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Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts

Perspectives from the Past

Edited by Derryl N. MacLean
and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed



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COSMOPOLITANISMS IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS

Perspectives from the Past

EDITED BY DERRYL N. MACLEAN
AND SIKEENA KARMALI AHMED

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts

DERRYL N. MACLEAN

This volume of essays is based on a conference held in Vancouver, British Columbia, and sponsored by the Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures (Simon Fraser University, Canada) and the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (Aga Khan University, United Kingdom).¹ The orientation of the essays is on the typologies and contexts of Muslim or Islamicate cosmopolitanisms in the past and the possible tensions or conjunctions of these cosmopolitanisms with regional cultures, isolated enclaves, empires or modern nation-states.² The perspectives of the past chosen for comparison are sought not in the classical cosmopolitan venues ('Abbasids or Fatimids), but in the modern period, primarily in different sub-disciplines of history, and clustered around diverse geographic areas: the Swahili coast, Ottoman, Arab, Persianate, and Indo-Pakistan. The expectation of the editors is that the data will permit the comparison of specific cosmopolitan instances within Muslim contexts in the past and hence larger reflections on commonalities and differences. In particular, this book seeks to ask the question, is the concept of cosmopolitanism useful for the study of Muslim societies and cultures of the past?

"Cosmopolitanism", while a term of considerable antiquity referring to a "citizen of the world", has more recently become a key concept for the reconsideration of an array of philosophical, political, cultural, and social issues. As Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen suggest, the new cosmopolitan theory has focused on six different but related perspectives: a global condition of socio-cultural interpenetrations, a Kantian philosophy of the universal citizen, a political project founded on transnational institutions such as civil society, a political project founded on the notion of citizens with multiple identities, an internalised orientation towards global engagement and a kind of multicultural

competence or practice.³ Indeed, other cosmopolitanism perspectives could be located, and it is fair to suggest a plurality of cosmopolitan moments in the past and theoretical orientations in the present.⁴

Much of the discussion of the new critical cosmopolitanism has been situated within a contemporary European or North American context of multiculturalism or neo-liberalism, with little consideration of Muslim contexts of past or present, although this is beginning to change.⁵ Where Muslim contexts are considered, the focus has been either on the cosmopolitanism of Muslim empires, usually in an urban framework of humanism or Hellenism, or else contemporary Muslim neo-liberal examples projected against fixed identities, parochial intolerances or Islamic fundamentalism.

This location of the discussion of Muslim data has had two quite different but interrelated consequences. First, while there is a recognition that Muslims inhabited certain forms of cosmopolitanism in the classical past, these are often integrated with orientalist notions of an axial Islam founded on Hellenism and humanism and challenged by the rise of a less tolerant juristic Islam.⁶ This tends to incorporate a sense that these instances of cosmopolitanism in the classical past are overwhelmed by religionist rigidity and not easily transferable to modernity in a historical process. That is, there is a necessary rupture between Muslim cosmopolitanisms of the past and the present, and yet the possibility of redemption through transformation via secularism. Second, much of the public discussion, especially among Muslims, consciously frames Muslim cosmopolitanism as the other of fundamentalism or political Islam, and thus works apologetically to construct the “good” neo-liberal Muslim by providing a history and a genealogy in the past. This type of reading of cosmopolitanism, more Islamic than Muslim, has its roots in Islamic modernism, although in the public domain, discussion often verges on apologeticism and triumphalism, in a comparison of civilisational achievements of Islam and the West, often to the discomfort of the West.⁷ More interestingly, cosmopolitanism does feature in the “Islamisation” of knowledge project, wherein science and rationalism are reclaimed for Islamic principles.⁸

Our contributors were asked to think of cosmopolitanism within their region and discipline, with a specific eye on five different issues. First, what theories and philosophies of cosmopolitanism resonate in the analysis of your Muslim context? Second, what types of cosmopolitanism have been produced within your Muslim context? Third, if there is a plurality of cosmopolitanisms, what are the differences and similarities in issues of power, status, culture, economy and class? Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, what is the relationship between the high pan-Islamic and the grassroots vernacular form of cosmopolitanism within Muslim contexts?⁹ To what extent should we read cosmopolitanism as an instance of hegemony? Fifth, is it possible to locate a theoretically sound and non-essentialist form of Muslim cosmopolitanism?

No attempt has been made to determine our contributors' analyses of cosmopolitanisms within their Muslim contexts, to operate under a single definition of cosmopolitanism, or even to accept that it is a useful framework within which to view Muslim societies and cultures. Indeed, one of the values of these essays is the diversity of approaches and conclusions, with the authors problematising the implications of the notion of cosmopolitanism within their own region, discipline and sources. The focus of the essays then is less on theory than on actually existing Muslim contexts of cosmopolitanism in the past.¹⁰

The Swahili context is that of a large maritime cosmopolitanism constructing cultures around coastal urban areas within an enclave spreading outward from the coast. Both of our papers on this area focus on the problematic relationship between the high pan-Islamic and the vernacular or local. In Chapter 2, Felicitas Becker addresses the relationship between the Swahili cosmopolitan coastal culture (itself a sub-type) and the inland village cultures of Tanzania. Rather than perceive a one-way spread of cosmopolitan ideas from the urban areas to the villages, a process which incorporates and transforms ("converts"), Becker envisions a more complex process, in which the villagers have their own contexts and rationales for reaching out to the coastal towns and opening up to forms of coastal cosmopolitanism.¹¹ They take from this relationship a participation in a larger economy, worldview, religious notions and ritual practices, but at the same time these alone do not define their cosmopolitanism. On the contrary, the local consumption of networks (such as those of madrasas and Sufi shrines) permits a type of vernacular cosmopolitanism concerned equally with local social negotiation and larger cosmopolitan patterns of the Indian Ocean. This latter quality does seem to carry with it certain larger frames of "Islamic" reference over time.

In Chapter 3, Kai Kresse examines the primary port town of Mombasa and the way in which its urban environment historically has produced a certain configuration of cosmopolitanism, which focuses on openness to others and to the world projected from the social structures of the city.¹² His concern is the way in which integration processes of certain urban social groups work to incorporate others (such as South Asians) in systems of dependency or partnership. This marks Swahili cosmopolitanism strikingly as both an "openness to the world" and "a pool of experience of the world", constructed from the specific urban environment. Some of this, especially the integration of town within a larger Muslim maritime world, is enabled by Islamic structures such as pilgrimage and belonging to an ummah, although it is not entirely clear how this works locally. Is there an Islamic cosmopolitanism founded on a notion of pan-Islamic unity and sustained on the basis of universal rituals? If so, how does this relate to the pre-existing vernacular cosmopolitanism that moves away from urban areas?

The Middle East selections are represented within three different historical traditions; the Arab, the Turk and the Persian. They also, quite understandably, address issues of imperialism and colonialism. Thomas Kuehn in Chapter 4 descends on the Ottoman experience of constructing empire on the Yemen frontier, and asks how Ottoman bureaucrats practiced what he calls “colonial cosmopolitanism”. This required a conscious application of other non-Ottoman imperial practices, especially British indirect rule through local bridging elites, primarily for cost-accounting reasons. The British model, though, filters through existing Ottoman models of communal interaction (especially the *millet* system), and these have an impact on the unevenness of the relationship with the Zaydi imam and other provincial elites of Yemen. Kuehn suggests a certain incoherence to colonial cosmopolitanism on the frontier, with its mixed messages resulting in a frontier cosmopolitanism in highland Yemen under the Zaydi imam.¹³ The Ottoman colonial discourse is manifested within specific cultures but also within the material foundations of the frontier.

In Chapter 5, Ariel Salzman focuses both on empire and on the disputation of the memory of that empire. Ottoman cosmopolitanism is read primarily as inter-communal urbanity, but practiced in complex and multiform ways moving between the poles of dhimmitude and convivencia. Thus, as a form of cosmopolitanism, the Ottoman instance altered in certain ways over time, especially under print capitalism, thereby providing polyvalent evidence for modern contestations. Salzman focuses on the socio-political basis for the contestation of modern Turkish memory of the Ottoman cosmopolis, with the Hrant Dink funeral as an event revealing the contemporary cleavages in memory between Istanbul reified politically as a binary Islampolis or cosmopolis. This national conversation is ongoing and raises a number of issues about the selective erasure of memory within specific junctures of power. And a larger question remains: can there be an Islamic cosmopolis where the religion of Islam produces the irenic and multi-ethnic passages expected of cosmopolitanism?

In Chapter 6, Will Hanley moves the discussion to the cosmopolis of Alexandria under the Ottoman–European capitulations agreement. Focusing on communication as the key to understanding the cosmopolitan phenomenon,¹⁴ Hanley details an instance in which communication breaks down in a multilingual and multicultural context: a merchant curses a tax collector and a disputation breaks out at the cosmopolitan court (primarily run on French principles) over the meaning and implications of the Muslim Arab curse. While the legal comprehension of the curse seems very cosmopolitan in the sense that the cosmopolitan court patterns the definition according to elite perceptions, it also suggests a non-cosmopolitan other in Alexandria, who exist to provide a dangerous frisson to the elite cosmopolitanism. In a sense, as in orientalist binary patterning, the non-cosmopolitan is required for a cosmopolitan project,

and Hanley asks whether or not it is possible to conceptualise a cosmopolitanism without this quality. The essay reminds us of the classed nature of cosmopolitanisms as well as the perhaps inevitable breakdown of power-based communication across cultures, and the incomprehension that results.¹⁵

Nile Green, in Chapter 7, approaches an instance of cosmopolitanism within a Persianate context. Similar to many of our contributors, Green is reluctant to impose a grand cosmopolitan narrative, but instead utilises the notion of “culinary cosmopolitanism” to examine the way actual interactions around food by Christian Britons and Muslim Iranians serve to facilitate communication across borders. To the extent that cosmopolitanism coalesces around openness to other cultures, and food codes are notoriously culturally confined and even form the basis of exclusive moral codes (one must eat right), it is useful to examine the confluence of peoples from two different cosmopolitan practices. Green argues that the material historical patterns of the nineteenth century, marked in the consumption of commodities such as tea and spices along with international rituals, have two unforeseen consequences: it brings British and Iranians together in a kind of “culinary sociability” while at the same time permitting the “understanding” of difference through displays of consumption. Indeed, there is a suggestion that the ability to share food and conversation across cultures – what Green calls “face-to-face cosmopolitanism” – was an important demonstration of belonging to an elite cosmopolitan class which began at last to share “pleasure”.¹⁶

The South Asian instances are particularly complicated by the continuing disputation of the nature of Muslim history both within India and within Islam, with a particular concern for issues of Islamic (rather than Muslim) authenticity. Iftikhar Dadi is concerned with the high culture context of Indo-Islamic art in the working out of an imaging for Pakistan, while Muhammad Khalid Masud is concerned with the high religious context of *fiqh* (“jurisprudence”) in the context of Islamic movement. Iftikhar Dadi, in Chapter 8, examines the polyvalent contexts of Abdur Rahman Chughtai (d. 1975), perhaps the most prominent and influential Indo-Pakistani artist. Dadi argues that Chughtai revisits and modernises a pre-existing Mughal cosmopolitanism, particularly of the era of Akbar, and utilises this as a basis to provide a modern cosmopolitan aesthetic for South Asian Muslims, especially in the context of Pakistan.¹⁷ The procedure entails an orientalism, where Mughal cosmopolitanism is remembered within the decolonisation process, and a co-option and essentialism of a deeply imagined and embedded Persianate tradition, especially the genre of *muraqqa'* (album painting) seen as continuous within a Lahore school of art that enables Indo-Muslim subjectivity. Mughal modernism has formed one important strand of Pakistani cosmopolitanism, which evokes optimism in global terms in the process of longing for the larger reified identity of the Persianate miniature.¹⁸

It is fitting that our volume concludes with the wide-ranging essay of Muhammad Khalid Masud, who is the only one of our contributors to engage explicitly with Islamic data over the long term. Masud is interested in whether the modern rise of concern for cultural authenticity in identity has compromised openness across cultures and thus obviated the material conditions of cosmopolitanism within Muslim societies and national cultures.¹⁹ Masud tests this argument by examining legal opinions in modern South Asia concerning the important legal doctrine of *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffar* (“imitating the non-Muslim”), which concerns a range of relationships with non-Muslims, but especially the appropriation of cultural symbols. The well-entrenched Indo-Muslim cosmopolitanism, Masud argues, was compromised by the British imperial project and the subsequent forms of nationalism and communalism in the subcontinent. As a result, a variety of political and cultural contexts emerged, and these were reflected by growing distinctions between religion and culture and the imaginings of various forms of openness. The readings of *tashabbuh* follow this change in context, although at the same time the embedment of the concept within the larger *fiqh* syllabus, no matter how much the accommodation, does seem to constrain the method and range of interpretation of the legal opinions.

Let me conclude by pointing out several commonalities in our contributors’ readings of these cosmopolitanisms of the past. First, with some exceptions, there is an apparent reluctance to attribute prominence to the specifically Islamic (i.e. religious) elements in their Muslim contexts or cosmopolitan typologies. Here the discussion departs from earlier Islamic cosmopolitan studies that mined the Qur’an and hadith for normative directives for Muslim mobility or tolerance, based especially on the elevation of commerce or knowledge as an Islamic duty; that examined scientific or philosophical institutions as evidencing an Islamically oriented global science consuming other cultures; or that saw pan-Islamic rituals such as the pilgrimage or spaced prayer as constituting the necessary basis for trans-regional mobility or ummicity.²⁰ Islamic religious data then, for our contributors, simply becomes one part, perhaps not even the most definitive, of the larger puzzle of cosmopolitanisms in Muslim contexts.

It is not surprising then that there seems to be a related uneasiness about locating a “Muslim” cosmopolitanism that is coherent and permeable across time and space, due in part to a distrust of grand narratives such as “civilisation” and “orientalism”. The cosmopolitanisms that emerge within complex Muslim societies and cultures are not all that different from those that arise within complex non-Muslim societies and cultures, and this renders the question of a “clash of civilisations” nonsensical. The difference in the contexts of cosmopolitanism seems one of class, stratification, empire and the like, which in itself raises questions of subject and analysis. Thus an assumption of a clash of civilisations or even a clash of cosmopolitanisms between Islam and the West

draws little support from these essays. The actually existing cosmopolitanisms constructed in Muslim contexts of the past are part of a human pattern, and we need no special theory to account for them.

Our contributors have tended to focus on cosmopolitanisms associated with modern imperial formations (Ottoman, Mughal, British, French) and the memory of these formations within specific national narratives. Cosmopolitanisms seem to be a legacy of empires and their enabling classes more than civilisations. Thus the focus of much of the analysis is on the bridging qualities of communication and solidarity of those classes who manage the empires as they cross cultures within a political economy. This also has implications when the unevenness of the decolonisation process and the formation of national agendas produce a contemporary contestation of the identity and sustained power of prior imperial cosmopolitanisms within entirely different classes.

At the same time, in a final cosmopolitan anxiety, most of our contributors want to conceptualise an actually existing cosmopolitanism that permits the inclusion of subaltern classes, such as those on the Swahili frontier. These firmly rooted classes may be part of a cosmopolitan system, although not themselves being cosmopolites, and it is not entirely clear how historians should conceptualise this vernacular cosmopolitanism in their understandings of the larger phenomenon of cosmopolitanism.²¹ Indeed, in the final analysis, perhaps the most important directive to emerge from the discussions of Muslim contexts of the past is this problematic relationship between pan-Muslim, texted forms of cosmopolitanism and locally rooted communities with all their complexities.

NOTES

1. The co-conveners of the conference were Derryl MacLean and Abdou Filali-Ansari, and papers or comments were also provided by Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, Ali Lakhani, Luke Clossey and Andrew Rippin. This volume does not aim for completeness, and further conferences are intended on instances of cosmopolitanisms in classical Muslim empires, the greater Indian Ocean and the land-based Persianate contexts. The editors have not enforced a uniform transliteration system for the volume, due to the variety of papers which cross disciplines, regions and transliteration conventions.
2. Muslim is used here adjectively as shorthand for Marshall Hodgson's Islamicate, "... the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims." See *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 1, p. 59.
3. See Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, "Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism" in their volume of essays, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 8–14.
4. For a display of multiple contexts of what the editors term the "infinite ways of being" (p. 12) of cosmopolitanism, see the essays in Carol A. Breckenridge et al. (eds),

- Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). The ethical foundations of cosmopolitanism are emphasised by Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).
5. A thoughtful overview of Muslim cosmopolitanism from the perspective of the history of religions is provided by Bruce B. Lawrence, “Competing Genealogies of Muslim Cosmopolitanism”, in Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (eds), *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 302–23. Roxanne L. Euben provides a new way of thinking of Muslim cosmopolitanism over time in her *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially chapter 6, “Cosmopolitanisms Past and Present, Islamic and Western”.
 6. A sympathetic discussion of classical Islamic humanism is provided by Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), but also see the suggestions of Josef Van Ess, “Islam and the Axial Age”, in Johann P. Arnason et al. (eds), *Islam in Process: Historical and Civilizational Perspectives*, Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam, 7 (London: Transaction, 2006), pp. 220–37.
 7. To a certain extent, this type of response is generated within the dispute over the so-called “clash of civilisations” thesis of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington where the Islam in Islamic civilisation serves as a brake on the acceptance of modern virtues such as democracy and gender egalitarianism.
 8. See, for example, Ahmed S. Moussali, “Islamism: Modernisation of Islam or Islamiisation of Knowledge”, in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999), pp. 87–101.
 9. For discussion, see Pnina Werbner, “Vernacular Cosmopolitanism”, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 23 (2006), pp. 469–98.
 10. For actually existing cosmopolitanism, see the discussion in Scott L. Malcomson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience”, in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the National* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 233–45, and Zlatko Skrbis, Gavin Kendall and Ian Woodward, “Locating Cosmopolitanism Between Humanist Ideal and Grounded Social Category”, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 21 (2004), pp. 115–36.
 11. Becker reflects on the larger theoretical argument concerning conversion as a process in Tanzania in her *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1890–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008).
 12. For an expansion of these arguments, see Kai Kresse, “The Uses of History: Rhetorics of Muslim Unity and Difference on the Kenyan Swahili Coast”, in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 223–60.
 13. The larger frontier–cosmopolis argument within the Yemen context can be found in Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and the Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
 14. Hanley’s larger theoretical considerations can be found in his “Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies”, *History Compass*, 6/5 (2008), pp. 1346–67.
 15. The issue of incomprehension within classed cosmopolitanisms is intimated for sixteenth-century Mughal India by Derryl N. MacLean, “Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar”, in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond*

- Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 199–215.
16. Green expands on this British–Iranian interaction in his “The Madrasas of Oxford: Iranian Interactions with the English Universities in the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Iranian Studies*, 44, 6 (November 2011), pp. 807–29.
 17. Dadi reflects on the problematic relationship of Chughtai’s artistic project within transnational modernism in his *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
 18. The Karkhana movement is a good contemporary example of this globally oriented Mughal cosmopolitanism. See Hammad Nasar (ed.), *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration* (Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2005).
 19. The position is argued specifically for Middle East data by Roel Meijer in his introduction to *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999).
 20. A good example of taking Islamic data seriously within a social context is Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). More recently, Karim H. Karim has looked at the “pluralist” roots of Islam in forming a faith basis for Muslim cosmopolitanism. See his “Cosmopolitanism: Ways of Being Muslim”, in Aryn B. Sajoo (ed.), *A Companion to Muslim Cultures* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 201–20.
 21. For discussion of the historical problem of vernacular cosmopolitanism within a Sanskrit context, see Sheldon Pollock, “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History”, in Carol Breckenridge et al. (eds), *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 15–53.

