researches there. And if he had not introduced me to the amir of Mecca I would have never been able to reach Istanbul. So he is mainly responsible for the writing of this book.”

His deft diplomacy was evident when he continued to enjoy royal patronage in Istanbul, despite dedicating the book to the sheriff of Mecca. He interacted with Turki ulema and religious scholars. He responded to their concern that the new generation doubted Islamic learning due to the influence of Western education. In 1865, at their request, he wrote a book on issues like basharat wa nabuwat (the divine message and Prophethood) and hasar wa nasr nazur va wabi (revelations of God’s message). This book, entitled Tanbihat, was also published in Istanbul, under the orders of Khairuddin Pasha. In the 1880s, Caliph Abd-al Hamid II showed a keen interest in him, and Kairanwi was invariably treated as his royal guest. As we saw above, in 1883 Kairanwi stayed in Istanbul for a year, and in recognition of his writings was honored with numerous exalted titles by the pasha. He was honored with the title of payah harmain (pillar of Kaaba and Masjid-i-Nabawi) and presented with a medal called Majidi darja doam. He also received a khilat and a monthly pension, and was asked to reside in the royal guest house (shahi mehmankhana).

Cosmopolitanism Sketched

Kairanwi wrote the Izharul Haq in Arabic. It is a compilation of the debate between him and the Christian missionaries; in it, he pleads for the superiority of Islam over Christianity and Judaism. He does so by representing the Koran as a positivist, rational text that could play the role of a connector in the larger civilizational victory that Muslims had to win over the West. Kairanwi’s aim was to present the book as an exemplar of Muslim faith in rationality, reason, and
scientificity. He showcased the Koran as a text subject to positivist scrutiny and not merely a sacrosanct divine revelation. He hoped to lend scriptural sanctity to Muslim “modernity” by demystifying the Koran. Kairanwi was convinced that the Koran was exceptional because its spirituality lay within an appealing shell of reason and rationality. This unique combination enabled the text to be the critical factor that would unite Muslims in empires around the world so that they could then function as a civilizational force against Western ascendancy.

The aim of Izbarul Haq is to prove the exceptional status of the Koran and the Hadith on the basis of their historicity and to prove the ahistorical nature of the Bible, the Torah, and other revealed books. These were lower in the hierarchy of revealed texts as they lacked the sanctity of evidence and authorial legitimacy.73 The book lays out Kairanwi’s use of the scripture as the exceptional connector and accretive platform on which the global appeal of Islam could be showcased. Izbarul Haq demystified the Koran by attributing to its revealed wisdom a worldly author: the Prophet. It wrapped it in this-worldly evidence subject to historical scrutiny and brought it closer to everyday life. This focus on the individual and the worldly context (dunyadari) was to become the signature of the India-specific Arabicist grid, as it allowed for flexibility of thought and action, even while acknowledging the unique status of Islam and the exceptional powers of Allah and the Prophet.

Izbarul Haq revealed Kairanwi’s use of “modern” norms of authorship and scientific objectivity to frame religious writing. His literary format was grounded in the scriptures, framed in an Ottoman-tanzimat-inspired modern vision, and sustained by imperial networks. Like the tanzimat-impacted Ottoman reformists, Kairanwi too saw “modern” norms as Islamicate and not European in origin. He used the Islamic reformist language of the Salafi intellectuals of the Ottoman Arab provinces, who stressed reason, logic, and scientificity, to scrutinize the religious literature of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. He concluded that judged by such an Islamic yardstick of “modernity,” the Koran outshone all other literary productions.

The Izbarul Haq offered a methodology that framed the religious texts of the people of the book (ahl-i-kitab) in distinct “modern”
norms that were scientific, positivist, and objective. It privileged texts on the basis of authenticity, verifiability, veracity of facts, and accountability of the author. Kairanwi, very much like positivist history writers, was intolerant of any inconsistencies between the original manuscript and the text itself, as well as between different versions of the text. According to Kairanwi, a superior text was one that is unchanging: untarnished by the introduction of any changes in words, meanings, or points of emphasis. And thus in this sense, the revealed text of the Muslims, the Koran, seemed to him to be most authentic as it had remained unchanged—based on words of God rather than on different versions of written documents vulnerable to individual intervention.

The first few sections of the book downgrade Christian and Jewish religious literature on the grounds that they lack scientiﬁcity and historicity. Kairanwi uses this point as the basis for his critique throughout the book. The opening chapter is called “Bible Mein Tahreef kei Dallael” (Evidence of Changes in the Bible). In it, Kairanwi enumerates two types of changes: The first is a change of words, which means adding new words and substituting one word with another. The second is a change of meaning, which means offering varied interpretations that diverted attention from the real meaning of the word. Kairanwi states that Protestants wrongly deny that new words have been inserted in the original Bible. But the second kind of change caused by numerous interpretations of the Bible cannot be denied as it has created in-house factions within Christianity: Christians, he states, accept the fact that the Jews changed interpretations and explanations in those verses from the ancient times that refer to Jesus Christ. Protestants allege that the followers of the pope made changes as well. And the Catholics, of course, counter these allegations and level the same charge against the Protestants. He concludes that these in-house circles of allegation within Christianity prove that changes were made and that therefore he does not need to provide further proof. Kairanwi elaborates on the types and impact of the change of words in subsequent versions of the Bible. According to him, changes were introduced by substituting words and figures for those that appeared in the original. For instance, all three original
manuscripts of the Bible change the number of years that denote the period between Adam and the storm of Noah’s fame, as compared to the Koran.

In contrast, he underlines the privileged status of revealed texts like the Koran. Kairanwi dismisses the notion that the Torah was in the same august league as the Koran. He argues that the Torah of the Jews is definitely not the one that Moses had seen in his dream and that therefore it was an unreliable text. The original text was destroyed and subsequent editions were compiled by the Prophet Azra, who produced it from the unreliable manuscripts available to Christians. Speaking about the finality of the damage done by the introduction of changes, Kairanwi states that once these changes were introduced, subsequent prophets could not rectify them and absolve the text of its adultery.