CHAPTER 2

Freeborn Villagers: Islam and the Local Uses of Cosmopolitan Connections in the Tanzanian Countryside¹

FELICITAS BECKER

For centuries, the Swahili towns on the East African coast were part of far-reaching networks: traders and scholars, refined goods and cultural practices passed between the ports of Mombasa, Tanga or Zanzibar and other shores of the Indian Ocean, from Yemen to South Asia and beyond.² Their inhabitants appreciated and displayed their cultural and commercial connectedness in a way that corresponds to a basic understanding of a “cosmopolitan” mindset as “outward-looking; appreciative of cultural exchange, of the new and exotic”. Until recently, Western observers tended to treat them as anomalies on the edge of a barbarian continent full of rural, decidedly inward-looking and parochial peasant societies; sometimes even as an Arab “transplant” onto African shores.³ In the 1980s, a new generation of Swahili scholars began to explore the African roots of Swahili culture and, to some extent, the exchange between Swahili towns and their African “hinterland”.⁴

It has become clear that the African continent, its languages, political practices and rituals, contributed crucially to the development of Swahili culture and society. Nevertheless, the role of non-Swahili African neighbours in more recent interactions with the Swahili towns continues to be described as reactive. These interactions have certainly been recognised as significant. Jonathon Glassman, in his foundational study of nineteenth-century towns, has used the phrase “urbanization of the countryside” in order to describe their effects during the heyday of the East African slave and ivory trades.⁵ The rural societies close to the towns and trade routes began to converge around sites of exchange, while their leaders integrated goods and rituals from the towns into their political practice. The ability to practice quasi-urban patterns of conspicuous consumption and display became a measure of political success.

In this context, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the first conversions to Islam occurred in the countryside, initially among the retinues of “big men” with privileged access to the trade routes.⁶ When these conversions continued apace and even intensified in the following decades, exasperated missionaries and colonial officials tended to explain them with reference to the villagers’ deference to the perceived material and cultural sophistication of the Muslim towns. Uncouth peasants, they implied, were easily dazzled by the displays of an urban culture which European observers by then considered decadent and itself parochial.

This chapter examines the conversion of villagers to Islam in the context of rural–urban relations and the changes wrought by colonial rule during the 1920s and 30s. This was the period when conversions to Islam were most frequent in this region, and the evidence indicates that converts conceived of their new religion as a means to connect culturally with the coast and its wider networks. This chapter aims to show that despite villagers’ determination to be part of such networks, their appreciation of the towns was pragmatic and often critical rather than retrograde; it was premised on their knowledge of the extreme deprivation in the countryside. Moreover, and crucially, I argue that while villagers saw conversion to Islam partly as a means to establish allegiance with the cosmopolitan networks of the coast, they were interested in this allegiance for very specific ends set firmly in the context of village politics.

The adoption of Muslim allegiance formed part of an engagement with the fluid political environment created by colonialism. After 1918, the pre-colonial “big men” were gone altogether, and their violent and demonstrative political practice was gone with them. The presence of the colonial state was fairly low key. Indirect rule intermediaries operated on a small scale and changed often, making them more obscure figures than the “chiefs” of other indirect rule regimes in British Africa.⁷ Colonial administrators, frustrated by nagging economic problems, portrayed local society as inward-looking and passive. The increasing visibility of Muslims fit with this stereotype, for in the same measure as the East African coast lost its leading economic role, administrators identified the region with “coastal sloth” and apathy rather than cosmopolitanism and wealth.

The aim of this chapter is not only to make clear that villagers were far from naïve in their efforts to establish religious linkages. Their example also shows, I think, that the concept of cosmopolitanism in the Indian Ocean needs to be used with caution.⁸ It is a value-laden term; where people conceive of themselves as cosmopolitan they typically imply a contrast with others, often quite close by, who are dismissed as provincial. Inasmuch as Swahili townspeople extolled the overseas connections of their specific location while, in the same breath, sniffing at villagers’ supposed ignorance, their cosmopolitanism was itself

parochial and exclusivist. In a sense, the villagers discussed here extended the cultural sphere of which the Swahili towns were part – characterised by the presence of Islam, an attachment to its holy sites overseas, and a more general appreciation of cultural connectedness that can be glossed as cosmopolitan – to the countryside. They could be said to have undercut the exclusivist tendencies of coastal urban dwellers. But this was not an easy flow of goods and ideas; it involved a good deal of hardship and did not actually erase the physical, cultural and social barriers between town and countryside. Moreover, the significance of Islamic allegiance turns out to be highly place-specific despite the pride both recent converts and educated urban Muslims took in the vastness of the Islamic cultural sphere in the Indian Ocean. Networks, however vast, can be construed quite differently from every one of their nodes, and the outside observer has to be careful not to homogenise these differences and to acknowledge the tensions between the different constructions.

WAYS OF CONVERSION AMONG VILLAGERS: THE COASTAL CONNECTION

[The Muslim] religion did not really come here until the time of the English. In the time of the Germans, many people were ignorant. They had no religion.⁹

[During my childhood] there were pagans round here, too ... Muslims and pagans lived together quietly; religion established itself slowly, not forcefully ... A man and his child might be pagan first and then become Muslim, and then they might convert the mother, too.¹⁰

These statements by men from villages situated about 150 kilometres west of the Indian Ocean coast clearly mark the difference between the old Muslim towns on the coast and the recently converted rural villages.¹¹ They chime with the chronology of the growth of rural Muslim communities suggested by August Nimtz¹² and also with the only written information available specifically for this region, provided by Benedictine missionaries. Yet these quotations also hint at the difficulties of tracing expansion, which was a quiet, cumulative process that produced next to no official record.¹³ To see how and when villagers became Muslim, what induced them to do so and what conversion actually implied for them, we have to turn to oral information.

Oral sources suggest that conversion occurred as part of an active search for new ritual and social possibilities, and that villagers interpreted their Muslim allegiance to suit the pursuit of divergent aspirations. Local politics were still about acquiring dependants but, with the end of slavery and big man-ship, the options for doing so and the forms of dependency had changed greatly. For aspiring elders within lineage networks, the establishment of mosques presented

a chance to claim authority over a ritual site. Villagers without such connections or aspirations developed a notion of the Muslim person, and of social relations among Muslims, that they could call upon to limit the ambitions of notables. For them, self-control, charity and shared humility before God were what made a Muslim. The emerging Muslim communities, then, were not based on the unanimous acceptance of a new religious vision, but on the convergence of different visions and aspirations around shared expressions of social allegiance and shared ritual forms. The practical circumstances under which conversion occurred signal some of the ways conversion was understood. According to Issa Makolela, *imamu* (long-standing prayer-leader) in Rwangwa, a former village, now country town west of the coastal belt:

People who went there [to the coastal towns] from here observed the townspeople pursuing religious activities. Now they, these pagans,¹⁴ said what is this thing? ... He [Khalifa bin Abdulkarim, leader of the Qadiriyya *tarika* in Lindi] says “This is religion.” “‘Religion’, so what do you do?” He says, “This is the religion of the Prophet.” “So how do you obtain it?” – So they convert and join this religion.¹⁵

The “religious activities” led by Khalifa were Sufi rituals. In the coastal towns, the Sufi orders were growing quickly between the wars, as they absorbed many new immigrants to the towns, especially former slaves.¹⁶ As Makolela makes clear, their performances attracted the interest of visiting villagers. His description is typical in that it places the performance of the act of conversion on the coast. A first-generation Muslim woman explained further:

I had two maternal uncles [who converted] and my sisters converted too; [they said] let’s go to take her [the respondent] to Lindi so that she may convert. I went to Lindi, we walked and walked and bought clothing, [they asked] so now do you accept Kiswahili as is required for conversion? [I said] I want Kiswahili and reject [the ways of] the interior, I want those of Lindi, I am going to Lindi to convert.¹⁷

And:

I went to Lindi and I went straight into the water – aaaaaah! – down into it three times, while the teacher was reciting, and in this way I became fit to wear the kikoi.¹⁸

Missionaries at Ndanda on the Lindi–Nyasa road in the mid-1930s confirm this procedure: while conversion to Islam could be performed in rivers, the sea

was preferred.¹⁹ To venture into the ocean was a memorable feat for visitors from the interior, who mistrusted its opaque waters even more than the townspeople themselves.²⁰ Bath and prayer ritually marked the acceptance of Islam. The religious instruction given prior to performance of the ritual was normally minimal: it comprised the basics of prayer and of halal eating. Nevertheless, this action, even if it was over in an hour, was apt to mark a new start.

Yet the practice of conversion in the ocean was increasingly replaced with a ritual that could be performed in the villages. Saidi Hamisi Mponda remembered of his father, the first resident *shehe* (sheikh) of Mnero village, that:

He would also baptise some people who had not yet been baptised before the holiday ... he would wash them with water, douse them and recite for them and they would say *shahaduhu la illahi ila allah* ... that is how you convert.²¹

The villages, then, became increasingly ritually independent from the coast. But there is a telling detail to the process: it was customary to add salt to the water used for the ablution, “to make it resemble sea water”. Within the coastal environment, the sea makes a fairly obvious place to perform an act of cleansing, of washing off past habits. The adding of salt to the water in locations in the interior, however, signals that the role of the sea was not merely pragmatic. The use of salt water in the villages was a way to recreate the allegiance of Muslims with the coast, hence the sea. Asumini Litanda, quoted above, explicitly conceived of her conversion as an affirmation of allegiance with Swahili ways over those of the interior. The same point is confirmed by the fact that the term used to denote “Muslim” in the Mwera language is *mulungwana*, derived from *muungwana*, the Swahili term to denote the free-born citizens of a coastal town.

THE CONTINUING ATTRACTIONS OF THE TOWNS

Evidently, villagers did not share the colonialists’ increasingly dismissive attitude towards the Swahili towns. Ordinary villagers at this time went to town most often after harvest, in order to sell bags of sesame and grain:

The shops were in Lindi, so we would take the trouble to sleep on the [barely inhabited and lion-infested] Rondo plateau, then to sleep in Ng’apa [on the western edge of the coastal belt]; a round trip to Lindi and back would take six days. We took all this trouble in order to deliver our sesame seed. We would prepare bark cloth sacks to put the sesame in because there were no gunny sacks, there were no bags except our bark cloth sacks, and so we went to Lindi ... When we got back here we would have sore feet ... One had to

go to Lindi, if you had wanted to sell your crops here, who would have been there to buy?²²

Villagers had to travel to town to sell their goods so as to acquire cash with which to pay their tax as well as all household necessities, and as there were no shops or trading posts in the countryside, they were impressed by what they found in town. Informants reminisced about first encounters with salt and sugar, about types of cloth and pots and pans.²³ Mangoes “for the children back home”, coconuts (whose use in cooking had to be learned) and sugar were among the novelties carried back from the coast by the pedestrian village traders. Coastal towns were a consumer’s heaven.

It is nevertheless clear that the acceptance of Islam was not just another acquisition. Although becoming Muslim was clearly in fashion, the connotations of coastal Islam were too complex to think of it as merely an accessory. This becomes clearer if we consider some further nuances in the recollections of villagers’ journeys to the coast. Antagonism between coastal towns and rural villages had not disappeared entirely. Villagers could expect little comfort on visits to town:

They used to sleep in an open yard that had been built for them, like it might have been for slaves ... There was no thought of sleeping in a guesthouse or a large hotel. They would just arrive at this yard and lay themselves down to sleep, every one holding on to his load, so that he might sell it in the morning. Others slept in a go-down.²⁴

The reference to the way slaves used to be treated is particularly telling. The open yard marked a lack not only of comfort, but also of status. Villagers in town were still bumpkins, strangers and potentially dupes. Informants recalled with amusement their enthusiasm at simple goods such as sugar, but they also felt that they were being short-changed because of their ignorance and were vulnerable to exploitation.²⁵

Still, if their need for “tax money” forced them into exchanges they could not control, they also appreciated that the real threat of slavery was over. Informants from the villages tend to place the end of slavery at the beginning of the British, rather than in the German, period.²⁶ The end of slavery, then, coincided with the beginning of the practice of travelling to town to convert. A sense that the acceptance of Islam was a way of overcoming a historical social division is palpable in some observations by village informants. According to Mohamed Athuman Mwindi, elder of an isolated outlying village near Mnero:

Black people started to take an interest in [the Muslim] religion because of the Arabs. After they [the Arabs] had stopped ruling, they began to take

pity on the black people and to bring them religion ... the local people, the Africans, began to realise the sweetness of religion. One by one, they agreed to come to the Arabs to study. When they returned from there, they had progressed because of their learning, thanks to religion.²⁷

With its reference to the passing of Arab rule, this account pays the “Arabs” a somewhat back-handed compliment. They became educators only after they had stopped being slavers.

On the coast, the acceptance of Islam still occurred within a hierarchical environment. It is noticeable that conversion “in the sea” is not mentioned in connection with the names of the most prominent coastal *shehe*. Rather, these rituals were conducted by less urbane religious experts, not from the stone towns, but from the mud huts that surrounded them. There is some irony in the fact that, viewed from Mnero, the diverse and – according to self-conscious “Arabs” – often rather un-Arab members of coastal society that helped disseminate coastal Muslim practice to villagers coalesced into an apparently homogeneous category of “Arab”. Further layers of the significance of villagers becoming *balungwana* emerge if we consider the need and scope for the realignment of villagers’ social relationships created by the colonial order.

INDIRECT RULE, ECONOMIC MARGINALITY AND COLONIAL LOCAL POLITICS

It is widely accepted that the imposition of colonial rule catalysed religious change in African societies. There are many different accounts, though, of the causes; they differ especially in regard to the relative importance of the rupture and destruction caused by colonialism on one hand, and of more long-term, constructive social processes within African societies on the other.²⁸ Concerning the acceptance of Islam, these explanations tend to take one of two forms. Some accounts of the spread of Islam under colonial rule revolve around the role of pre-existing Muslim groups in colonial states, whether as paragons of resistance or as intermediaries of the colonial order, or simply on their increased mobility and visibility under colonialism.²⁹ Others focus on the role of Islam as a means of forging new communities among ex-slaves and others displaced by the colonial order.³⁰

Neither of these explanations sits entirely comfortably with what we know of the problematic, even divisive, role of Muslim allegiance in the late pre-colonial past. Nevertheless, elements of both, and especially the second, are relevant to the present case. To understand how, we must trace how rural Muslims in the interwar period were able to depart from and reinterpret the problematic associations of Muslim allegiance. For this purpose, we again depend on oral evidence, as the European authors of written sources tended to look upon the acceptance

of Islam in the villages as a clumsy attempt to appropriate an obsolete social ideal. The assertion of continuity with the past inherent in becoming Muslim was part of what exasperated missionaries, who thought villagers should want a clean break with the bad old days.

Instead, we need to trace the way villagers reinterpreted the significance of being Muslim. For this purpose, we have to understand the local, rural perspective on colonial rule. While becoming Muslim was not a reaction *against* the colonial order, it was a way of addressing concerns *about* the dilemmas it caused. Despite the brutality of colonial conquest, especially the suppression of the Maji Maji uprising in 1905–7 and the First World War, colonial rule in Southeast Tanzania was characterised subsequently not by its intensity, but by haphazard, intermittent intervention paired with neglect. The colonial state was meddlesome, unpredictable and feared, but was also distant most of the time. The form of local politics in which Islam became implicated grew up in the space around the tenuous and dispersed links between the villages and the state that was rather lackadaisically governing them.³¹

The hands-off attitude of British administrators was an exasperated response to persistent economic problems, reflected in embarrassing tax shortfalls. The economic marginalisation of the southeast was a process with many facets, but one plain root cause: after the demise of the trade in ivory, slaves and rubber, there was nothing very profitable to sell. The problem did not therefore lie entirely with natural endowment. While the production of coffee, tea or cocoa was out of the question, cotton might have become profitable, and the ongoing grain trade less precarious, if there had been a railway or even just a good road. As it was, though, villagers depended for their cash income on the grain they could carry to town on their own shoulders. Tunduru and Liwale, situated so far from the towns that this form of market participation became impractical (for the sellers literally ate up their profits on the way to market and back), became labour reserves.³²

The resulting economic stagnation provided a rationale for the government to treat this province with disinterest. For many local people, it spelt misery: the need to sell foodstuffs for cash, combined with labour migration by young men, contributed to a series of famines in the 1920s and 30s. Since famine relief to the area was expensive given the poor transport facilities, administrators cited the costs of famine relief as a reason not to provide funds for more productive expenditure. The government preferred to finance regions with more secure returns.

The weakness of indirect rule in Southeast Tanzania has entered the literature as an example of the failure of this type of regime among stateless people, but it would be misleading to attribute the administrative problems wholly to the pre-existing political culture of a “stateless” population.³³ Unlike other indirect rule intermediaries in the British East and Central Africa, the *wakulungwa* (“big

men”) had no rights over land and operated on a small scale; the same was true of the *liwali* (sub-district officials without putative “traditional” legitimacy) that supplanted them when the *wakulungwa* were found ineffective. Moreover, administrators were ready to replace them much more quickly than supposedly dynastic rulers elsewhere.³⁴ When *liwali* were introduced, officials even had to drop one candidate of their choice in response to popular protest.³⁵ As “native authority” posts were salaried, there was never a shortage of candidates. But there was little incentive for them to strive to carry out orders.

The weakness of official intermediaries intensified the characteristic ambiguity of colonial rule, its dependence on forceful incursions on the one hand, and the weakness of everyday government on the other, where officials substituted rhetoric and performance for active interference.³⁶ In this context, intermediaries sought their advantage in personalised stratagems. An unofficial hierarchy arose among *wakulungwa*, based on their individual advantages and skills, but traceable even in the official record. Among the handful of *wakulungwa* mentioned by name in official records, Salum Nachinuku stands out by the liveliness of informants’ recollections of him.³⁷ He had a pedigree of sorts: his father had been a local big man who had avoided taking sides against the Germans in 1905, but had sought to protect the people of Mnacho against the incursions of their pro-German neighbour, Matola. From 1927 until his death in the mid-1930s, Salum Nachinuku passed as a “king” in the sub-district of Mnacho. He was made “head *mkulungwa*” by the provincial administration, an honorific title that nevertheless came with special perks. Officials considered him reasonable and unusually effective. In Mnacho, he is remembered as somebody who got administrators to listen, who obtained famine relief and leniency with the collection of taxes in bad harvest years, and who “helped” with the payment of taxes by letting people perform tax labour on his fields.

That his success depended on personal skill is illustrated by the fact that his sons failed to carry on his reign; they were not equally skilled at building consensus. As a small-scale and transient approximation of the indirect rule chief that administrators often looked for in vain, Nachinuku throws into relief the lack of continual engagement with the colonial order that characterised Southeast Tanzania as a whole. He was also the patron of one of the first mosques in the region.

The disinterest of the colonial rulers in an economically marginal region and the flat hierarchies of the local colonial regime combined to keep the colonial state remote. Because of this remoteness, certain idioms of colonial politics that were directed towards colonial officials remained relatively muted. There was little talk of ethnicity, of ethnocentric histories, or territorial claims; where it occurred, it tended to be voiced with the support of the Christian missions and discussed mostly among mission-educated people.³⁸ In the discursive space

elsewhere occupied by these themes, villagers in Southeast Tanzania reinvented themselves as coastal and Muslim people. The coast was closer than the colonial state, and *uungwana*, being of the coast, mattered more than ethnic affiliation. Being Muslim was its most tangible expression. It is likely, albeit not demonstrable, that the spread of Islam helped dampen the expression of politicised forms of ethnicity. Yet allegiance with the coast drew its relevance from a recent permutation of social relationships with deep local roots: from villagers' efforts to redefine social relations in the post-big man era. We can trace these connections by examining more closely the early history of rural mosques.

THE NARRATIVES OF MOSQUE FOUNDERS

The following account of the foundation of the mosque in Rwangwa is by Issa Makolela, an *imamu* of this mosque. He no longer leads prayers there due to his frailty (he is over eighty), but is still involved in its administration.³⁹

I had a maternal uncle,⁴⁰ Bakari Chiwaka. He went to Zanzibar to study; when he came back they [the elders of Rwangwa] settled on the plan to build a mosque. He became its *shehe* and prayer-leader. The person who advised him to build the mosque was Mzee Zuberi bin Athuman, his maternal uncle.⁴¹

As for where they got their religion from, he [Chiwaka] had studied in Zanzibar, but this religion first arrived in Kilwa. It was in Kilwa that the first followers of the Prophet lived ... from Kilwa it spread to Lindi, in Lindi there were *shehe* who were well educated, one of them had studied in Mombasa, and this one who had been to Mombasa taught Shehe Khalifa bin Abdulkarim.⁴² So the religion grew ... Now when they built this mosque, they realised their *shehe* [Chiwaka] could not teach in it because of his other commitments, so they went to the *shehe* in Lindi and came back with his student *mwalmu* Bakari Cholicho. He came here, they built him a house and he taught the children ...

[Mzee Cholicho] became a teacher because of his father. When [the father] saw that he was a good youth, he brought him to the *shehe* [in Lindi] to study. He was from right here, from the mainland, from Mbemba⁴³ ... When an elder from round here arrived there [in town] saying we want a youth to come to us so he can teach our children, the *shehe* [Abdulkarim] said yes, we have a youth from right where you come from, and gave them Cholicho.

Makolela specifies a number of key elements in the foundation of this mosque. Individual villagers took the initiative to acquire learning, turning to the coast as the authoritative source. But the establishment of the mosque required the collective initiative of elders, of locally influential men. Often, the role of these elders is described by saying that they "provided the plot" for it.⁴⁴

It could seem, then, that by founding mosques the elders finally achieved what had long eluded them: a firm grasp of authority based on control of the sites of collective ritual. Yet prayer was still far from the only important ritual. Moreover, Makolela makes an implicit distinction between religious expertise and authority over the mosque. Religious expertise was available to any interested individual (see Mzee Cholicho, for example) but the authority to establish a mosque rested with a particular group of elders. As one Rwangwa informant put it, “you can be a *shehe* because of your learning, or because you are an elder”.⁴⁵ While Bakari Cholicho was the main teacher at the mosque, authority over it derived from Zuberi bin Athumani, who is said to have “supplied the plot” for it. It had been passed down first to Zuberi’s nephew Bakari Chiwaka, then to Bakari Chiwaka’s nephew Issa Makolela. In other words, it followed a matrilineal line of succession, in keeping with long-standing local practice. The elders who sought to establish a new form of ritual authority still deferred to the established pattern. The authority of elders, then, was delicately patched together from their family connections, their role in local politics (including, but not limited to, the indirect rule regime) and their patronage of ritual sites.

Information on another location, Nkowe/Mpumbe, confirms this, and highlights a further aspect of the multiplicity of sources of authority that elders were juggling. Issa Makolela from Rwangwa acknowledged the primacy (in time, at any rate) of this mosque:

The first mosque around here was down there, going down the slope towards Nkowe Mission ... It was the mosque of Hamisi Mohamed Mbalika ... He was from right here, from Mpumbe ... He had studied in Kilwa.

The current *imamu* of this mosque, Musa Saidi Mbalika, breaks the pattern of matrilineal succession by describing himself as the son of the founder and first *imamu*, Hamisi Mohamed Mbalika, rather than his nephew. According to him, his father studied in Mchinga, a coastal settlement north of Lindi, with a teacher trained by Khalifa bin Abdulkarim of Lindi. As in Rwangwa and Mnero, it is said that Mbalika the elder was himself the nephew (sister’s son) of the man who “provided the plot” for the mosque. This patron, in turn, was one of a group of elders who at the time represented the two lineages considered indigenous to Mpumbe. Another informant on Mpumbe, Rashid Liegwe, effortlessly passed from this group of elders to the figure of the “founder” of one of these lineages, “Mzee Chiumbi”, whose shrine was said to have been near the present location of the mosque.⁴⁶

In effect, Mbalika the younger and Liegwe’s accounts create a historical continuity between this powerful non-Muslim ancestor, formerly the patron of a shrine, and the present-day mosque. The discursive effort to place mosques

at the centre of relationships between leading “indigenous” lineages is tangible. Old-fashioned matrilineal succession, from maternal uncle to nephew, is the most important inter-generational link in these accounts. At the same time, Salum Nachinuku’s career shows that colonial restatements of tradition for the purpose of “native administration” and the claim to authority over a mosque could be mutually reinforcing.

THE REPUBLICANISM OF RURAL MUSLIMS: VILLAGE POLITICS UNDER COLONIAL RULE

We have now encountered two different narratives of the growth of Muslim communities whose members understood their Muslim allegiance as a form of participation in the cosmopolitan networks of the coast. On one hand, individual villagers became Muslim in a determined bid to shed the “ways of the mainland” and acquire those of the coast. On the other, local notables, or aspiring notables, came together to arrange for the building of mosques. The question remains how these two narratives fit together. Oral accounts by members of the networks around mosques give the impression that mosques needed the endorsement of elders in order to succeed, but it makes as much sense to say that elders needed mosques to substantiate their status. At the same time, while some of the attractions of the coast are clear enough, we have to ask what being “of the coast” meant for ordinary villagers during their everyday interactions in the villages. We can arrive at an answer by considering villagers’ efforts to define social interaction among Muslims. They indicate that the reference to Islam helped in formulating local power relationships that were less harsh, less forceful and less confrontational than in the days of the big men.

This reformulation was the outcome of tense negotiation between notables and commoners no less than of shared weariness of the warlike past. The collapse of hierarchies based on long-distance trade was felt in the villages as well as on the coast. Nevertheless, villagers continued to recognise internal hierarchies. The foundation narrative of the mosque in Rwangwa puts a very clear emphasis on the pre-eminence of “indigenous” lineages. At the other end of the social scale, the missionary Joachim Ammann in the 1930s noted the contempt in which former slaves were held in the Mnero area if they had severed their links with their former owners and not made a success of living independently: “they are like birds who have plucked out their own feathers”.⁴⁷ Conversely, a niece of Salum Nachinuku and granddaughter of Mzee Nachinuku was quite explicit about the fact that her grandfather “bought women and men”, and that as his descendant she had a privileged position in the village.⁴⁸ Still, it is difficult to get a clear sense of internal hierarchies among villagers. We can take some leads from the narratives in Rwangwa and Mnacho. The networks of elders in the

two cases were very differently structured: in Rwangwa the network was much less clearly focused on one person than the network in Mnacho was on Salum Nachinuku. In both cases, though, the mosque elders came from among the *wenyeji*, the “local people” who controlled the good soils of the location. That they had protected this access carefully is clear from oral accounts and, in the case of Mnacho, the salience of cross-cousin marriage until the interwar period. On the other hand, oral accounts also make clear that unlike river valley fields, rain-fed upland plots were freely available. The 352,000 inhabitants ascribed to Southern province in 1938, after all, shared an area similar in size to that of Scotland.⁴⁹ For more marginal inhabitants of these locations, this implied a constant need to weigh advantages: they could stay near the good soils, put up with the *wenyeji*’s privilege-mongering and hope for a share of good valley land, or they could move on to open up unclaimed land and leave the *wenyeji* be.

The *wenyeji*, in other words, had to integrate other villagers or risk losing them. Like the big men, the *wenyeji* found they had to have people around them; yet, compared to the big men, the *wenyeji* now had few means of control. The ease with which villagers transferred allegiance and residence between different *wakulungwa*’s abodes is a recurring theme in the colonial record.⁵⁰ There was always somewhere else to go. In the words of one informant, even now, after “we [people] have flooded the world”, there is fallow land left.⁵¹ The interwar period was a time of gradual consolidation of settlement, with missionaries noting signs of the increase of population from the late 1930s. This probably constituted no more than a return to population densities before the disasters of the early colonial period. Before those had occurred, the big men had held together their people with a balance of threat and patronage. Now, the *wenyeji* had to look elsewhere for a means to hold on to people. Arguably, the public life around mosques was part of the answer.

Villagers outside the *wenyeji*’s networks, though, had no interest in allowing the *wenyeji* to define their role in the mosques as a justification for quasi-aristocratic privilege. They were challenged to define the role of the mosques and their patrons in a way that safeguarded their position within the villages. Here lies the origin of the emphasis on collective decisions, on cooperation and the absence of force in villagers’ descriptions of social life among Muslims.⁵² They were normative statements. That control over ritual sites or ritual expertise ran in families, as in the case of the mosques, was not new. Moreover, the earlier big men, too, had had to reckon with independent ritual experts. But the kind of leadership that villagers now ascribed to mosque sponsors was very different from the bare-knuckled power exerted by the big men of earlier generations. Villagers’ interpretation of leadership among Muslims aimed to circumscribe the authority of the big men’s successors. In order to pass as *Muslim* leaders, they had to be cooperative.

We have one fairly explicit statement of this connection from an earlier period. In 1968, just over a generation after the time when the mosques discussed here were founded, a respondent from Undendeuli, an area to the northwest of the region we are concerned with but part of the same ethnic and cultural continuum, claimed that the chief Muslim proselytiser in the area particularly impressed his audience “by his assertion that only those who were well thought of by others and who respected and loved others could become Muslims”.⁵³ The same view still prevails among villagers in Southeast Tanzania. Again and again, when asked why one should want to become Muslim, respondents said that Islam was a good religion because it made you a “good” person, and that meant a patient, cooperative, calm person.

These claims resonate with several notions that have been operative among people in our region over time. They recall the serenity and calm that coastal Muslims associated with Muslim scholars. They are also in keeping with a penchant for close social control and mistrust of social differentiation that have been described as characteristic of peasant societies, notwithstanding the fact that peasant societies tend to be imagined as the very antithesis of cosmopolitan ones: as inward-looking and mistrustful of all that is new and strange.⁵⁴ In the present time, they carry an echo of post-colonial officials’ insistence on the docility of villagers. Against the background of what in the 1920s and 30s was recent experience, though, they form an assertion of a new way of handling local politics, underpinned by a new Muslim identity. The contrast with the violent pre-colonial big men could not be clearer.⁵⁵ Discussing local politics among the Ndendeuli at the end of the colonial period, John Iliffe remarked on their “republican constitution”.⁵⁶ Arguably, this republicanism was characteristic of rural Muslim communities all the way from the coast to Undendeuli.⁵⁷ The location of mosques at the centre of villages, rather than in the wilderness where traditional sacrificial sites were found, is emblematic for their social embeddedness and the subjection of their patrons to the judgement of others.

CONCLUSIONS

It is now clearer why the material elements of coastal culture and *mulungwana* identity remained significant among rural Muslims. Being of the coast meant not being a pawn in a big man’s game, being the equal of townspeople within the Indian Ocean region and, last not least, having a stake in the affairs of one’s place of residence. Villagers, then, consciously recognised and appreciated coastal towns as cosmopolitan in the sense of “open to and connected with the world”, while finding importance in this cosmopolitanism partly for quite parochial reasons.

Villagers' appreciation of coastal cosmopolitanism took in both its material elements (buckets, sugar) and its ritual and religious ones (Sufi performance), without any sense of contrast or contradiction between them. They sought to participate in the circulation of goods, but at the same time the rural students joining coastal madrasa and returning up country as teachers in their own right participated in the far-flung networks of educational exchange with which Muslim cosmopolitanism in the western Indian Ocean is more often identified. Islamic allegiance was an essential element of mediation between the disparate participants in the expanding networks that tied rural areas to the coast. It did not, however, fully define this cosmopolitanism: villagers brought their own aims and interpretations to their relations with coastal Muslim networks.

By the last decade of colonial rule, Muslims outnumbered Christians and followers of indigenous religion in most districts of Southeast Tanzania. Mosques were still being founded. It had become customary to mark the month of Ramadhan – sometimes, the missionaries sneered, with a beer fest – and even though few people in the villages visited the mosque daily, an increasing number of people walked long distances to attend prayers on Fridays.⁵⁸ Islam had become a fundamental, albeit low profile, element of social life. The numbers we know of are almost entirely taken from mission statistics. While it is not easy to say whether this implies a bias towards exaggeration or underestimation, the overall tendency is beyond dispute. For instance, in 1935, missionaries at Nkowe estimated the population there at 1,700 Christians, 7,000 pagans and 4,000 Muslims.⁵⁹ In spite of the mission presence, Muslims already outnumbered Christians. When taking stock after the Second World War, the missionaries described themselves as ministering to a minority facing a no longer “pagan”, but Muslim majority.⁶⁰

The Muslim communities that grew up around mosques were formed by the convergence of disparate networks and separate interests, and accommodated diverging individual ways of being Muslim. In this sense, they were cosmopolitan without losing their local and in some ways parochial character. The appeal to shared Muslim norms formed part of a process of negotiation over their practical application, rather than expressing a pre-existing consensus. The idea of “community” was not homogenous, but socially composed; not based on consensus, but on a shared language with which to contend for a stake.⁶¹ Different people in the villages emphasised different aspects of what it meant to be Muslim. It was thanks to this openness to interpretation that being Muslim became so widely relevant. For aspiring leaders, it was a way of claiming authority, while for commoners it gave grounds to make their allegiance conditional upon the leaders' behaviour.

Inasmuch as it was a debate over the definition of social relations and obligations, the acceptance of Islam in the villages continued the pattern of pre-

colonial struggles for citizenship on the coast. In fact, it could be seen as a quiet appropriation of citizenship in the Indian Ocean region. Yet neither oral memory nor written sources retain information on actual conflict over the definition of *uenyeji* (roughly “citizen status”) and its implications. In part, this reflects the intrinsic weaknesses of oral sources – the tendency of informants to speak of the past using an unspecific “we”, and to discount dissenting voices. Nevertheless, the emphasis on consensus is not merely ideological. Compared to the pre- and early colonial period, there was now less at stake in local power struggles, and they were less destructive.

Although negotiations on an intimate level have shaped the record, the process just discussed also forms part of large-scale change, of a new kind of integration of the Indian Ocean region that was catalysed by colonialism, but entirely independent of its interests. Even if the dynamics of conversion were primarily local, it drew villagers into a frame of reference for defining progress and citizenship that connected them to other shores of the Indian Ocean, and continues to be operational today.