Subsequent chapters of the Izharul Haq continue to disprivilege Jewish and Christian literature on the basis of factual authenticity. Kairanwi elaborates also on the addition of new words in subsequent versions of Christian texts, which thus has made them different from the form in which they originally appeared. According to Kairanwi, this was usually done in order to make these texts widely acceptable. He cites the example of eight books in the Christian world that in ancient times (abad i-ateeq) had been regarded as unacceptable. But after tactful additions were made to the original texts, the Roman Catholic Church slowly included these books in the acceptable corpus of literature. The Latin version of these books had been tampered with most. These included the Kitab-i-Asteer, Kitab-i-Barook, Kitab-i-Yaboodiyyat, Kitab-i-Taubiya, Kitab-i-Danish, Kitab-i-Pandkalisa, Makabe-Een kee Pehli Kitaab, and Makab Een kee Doosri Kitab. Kairanwi showed how this tampering helped enhance their popular appeal. But this was by no means a smooth ride. At one meeting of Christian theologians called in Constantinople by the emperor, it was decided that of these books only Kitab-i-Yaboodiyyat would be considered acceptable and the others declared objectionable. In a later conference in Lodeshia, one of the objectionable books, Kitab-i-Asteer, was declared to be acceptable, along with the Kitab-i-Yaboodiyyat. In a third conference, in Carthage, which was attended by 127 ulema including the famous Christian
theologian Augustine, all of the other books on the list were declared to be acceptable. In three further conferences, held in Trent and Florence, this list was further endorsed, and they were regarded as accepted Christian texts until 1200. The Protestant movement once again stopped their publication and declared that they were unacceptable. Only one book, Kitab-i-Asteer, was allowed to be published in one volume in a heavily edited version.78

However, these books were not considered unacceptable by Jews, and they continued to be appreciated by Catholics. And for Protestants and some Jews there could be no greater proof of change than the fact that the books they had considered for so many years to be unacceptable for all Christians were suddenly acceptable to one group of Christians. This showed that the texts of their ancestors were unreliable. And, Kairanwi claims, similar methods might also have been adopted to make the Bible acceptable as the ultimate truth.79 Further changes were introduced when the Roman Catholic Church translated these books into Latin. The Protestants’ anger notwithstanding, these books, with all their changes, began to be regarded as the authentic religious books of Christians.

Indeed, Kairanwi alleges that given the tradition of tabreef lavzi (the practice of changing words) even the book that is known today as the Injeel of Jesus (Anjeel Masee)—the first Injeel that Christians regard as their ancient (qadeemi) text—is in reality not the one that Christ authored. Kairanwi claims that the original, written in the Abrani language, was altered by Christians to the extent of it becoming useless. And he stated that there is a general understanding among Christians that the Injeel that was in circulation was a translation of the original. But Kairanwi doubts even this claim, since, as he points out, Christians do not have the certificate of its translation. Interestingly, Kairanwi invokes “modern” norms of individual authorship and accountability and ridicules the fact that Christians do not even know the name of the translator of the text. Reflecting his own entrenchment in the literary production norms of “modern” empires, in which authorship is salient to the text, Kairanwi states that no book could hold any significance if its author were unknown. Merely guessing its writer was not enough. He questions Protestants who argue that Jesus himself was the
He invokes the new systematized norms of individuated authorship and points out that Christian religious books whose authors or even the translators are not known cannot be treated as reliable or authentic. Thus Christian claims flaunting such literature as sacrosanct lack merit.

Kairanwi argues that if Christian and Jewish texts fall below this line of “modern” scientificity, objectivity, empirical scrutiny, and logic, then it follows that their readers cannot be “modern” and honest individuals. He launches his attack on the Christian clergy, again using this yardstick of “modernity.” According to him, the Christian clergy has misled people into believing that only Muslims have alleged that Christian texts were “adulterated.” He reiterates his claim that both the opponents and supporters of Christians and Jews have said that they have introduced changes into their texts and that they were in the habit of making such interventions even in their asmani kitab (revealed books).

Kairanwi uses information from newspaper editors and writers to show that even Jews introduced changes into their religious texts. Quoting a newspaper story, Kairanwi writes that one day a sultan, Shah Talmai, asked for the torah from the Jews. Their religious leaders were scared to present it to him. This is because it had many tenets that the sultan denounced (munkar). So about seventy men of religion got together and changed the objectionable verses. In his book, Kairanwi wonders whether one could rely on the authenticity of such a text if it had been tampered with so readily. Indeed, he blames the Jews for destroying the earlier versions of the Bible in the seventh and eighth centuries and thus being complicit in making the text inauthentic. He cites Kini Scott to argue that the Jews destroyed the old version of the Bible—the version based on the manuscripts of the seventh and eighth centuries—because its tenets did not conform to their beliefs. The Bible currently available, then, is not authentic because it is based on the manuscripts of the later period. According to Kairanwi, the Bible had even been changed in response to the expansion of Islam in the eighth century. And since it kept changing with the times, it cannot be relied on as an authentic text. But, Kairanwi insists, the onus of tebreef (changing words) is by and large on the Jews, who completely distorted books of the
ancient times and deleted from them the good news of the arrival of Jesus that those books had announced.84

According to Kairanwi, both the process of writing the text as well as the technique of copying also produce changes. The possibility of the error of oversight is always there. Often the copyist mistakenly thinks that some things are worthless and deletes them, even though they are not. At times in his urge to create consistency he smoothes out the text by tampering with inconsistent or opposing sentences and makes them conform to each other. This type of change is most evident in the Bible where the letters of Polius have been tampered with. And finally, the anxiety and lack of knowledge of the writer is always there to reckon with.85

Kairanwi lashes out at the idea that the popularity rather than the veracity of a text proves its authenticity. And he refutes the Christian claim that the global popularity of the “revered books” proves that their content has remained unchange. Kairanwi challenges this claim by contending that time and again Jews themselves have said that these books have been changed. He wonders what the point is of raising this issue again and bringing in the issue of the books’ popularity.86 He contrasts these texts to the Koran, which, he argues, was embodied in every Muslim’s heart in the same way as its words are inscribed on its pages.87

He invokes the Islamic oral tradition of learning to bring to the fore the exceptional stature of the Koran. He privileges the memorizing of the Koran over the writing and reading traditions associated with the Christian and Jewish books and views that as the reason why the Koran has remained untainted and free from the charge of tehreef, or change. He cited the example of the Al-Azhar seminary in Cairo, where, he says, “one will find at least 1000 people at any point of time who are hafiz or one who has memorized the Koran.” He states that there is not even a single small village in Misr (Egypt) where one cannot find a hafiz. In contrast, in the whole of Europe one will not find even a single person who is hafiz-i-Injeel (those who have memorized the Bible), or one who can compare to any hafiz-i-Koran (those who have memorized the Koran) of Egypt.88 This is even more surprising since European societies are relatively well off and have far more resources than their Muslim
counterparts. And yet he has not heard of a single person who said that he is the *hafiz* of the Bible, let alone that of the Torah and other books. Kairanwi challenges the Jews to produce even ten such people in the world. He states that it is appalling that no one in the whole of Europe can compare to the people of one little village of Egypt in memorizing the religious texts. He ridicules the religious leaders of Christians and states that in this respect, “The padres of the Christians are worse than even the mules and donkey owners of Egypt.” He rubs in the superiority of Islam over Christianity and Judaism by underlining the fact that it is to the credit of the Prophet Muhammad and his miraculous powers that at any point of time in the world one can find at least one hundred thousand *hafiz-i-Koran*, whereas in the Jewish community it is said that only Prophet Azra was so gifted.

Kairanwi gives several anecdotes to prove that the oral tradition of learning by rote is the reason for the wide popularity of Islamic literature. He notes that one day an English officer saw children in a madrasa in Saharanpur, India, reciting the Koran from memory. On inquiry, their teacher told him that these kids were all *hafiz-i-Koran*. The Englishman called on one thirteen-year-old and tested him. The boy excelled, and the officer was so impressed that he said, “I vouch that no other book is so blessed.”

Kairanwi applies nineteenth-century standards of historicity to prove the scientific nature of Islamic religious texts. He refutes the Christian claim that the early manuscripts of the Bible were written before the Prophet and that they are very similar to Muslim manuscripts of the Koran. He states this is yet another canard because, according to Kini Scott and other writers, there is not a single manuscript that predated the tenth century. He notes that the earliest manuscript, called the Codex, is dated variously as being from the tenth and eleventh centuries, and that the Abrani manuscript was based on it. He concludes that he is not interested in proving if the early *nuskhas* (manuscripts) of the Christian texts are pre-Prophet or not. He argues that even if one were to accept that many manuscripts, like the Codex, predate the Prophet, the fact remains that they are open to change, and indeed prove further that Christian
literature is unauthentic because of the layers of changes to which it has been subjected.93

Kairanwi condemns Christian and Jewish literature for falling flat on yet another “modern” literary principle: consistency and neatness of narrative style. He considers the existence of exaggeration or hyperbole in the Bible as proof of its dubious veracity. Kairanwi gives many examples from the Bible to prove that the hyperbolic claims in the text make it fall short on the nineteenth-century literary authenticity yardstick.94 In the final section of his book, he critiques the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity. In this section, called “Khuda Teen Naheen” (There Are No Three Gods), he invokes the Islamic concept of One God and sarcastically highlights versions of the Bible where the word God (khuda) is used for angels (ferishtas) at least fourteen times. This is clearly unacceptable to Kairanwi.95 Indeed, Kairanwi notes, in some versions of the Bible the word khuda is used for ordinary people and for Satan as well. He also cites instances where God is described in terms of an animate figure with a face and limbs.

He then invokes reason, scientificity, logic, and rationality to challenge some of the basic beliefs of Christianity. One of these is that according to the Roman Church two pieces of bread can become the body and blood of Christ and therefore can be converted into Christ. Kairanwi said that no matter what Roman Catholics say the fact of the matter is that the bread tastes like bread, and when it is stale it has all the traits of stale bread, and has no indicators of possessing any human traits at all. So this claim, according to Kairanwi, is ridiculous.96 Carrying forward his critique of the bread representing the body and blood of Christ, he states that if this were so then Christians are worse than Jews. The latter just tortured Christ once, whereas the former eat him every day and drink his blood at mass.97 He also questions the belief that Christ had the ability to be physically present at different places at the same time. Again, invoking science, logic, and rationality, Kairanwi asks that if Christ was human like all of us, if he ate, drank, slept, and feared Jews, and if he had all human qualities, then how is it logical to expect that he could appear simultaneously at different places?98
Again using the nineteenth-century narrative style—a style that is straightforward, structured, well reasoned, logical, and easy to comprehend—Kairanwi critiques those sermons of Jesus that lack cohesiveness and are difficult to follow. He cites numerous instances where ambivalence, incredibility, and abridgement prevail in the sermons of Jesus, at times so heavily that even his close associates and students could not understand what he was saying until he himself explained. Some of these sermons were explained by him and some remained ambiguous and therefore inexplicable. These can be found in the Bible, making it a difficult and an illogical text. Kairanwi illustrates this with an anecdote in which the Jews asked Jesus to perform any miracle. He replied by telling them to pull down their sacred site and then saying that he would rebuild it in three days. They could not understand him, and asked how that would be possible as it took them forty-six years to build. Even Christ’s students could not understand what he was saying. Only when Christ was resurrected from the dead did people understand what he meant and the unique prowess he had.99 Kairanwi asks that if the students of Jesus could not understand him, then what does that say about the Jews?