Nevertheless, villagers’ acquisition of this cosmopolitan allegiance did not obliterate the differences between them and townspeople, either in terms of standard of living or culture, and it was not owed to inclusive attitudes towards villagers on the part of most townspeople. Sufi leaders such as Khalifa bin Abdulkarim did work to draw villagers into their cultural sphere, but their everyday experience in town was still one of marginality. Arguably, villagers sought Muslim allegiance partly *because of* their continuing marginality: relations of social discontinuity and exclusion between town and countryside, rather than the sort of urbane “multiculturalist” outlook it is tempting to associate with cosmopolitanism, drove the expansion of the cosmopolitan religio-cultural sphere of the Swahili coast.

NOTES

1. This is partly based on Chapter 3 from Felicitas Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1890–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008). I thank the Academy for their permission to use the text.
2. Jeremy Presthold, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa* (London: Routledge, 2003).
3. A classic example of this approach is Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).
4. John De Vere Allen, *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon* (Oxford: James Currey, 1993); Justin Willis, *Mombasa and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the Swahili Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

5. Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); for further discussion, see Edward Alpers, “Kingalu Mwana Shaha and Political Leadership in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Tanzania”, in James Giblin and Gregory Maddox (eds), *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence from Tanzania* (Athens, OH and Oxford: Ohio University Press and James Currey), pp. 33–54.
6. Becker, *Becoming Muslim*.
7. On indirect rule regimes in Tanzania, see John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 318–41; on neighbouring Malawi, see Leroy Vail and Landeg White, “Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi”, in Leroy Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), pp. 151–92; Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
8. For an example of how this can be done, see Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, “Introduction. Cosmopolitanism Contested: Anthropology and History in the Western Indian Ocean”, in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (London: Hurst, 2007), pp. 1–41.
9. Interview with Mohamed Athuman Mwindi, Mnero-Kitandi, 15 August 2000. Informants were often adamant that indigenous religious practice should not be spoken of as “religion” (*dini* in Swahili).
10. Interview with Abdallah Omari Ngutila, Mnero-Kitandi, 18 August 2000.
11. *Bara* is still a loaded term, associated with poverty and ignorance, but as will be seen here, it can also be used assertively.
12. August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).
13. The few references to Islam in the official record mostly concern Muslim law. See Tanzania National Archives (TzNA), 13329: “conflicts of law, native and Muhammedan”, for inheritance cases; TzNA, 16/1/29, vol.1: “rules and orders made by native authorities” for Muslim marriage.
14. The term I translate as “pagan” is the Swahili word *mpagani*, probably derived from missionaries’ use of the term “pagan”. The Swahili term is a common, though occasionally slightly dismissive, way of referring to people without formal religious affiliation.
15. Interview with Issa Makolela, Rwangwa-Likangara, 6 September 2003. The “he” refers to an earlier mention of Khalifa bin Abdulkarim.
16. Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, Chapter 6; August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*.
17. *Ninakubali mambo ya Kiswahili, mambo ya bara siyataki*. Two terms are used for what I have rendered as “to convert”: *kuzindua* and *kusilimu*. The latter is certainly and the former apparently only used to describe conversion to Islam. It would make as much sense to translate both terms as “to become Muslim”, but “to convert” is how Swahili interlocutors initially translated it for me.
18. Interview with Asumini Litanda, Mnero-Mwandini, 16 September 2000.
19. *Chronik der Kongregation St Ottilien (CdK) 1932*, “Nyangao, 1931”, 275. The missionary mentions that the newly baptised were given *kanzu*, sandals, *kofia* and a black umbrella.
20. Numerous people in the coastal towns do not know how to swim. If someone drowns

- (most often teenage boys who have ventured too far out into the currents), this is often explained with stories of *kinusi*, a creature of the deep who pulls human beings down to drain their blood (the corpses tend to look grey and bloodless by the time they are found).
21. Interview with Saidi Hamisi Mponda, Mnero-Kimawe, 14 September 2000. The use of the term “baptise” for conversion may reflect two things: the desire to speak understandably to a Christian interlocutor, or a determination by Hamisi Mponda to assert equivalence between conversion to Islam and the much-celebrated Christian baptisms at the mission. More often, the term used for this ritual was *kuzindua*, which has no European derivation.
 22. Interview with Hamisi Ibrahimu Nangwawa, Mnacho-Ng’au, 28 August 2000. Villagers remember selling their goods *kwa Wahindi*, “to the Indians”. Indian grain traders had been present on the southern coast since the pre-colonial period. J. F. Elton, “On the Coast Country of East Africa South of Zanzibar”, *RGgrS Journal*, 44 (1874), pp. 227–52, describes Elton’s trip to the southern towns to enforce the manumission of slaves by British Indian subjects. After the decline of the Arab traders in the early colonial period, rural intermediate trade was effectively racialised. There was very little social interaction between Africans and Asians, and the belief that Asian traders somehow “cheated” Africans continues to be widespread: see the correspondence between Maarufu Issa and the Nachingwea Forestry Office, in TzNA, Acc 496 MC/NH/1/42A: “Southern Region Timber Cooperative Society” on a forceful statement of anti-Asian sentiment from the 1960s. This also means that there is next to no information on cooperation between Asian and African Muslims, the exception being the village of Mingoyo, where Asian traders sponsored an African madrasa in the late colonial period. Interview with Mzee Bin Juma and Uzia Mzee, Mingoyo, 11 November 2003.
 23. Interview with Somoe Bakari Mpegwa, Mnacho-Chimbila, 29 August 2003.
 24. Interview with Somoe Bakari Mpegwa, Mnacho-Chimbila, 29 August 2000.
 25. This assumption of having been fooled as a matter of course was suffused with anti-Asian sentiment. Many villagers took it for granted that “those Indians” must have been swindling them.
 26. This is consistent with the fact that slavery was officially abolished only in 1922. But the control of most masters over their slaves had collapsed before then. See Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).
 27. Interview with Mohamed Athuman Mwindi, Mnero-Kitandi, 15 August 2000.
 28. For instance, John Peel attributes the mass conversion of Yoruba to Christianity to the British conquest, because it destroyed indigenous institutions that had opposed Christianity and promoted the identification of Christianity with the wealth and power of the new rulers. See J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 278–318. On the other hand, the acceptance of Christianity can also be interpreted as a means of maintaining continuity with or even recovering the past. For instance, Derek Peterson describes the spread of Christian education among the Kikuyu as motivated by a hope to return to the “self-mastery” of the pre-colonial past with the help of the skills learned from the invaders. See Derek Peterson, “Writing in Revolution. Independent Schooling and Mau Mau in Nyeri”, in John Lonsdale and E. S. Atieno

- Odhiambo (eds), *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), pp. 76–97.
29. Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).
 30. David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens, OH and Oxford: Ohio University Press and James Currey, 2000); James Searing, “*God Alone is King*”: *Islam and Emancipation in Senegal. The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).
 31. “This makes the most depressing provincial report I have yet read”, reads the comment of a member of the governor’s staff under the annual report of the Southern province for the year 1926 (TzNA, 1733/6).
 32. The district officer described the vicious circle in TzNA, 1733/10, pp. 159–66: annual report, Tunduru sub-district, 1925.
 33. On the perceived conflict between indirect rule and stateless society, see J. Gus Liebenow, *Colonial Rule and Political Development in Tanzania: The Case of the Makonde* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
 34. The contrast is particularly clear with Malawi. See Vail and White, “Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi”. For the dismissal of *wakulungwa* soon after they had been appointed, see TzNA, 12975 NA/V9/6, *passim*: “Lindi province native courts, correspondence, 1928–30”.
 35. Interview with Mzee Abdallah Omari Ngutula, Mnero-Kitandi, 18 September 2000; with Madina Omari Ngaweje, Mnero-Kipara, 23 September 2000.
 36. This ambiguity is well captured in Fields, *Revival and Rebellion*.
 37. He is prominent in all interviews from Mnacho, the interview site closest to his residence.
 38. See, for example, “Kushika mwenye: die Haeuptlingsweihe” (Ndanda Mission Library, anonymous typescript, n.d).
 39. Interview with Issa Makolela, Rwangwa-Likangara, 3 September 2003.
 40. He used the Swahili term *mjomba* (plural *wajomba*) for maternal uncle, the main authority figure in matrilineal families.
 41. Given the occurrence of vernacular patronyms (“Chiwaka”, “Makolela”) in the names of almost all the other men involved, this entirely Muslim name is puzzling. No informant in Rwangwa would entertain the idea that Zuberi was a foreigner; it would seem that his forebears converted earlier than those of most other people, that he had dropped a local patronym in favour of Athuman or that it has been changed by oral tradition.
 42. In Lindi, Shehe Khalifa is described as locally trained, in contrast to Shehe Badi, who had studied in Mombasa. Makolela is either portraying Khalifa as a disciple of Badi, or referring to the fact that Khalifa’s lineage, the Jamalidini family, claimed origins in Mombasa’s Kilindi neighbourhood several generations ago. On the Jamalidinis, see TzNA, G 9/47: report by the District Office, Lindi, to Central Government, Dar es Salaam, 25 February 1910. This was also supported in interviews with Fadhili Zubeiri Jamalidini, Lindi-Mikumbi, 24 July 2000; with Safiya binti Abderehmani Likokora, Lindi-Ndoro, 22 July 2000.
 43. Mbemba is an isolated settlement to the northwest of Mnero near the Mbemkuru

- River. It was also sometimes mentioned as a site of fighting with German troops in the Maji Maji War.
44. *Alitoa uwanja*. Speaking of mosques, this expression does not denote a legal transaction, but it does emphasise that the elder in question held some control over land. It makes more concrete legal sense when speaking of the endorsement of churches by local elders, as missionaries normally wanted a written title for land they built on.
 45. Interview with Hassan Athuman Pachoto, Rwangwa-Likangara, 23 October 2003.
 46. Interview with Musa Saidi Mbalika and Rashid Juma Liegwe, Nkowe-Mpumbe, 21 November 2003.
 47. Joachim Ammann, “Sitten und Gebrauche bei den Wamwera”, pp. 38–9.
 48. Interview with Bi Sharifa Binti Abedi Mpwapwa and Mzee Ally Hassan Mnajilo Mnacho-Ng’au, 20 November 2000. Characteristically, she used to pay labourers to carry her harvest to the coast. It was often the descendants of slave owners who could afford to hire labour.
 49. The figure is mentioned by Sr Hildegund Kleiser, in *Missionsecho*, 17 (June 1938), pp. 112–15.
 50. The topic is addressed again and again in “Rules and orders made by native authorities”: TzNA, Accession 16/1/29, vol. 1, because of its implications for tax collection. See especially Provincial Commissioner, Lindi, to Chief Secretary, Dar es Salaam, 11 October 1929 (p. 71).
 51. This was part of an off-the-record closing statement by Mohamed Athuman Mwindi, interviewed in Mnero-Kitandi, 18 September 2000.
 52. Especially Lindi, Mingoyo and Mnero interviews, 2000.
 53. Interview with Hassan Mang’unyuka, 26 November 1968. Joseph T. Gallagher, “Islam and the Emergence of the Ndendeuli” (Boston University: PhD thesis, 1976), p. 132.
 54. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Goran Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Note, though, that the views and behaviour of Southeast Tanzanians are not in keeping with Hyden’s notion of an “economy of affection” trumping interest in market participation. See below, Chapter 8, for a discussion of villagers’ struggle to access markets.
 55. It also forms a contrast with the sort of behaviour that people tend to expect of Europeans, who are thought to have very short tempers.
 56. Iliffe, *Modern History*, p. 533.
 57. Indications are that other parts of Tanzania were similar. In the late 1970s, an anthropologist among rural Muslims in the hinterland of Tanga summed up the views of his informants by stating that “a man without *viugho* [Shambaa for Swahili *heshima*, English honour, respectability] is said to live selfishly, is prone to insulting behaviour and to sudden bursts of anger or changes in mood ... It is the quality of his manner of dealing with other human beings which primarily gives *viugho* or prevents its acquisition.” See Graham Thompson, “The Merchants and Merchandise of Religious Change. The New Orthodoxies of Religious Belief and Economic Behaviour among the Shambaa People of Mlalo, North East Tanzania” (University of Cambridge: PhD thesis, 1984), pp. 190–1.

58. *Missionsblaetter* 52 (1948), pp. 158–62; interview with Issa Juma Nangalapa, Rwangwa-Dodoma, 13 October 2003.
59. *Missionsblaetter* 34 (1930), p. 274; 39 (1935), p. 137.
60. *Missionsblaetter* 45 (1950), p. 140; Jimbo la Lindi la Kanisa Katoliki, ofisi kuu Lindi, takwimu za parokia za jimbo (statistics of Lindi diocese, Lindi head office, selected years from 1950).
61. This term is taken from Steven Feierman, who states that in pre-colonial Shambaa ritual, “Knowledge was not collective; it was socially composed”. See Steven Feierman, “On Socially Composed Knowledge: Reconstructing a Shambaa Royal Ritual”, in James Gibling and Gregory Maddox (eds), *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), pp. 14–32, here p. 15. The point that social struggles took the form of arguments over the interpretation of commonly held norms is also made by Jonathon Glassman with regard to the coastal towns.

CHAPTER 3

Interrogating “Cosmopolitanism” in an Indian Ocean Setting: Thinking Through Mombasa on the Swahili Coast

KAI KRESSE

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

“Any conception of ‘cosmopolitan society’ ... ought to reflect the historical struggles on which it builds”.¹ This conviction, that Edward Simpson and I formulated when discussing a string of research projects on Islam and cosmopolitanism in the western Indian Ocean, might provide a guideline for this discussion of representative historical narratives of Mombasa, an ancient port town on the East African Swahili coast. As early as 1505, when the Portuguese first conquered and destroyed it, Mombasa was a city with about 10,000 inhabitants and multi-storey stone buildings; it was at the centre of Indian Ocean trade networks exchanging gold and cloth between Sofala and Cambay, and also an important port for ivory and lumber trade. The population consisted largely of Africans, had a notable minority of Indian (Gujarati) traders, and was ruled by “Moors” of Arab and African complexion.² My aim here is to interrogate the historical underpinnings of the town’s seemingly obvious cosmopolitan character. The historical sketches I use are necessarily selective, and the point here is to think through some of Mombasa’s urban features and the historical processes behind them in order to think critically about “cosmopolitanism” more generally. Readers should note that Ibn Battuta’s brief descriptions of fourteenth-century Mombasa,³ Portuguese accounts of the city,⁴ historical dictionaries on Swahili language use,⁵ and biographies of urban residents all provide further entry points for discussion, beyond the scope of this chapter. But let us first turn to some general considerations.

To my mind, cosmopolitanism is not an exclusively urban phenomenon. Even though in pronounced urban contexts we are more likely to encounter cosmopolitan attitudes and ways of living – reflecting an open, receptive and

well-informed perspective on a world that seems interconnected – this does not mean that people in less urban contexts could not become cosmopolitan. This is documented, for example, for rural Anatolia from the late nineteenth century,⁶ or for contemporary northern Pakistan;⁷ in littoral contexts, this also applies to coastal southern Tanzania,⁸ and for the historically developed Hadrami networks spanning the Indian Ocean.⁹ Also, urban experience does not necessarily lead to a cosmopolitan attitude. Georg Simmel's foundational essay in urban sociology, on the "metropolis and mental life",¹⁰ helps to illustrate this. There, Simmel shows how individuals confronted with the constant presence of others develop protective mechanisms in their psychology and social behaviour. These shield them from an over-stimulus of pressures, demands and signs that might otherwise harm their mental balance. Such a fundamental ambivalence, leading to social distance and estrangement among citizens, is often seen as a characteristic experience of Western urbanity and modernity. Living among strangers, without the comfort and orientation that comes with being a member of a social community, individuals develop habits to avoid social interaction and set themselves apart from others – though in fact they are yearning for company. So if the "metropolitan" context does not include a "cosmopolitan" sense of being but offers potential for as well as resistance against "cosmopolitanism", there is little basis for assuming that the social world of human experience becomes more "cosmopolitan" by default or historical progress(ion).

The realisation of cosmopolitanism as a social and intellectual project remains a challenge to people in different contexts and regions around the world. This links us back to Immanuel Kant, who was a major inspiration for Simmel and a leading advocate of cosmopolitanism himself. For Kant, cosmopolitanism, as the vision of a common society of all human beings, is a given task emerging out of the fundamentally ambivalent nature of being human. As Kant put it, human beings taken collectively are "unable to do without peaceful conviviality while at the same time they cannot avoid disliking and despising each other".¹¹ These internal tensions between needs, feelings and obligations lead to the idea of a global unity that is constantly threatened from within. The possibility of its realisation then seems linked to the successful use of strategies of "adaptivity" as the means by which to alter and adjust oneself to changing circumstances of social interaction and possible confrontation. For Kant, humans are truly awkward social beings who are driven by an unsettling "unsociable sociability" (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). From this perspective, the need to be sociable creates a drive to further exposure to more human beings, an increase of social contacts. Once established, these lead to more tensions and antagonisms, and finally a renewed need to re-adjust society from within. Thus we see a kind of progressive circular movement at work, pushed forward by the discrepancy between a moral vision of cosmopolitanism (as a unifying force) and the empirical human diversity. For

society, this means we should expect a continuous process of shifting phases of social approximation, opposition and re-ordering – a picture of ongoing struggles and ever-changing alliances within which individuals find their own pathways.

Interestingly, an ethnography of cosmopolitanism in Jamaica¹² uses Kant and Simmel to retell “modernity” in terms of local experience, bringing into view a largely negative side (or under-belly) of the common Western narrative through the historical experiences of displacement, slavery and colonialism, and their eventual overcoming. These experiences have shaped the larger social sphere of interconnectedness within which Jamaicans now interact. Local consciousness of historical woes and social ties to the wider world underpins distinct performative ways in which this experience is creatively expressed and negotiated in everyday life, for example in music, verbal art, ritual, religion and politics. Wardle’s ethnography shows how Jamaicans have cultivated emphatic and locally peculiar senses of individuality, apocalypse and egalitarianism, and he argues that this represents a more pronounced case of cosmopolitanism than the prototypical “Western” one, for better or for worse.

As we are concerned here with the historical dynamics that constitute cosmopolitanism on the Swahili coast, some of these comparative features may play a role, such as forms of colonial experience and slavery, religion, and different social groups and hierarchies interacting and shifting in their relationships. Recent research in Indian Ocean contexts has claimed that cosmopolitanism may coexist in parallel with “parochialism”,¹³ or with a “resolute localism” of groups whose diasporic networks are organised around a “homeland”. The label “local cosmopolitans” for these people¹⁴ indicates no contradiction, just like “cosmopolitan patriots” for others.¹⁵ These aspects however will not play a major role in the discussion here, nor will the programmatic aspects of “Islamic cosmopolitanism”.¹⁶ What I suggest, in the concluding conceptual reflections below, is that undergoing a certain set of social experiences under particular historical conditions may bring people to cultivate specific ways of dealing with their social world, navigating it more skilfully. In conclusion, I reflect on the relevance of what I have come to see as three interrelated sub-aspects of cosmopolitanism (that we may encounter in Muslim contexts as well as elsewhere). These are – and casting them in German provides better conceptual clarity and visible consistency here, with a view to how the world is perceived, experienced and navigated – *Weltoffenheit*, openness to the world; *Welterfahrung*, significant experience of the world; and finally, *Weltgewandtheit*, the skill of dealing flexibly with the world.

MOMBASA AND THE SWAHILI COAST: “COSMOPOLITAN”?

Mombasa and the port towns of the Swahili coast belong to the kind of social urban environments that invite the adjective “cosmopolitan” – an outlook of openness to others and the world as a whole, building upon experiences and connections that go well beyond the established realms of family, community or nation. Over a millennium of coastal social history including the presence of Islam and trade networks that connect the urban port settlements to places across the western Indian Ocean attest to this. So too does a long established lingua franca that has facilitated communication between groups and individuals of widely different backgrounds. This is Kiswahili, an African language which has integrated a large amount of vocabulary from a variety of linguistically unrelated languages (most prominently Arabic) through long periods of social contact. Finally, interactive connections to relatives and social and religious peers all over the world, whether new or long established, are all factors that play an important role. Thus the Indian Ocean networks established and facilitated through trade, religion, kinship and language are regarded as the pillars on which such assumptions of cosmopolitanism can be built. Indeed, the social and historical features typical of the towns on the Swahili coast – in terms of architecture, the variety of languages heard and the kinds of people seen in the streets – may call for the qualification “cosmopolitan” provides more emphatically than many other places, and we can find the label readily employed in the literature.¹⁷

Yet we have to take care that the use of “cosmopolitanism” does not become superficial or meaningless, nor should it be imposed by the social scientist with a particular heuristic intention or research goal in mind. To represent social dynamics appropriately, the analytic terms used for reflection upon the historical or ethnographic material should emerge from social experience. In this respect, a focus on Swahili urban communities may suggest the use of “cosmopolitanism”, as multiple and extended connections to the world outside obviously shape the inside of their social world. This is well documented in the literature, and below I will recount historical processes of urban reconstruction in which outsiders become members of the social community. As strangers become insiders, insiders may well become cosmopolitans. Indeed, they may become likely to see themselves, and act toward others, with a view to a variety of possibilities and options, including previously foreign perspectives that have been integrated into their own social world. This could be called an attitude of “having a wider world in mind” – which is generally what I would describe as “cosmopolitan”. The aspect of having options is significant here, since we are concerned with a social world that envelops or incorporates others, or at least important aspects of them. Such a plurality for the Swahili context has been emphasised by a

range of scholars, also with a view to Islam and Muslim identity.¹⁸ Loimeier and Seesemann¹⁹ relate this plurality to an emphatically “global” outlook of Muslims in the region, through networks of education, pilgrimage and trade. Using the expression “the global worlds of the Swahili” (in itself not unproblematic in presenting “the Swahili” as a unitary group), they highlight a “cosmopolitan outlook” for this region. Without such a connotation, the term “global world” – coined by Claude Markovits in his historical study of Hindu merchant networks from Sindh to emphasise their all-pervasive presence and effective global networks²⁰ – would seem tautological or redundant.

Here, I want to convey how such an enduring impression of cosmopolitanism in the region has led to Mombasa being shaped by historical processes of outsider integration, in both real and potential terms. Looking at these, I discuss the fundamentally related matters of unity and diversity, in relation to simple and more complex conceptions of “cosmopolitanism”. Hereby, notions of fundamental social “ambivalence” and “adaptivity” internal to the described urban context will become crucial. My reflections seek to take on the social and cultural specifics of the case of Mombasa but also to contribute to more general reflections on cosmopolitanism. I sketch out how a process of “integrating difference” shapes the profile and outlook of an urban community that, with a view to its sustained yet ever-changing internal diversity, can be described as a “community of strangers”.²¹ Through phases of common historical experience on the same social platform – rather than through a glossed-over “shared history” – groups and individuals create and sustain a heightened awareness of internal tensions and ambivalence, in Mombasa and elsewhere. Based on the knowledge of difference, then, this also encompasses the sense of an ever-widening potential of unity – a possible wider world to live in, so to speak. Still, the vision of such a potential draws from the experience of coping with disunity: “If it makes sense to speak generally of ‘Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism’, it is in this sense of social contestation based on a struggle with history that is not so much shared as held in common”.²² This also resonates with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s reflections on cosmopolitanism as an approach to the way that human beings, while living in a “world of strangers” under heightened conditions of globalisation, need to engage and interact with each other.²³

INTRODUCING MOMBASA

With well over half a million inhabitants, Mombasa is Kenya’s second largest city. Having East Africa’s biggest modern port terminal, it is the most important regional entry point for international trade goods. It has a long and chequered history under changing rulers and colonial administrators – the Portuguese, the Omani Arabs, the British – attracting merchants, traders, labourers and

sailors from along the shores of East Africa as well as across the Indian Ocean, integrating newcomers and sheltering refugees. In each case social connections between Mombasa and the wider world were fostered by these processes. The movements of people back and forth, in and out of the city, shaped different historical layers of social networks that were more or less fragile and became more or less rooted with every wave of immigrants and emigrants that were coming to and leaving the town in intervals that were determined by economic cycles, wars or political expansions.

To illustrate the inherent connectedness of local experience in everyday life in Mombasa today, to a diversity of places across the Indian Ocean, let me turn to the street where I lived during a year's fieldwork in the late 1990s. I stayed in the Old Town, in the neighbourhood of Kibokoni, near Fort Jesus, built by the Portuguese in 1593. The people living around me came from a variety of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Most families residing in the neighbourhood had been there for a couple of generations. My flat, rented from a Bohra landlady, was on the first floor of a house, above an Ethiopian restaurant. Next to me, a flat of the same size was occupied by a young Swahili bachelor (and later also his wife). Underneath him was the practice of a medical doctor of South Asian descent. Across the street, a Hadhrami-Arab in his sixties ran a repair shop for electric appliances together with his son, sub-specialising in second-hand fridges. His wife was of part-Arab, part-Indonesian background with most of her family based in Bahrain. Next door to them was a Hindu-Indian ironmonger's shop on the one side, and a couple of private houses on the other. Then came a barbershop run by a Baluchi, completing the string of ground floor shops. On the corner, there was a small bakery run by Somalis. Opposite it, on my side of the road, was a newly opened Swahili restaurant offering popular local dishes for affordable prices, well frequented by the Old Town community.

The shops on the ground floor on the other side of the road included: a small convenience store run by Somalis; a pan-leaf shop where a middle-aged Hindu man with a fancy rockabilly haircut was in charge; a simple gym or fitness studio for men offering weights, boxing and karate classes, from which male voices emanated; a laundry; several more convenience stores; and finally, another Swahili restaurant further down. The street itself was also creatively turned into business space, with Mijikenda women from the coastal hinterlands using the pavements as vending spaces for fruit and, on two other spots on the pavement, a couple of male tailors (one Mijikenda and one from upcountry) with pedal-driven Singer machines were strategically placed; a few more small open food and grocery stalls completed the picture. This was rounded off by a small mosque with some concrete benches in front of it. Around afternoon and evening prayers, groups of men would socialise here in *barazas*, exchanging

their views on local events or discussing the daily news of the world. At home, many had satellite TV and followed global news closely, on CNN, the BBC or Al-Jazeera, in addition to the national channels. For many, the interest in what was going on in other parts of the world had very personal dimensions, as they had relatives and friends living abroad. Indeed, many of my Kibokoni friends and acquaintances had siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles living in North America, Europe or one of the wealthy Gulf States. People in Mombasa, in my experience, were often not only well informed about the world, but also well connected to its economic and political regions of power, through kin and social peers. Also, many of those based in Mombasa at the time had already had long and significant travelling and working experiences abroad.

This scene may well evoke a sense of docile intermingling of diverse people, and of a vivid sociability on the streets of Old Town Mombasa. It may also convey an active interest in the wider world in relation to one's own (by following global news and politics). And it mirrors a sense of inherent connectivity to other regions, from the coastal hinterlands almost in sight to faraway places in upcountry Kenya, on other Indian Ocean littorals and elsewhere. Indeed, without reference to these, urban life here cannot really be understood. This illustrates the need for a translocal research perspective, one that anticipates and includes the many possible ways in which a spatial as well as historical “beyond” (the “trans-”) informs and shapes social action and interaction.²⁴ In Mombasa – as elsewhere around the world – appearances on the surface of social life already refer to such a beyond and thus bring attention to how the town and the wider world are invariably interconnected. From the perspective of social actors, such interconnectivity links us to the theme of “cosmopolitanism” as a conscious sense of being fundamentally connected to, and embedded within, a wider social universe beyond the actual sphere of one's own immediate experiences. Thinking, acting and behaving “with the wider world in mind”, so to speak, constitutes a cosmopolitan attitude for individuals.

Still, the presence of social diversity in a place underpinned by historical layers of comings and goings is not sufficient to qualify “cosmopolitanism” completely. While it is clear that Mombasa and other Swahili port towns in different historical phases cannot be understood without a view to their connectedness to the Indian Ocean and the wider outside world, it does not follow that an all-embracing and unifying “Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism” can easily be assumed due to the presence of social elsewhere in the local here and now. This would be a “lazy” use of cosmopolitanism²⁵ that does not aim to grasp the complex social reality and the historical processes leading to it.

HISTORY OF MOMBASA: INTEGRATING OUTSIDERS

I will now recount a historical sketch of Mombasa's urban social dynamics based on two seminal accounts of the history of Mombasa.²⁶ Over different periods and on different levels, the city's structural demographic process can be described as "integrating outsiders". Elsewhere I have discussed how the label "Swahili" was used as a variable relational term for a range of people in different historical phases, and how a "Swahili context" emerged out of the negotiation vis-à-vis others, such as "African" and "Arab" – but also "Indian".²⁷

With a focus on the Mijikenda hinterland peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Justin Willis introduces a characterisation of the ethnonym "Swahili" as people "of whatever origin, whose personal networks of patronage or clientage were located within the towns, participating in a patronage system based ultimately on access to the credit networks of the Indian Ocean",²⁸ and functioning largely under the mantle of Islam. This usefully incorporates both patrons and clients, which is provocative since it makes the urban patricians (*waungwana*) and their dependants, servants and slaves (*watumwa*) fall into the same general category, as citizens. Wealthy urban traders sought further dependants, since people (in terms of labour) were the ultimate source of status and power.²⁹ Newcomers became Muslims and were integrated into the respective trade and subsistence systems while accepting dependency status.³⁰ There were, however, many levels of dependency, and through success in trade, reward by patron or marriage, upward social mobility was possible. In exceptional cases, people could transform their status from dependant to patrician, from *mtumwa* to *mwungwana*.

According to Frederick Berg,³¹ paradigmatic processes of the integration of related outsiders into the city are clearly documented from the seventeenth century onward, when a particular socio-political structure of the Swahili urban community of Mombasa developed, the so-called "Twelve Tribes" (*Thenashara Taifa*). The "Twelve Tribe" structure of Mombasa developed out of political instability in the neighbouring hinterland regions, causing groups of refugees and migrants to move to Mombasa for shelter and security. An urban core structure of four *taifa* evolved on Mombasa Island, around which five incoming *taifa* from urban environments on the northern coast were grouped, forming the Nine Tribes (*Tisa Taifa*). In complementary movements from the south and west of Mombasa, three *taifa* merged forces on the island by the 1630s, to form the so-called Three Tribes (*Thehatha Taifa*) in their own settlement in the southwest of Mombasa Island. This spatial division marked the long-ongoing rivalry between these two urban moieties. Still, altogether Berg described Mombasa as "an exceptionally successful example of a pre-colonial Swahili city state" because of its readiness to adopt "foreign" Swahili into the urban community.³²

As urban subgroups that originated from elsewhere and later became recognised as authentic insiders, the Twelve Tribes mark historical processes of integration. These could only take place because of a common (or unifying) religion, language and trade interests. The town thus functioned as both centre and guarantor of political power and social interaction.

So far, I have emphasised how the integration of outsiders was crucial to the formation of Mombasa’s urban community, involving aspects of demographic social diversity that created a wider social unity. Nevertheless, despite such integrative features and appearances, the established public ideology of Swahili urban society seemed to be strongly hierarchical and exclusive. Thereby, the sphere of civilisation, *uungwana*, inside the town is juxtaposed to *ushenzi*, the wilderness, outside of it. Characteristics of *uungwana* also include politeness and good manners, with a refined vocabulary and elaborate ways of talking. Being Muslim is part of this conception too and, ideally, being wealthy (through trade). As most of these features are performance-related and can be acquired and developed through practice, there is no categorical division line between citizens, despite the hierarchical character of urban ideology.

Mombasa’s urban subdivisions and rivalries of the colonial period were also reflected in dance societies, such as the *beni* for men³³ and the *lelemama* for women.³⁴ These organisations served as vehicles for the integration of outsiders into urban society, while at the same time they pronounced existent rivalries between groups, mostly associated with town quarters, *mitaa*. As such, they were part of an intermediary Swahili continuum, which was open-ended at the bottom. Somewhat paradoxically, it allowed access to a society characterised by its internal inequality while it was, in principle, open to everyone. While inside this urban continuum everything depended on the negotiation of status, no one was excluded from the outset. Still, the ideology of hierarchy and status in actual social discourse was an important means to conserve the existent hierarchical structure of society. This may be why dependency in terms of serfdom or slavery (*utumwa*), structurally a kind of funnel through which outsiders were integrated into urban society, was ideologically cast as a concrete layer of distinct status. The ambivalence of *utumwa* expresses the inherent tension between open integration and strict subjection to social hierarchy. In practice, both aspects worked and were employed in different ways at the same time. *Utumwa*, a dependency system linked to urban and Indian Ocean trade networks, sustained the patrician class (*waungwana*) through a wide scope of services by labourers and dependants (*watumwa*), but it also posed a potential danger to it from within. Such ambivalence and interdependence has historically been at the core of social relationships in Swahili urban contexts.

Through this historical sketch, we have seen integration processes making incoming migrants members of the inner urban community. Their integration

also increased the scope of social experiences from which Mombasa could draw in the future. The *mitaa* and *taifa* represent a wider political unity, which, however, could never be without tension. Rather, internal differences and antagonisms were part of the unity that was gained, highlighting the ambivalence of urban cosmopolitanism and the processes producing it. Systems and relationships of dependency could also be employed as access points and channels into the urban community, bearing the possibility of transforming one's personal status. Thus the urban scenario, boosted by the multiplicity of sources, resources and experiences underpinning the community, broadened the citizens' outlook on the world. Yet a restrictive and exclusivist urban ideology remained strong, and its proclaimed antagonisms and hierarchies continued to be important reference points.

SOUTH ASIANS IN MOMBASA

Another example demonstrating Mombasa's cosmopolitan potential is that of the South Asian communities. Here I deal with the Badala, Sunni Muslims from Cutch³⁵ who, as a historical group of sailors and shipbuilders, are reported to have integrated well into the Swahili urban community – in contrast to most other South Asians.³⁶ I base my account on Cynthia Salvadori³⁷ who worked closely with members of the communities and provides personal narratives and life histories of Cutchi and Gujarati immigrant families from the mid and late nineteenth century.

Trade connections between the West Indian and East African coasts have existed for many centuries, and a major boost in economic interest for Cutch merchants and traders in East Africa was triggered by Sultan Said's move from Oman to Zanzibar in 1837. This included political and economic control of most of the Swahili ports and opened up many opportunities for traders, suppliers and middlemen, so that the scale of economic activity and the number of people engaged in it reached a whole new dimension. Indian businessmen became the financiers not only of the Sultan's house but also increasingly of Arab and European traders. This continued throughout the British colonial period (beginning in 1895). Indian merchants financed major economic investments, including trade and transport infrastructure; for Mombasa, this meant especially the modern port and the East African railway line. Over time, a remarkable diversity of South Asian residents, with a range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, social status and religious affiliations was developing.³⁸ Among the Muslims, three groups of Shias with origins in Gujarat were especially prominent: the Ismailis, the Shia Ithnasharis and the Daudi Bohras. Other significant groups included former railway workers (mostly Punjabis) who stayed on after completing their contracts. There were also merchants, traders and shop owners of Muslim and Hindu backgrounds, and a number of caste groups who found or

created opportunities matching their professions. According to the accounts, incoming Indian migrants had a good sense about the services needed, and were quick to adapt and contribute, finding their own niche. Often male immigrants would come for a trial period before returning to India (or Zanzibar, or Lamu) to bring their spouses and families back with them. The occupations of Indian groups were very diverse: ironmongers, goldsmiths, launderers (as *dhobis*) and dairy farmers, among others. But probably most prominent and historically significant were the merchants and traders who invested in, and partly organised and conducted, the trade with African interior markets as well as the trade with economic centres and markets across the Indian Ocean, particularly Bombay.³⁹

THE BADALA: INDIAN MUSLIMS BECOMING “SWAHILI”?