Again, when Jesus told the Jews that they should eat the bread as it was his body and all of his virtues would be transferred into them, they did not understand him. Even some of his Christian students were appalled and separated from him as they thought that he was exhorting them to eat him.100 Kairanwi states that because of the abridged nature of Christian texts a lot of things remain unclear. One of these confusing points has to do with the Day of Judgment—when will it come? Indeed, matters are even hazier because the real Bible was missing. And the Greek translation, in which all kinds of changes were made, and whose writer and translator are unknown, remains the only source of information.101

Carrying forward his scrutiny of Christian literature—still using as his yardsticks the “modern” notions of simple narrative style, logic, rationality, and veracity of evidence—Kairanwi introduces a special section called “Tasleet kaa Aqeeda Aqal kee Kasauti par” (Christian Doctrines That Do Not Pass the Test of Rationality). Here he once again talks about the myths related to Christ and his
miraculous powers. According to Kairanwi, only illiterate Christians believe in these illogical myths associated with Christ.  

Although Kairanwi is harsh toward Christian texts and their irrationality—texts, he claims, that attribute exceptional and often outrageously ridiculous powers to Christ—he never comes down heavily on the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, he uses his interpretation of the words of Christ to question the logic of Christian doctrine, particularly the idea of the Holy Trinity. He cites the Bible to argue that Jesus said to God that people should consider Him as their one and only God (khuda-i-wahid) and regard his own self (yesu masih) as the messenger. Kairanwi states that this proves that Jesus himself felt that people should regard God as the only divine one (wahid haqiqi) and him as his Prophet. He never said that people should regard him as part of the Trinity (teen aqoom wala) and hence sacrosanct and a god in his own right. Kairanwi repeats that Jesus did not even say that he is both man and God, or that he is a god with a human body. He cites numerous other instances from the Bible to prove that Christ himself said on numerous occasions that there is only one God.

Kairanwi once again uses reason and logic to question the Christian belief that Christ’s death by crucifixion absolved or washed off people of all sins. He argues that this was untrue because the original sin according to the Christian belief was committed by Adam, and that it is ridiculous to believe that Christ or anyone of Adam’s children should be made to repay for his sins and be absolved of it by crucifixion. Each man has his own quota of sins to deal with. One crucifixion cannot wash off the sins of the world.

Secularizing of the Koran

First published in Arabic in Istanbul in 1865 by the imperial printing press, the Izharul Haq was soon translated into Turkish as well by Hareddin Pasha, the grand vezier. Once published in Istanbul, the Izharul Haq traveled across the imperial grid to have many different lives in regions that corresponded to the conceptual and discursive civilizational space that Kairanwi had laid out between
empires. It was subsequently translated into Gujarati and Urdu in India, and several editions were printed simultaneously in Egypt. Indeed, Edward Wilmot Blyden, the well-known father of pan-Africanism who later became interested in Islam, reported seeing it during his stint in Sierra Leone: “We saw a copy of this book [Izharul Haq] in the hands of a West African Mohammedan at Sierra Leone, who was reading and commenting upon it to a number of his co-religionists.”\textsuperscript{107} Its English translation launched it out from the Muslim world into the whole of Europe.\textsuperscript{108} It created a stir in London. In 1894, the \textit{Times} wrote, “As long as people continue to read Izharul Haq Christianity will never prosper in the world.”\textsuperscript{109} One of the lasting impacts of the text was its take on the Koran as a book entrenched in the positivist literary tradition that characterized the age of empires.

According to Kairanwi, the Koran meets the highest standards of poetic license as well as scientifcicity, even though it is a revealed text. In the fifth section of Izharul Haq, entitled “Koran Kareem Allah kaa Kalam Hai” (Koran Is the Book of God), Kairanwi highlights the wondrous virtues of the text. He discusses twelve proofs that show that the Koran is the revealed text of the world (kalam-i-almi).

He defines its exceptional divine status as a revealed text in positivist terms. Thus for him the Koran is unique not merely because it is revealed. Instead, it is exceptional because of its maturity of words, narration, and transmission style—\textit{balaghat}. Its appealing verse makes it stand out from all the poetry and poets of the world. It is unmatched to any other manmade text or narrative. In this way, Kairanwi judges the Koran using “this-worldly” poetic norms.

This stamp of scientifcility, reason, rationality, poetics, and methodology in matters of religion was one of the characteristic features of the late nineteenth-century Islamic diasporic literature from Istanbul. Kairanwi fit the Koran into this diasporic literary genre. He demystified it as he lent to it an author and brought it in line with nineteenth-century positivist literature. He measured it on the yardstick of the poetic production norms of his times. He explained that \textit{balaghat} meant the use of the correct choice and apt number of words. And, he stated, the Koran’s narrative style makes
a perfect fit to balaghat norms. It reaches that high point of eloquence. According to Kairanwi, the Koran excels in eloquence because its verses are based on truth. Its verse is all encompassing and unparalleled in its appealing narrative style. Again, as compared to other poets and littérateurs, whose verses begin to fall in grace if there is repetition, the Koran stands as eloquent as ever despite its repetitive narration of the life and times of the Prophet. It can list several points of good etiquette (akhlaq) in a single verse and yet remain pristine in its freshness, unlike other texts that look drab when their authors package a mouthful of such virtues into a single verse. Finally, whereas every poet has his own specialized themes and seldom moves beyond that, the Koran covers a wide range of themes and yet remains steadfast in its eloquence. The Koranic verses that outshine in eloquence include ones on temptation, deterrence, threat, and sermonizing. Kairanwi is of the view that the melodious sweetness in the text has an empowering effect on its verse.