The Badala, as sailors, seafarers and ship builders from Cutch-Mandvi, have had important, long-standing relations with Mombasa. As seasonal visitors, incoming citizens (“marrying in”), part-time residents and labour force, they have featured in the urban demography for centuries. They were not typical of the South Asian immigrants of the nineteenth century, as they were neither “newcomers” nor “businessmen” who took advantage of the extended opportunities. Salvadori highlights as characteristic for the Cutchi Sunnis (which include the Badalas) that they associated freely with their Swahili neighbours, conversed in good Kiswahili and blended into the urban community – very unlike many other South Asians. Having come in as “strangers”, they dissipated into and became part of the Swahili social fabric that underlies urban relations.⁴⁰ Indeed, due to their readiness to adapt one can argue that they are the true cosmopolitans out of a diverse range of South Asians in Mombasa. This resonates with observations about Badala–Swahili relations by others⁴¹ and, in hindsight, also with my own.

For instance, I worked with two prominent local Swahili intellectuals who were brothers: a poet and healer, and an Islamic scholar and former politician and publisher. Their paternal grandfather was a Badala captain (*nahodha*) called Juma Bhalo from Cutch who married and (partly) settled in Mombasa in the nineteenth century. Both are among the best-known “Swahili” intellectuals, in terms of knowledge, verbal capacity, habitus and mannerisms. On many different occasions during the months of my fieldwork, I would see them with South Asians who were, as I found out, their direct relatives. A close cousin of theirs is also known by the name “Juma Bhalo” all along the coast as a famous singer of the popular Swahili *taarab* music, which itself has absorbed prominent features of various Arabic and Indian traditions. In fact, the *taarab* known as the prototypical popular “Swahili” music is actually called “Indian *taarab*” among musical experts in Mombasa.⁴² Most interestingly, such Swahili music, drawing

heavily from influences across the ocean, can be qualified in parallel to the way that the singer Juma Bhalo is characterised, as “in some way part Indian” yet at the same time also as “iconically Swahili”.⁴³ Thus on a different level yet along the lines of our discussion above, the Swahili world is again characterised as integrating related perspectives, thereby widening its own scope of experience and potential in a manner that can aptly be described as “cosmopolitan”.

It is hard to imagine a better illustration of the absorption into the wider Swahili community. Under the common mantle of Sunni Islam and under conditions of cohabiting in the neighbourhoods (*mitaa*) of Mombasa’s urban space, close interrelations increased and the sense of community developed accordingly. Within the scope of everyday social interaction, intermarriage and common participation in religious rituals occurred, as well as in artistic forms of cultural creativity (like music). All this contributed to a merging (but not complete blending) of groups under the “Swahili” umbrella. There is no lack of evidence that urban “Swahili contexts” have absorbed people from various other groups over the centuries in similar fashion. Notable examples from “Arab contexts” include the Hadhramis and Omanis; from “African contexts” they include the Mijikenda and incoming labourers from upcountry.⁴⁴ For these cases too, Islam is a basic common denominator on which social integration is founded. We can observe an integration into the Swahili–Sunni–Shafii networks and practices, whether on a common historical basis, as in the case of the Hadhramis, from a very early stage, or through the blurring of differences between Ibadhi and Shafii orientation in the processes of becoming Shafii as in the case of many Omanis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or through conversion to Islam in the first place as was the case with some Mijikenda groups and upcountry Africans. Beyond religion, the ability to communicate fluently in Kiswahili also unites these groups of incoming social agents.

Interestingly, the Badalas and other South Asian Sunnis hardly feature in the research literature on the Swahili coast, while work on the other groups has been more prominent. Perhaps this is because their ability to blend into their Swahili environment has kept them outside the focus of most research conducted so far. In comparison, other South Asian communities are seen to be rather inward-looking and exclusive, keeping to and marrying among themselves. Largely, this applies to the Muslim Shii Ithnasharis, Ismailis or Bohras, but also the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Jains – somewhat reflecting the central relevance of caste and social hierarchy in Indian society back across the ocean. Consisting then, of a string of distinct social and religious groups linked (partly) by shared geographic origin and language, South Asians have overall been seen largely as outsiders in East Africa, despite the longevity of their presence. In Kiswahili this status is captured nicely by the term *wageni*, which means both “foreigners” and “guests”.⁴⁵

INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS AGAINST COMMUNAL PAROCHIALISM: AN EXAMPLE

As an extraordinary example among Mombasa's South Asians, I now discuss the case of a prominent Hindu educationalist, social reformer and political activist known as “P. D. Master”, following the accounts of his children as given by Salvadori.⁴⁶ He was engaged against norms and restrictions that were imposed upon Hindus from within the community, and also against racial bias in colonial politics. His example sheds light on the ongoing power of traditionalism, as well as liberating activities against it, by committed individuals. P. D. Master was born in 1899 in rural Gujarat under the name Purushottandas Dhanjibhai, into the Patel community. His journey to Mombasa began when, aged sixteen, he ran away from home and school to seek a better education in metropolitan Bombay. He enlisted in a school and supported himself as a shoe-shiner. There, he was spotted and then employed by a British army officer, first as a valet during the First World War and later as a private teacher for his children. They called him “Master” as a term of respect, adding this to the abbreviation of his first name (“P. D.”), which their father used to call him, and this became the name by which he was known. P. D. Master accompanied this family to a farm near Jinja in Uganda. Then he left them, heading for Mombasa where he became the clerk and administrator for A. B. Patel, an Indian advocate and well-known political activist. He became involved in campaigns for civil rights and mass education, and helped to build local welfare organisations like the Mombasa Women's Association and the Kenya Theosophical Society. A recognised citizen of Mombasa, well beyond South Asian circles, he was elected to raise the Indian flag during the independence celebrations in Mombasa.

His critical engagement with colonial Kenya is illustrated in a political pamphlet (“Master 1923”), in which he spoke out against colonial racism against Indians and protested against the ruling of the so-called “white highlands”. This had determined that only ethnically “white” people of European origin were allowed to own property in the fertile highland region around Nairobi or live in certain designated urban areas (also in Mombasa), excluding even wealthy Indians who were colonial subjects and had ample financial means. His booklet, like other Indian notes of protest, exposed and rejected a basic racist attitude, not just among the white settlers but also by the London-based colonial administration. This, the South Asians felt strongly, actually went against both the spirit and the letter of the established rules and conventions of the common (and equal) status as “British subject” in a global empire.

In his own community too, P. D. Master was critical and non-conformist, wearing a long beard (against common conventions) as a sign of his “ecumenical” leanings and mediating efforts between different religious and social groups. As it happened, he seemed to push his liberal views too far when he challenged the

traditionalist Hindu prohibition to (re-)marry a widow as unjustifiable. After the death of his first wife, P. D. Master decided to look for a Hindu widow as his next spouse. He travelled to India and publicised his intentions there, despite strong objections from the community and his own parents, who even threatened to shun and disown him. He proceeded, and found a much younger “child widow” whose parents agreed to marriage. They married and settled in Mombasa where they eventually had six children. Yet Mombasa’s Hindu Patel community would not accept this rebellion and turned against him, despite all his previous achievements. Community leaders decided to shun him and his family from community rituals and social interaction.

In retrospect, one of P. D. Master’s children called her father’s activities of social reform “a clash of Global Outlook versus Narrow Views”.⁴⁷ Her father had lived according to his moral convictions that were based on a long educational pathway. He rebelled against the rules governing his own community and paid the price. We may call this a case of individual cosmopolitan conviction struggling against the strong and ultimately prevailing currents of traditionalism and parochialism. This account shows that the emergence of more open-minded perspectives and practices by individuals does not easily lead to wider social agreement and unity. There is no such rule of “progress” in place, toward a more rational or sensitive social world. Similarly, the integration of outsiders into an urban community does not resolve the issue of internal conflict, whether between or inside groups.

CONCLUSION

The Dutch anthropologist A. H. J. Prins⁴⁸ provides some suggestive ideas about the Swahili context as part of a “maritime culture” in general. These are useful to consider when thinking about cosmopolitanism in Mombasa as they also help us reflect upon the integration of the Badalas into their Swahili urban environment in terms other than Islam, highlighting sea-related cultural and occupational dimensions in littoral societies with a view to urban dynamics. According to Prins, a “maritime culture” is characterised by a specific coastal urban context, placed in a wider network of related port towns. It has a range of social contacts and reference points to social “elsewhere” in the (far or near) distance who are also largely oriented towards the ocean.⁴⁹ As the basis of a “maritime ethos”, underlying a corresponding sense of being or attitude to the world by people, Prins sees “adaptivity” to ever-changing circumstances within a scenario of urban “ambivalence” and opposition as an analytic key to the understanding of social behaviour. He links this to a certain flexibility, forbearance and tolerance of the people towards co-citizens, neighbours and kin. He mentions relatively open marriage rules and frequent changes in group affiliations, and he also points at

openness toward strangers, who he says “have always been accepted into society on an equal footing, provided they embraced Islam”.⁵⁰ Prins also refers explicitly to the historical example of Mombasa and its “Nine Tribes” who are presented as “original” groups of the town although they were clearly constituted by fugitive groups seeking shelter in Mombasa, as mentioned above.

Prins develops a conceptual emphasis on “adaptivity”, including openness, tolerance and the integration of strangers as social features of Swahili ports, in response to “ambivalence” as basic social experience. This does not mean that intolerance, prejudice, ethnocentrism and unease towards “outsiders” did not occur – the ethnographic and historical literature attest to these as well. Yet the overarching model of social relations provided pathways, loopholes and justifications to declare someone in whom one had an interest an “insider” – and thus to increase one’s number of affiliates, associates and dependants within the given framework. Even though distinct and exclusive ideologies of urban social hierarchy existed – emphasising difference rather than unity – social practice in the Swahili context historically tended to facilitate the integration of outsiders, or at least maintain it as a possibility. From here, we could argue that “maritime cosmopolitanism” is characterised by the following: the creation of a wider urban unity, through the multiple connectivities that a specific maritime context facilitates, leading to a wider perspective upon the world at large. This also includes the potential of a larger arsenal of experiences, and of responses to social problems that can be drawn from – which again could not be had without the kind and scope of connectivity that “maritimity” provides.

This would lead us to think about cosmopolitanism along the lines of a “resource” (that can be drawn from) and a set of acquired and developed “skills” (that can be employed). If cosmopolitanism could be seen as a kind of resource, this would mean it was a pool of knowledge, ideas and related practices, drawing from experience and a longer period of exposure to the presence of, and interaction with, knowledge, ideas and practices from elsewhere. In social settings like Mombasa, which build on the historical underpinning of the integration of “other worlds” into the common social experience, something like a “widening of horizons” of experience and of knowledge and perspective happens, and this can then be used as a resource to address and tackle challenges posed to the community. In this way, conscious reference to and active use of skills is made – skills originating from a wider world than the immediate social context. Through such reference and use being made, the scope of the actual social world itself is broadened, becoming more of a “global world”. But this does not mean that internal differences are thereby eradicated, diminished or appeased for good (even if this were attempted). The renewed and intensified eruption of social tensions and antagonisms always remains within the scope of possibilities, and part of the challenge.

Overall, the processes of “integrating outsiders”, seen here as central to the discussion of Mombasa, happen through mediatory channels within which the incoming outsiders are already anticipated or identified as a (remote) part of the social world. This is not a process of integrating a (pronounced) “other” or turning aliens into equals. Rather, the social funnels and channels through which outsiders are integrated could draw from an expanded yet blurred field of “potential dependants” and “potential partners”. Due to a certain quantum of previous contact, however limited or indirect, these are not aliens but “related strangers” who, while outsiders, are already somewhat familiarised (at least partly) with the community they have come to join – comparable perhaps to distant relatives.

For the conception of cosmopolitanism in Mombasa, we could perhaps say that in terms of social dynamics urban society here seems always “ready”, on the lookout, for newcomers. It has cast a net toward the outside world, half invitation, half bait, to attract potential contributors from within a kind of cultural corridor that is “facing both ways”,⁵¹ looking seawards and towards the hinterland. This corridor is marked by a sphere of influence made up of the towns and individual merchants or traders, as well as by political, military or religious bodies that create (and hold together) networks of partners, members, dependants and followers. Thus we could speak of a historical process of “being in touch” with an urban network that precedes and gradually turns into one of becoming integrated or linked into. From an internal perspective we could speak of a consciousness and anticipation (even if loose or vague) about a wider social world beyond the one that is immediately visible and to be experienced. In this sense, then, urbanites on the Swahili coast (and in many places elsewhere) are “living with a wider world in mind”. If appropriate, this may be a suitable characterisation of cosmopolitanism more generally.

I have focused here on conveying a picture of the ways in which historical urban dynamics that underpin and envelop the social action of individuals were themselves shaped and transformed, in relation to and in interaction with the (nearer and wider) world outside the town. Here it seemed important that the divisions between town and related hinterlands (or other towns) were not drawn clearly, so that interaction with, and integration of, outsiders could remain potential steps and stages of the same process of recruiting further citizens. Through this process, the standing, scope, outlook and sphere of influence of the town would be boosted while for individual actors (in different historical contexts and with changing needs) promises and rewards of security, prosperity and liberty could be sought and (sometimes) realised. At the junctions described here, we have seen that certain intersecting aspects matter particularly in marking or shaping cosmopolitanism. Due to an emphasis on the historical social processes here, an

initial openness toward the wider social world was particularly prominent in this discussion, in connection to the ways in which forms and cases of interaction between town and outside world work, creating a large pool of experience that can be drawn from as a resource for the future.

To my mind, these two, firstly an openness to the world (in German: *Weltoffenheit*), opening up and leading to secondly, a pool of experience of the world (*Welterfahrung*), characterise two out of three core instances of an overall conception of cosmopolitanism. The third and perhaps most relevant one is well summed up in the German word *Weltgewandtheit* – what in English we could call the “skill to navigate the world”, based on one’s previous knowledge and experience.⁵² Literally, this means something like one’s flexibility to move in the world and deal with it. If this is what really marks cosmopolitanism in instances of concrete and observable social action, this had to be neglected here as we were concerned mostly with the historical struggles and social contexts underpinning, framing and enveloping it. Having here explored and interrogated the kinds of *Weltoffenheit* and *Welterfahrung* that characterise cosmopolitanism in Mombasa, we could, in a next step, investigate *Weltgewandtheit* because we now know how it is framed. This would mean determining, documenting and discussing how the *skills* acquired within such a framework, based on particular sets of experiences, are employed and made to work in specific cases by individuals.⁵² What I have tried to do here is to clarify the perspective on some of the internal features, instances and processes that mark Mombasa, in its setting on the Swahili coast, as “cosmopolitan”.⁵³ As we have seen, Islam here was an important factor helping to link “town” and “outside world”, and to act as the social glue that holds diverse citizens together – but it was by no means an exclusive determinant aspect.

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NOTES

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37. Cynthia Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows* (Nairobi, 1996), vol. 1 and Salvadori, *Through Open Doors*.
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 39. See also Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and Jeremy Presthold, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
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 45. Still, the Ismailis have been engaged in many social and educational activities, funding schools, kindergartens, other educational projects and also hospitals, dispensaries and medical projects all over East Africa. Also, Shii Ithnashari activities of Islamic missionary work among African peoples have been successful over the last decades, thus breaking up the previous unity of descent and Ithnashari denomination.
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 50. Ibid., p. 269.
 51. David Parkin, “Being and Selfhood among Intermediary Swahili”, pp. 247–60.
 52. See Simpson and Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History*, p. 15.
 53. I have recently sketched out some instances of this for the contemporary setting of coastal Muslims in Mombasa, albeit without explicit reference to “cosmopolitanism” (Kresse, 2009).

CHAPTER 4

*Translators of Empire: Colonial Cosmopolitanism, Ottoman Bureaucrats and the Struggle over the Governance of Yemen, 1898–1914**

THOMAS KUEHN

During the long nineteenth century, imperial administrators around the world were acutely aware that theirs was a time of heightened competition among different empires for control over resources and strategic positions. Increasing competition prompted British, Dutch, French, Ottoman and Russian policymakers to observe more closely the governmental techniques of other empire-states and made them more willing to learn from these techniques with a view to governing their own subjects more effectively and to better fending off the encroachments of their rivals.¹ From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the gathering and transmission of this imperial knowledge was greatly facilitated by the expansion of new forms of transport and communication, such as railroads, steamships and the telegraph that allowed people and ideas to move with unprecedented speed. The term “colonial cosmopolitanism”, I suggest, captures well this awareness of living in a world of competing empires and the sharing and adaptation of techniques of governing colonial subjects across imperial frontiers. While historians have studied instances of colonial cosmopolitanism in the context of Tsarist Russia and the overseas empires of Britain, France and the Netherlands, this phenomenon remains virtually unexplored with regard to the Ottoman Empire.² This chapter is concerned with one particular instance of Ottoman colonial cosmopolitanism. Specifically, I explore how Ottoman policymakers debated and sought to learn from British practices of colonial governance in order to maintain their rule in Yemen, one of the most notorious trouble spots of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. While it has been suggested that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Ottoman Empire functioned increasingly like a nation-state,³ Ottoman attempts to learn from European techniques of colonial rule for the purpose of

governing Yemen demonstrate that administrators at one level still thought and acted very much as rulers of a differentiated empire-state.

As historians have recognised for some time, Ottoman policymakers during the period under study were all too aware that they were living in a period marked by the global territorial and economic expansion of European imperial powers, especially Britain, France and Russia. Indeed, accounts of late Ottoman history regularly make the point that Ottoman efforts at military, administrative and fiscal reforms from the reign of Selīm III (1789–1808) onward were in part undertaken with the express intention of making the empire more resilient against these encroachments of its European competitors into the Ottoman lands.

In this context, the importance of European expertise for these reform efforts has often been emphasised: Ottoman reformers, so the argument attests, saw European, and particularly French, state institutions and practices as the keys to European success. Hence the need, to (re)build the Ottoman military, the empire's administrative structures as well as its judiciary along European lines.⁴ Overall, the historiography of Ottoman reform during the long nineteenth century is largely based on the assumption that Ottoman policymakers sought to learn from the institutions and practices of European *metropolitan* states, most notably France and Britain, with the ultimate goal of transforming the Ottoman Empire into a modern, unitary (nation)state under the banner of Ottomanism, a form of imperial patriotism. This perspective is in part informed by the idea that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Middle East history was – at one level – marked by the transition from empire to nation-state. Eugene Rogan and Erik Jan Zürcher among others have shown that many of the institutions and practices that were crucial for the creation of post-Ottoman nation-states, such as the Kingdom of Jordan and the Republic of Turkey, were forged during the late Ottoman period.⁵ These studies look at the late Ottoman Empire from a post-imperial vantage point and cast the Ottomans as the precursors of post-Ottoman state-builders without asking what was actually imperial about the late Ottoman Empire. An exception to this approach is an article by Selim Deringil that argues that Ottoman rule over the empire's Arab provinces during the reign of 'Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) and the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18) was characterised by what he terms a “borrowed colonialism”.⁶ While innovative in its attempt to explore Ottoman governance within the larger world historical context of nineteenth-century colonial rule, the article remains unclear as to what exactly Ottoman administrators borrowed from European colonial rulers and how this borrowing actually worked.

In this chapter, I suggest a different perspective by arguing that Ottoman soldiers and administrators debated and sought to learn from the practices of British *colonial* rule, and especially their ways of governing “backward” peoples,

with a view to better running what was still a large, spread-out and differentiated empire. I focus on Ottoman Yemen because the southwest of the Arabian Peninsula was the frontier region of the empire where the Ottomans perhaps came most closely into contact with manifestations of British colonialism. More important still, the question of to what extent these forms of colonial rule might serve as models for Ottoman provincial governance was most vigorously debated with reference to Yemen: from the turn of the twentieth century the Ottoman central government faced the increasingly determined opposition of the Zaydī imams and of the 'Asīrī Sufi leader Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī along with the rapidly spiralling human and financial costs of major counter-insurgency operations. By contrast, especially British colonial rule in the neighbouring Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Aden or India seemed to be successful at ensuring effective control over these areas at relatively low cost.

At the same time, I demonstrate that Ottoman administrators were not actually interested in adopting those forms of British colonial governance that ensured the mastery of the colonised through their exclusion and institutionalised discrimination. Rather, the aspect of British colonial rule that policy-makers in Istanbul and Yemen found most attractive was the practice of ruling particular areas indirectly through the devolution of power to local leaders. I argue that in pointing at the effectiveness of this particular form of colonial rule Ottoman officials sought to rehabilitate in government circles the practice of institutionalised autonomy for local leaders – a form of governance that had served the Ottomans well for centuries but that since the period of the *Tanzīmāt* (1839–76) and particularly since the rise to power of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihād ve Terakki Cem'iyeti*) from 1908 onward had become associated with territorial fragmentation and imperial decline. As we shall see, these ideas did not remain on paper but informed the Da‘ān agreement of October 1911, which introduced a significant measure of autonomy into the governance of the highland region of Ottoman Yemen on the eve of the First World War. The agreement, which brought to an end more than two decades of fierce conflict between Imam Yaḥyā and his predecessors on one side and the Ottoman central government on the other, was certainly inspired by forms of British indirect rule but it owed more to the long-standing Ottoman practice of devolving power to the leaders of religious communities.

BACKGROUND: OTTOMAN AND EUROPEAN IMPERIAL COMPETITION IN THE RED SEA AND THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGIONS

Twice, from 1538 to 1636 and from 1849/72 to 1918, the Ottomans succeeded in extending their rule over large parts of present-day Yemen. Both periods of Ottoman rule in southwest Arabia were intimately connected with the larger

context of inter-imperial competition that pitted the Ottomans against their rivals in the Red Sea region and the western Indian Ocean, be it the Portuguese in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries or the British and Italians two hundred years later. In 1516–17, the Ottomans conquered the Bilād al-Shām and Egypt, destroyed the Mamluk sultanate that had ruled this region for close to three hundred years and replaced the Mamluks as protectors of the holy sites of Islam at Mecca and Medina in the Hijaz. For the Ottoman ruling elite, Yemen now assumed a crucial role as an imperial line of defence against Portuguese incursions. Until the end of the Ottoman Empire, control of the Hijaz and the protection of the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca (ḥajj) would remain central elements of the Ottoman dynasty's claim to legitimacy.⁷ The first period of Ottoman rule in Yemen was brought to an end not by the Portuguese, but by the Qāsīmī line of Zaydī imams who forced the Ottomans to abandon their province in southwest Arabia in 1636.

It was primarily concern about British expansion from India into the Red Sea region and the Arabian Peninsula that prompted the Ottoman central government to reassert its sovereignty over southwest Arabia more than two hundred years later. As during the sixteenth century, Yemen was again perceived as a buffer to prevent other imperial powers from occupying the holy sites of Islam at Mecca and Medina. Initially, during the 1830s, the central government attempted to regain control of their former possession with the help of Meḥmed 'Alī Paşa, the governor-general (*vālī*) of Egypt. This, however, proved ultimately unsuccessful and led Britain to occupy the port of Aden in 1839. In response, Ottoman military forces established a foothold in the Tihāmah in 1849, but suffered a severe defeat in their attempt to occupy Şan'a'. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the military setbacks suffered at the hands of the ruler of 'Asīr, Muḥammad b. 'Ā'id, in 1870–1, made the spectre of British expansion appear much more tangible to Ottoman policymakers who now considered Ottoman control of both Yemen's coastal region and the highlands necessary to deter Britain from expanding north towards the Hijaz. In the spring of 1872, military forces dispatched from Istanbul moved beyond Ottoman strongholds in the Tihāmah. By early 1873, they had re-conquered large parts of Yemen's northern and southern highlands. The years 1872–3 marked a turning point in the history of Ottoman Yemen. They featured the arrival of a new order with the disempowerment of the most prominent lords in the highland region and the incorporation of the re-conquered territories into the new and more centralised Ottoman provincial system that had been fashioned in the context of the *Tanzīmāt*. Most prominent in this connection were a clearly defined hierarchy of administrative sub-divisions (province, sub-province, district and sub-district) as stipulated in the law of provincial administration of 1871, an administrative council at each level of provincial government as well as a municipality in

the new provincial capital Ṣan‘ā’. The ideological outlook of the conquerors was also new: they now represented their actions as a mission to “civilise” and “uplift” a “backward” local population.

Yet, especially in the northern highlands, local opposition to the imposition of more direct rule remained widespread and partly rallied around successive Zaydī imams. As a result, more intrusive forms of Tanzīmāt-style governance, such as cadastral surveys, censuses and conscription were never implemented in Ottoman Yemen. For the next three decades, Ottoman administrators would attempt to control southwest Arabia by adapting governmental practices to what they considered the “manners and customs” (*‘adāt ve emzice*) of the local population.

To an important degree, Ottoman rule rested on the ability to concentrate military power against armed resistance and to co-opt significant portions of the local elite. While many jurists (*‘ulamā’*) and descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (*sāda*) were absorbed into provincial officialdom as low-to-medium level judges and administrators, the lesser local lords (usually referred to as *mashāyikh*) became indispensable to the functioning of revenue collection. For their own personal gain, they often colluded with officials from outside the province in overtaxing the local people. Overall, the province of Yemen remained far less integrated into the structures of the Ottoman Empire than most of Ottoman Syria and Anatolia.⁸

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the Zaydī imams al-Mutawakkil Muḥsin (d. 1879) and al-Hādī Sharaf al-Dīn b. Muḥammad (d. 1890) were largely unsuccessful in their attempts to project their power beyond the unoccupied parts of the Yemeni highlands. However, the increasing availability of modern firearms from the 1880s, severe droughts and fiscal pressure, especially on the people in the northern part of Ottoman Yemen, partly explain why in 1891–2, 1898–9, 1904–7 and 1910–11 the imam al-Manṣūr bi’llāh Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (d. 1904) and his son and successor al-Mutawakkil ‘alā ‘l-‘llāh Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad (d. 1948) succeeded in carrying their insurgencies deep into the province of Yemen.

In terms of its impact on Ottoman governance in this part of the empire, the uprising of 1904–7, and especially two events during the year 1905, were of particular significance. In April 1905, the fighters of Imam Yaḥyā temporarily captured the provincial capital Ṣan‘ā’ and forced the Ottoman central government to evacuate administrators, military personnel and their families to the coastal region of Yemen. After the reoccupation of Ṣan‘ā’ by the Ottoman military in the autumn of the same year, a large expeditionary force under Field Marshal Aḥmed Feyzī Paşa suffered a crushing defeat near the imam’s stronghold at Shahāra in the unoccupied part of the northern highlands. These military debacles brought Ottoman rule in Yemen to the brink of collapse and prompted

an unprecedented debate about the governance of this province among Ottoman imperial administrators in Şan'ā' and Istanbul. Why, these bureaucrats asked, had the Ottoman central government been unable to establish full control over southwest Arabia during the thirty years since the creation of the province of Yemen in the early 1870s? Why had armed opposition under the leadership of the Zaydī imams become more and more effective despite the increasing scale and length of counter-insurgency operations? These debates intensified from the summer of 1908 when the Young Turk Revolution forced 'Abdülhamīd II to reinstate the Ottoman constitution of 1876 that had been suspended since 1878. The junior bureaucrats and military officers who led the revolution were driven by a keen sense of urgency to wrestle control of the state from the sultan whose incompetent leadership, so their argument went, had furthered the fragmentation of the empire. It was in keeping with their objective to put the Ottoman state on a more secure footing that the precarious state of the Ottoman position in Yemen was among the issues they sought to address. Moreover, with the end of the sultan's autocratic regime and the lifting of censorship, the debate about the nature of Ottoman rule in Yemen entered the floor of the newly elected parliament and the pages of the now uncensored press. The magnitude of Ottoman military defeats in 1905 and the demise of the Hamidian regime prompted commentators both inside and outside government circles to be bolder in their attempts to devise policies that would stabilise Ottoman rule over the empire's southernmost province. It was in this connection that some of them looked towards forms of British, French and Italian colonial rule in India, the Red Sea region and North Africa.

READING COLONIAL RULE THROUGH AN OTTOMAN LENS

There is evidence that even before the revolution of 1908, elements of British colonial governance were on the minds of those policymakers in Şan'ā' and Istanbul who sought to find a solution to the "Yemen question". Throughout the reign of 'Abdülhamīd II, Ottoman bureaucrats appear to have been keen observers of the ways in which Britain – and other European powers – governed their colonial dependencies.⁹ In the early 1880s, governors-general Muştafā 'Āşım Paşa and İsmā'īl Hakkī Paşa had forms of indirect rule in British India and the Indian army in mind when they proposed to rule parts of Ottoman Yemen through local leaders and created a locally recruited auxiliary force, the 'Asākir-i Hāmīdīye (literally, the Hamidian soldiers), respectively. However, it is only from the turn of the century that top-level administrators in Yemen and the imperial capital seem to have taken a greater interest in elements of British colonial governance for the purpose of running the empire's southernmost province. In an undated draft memorandum, probably drawn up during or after

the completion of a stint in Yemen as a member of a commission of inspection in 1906–7, the official ‘Alī Emīrī thought the British policy of paying stipends to the protected chiefs in the Aden hinterland partly applicable to Ottoman Yemen.¹⁰ Similarly, in a dispatch to the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, Britain’s ambassador to Istanbul, Sir Nicholas O’Conor, noted on 27 June 1907 that the example of British rule in the Aden hinterland had been referred to during a meeting of the council of ministers ten days earlier in connection with a discussion of an autonomy scheme for the province of Yemen.¹¹ Apparently, the council had discussed the report of a special commission on Yemen that proposed

... a certain measure of self-government, setting forth that, in order to flatter the native Sheikhs and to satisfy their ambition, it would be well to choose the Kaimakams and Mutessarifs from among their number instead of sending Turkish [sic] officials from Constantinople, the post of Vali being alone retained for a Turk [sic] ...¹²

There are several reasons for the increased interest at this stage. First, the British, French and Italian conquests of the Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea during the 1880s and late 1890s meant that the province of Yemen was the frontier where the Ottomans came most directly into contact with various forms of European colonial rule. In this context, the southern portion of Lower Yemen, where Ottoman and British-Indian officials sought to demarcate their spheres of influence during the early 1900s, was not the only site for imperial encounters. For instance, traveling to and from Yemen by steamer provided Ottoman officials with opportunities to meet British and Italian soldiers, administrators and businessmen onboard ship and “talk shop”.¹³ Stopovers in colonial port cities such as Port Sudan, Massawa and Aden allowed them to experience some of the most important physical manifestations of European colonialism in the southern Red Sea region.¹⁴ More broadly, the very fact that Yemen was part of a region where different colonial powers – and forms of colonial governance – met and competed for influence may have contributed to raising the awareness of Ottoman bureaucrats of the ways in which these powers governed “uncivilised” peoples. This appears to have been the case particularly from the early 1900s, when the Ottoman government faced increasingly stiff opposition from the Zaydī imams while European colonialism in other parts of the Red Sea region and in British India appeared to be successful – despite the defeats that the Italians had suffered at the hands of Ethiopian troops in 1895–6.¹⁵

While Brigadier-General Rüşdī Paşa in his book *Yemen hâtrası* (“Memoirs of Yemen”) did not explicitly advocate the staffing of the key posts of the provincial administration with local shaykhs, or the paying of stipends, he nevertheless

urged the government to apply to the province of Yemen a mode of ruling through these leaders similar to what the British practiced in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and in the hinterland of Aden.¹⁶ Moreover, he recommended the adoption of two other central elements of British governance in the Sudan, namely the retention of local forms of administering justice and the large-scale recruitment of the provincial security forces among local volunteers.¹⁷ Thus, Rüşdî suggested that European colonial powers and particularly Britain were successful mainly because they effectively used their knowledge of the mechanisms of local societies to “manage” the latter in a way that made their rule acceptable.

‘Abdülganî Senî, who served in Yemen as *vilâyet mektûbcısı* (head of the governor-general’s chancery), elaborated on this point much more carefully in a series of articles that he published in the Istanbul-based journal *Mülkiye*. In contrast to Rüşdî and the above-mentioned officials, the *vilâyet mektûbcısı* was less interested in highlighting particular practices of British colonial governance that could be implemented in Ottoman Yemen and, in fact, strongly cautioned against simply copying elements of British or French administration in India and Algeria, respectively.¹⁸ Rather, his main focus was on exploring their underlying principles. For instance, he argued that the key to the success of the British in building and maintaining their rule over such a vast empire was primarily their ability to adapt their governmental practices to the civilisational levels of the various peoples in different imperial dependencies. In other words, the British always governed according to the “customs and dispositions” of the local peoples. As a result, ‘Abdülganî claimed, no territory within the British Empire was governed alike – this was true for Scotland, as well as for Australia, Canada, the Cape Colony or India.¹⁹ Therefore, by applying this principle to the different parts of the Ottoman Empire, the *vilâyet mektûbcısı* meant that areas like Albania (Arnavutluk) or the provinces on the Arabian Peninsula (‘Arabistân) could not be ruled like Anatolia or other areas. At the same time, however, he was careful to insist that only Tripolitania and Yemen should actually be ruled as colonies.²⁰ Making this administrative distinction between these two provinces and other *vilâyets* was imperative, he argued, because of the “customs and disposition” of its inhabitants (*bunların kendilerine mahşuş ... tabâyi’ ve me’lûfâtı*) and “their separation and distance from the centre” (*merkezden ayrılıkları, ba’dîyetleri hasebiyle*).²¹ While ‘Abdülganî did not elaborate on the case of Tripolitania, it is clear from some of his other writings that, in his view, the population of Ottoman Yemen still occupied a far lower stage in the hierarchy of civilisations than the people in other parts of the empire.²² The *vilâyet mektûbcısı* subscribed to the idea of a civilising mission in Yemen, but, unlike the authors of previous memoranda and articles on Ottoman Yemen, he wanted to formalise the perceived cultural hierarchy between the locals and the officials outside the province by placing the province under a special administrative regime. That is,

for ‘Abdülğanī, the term “colony” implied – to borrow Thomas Metcalf’s words – a “demarcation of spaces meant to separate” the local population from the more “developed” people in provinces such as Syria or Bursa.²³ At the top of a future colonial administration in Ottoman Yemen, ‘Abdülğanī envisaged a governor-general with decision-making powers considerably more extensive than those of an ordinary *vālī*. In his work he would be assisted by a provincial assembly.²⁴ While Rüşdī Paşa did not recommend that Yemen be formally declared a colony, he emphasised that certain administrative techniques used by European colonial powers should be adopted for the purpose of governing “exceptional” (*müstesnā*) parts of the Ottoman Empire, such as Yemen.²⁵

The perspectives of ‘Abdülğanī or Rüşdī on Yemen were generally in tune with the efforts of modern bureaucrats of this period to categorise, manage and, ultimately, reform social groups that were perceived as “deviant” from those who espoused, by and large, what Selim Deringil has called “the values of the centre”. This approach was also reflected in the creation of the “school for tribes” (*aşiret mektebi*) in Istanbul in 1892. The brigadier-general and the *vilāyet mektübçüsü* applied this logic to an entire province and its population. In this sense, Rüşdī’s argument that Yemen was an “exceptional” part of the empire that could only be controlled through techniques from the context of European colonial governance and ‘Abdülğanī’s idea of creating a colony of Yemen were only slightly different expressions of the same notion. In the particular case of Yemen, the group that needed to be categorised and thus designated as a “case” or an “issue” to be dealt with by the modern state were not dispersed, as it were, throughout the empire. Rather, they were concentrated in a particular area, which could, therefore, be separated by the institution of a specific administrative regime labelled as “colonial”. These bureaucrats thus proposed to carve out a separate space for the “uncivilised” within the larger space of the Ottoman imperial system. In short, for Rüşdī and ‘Abdülğanī, colonialism in the Ottoman context meant the territorialisation of savagery.