Kairanwi describes the elements of the Koran’s enchanting poetics that make it kalam-i-alami: exceptional composition (ajib tarkib), novel and well-formed verses, a narrative style that reflects heavenly truth (ilm-bayan kei daqaiq aur irfani baqaaig parr mush-tamal bona), beautiful and pristine couplets (busn-i-ibarat aur pakizah ashaar), and excellent, methodical arrangement of words (behtarene tartib). According to Kairanwi, this poetical style surprised even the best of the littérateurs. The purity of style (fasabat) and the eloquence (balaghat) of the Koran are deliberately raised to a high pitch so that no one could ever have a chance to say that it has any element of borrowed or plagiarized elements. It was also important to make its poetics exceptional so as to distinguish this book—God’s book—from anything penned by human beings (insaani kalam). Kairanwi notes that many specialists of the Koran had openly challenged littérateurs to produce anything similar to its eloquent and poetic verses. But their urging did not yield any positive results. According to Kairanwi, the widespread appeal of the Koran is due to its poetic elegance, melody, and the sweetness of its verses. He cites a tradition that says that when Abu Jahal (a tribal leader and enemy of Islam) heard the Koran he went to his nephew Walid to admonish
him. Walid replied, “I can say in the name of God that none of you know the beauty and poetic value of couplets more than me. And I can vouch that what Muhammad says is unmatched with respect to any couplet.” Kairanwi refutes claims by proponents of the mutazalli tradition that the Koranic verses were familiar to people before Prophet Muhammad was born, and that Muhammad’s arrival only made them appear fresh or new. He argues that it is possible that people were familiar with some of its tenets. But its real impact is in its entirety. Its case is similar to that of a rope that when reduced to single strand is of no use. But when woven together with myriad strands it can serve important functions such as docking a ship or tying a huge elephant.

Kairanwi scrutinizes the Koran for its historicity, and it comes out with flying colors. He claims that the Koran is unique because it offers information about the past directly from the Prophet’s mouth. The agency of the Prophet in decoding the past is remarkable considering the fact that he was illiterate and did not have the privilege of attending formal lectures and education—darrs, tadris, or majlis—and had idol and pagan worshippers in his company. Even the books that were available then were either unreliable, like the Bible and the Torah, or very ordinary as they were not in the revealed category. Kairanwi attributes the vast compendium of history and knowledge of the past events contained in the Koran to the Prophet’s intellect and exceptional prowess.

Again, continuing his emphasis on demystifying the Koran, he stated that it is an agile text that was written in response to societal concerns. It refutes the various conspiracies and canards that non-believers spread about Islam. Kairanwi thus presents the text as an organic and live entity that was divinely revealed but that is also in sync with the issues of its time. It offers solutions and responds to all kinds of criticism heaped on Islam to produce a canon based on reason and rationality. This characteristic is best exemplified in the chapters on jurisprudence, which reflect its stress on logic and reason.

Kairanwi enumerates the Koran’s many medical virtues, in particular its prescriptions for health and well-being. He then gives anecdotes about discussions between men of Islam and Christian
padres and physicians; in these, the Christian padres and physicians assert that the Koran is lacking in medical knowledge. In defense of the Koran, one Husain bin Ali stands up to the Christian physician and recites a verse of the Koran that encapsulates the essence of its medical dictums: *khao aur piyo aur israf na karo* (eat, drink, and do not waste). The physician is not satisfied, and asks if the Prophet had anything to say about Islamic healing. And Ali replies that the Prophet in just a few words has encapsulated the entire discipline of medicine. He then recites the words of the Prophet: “Meidah amraz kaa ghar hai aur perhaiz sab sei barri dawa hai. Badan ko who cheezein dau jiska tumnei isko aadi banaya hai.” (The liver is the home of diseases. And abstinence is the best medicine. Give to the body only those things that you have made it used to having.) The Christian physician is so impressed that he says words to the following effect: “Your Prophet and your Book have made the famous physician Galen [Jalenoos] irrelevant. And they have provided us knowledge which is essential for good health.”

Kairanwi not only underlines the scientific and rational profile of the Koran, but also points out its rhythm and melody, the features that make it easy to memorize—*hifz-i-Koran*. Kairanwi shows that children, students, and all kinds of Muslims can memorize the Koran very easily. He states that even in their day and age, and even when Islam faced very difficult challenges, there were at least one hundred thousand Muslims in certain areas who knew the Koran by heart (*hafiz*) and who could write it from memory at any point of time (*qalam-band*). He compares this to the situation in Europe, where, he states, it is difficult to find people in such large numbers who know the Bible by heart. And this is despite the fact that the Christian world is far better off and wealthier than the Muslim one and has a longer learning tradition.

Kairanwi argues that the Koran has survived over the years because of its easy-to-memorize style. He states that its recitation is an ongoing process and it will continue to be a living tradition until the Day of Judgment. The Koran is the only text that has recorded the miracles of all the prophets of Islam. No other book can make such a claim. It has about two thousand small *muajzabs* (miracles), and these collectively have stood the test of time and have remained
unchanged for the last 1,400 years. Kairanwi states that the Koran is exceptional also because of its endearing qualities. The more one reads it the more it is endeared to the heart. One never gets tired of reading or hearing it. This is in contrast to other texts that if repeatedly read will tire as well as bore the reader. Kairanwi elaborates on the aesthetic appeal of the Koran, a quality that is best proven by its popular reception. He discusses the special way in which it is received and the impact it has on those who hear it. He notes that people are awestruck on hearing its verses. He states that the recitations of the Koran (tilawat) have a special register and meter that not only touch the aesthetic sensibility of the listener and reader but that impact the heart. He claims that this meter is so effective that even if people do not understand its meaning it still impacts their heart and mind through its sheer rhythm. And he states that many people have accepted Islam the first time they heard the tilawat. He cites an anecdote about a Christian man who heard the Koran and was so dumbfounded by the melody and rhythm of its verse that he started weeping. When he was asked why he was crying, he replied that he was in awe of its rhythm and that he had experienced a special kind of reverence and awe when he heard the Koran, which brought tears to his eyes. According to Kairanwi, the eloquence and rhythm of the Koran is enough to convert to Islam even the most ardent Jewish theologians who care to hear and debate it. Kairanwi argues that all this proves that the Koran is a miracle. It is so because it is a book of God’s praise (kalam-i-khuda wandi). There are three reasons for its greatness and value: its beautiful, hyperbolic words (alfaz fasih), the fine arrangement of its words and its appealing composition (tartib aur talif pasandidah), and the purity of its chapters (mazamin pakeezah).

In his discussion, Kairanwi combines the “this-worldly” charm of the Koran with its surreal appeal. He describes its ability to prophesize (pesbingoi). Kairanwi lists twenty-one prophecies of the Koran that came true. One of these was that God has said that people will enter the masjid-i-haram one day with either tonsured heads or short hair. And that did happen when the learned ones (sahaba) entered the holy Kaaba in Mecca. He cites another instance when God promised those who were believers and maintained good deeds,
offered prayers, and did not worship anyone except Allah that he would provide them caliphates in this world, make their religion very strong, and convert their fearful existence into a peaceful one. Kairanwi points out that this promise too was fulfilled to the letter even in the lifetime of the Prophet. Muslims conquered Mecca in his lifetime and soon expanded to other Arab lands like Yemen, Bahrain, and Africa (mulk-i-babsh). Non-Muslims in Syria accepted Islamic rule and agreed to pay the jaziya or tax on non-Muslims. In the years to come Muslims spread to other cities of Syria and to Persia. In the Abad-i-Faruqi, this process of expansion continued. The whole of Syria (Sham), Egypt, and Persia became Muslim. In the time of the Usmani caliphate, Islam spread as far west as Andalusia in southern Spain. Muslims continued to pray and God kept his promise. In the caliphate of Ali, even though no fresh lands were added, the prosperity continued. Kairanwi interlaces this section with his replies to the Christian missionaries, who in their book Mizan-ul-Haq alleged that many of these examples were not prophesies of God but just intelligent and thoughtful comments of the Prophet as he addressed his community. According to Kairanwi, if that were the case, some of these prophecies would have been proved wrong. But the fact that all were proved correct shows that they were promises of God.

The last section, consisting of about a hundred pages, is called khatimah (conclusion). In it, Kairanwi proves that the Koran is an exceptional text and a muajzab—something that astounds both through its narrative as well as through its narrative style. They are what make the Koran a truly this-worldly book with other-worldly charm. According to Kairanwi, the Koran contains verses that are a response to the social problems prevalent in Arab society. The prophets were blessed with the traits of balagbat and muajzab (the power of miracles) because they lived in times when people falsely claimed to have exceptional God-like powers. The only way such individuals could be contained was to give real prophets unique divine qualities; worldly mortals would then realize that they were nothing when compared to those who had divine connections (minjanib allah) and the power to perform miracles. Kairanwi cites anecdotes about Moses, who shocked and outdid the magicians of
his time with his exceptional powers; of Jesus Christ, who dumbfounded the medical professionals (fan-i-tibb) by curing lepers and the blind; and of Prophet Muhammad, who stunned into silence the professionals of his time—men who prided themselves on their elegance and oratory (Zaban dai aur fasahat aur balaghat)—by displaying exceptional eloquence (Qurani balaghat) in reciting the Koran. All these categories of professionals soon began to believe that the Koran and its prophets were exceptional and that the book itself was a muajzab.127

Kairanwi demystified the tale of the Koran’s revelation and explained the process as a natural response to the prevalent social ills. According to him, the Koran was not revealed in one go (ek dam kyon nazil nahin hua). Rather, it arrived in installments. He said that the Prophet was not literate and therefore he might not have been able to absorb the entire revelation if it came as one whole. He memorized it because it came in installments. Soon it became Sunnat (the Prophet’s way) to memorize the Koran. Kairanwi commented that it was good that the Koran came in installments also because it offered an alternate way of life, which would have been difficult for pagans to accept all of a sudden in its entirety. The Prophet initially introduced only the taubid. His meetings with the angel Gabriel, who brought him verses of the Koran, relaxed him, and gave him the stamina (taqwiyat) to spread the message (tabligh). The Koran came gradually and dealt with everyday issues. It responded to the immediate problems of the people. And through this gradual process of revelation, it prepared people for its ultimate message of bestowing prophethood on Muhammad. Finally, because the revelation was delivered in installments, it enabled the angel Gabriel to maintain his significance and status as the exalted mediator between God and the Prophet, or the apostle. This might not have been possible if the Koran was delivered all at once.128

Thus, according to Kairanwi, the Koran, notwithstanding its exceptional status as a revealed text, conformed to the highest this-worldly literary standards: poetics, eloquence, meter, rhythm, and relevance to societal issues. Its repetitions were meant to impress upon a range of pagan worshippers the value of its tenets. The repetitions were also important in terms of textual aesthetics: brevity
(ikhtisar), empowerment (tatwil), and eloquence (balaghat). Indeed, its exceptional eloquence made the Koran different from any other insani kitab (nonrevealed book). Even as he highlighted the this-worldly objectivity of the Koran, Kairanwi never ceased to point out that it was as wondrous as a miracle.

He emphasized the point that the Koran had had a distinct production style that made it different from those sacred Jewish texts that had combined the oral and the written traditions at tremendous cost to veracity. These books were revealed to Moses on Mount Tur, and although he compiled them, the explanations later included in the books remained a very important part of the oral tradition that was passed from one notable and companion of Moses to another. The Jewish books were meant to be read along with their commentaries, which were based on the oral tradition (zabani rawayait). According to Kairanwi, Muslims could not believe in those sections of these texts that were based on zabani rawayait, as these were liable to change and interpretation. They had been written neither on the basis of eyewitness accounts nor of revelation.

Kairanwi privileged the Koran over the Bible and Jewish religious texts mainly because it was the only text that had been memorized by hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. Embodied in the hearts of people, the Koran remained changeless and a perfect global connector. It was indeed the most useful text with which to unite Muslims. Kairanwi gave the example of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, where, he claimed, at any one point of time there would be more than a thousand people who had memorized the text—hafiz-i-Koran. Indeed, according to Kairanwi, in Egypt even the donkey and cart drivers were hafiz-i-Koran. This was not the case with any of the Christian or Jewish books. Kairanwi claimed that this proved that the words of the Koran impacted people and made them want to memorize and remember it. And, he stated, this was not the case with books of other religions.

Kairanwi also discussed the making of the Hadith tradition in Islam. He noted that Muslim notables and men of learning were reluctant to compile Hadith text as they were scared that it might get confused (mustabah) with the Koran. But some of their students, such as Imam Zahri, initiated the process of compiling collections.
Imam Malik, for instance, who was born in Mecca, Abd-al Rahman in Syria, and others in Basrah began to collect the traditions of the Prophet and organize them into compilations. Through this process, written texts, called the Hadith, were produced. Imam Bukhari commented on these and picked for discussion only those traditions that were correct and in his view worthy of intellectual debate. He rejected the weaker ones. And most *sahabah* (notables and companions of the Prophet) built genealogical traditions that linked the contents of the compiled books to the Prophet.¹³⁴

Kairanwi emphasized that the Koran was a more significant and central text than the Hadith for three reasons: First, relatively less human agency was involved in the production of the Koran. Its copyists did not change it even by a single word. It exists exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet. In contrast, the Hadith had been recorded using Arabic words chosen by its compilers in their wisdom to connote what they remembered of the sayings of the Prophet. Second, the Koran is fixed in its final word. To deny any part of it is sin. Third, the Koran’s words are diktat or orders (*ahkam*). They need to be obeyed. This is not the case with the Hadith.¹³⁵

Kairanwi defined authenticity using the literary norms of “modern” empires that put a premium on rationality, authenticity, and individual accountability. But, very much like the *tanzimat*-inspired Salafi intellectuals, with whom he interacted, he claimed Islamic origins for these norms. In the hierarchy of authentic knowledge, he accorded the highest status to the Koran. And even as he subjected Islamic literature to scrutiny based on these norms, Kairanwi also defined its exceptional cosmopolitan character on the grounds of its reliance on and deep roots in oral tradition. Thus Kairanwi’s cosmopolitan literature is unique because of its dependence on both the Ottoman reformist “modern” styles and the more traditional Islamic oral tradition of memorizing and narration.

The Politics of Kairanwi

This chapter has argued that Kairanwi redefined what it meant to be Muslim and to belong to a global Muslim community in the late
nineteenth century. His career revealed that modern pan-Islamic activism was far from being merely caliph-centric. Instead, it was cosmopolitan, as it lay entangled in pan-Islamic networks that had the scriptures as their core even as they remained embedded in imperial spaces and politics. Kairanwi demonstrated pan-Islam’s intellectual core through his eclectic syllabus at the Madrasa Saulatiya and through his writings, in which he debated with Christian theologians and offered a historicist, positivist, and rational rendering of the Islamic religious texts. His emphasis on the Koran’s poetic meter, its rhythm, its narrative style, its rendition (qirrat), and its exceptional status as a book that was widely memorized (indeed, as a book that was memorized by more people than any other book) enabled him to demystify it and make it this-worldly. In the case of the Koran, the art of memorizing fixed the text in the hearts of people and preserved it for posterity. This was in contrast to Jewish and Christian literature, which had no such tradition of memorizing or an exceptional poetic and narrative style. Indeed, the human agency involved in writing and transmitting those texts had introduced change into them. Thus, the unchanging Koran, embedded in the hearts and memories of people, became the basis for an intellectual grid that existed across empires and that provided the perfect global canvas upon which cosmopolitan pan-Islamic networks could flourish. These webs were energized by the hafiz-i-Koran who straddled worlds and thereby created a discursive Muslim civilizational space between empires. But the deep entanglement of the Koran’s readers and commentators with trans-Asian Western empires meant that the Muslim cosmopolis was also attractive to liberal Ottoman sultans as well to temporal British leaders. And this imperial interest also meant that Muslim cosmopolitanism remained connected with politics of the Indian subcontinent, and to its defining elements of homeland, language, and ethnicity. Indeed, it sustained itself by playing the imperial politics game to its advantage.

Kairanwi too never shied away from direct political action as he moved across Asia in a period of imperial rivalries. Thus he urged the Ottoman sultan not to give permission to the English to establish themselves in Aden in order to obtain coal for their steamers.
He argued that this was a crucial area and that if the English established themselves there it would become the launchpad from which they would spread throughout the whole region. The sultan did not pay heed to his advice and sure enough suffered the consequences. It was also a popular perception in India that the Madrasa Saulatiya, even though located at the imperial crossroad at Mecca, was tuned to and responsive to Indian affairs. And Kairanwi encouraged this image because he saw India as integral to his transimperial political and intellectual networks. In 1899, the Azamgarh newspaper the *Liberal* reported that the manager of the madrasa told them that it had once refused funding from the sultan of Turkey on the grounds that “it looked only to natives [Indians] for aid.” The editor concluded that this gesture showed how “closely this literary institution [was] connected with them.” According to the editor, the madrasa received funds from India even after the maulana’s death in 1893. This of course reflected the connections between the Muslim cosmopolitan world and India. But the fact that a range of Muslim and a few Hindu newspaper editors raised funds for the madrasa indicated also the significant role the Indian Muslim cosmopolitans played in energizing the print culture back home. Indeed, the Muslim cosmopolis, via its literary productions, demand, clientele, and dissemination of books, kept the printing presses in India busy. It was no surprise that media barons and printing houses generously financed the Muslim cosmopolis. Thus in 1899 it was reported in the *Liberal* that Munshi Asad-ud-din, the proprietor of the *Naiyar-i-Asfi* newspaper in Madras and the proprietor of the *Wakil* newspapers in Amritsar, collected funds for the upkeep of the intellectual hub of Muslim cosmopolitanism, Madrasa Saulatiya. Equally interesting was the collection of funds by Munshi Amba Prasad, the proprietor of the *Jami-ul-Ulim* newspapers. He was inclined to contribute a large portion of his profits from the sale of his books to the funds of the madrasa. The *Liberal* exhorted all Muslims to “loosen strings of their purse and help the institution situated at the center of the Muhamedan world.”

Kairanwi saw India as integral to his trans-Asian networks, which were, as we have seen, dependent both on imperial webs of communication and on the repertoire of traditional knowledge and of
communication skills. He wanted to pull Indian Muslim politics out of its narrow territorial “nation”-bound groove and locate it in the wider public sphere of books, ideas, and littérateurs that existed between empires. Kairanwi always opposed the idea of Muslims joining the Indian National Congress. His response to an invitation by Nawab Amar Ali Khan rais Basudah to join the Congress was reported in the press as follows: “He replied that he was not familiar with the objectives of the Congress. But even if these objectives are good for a variety of reasons I consider the Congress harmful for the Muslims.” But the fact that the Muslim notables of the Congress still considered him worthy to be included in the party and to take an integral role in their affairs, even though he lived in the Hijaz and Istanbul, shows how the cosmopolitan Muslim networks intersected with the territorially bound idea of the nation.

It has been argued that in the nineteenth century the politics of expediency made Muslim men of religion disprivilege the normative Muslim thought that had earlier fixed their cosmopolitan imaginary around the caliph and inclined them toward exclusivity within India. Until the Khilafat movement, when this normative thought resurfaced, Muslims developed new and individual ways to balance their lives with the British as political sovereigns and the caliph as the spiritual referent in Istanbul. In this way they could balance territorial nationalism with universalism and carve out an exclusive identity for themselves. The trans-Asian intellectual and institutional networks of Kairanwi gave physicality to the extraterritorial imaginary and deflected it from the single referent of the caliph. It offered Muslims more substantive networks that depended on global imperial webs and that were derived from the Islamicate repertoire of knowledge and of communication skills. Now it was not only a question of territorial nationalism coexisting with an imaginary universalism, but of the two physically intersecting and energizing each other. Thus the intellectual grid of Kairanwi not only injected life into the trans-Asiatic movements of career brokers and entrepreneurs like Sayyid Fadl, but also intersected with political parties and people who operated within the confines of the territorial idea of the nation.
And thus Kairanwi’s trans-Asian networks were always a part of Muslim lives (not just normative thought) whenever Muslims needed to use them to tap the world outside. In 1890, when a terrible famine engulfed the Arab lands and Indian Muslims wanted to send help, it was the names of Kairanwi and his associate Imdadullah Makki that were most often cited as the reliable sinews that connected India to the trans-Asiatic world outside. The editor of the Mushir Qaiser of Lucknow wrote in its issue of 12 February 1890: “The famine is severe . . . many rich Muslim of Hind do not know about this yet . . . otherwise by now help would have come from Calcutta, Mumbai, Rampur, Junagarh, Tonk, Bhopal, Patna, Delhi etc. . . . One can send money and food via the resources of Rahmatullah Kairanwi and Imadadullah Makki.” Indeed, the editor also mentioned in further reports that since very little was known about the actual conditions in the Hijaz, readers should tap the networks of Kairanwi and lean on him for news and information.141

Equally noteworthy were the efforts of Kairanwi’s Deoband colleagues, Maulvis Muhammad Qasim (1833–1877), Muhammad Refiud-Din, Muhammad Abid, and Muhammad Yaqub (d. 1886), who sent money to Turkey via Kairanwi’s contacts at the time of the Russo-Turkish War in 1877.142

These instances reveal what it meant to be a Muslim in late nineteenth-century India and to belong to a global Muslim community that was accessible via imperially embedded pan-Islamic networks. Even if the caliph was not popularly viewed as the sole connector of this global Muslim community, British fears of his imagined influence and the occasional Ottoman invocations to his spiritual clout kept him relevant. For example, a newspaper in Istanbul, the Urdu-language Paik-i-Islam, printed by the runaway Indian Muslim Nusrat Ali Khan, was financed by the Ottoman government for its procaliph stance. In retaliation, the British sponsored a London-based Syrian Christian, Lauis Sabunki, who published an Arabic journal, Al-Khalife, that questioned the authority of the caliph. The protests of the Ottoman government led to the journal’s closure. But this compliance by the British did not stop the Ottoman ambassador in London, Masurus Pasha, from supporting an Arabic-Persian newspaper, al Gayrat, that was published by an Indian Muslim from
Delhi. This newspaper was not anti-British, but it emphasized the importance of the caliphate.

The next chapter, an examination of Kairanwi’s close associate Imdadullah Makki, reveals how transimperial subjects like these runaway mullahs continued to maintain intellectual and financial links with the subcontinent and make borders porous. But even as these men straddled empires, there were Muslims who were firmly framed within the territorial idea of India and so reconciled to India’s British sovereigns that they always opposed men like Kairanwi. Notable among these was Sir Sayyid Ahmad, as we will see in Chapter 6.