It is noteworthy that some of the high-ranking soldiers and administrators who were involved in hammering out an autonomy agreement with Imam Yaḥyā during the years after 1908 looked toward forms of European colonial rule for models of how to integrate the Zaydī leader successfully into the political and administrative structures of the empire’s southernmost province. Like Rüşdī Paşa, these policymakers favoured a solution that centred on the devolution of power to local leaders, not, as ‘Abdülğanī had proposed, on a powerful governor-general. On 29 March 1909 the members of an interdepartmental commission on Yemen introduced their recommendations for a settlement that would give Imam Yaḥyā a substantial measure of control over tax collection and judicial affairs in the Zaydī parts of the province, with the remark that they had taken into consideration the principles and rules (*uşul ve kıvā'id*) that some states

adopted in connection with the administration of their colonies.²⁶ Three months later, Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, the chief of the general staff and a member of the commission who played a key role in the negotiation of the Da'ān agreement during the summer and autumn of 1911, specifically pointed out that the form of indirect rule that the British exercised over the princely states of India and the local leaders in the hinterland of Aden provided a model of governance that could be adapted to the conditions of Ottoman Yemen for the purpose of ensuring government control over this province.²⁷ The paşa proposed a reform plan whereby the portion of the province with a Zaydī majority population would be governed by Imam Yaḥyā. At the same time, a high ranking Ottoman administrator would reside in Şan'a', Ottoman garrisons would be stationed both in Şan'a' and along the strategically important road between the provincial capital and the district of Jabal Ḥarāz, and the construction of roads and bridges was not to be obstructed.²⁸ These measures were meant to ensure that the imam would receive a significant degree of autonomy but not de facto independence. For those parts of Ottoman Yemen that would not fall under the autonomy agreement with the imam, Aḥmed 'İzze Paşa proposed to organise the local tribes according to their size into districts and sub-districts and to appoint their leaders governors of these new administrative sub-divisions. Crucially, the chief of the general staff wanted to tie the shaykhs to their respective tribes and did not envision postings around the province or careers in provincial officialdom for them. These leaders, he insisted, should never be rotated to administer tribes other than their own. By the same token, *kāymaḳām* positions in the larger cities and the governorships for the sub-provinces (*mutaşarrıflar*) should be filled with civil administrators and military officers, presumably from out of the province.²⁹

In making elements of European colonial governance the principal point of reference for the restructuring of the provincial government in Ottoman Yemen, Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, 'Abdülganī Senī and Rüşdī Paşa also contributed to a larger Ottoman debate about governance more generally. Ottoman bureaucrats and members of various oppositional groups had been discussing the issue of how much administrative centralisation or decentralisation was necessary to ensure the empire's survival since before the restoration of the constitution in July 1908. One of the most prominent advocates of administrative decentralisation was Şabāḥaddīn Bey, a nephew of 'Abdülḥamīd II and a leading member of the opposition in exile before 1908.³⁰ As we shall see, the leaders of the CUP, by contrast, strongly opposed forms of decentralisation – including governors-general with extraordinary powers or regional autonomy – and insisted on “the extension of central authority to the widest extent possible and the standardization of administrative and fiscal practices.”³¹ On 4 September 1908, for instance, Ḥüseyn Cāhid [Yağın], the editor of the Istanbul-based daily *Ṭanīn*, wrote,

If our remote provinces that have not yet attained an advanced stage in their political lives were to be administered on the basis of decentralization, and a kind of autonomous administration evolves in these areas . . . the result will be lawlessness.³²

It is possible that for CUP leaders – as for ‘Abdülhamîd II – the terms decentralisation and autonomy also conjured up Meĥmed ‘Alî Paĥa’s rise to power in Egypt, or the cases of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, Samos, Crete or Mount Lebanon, where European powers had pressured the Ottoman central government into accepting measures of local autonomy that either severely limited the latter’s authority on the ground or created the polite fiction of Ottoman sovereignty over *de facto* independent territories. In other words, for these observers, local autonomy was associated with a hundred years of political fragmentation, territorial contraction and European dominance, and was thus tainted as a political concept. Referring to forms of autonomy and devolution of power in the British Empire as possible models for governing Yemen was therefore an attempt to rehabilitate these concepts in the context of Ottoman imperial governance and to “re-brand” something that stood for imperial decline into something associated with the modern, scientific and cost-effective management of large, spread-out and highly differentiated imperial domains. Neither ‘Abdülġanî Senî nor Rüşd or Aĥmed ‘İzzet Paĥa discussed British colonial governance in the Sudan, Aden or India in any particular detail. For instance, none of them made reference to the residency system that was at the core of British indirect rule over the princely states of India even though Ottoman observers were clearly aware of it. What these officials found attractive about British colonial governance was thus the idea that devolution of power could serve as a means to stabilise and firmly establish imperial rule rather than any particular administrative arrangements. In other words, the British experience demonstrated that governing according to the “customs and dispositions” of the local people could be a successful way to build an empire and not to undermine its foundations. Indeed, both ‘Abdülġanî and Aĥmed ‘İzzet Paĥa suggested that the forms of governance they proposed would create the conditions on the ground that would allow the central government to properly exploit the natural resources of the province, especially in the fields of agriculture and mining. By the same token, the refashioning of provincial governance would be the first step toward integrating Ottoman Yemen more firmly into the empire: the devolution of power to local elites was to be accompanied by an expansion of state education at the local level and the creation of a provincial assembly. Over time, both officials argued, a more educated population and the integration of non-elite Yemenis into provincial policymaking would undermine the power of the old elites.

However, European colonial practices were not the only point of reference for those who wanted to advocate a greater devolution of power to local elites in Yemen. Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa pointed out that forms of self-government were actually very common in many provinces that were – these practices notwithstanding – integral parts of the Ottoman Empire. Among the examples he listed were the Hijaz, Najd and certain districts in the province of Basra and the Bilād al-Shām. Already, in his 1905 proposal for a sectarian order meant to contain and control Yemen's Zaydī community by appointing a representative of the government's choosing over them, the minister of the interior, Memdūh Paşa, invoked the Ottoman practice of devolving degrees of autonomy to religious communities, a practice which, in various forms, had been a standard feature of Ottoman imperial rule for several centuries.³³ And in February 1912, he suggested that there were other Ottoman precedents for the devolution of power to provincial leaders in Yemen, namely the rights (*hukūk*) and special privileges (*imtiyāzāt*) that Sultan Selīm I (r. 1512–20) had granted to local elites in Egypt and Kurdistan.³⁴ In referring to these particular examples these officials implied that there (had) existed forms of autonomy in the Ottoman Empire that did not stand for territorial contraction. Drawing attention to these Ottoman examples of autonomy was important because some observers viewed European colonial rule with skepticism. In their writings, Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa and Abdülḡani Senī emphasised that even though Algeria was a colony of France, it was no less a part of France than those territories that constituted the French metropole.³⁵ In so doing, they addressed the concern that declaring Yemen a colony and granting this province a certain degree of autonomy would compromise the unity and cohesion of the Ottoman “fatherland” because these measures implied forms of imperial ties that were somewhat loose and demarcated a political space that was not quite an integral part of the Ottoman lands. Thus, there appears to have been a concern among Ottoman officials that declaring Yemen a colony would undermine central elements of the Ottoman politics of legitimacy, not only in Yemen, but also in the empire's Arab provinces more generally.

The work of the Yemen commission produced an autonomy plan that Grand Vizier Hüseyn Hilmī Paşa presented to the Ottoman parliament in the spring and summer of 1909. It adopted the central idea of the commission: Imam Yaḥyā was to be governor-general of a new province that would consist of the highland districts of Ottoman Yemen with a Zaydī majority population. Except for a garrison in Şan'ā', Ottoman military forces were to be withdrawn from this province. Despite Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa's efforts to make a case for the grand vizier's plan, Ottoman MPs were not impressed. To them the proposal must have looked like a thinly disguised Ottoman withdrawal from highland Yemen. The role that the autonomy plan accorded to the imam probably reminded them of the positions of de facto independent rulers that the Khedive of Egypt or the

Prince of Bulgaria had held for many decades in the Ottoman Empire. Critics of the plan were also concerned that autonomy for a portion of Yemen would embolden Arab nationalists in other Arab provinces of the empire. Similarly, Maḥmūd Nedīm Bey, one of the senior administrators with most experience in Yemen and later the last *vālī* of the province, argued that making the imam the autonomous ruler of the highland portion of Ottoman Yemen would invite encroachments of the British from their sphere of influence in the hinterland of Aden.

Imam Yaḥyā in turn rejected Hüseynin Hilmī Paşa's plan mainly because he wanted autonomy for a greater portion of the highlands. It was only after yet another uprising led by the imam in late 1910 and early 1911, in which neither the central government nor Yaḥyā were able to win a decisive victory over their opponents, that negotiations resumed between the two sides. These led eventually to the conclusion of the Daʿān agreement on 20 October 1911. In the agreement, the central government accepted key demands of Imam Yaḥyā, but it did not make him the autonomous ruler over the Zaydī parts of Ottoman Yemen. Rather, the province of Yemen remained intact and under the authority of a governor-general from outside the region. However, an imamic-Ottoman condominium was created over the sub-province (*sancaḳ*) of Şan'ā' and those districts of the *sancaḳ* of Ta'izz where Zaydīs constituted at least fifty percent of the population. Here, the imam exercised authority insofar as he nominated the judges who would deal with cases involving members of all sects from the area covered by the agreement according to the Zaydī version of the shari'a, as well as the presiding judge and members of a court of appeals that would be based in Şan'ā'. Further, only the canonical taxes were to be levied. At the same time, all the other administrators continued to be appointed by the central government, and Ottoman garrisons were to be maintained. But even in judicial matters, the imam's authority was limited. The imperial government reserved the right to approve the imam's judicial nominees. More important still, in cases that involved penal judgments based on the principle of retaliation (*qişāş*) the ultimate decision remained in the imperial capital. Outside the province of Yemen the agreement made Imam Yaḥyā a dependent ruler under Ottoman sovereignty: Istanbul provided the imam with a yearly stipend and military assistance that allowed him to survive a crucial power struggle with his most important rival in the northern highlands, the 'Asīrī ruler and Sufī leader Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. In this sense, the arrangements of the Daʿān agreement helped lay the foundations for the creation of an independent Yemeni state under the imam's leadership following the end of Ottoman rule in the aftermath of the First World War. At the same time, in turning Yaḥyā into an ally who would remain loyal to the central government until the end of Ottoman rule, the agreement was at least partly successful in stabilising the

Ottoman imperial presence in southwest Arabia after decades of fierce military confrontation.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on how Ottoman bureaucrats and military officers learned from the British experience of managing “backward peoples”. The debates of these officials about what strategies of British colonial rule might be most suitable for the purpose of running the province of Yemen more effectively are examples of what I have termed colonial cosmopolitanism: bureaucrats like ‘Abdūlganī Senī, ‘İzzet Paşa or Rüşdī Paşa were not only aware that the Ottomans were indeed part of a wider world of imperial powers, but in the specific circumstances of turn-of-the-century Yemen they also came to the conclusion that some of the ways in which Britain in particular governed colonial subjects in some of its dependencies around the Indian Ocean might be adapted to ensure Ottoman domination over the “uncivilised” peoples of southwest Arabia. What Ottoman observers primarily associated with, and found attractive about, British colonial governance was its ability to rule “according to the customs and dispositions” of the local peoples and, more specifically, through their leaders. The principal reason for the success of British colonial rule seemed to be the native chief or local ruler under British sovereignty who governed on behalf of the crown and ensured British domination in a cost-effective way, not the Oxbridge-educated district officer of the Indian Civil Service who managed the locals under his charge. In this respect, policymakers and political commentators in Istanbul and Şan‘ā’ resembled many of their French, German, Japanese, Russian or American contemporaries who often looked toward forms of indirect rule in various parts of the British Empire for models of how to run distant colonial dependencies. As we have seen, Ottoman interest in this particular form of British colonial governance stemmed not only from the fact that it promised to offer a solution to the perennial problems of running the empire on a shoestring; indirect rule also attracted the attention of policymakers because there were precedents for it both in the long Ottoman history of governing a large, spread out and differentiated empire, and in the way some of the empire’s internal and external peripheries were run.

Associating the devolution of power to the Zaydī imam with a style of governance that seemed to ensure the greatness of the world’s foremost imperial power was a way to repackage and rehabilitate a form of imperial rule that had served the Ottomans well in the past, but that many bureaucrats from the early nineteenth century on viewed as furthering the empire’s disintegration. Thus, while the Ottomans did not actually adopt the residency system, or any other specific form of indirect rule practiced in Britain’s Asian or African colonies, the British

practice of ruling through local leaders in general inspired those policymakers in Ṣan‘ā’ and Istanbul who attempted to refashion provincial government in the sense that it enabled a debate about the possibilities for local autonomy in Ottoman Yemen. At the same time, the Da‘‘ān agreement shows the influence of Ottoman forms of communal and regional autonomy. The position of the imam as defined in the agreement looked more like that of a *millet* leader or of the *amir* and *sharif* of Mecca than that of an Indian prince. Imam Yaḥyā became a dependent ruler only in areas that were not part of the province of Yemen. As we have seen, these arrangements reflected the central government’s concern that granting autonomy to a part of the province of Yemen would encourage nationalist groups in other parts of the empire and invite British intervention in Ottoman Yemen. In other words, real and perceived threats at the regional and larger imperial levels made the adoption of indirect rule as practised in British India or the hinterland of Aden appear unsuitable. In short, Ottoman readings, especially of British colonial rule, helped fashion the political order that was ushered in through the Da‘‘ān agreement. These readings, in turn, reflected the empire’s connections to a larger colonial world dominated by European powers.

NOTES

- * Sections of this article have been published in Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference. Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011) and are reprinted by permission of the publisher.
1. I borrow the term “empire-state” from Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 153.
 2. See, for instance, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda,’ in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 28; Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar. Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 50; Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective”, *Slavic Review*, 65 (2006), p. 236 and Ilya Vinkovetsky, “Circumnavigation, Empire, Modernity, Race: The Impact of Round-the-World Voyages on Russia’s Imperial Consciousness”, *Ab Imperio*, 1–2 (2001), p. 194.
 3. See, for instance, Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire. Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 23.
 4. See, for instance, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapters 3 and 4.
 5. Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire. Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–20 and Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims, and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics”, in Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today’s Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 150–79.

6. Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45 (2003), pp. 311–42.
7. Jane Hathaway, *A Tale of Two Factions. Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 81.
8. For a more detailed discussion of these issues see Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), chapters 2–4.
9. For example, in his *Tārīh-i Devlet-i ‘Osmāniye* (“History of the Ottoman state”) ‘Abdurrahmān Şeref gave a detailed account of British governance in India and concluded that Britain was the most successful among the European powers when it came to governing its colonies. See ‘Abdurrahmān Şeref, *Tārīh-i Devlet-i ‘Osmāniye* (Istanbul: Karamet Matba’ası, AMal 1312/1896–7), vol. 2, p. 456.
10. Klaus Kreiser, “Alī Emīrī (1858–1924) – ein türkischer Bürokrat und Intellektueller im Jemen”, in André Gingrich, Sylvia Haas, et al. (eds), *Studies in Oriental Culture and History: Festschrift für Walter Dostal* (Frankfurt a. Main: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 213–14.
11. See Doreen Ingrams and Leila Ingrams (eds), *Records of Yemen*, 16 vols (n.p.: Archive Editions, 1993), vol. 5, p. 514, Sir N. O’Conor to Sir Edward Grey, 27 June 1907.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See, for instance, Mahmud Nedim Bey, *Arabistan’da bir ömür. Son Yemen valisinin hatıraları veya Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Arabistan’da nasıl yıkıldı?* (ed) Ali Birinci (Istanbul: İsis, 2001), pp. 121–4. For a different perspective on Ottoman–Italian relations in the Red Sea area during this period see Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity, Human Agency and the Imperial State* (London: Routledge, 2012).
14. See, for instance, ‘Abdülganī Senī, *Yemen yolında* (Istanbul: Matba’a-i Aḥmed İhsān, AMal 1325/1909–10), pp. 116–38.
15. In order to understand the particular interest that Ottoman bureaucrats showed toward British forms of colonial rule at this point in time it is also important to remember the considerable influence that Edmond Demolin’s 1897 book, *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons?* enjoyed among many educated Ottomans (and Europeans). This book explored the reasons for the success of the British Empire and identified forms of decentralisation as one of them. See Eve M. Trout Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 163; see also Kreiser, “Abdülganī Senī – ein aufgeklärter Imperialist im Jemen (1909–1910)”, *Jemen-Report*, 20, 1 (1989), p. 14. However, none of the bureaucrats under study makes explicit reference to Demolin’s work. It is also possible that the swift British conquest of the Sudan in 1896–9 prompted Ottoman literati and officials – just as it did their Egyptian counterparts – to look into the underlying reasons for British imperial success. See Trout Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, pp. 162–4.
16. Rüşdī, *Yemen hâşrası* (Dersaadet: Matba’a-i ‘Osmāniye, AMal 1325/1909–10), pp. 154–5.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 193.
18. ‘Abdülganī Senī, “Yemen’de hatı’at-i idāre – işkālī, netāyici, taşhīḥi –”, *Mülkiye*, 9 (1 Teşrīn-i evvel 1325 [14 October 1909]), pp. 56–7.

19. 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Siyaset-i idâreden bir nümüne – rıfkımı, Şiddetmi? –", *Mülkiye*, 5 (1 Hazîrân 1325 [14 June 1909]), pp. 55–6; 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Hatı'ât", pp. 46–7.
20. 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Siyaset-i idâre", pp. 57–8.
21. 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Her vâliniñ derece-i şalâhiyet bir mi olmalıdır?", *Mülkiye*, 12 (1 Kânûn-i sâni 1325 [14 January 1910]), pp. 35–6.
22. 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Hatı'ât", pp. 46–7, 53–4; 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Yemen'niñ necât ve selâmeti. İhyâ-yi ma'ârif", *Mülkiye*, 13 (1 Şubât 1325 [14 February 1910]), pp. 39, 45–6; 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Yine Yemen'in huşûşiyet-i ahvâlinde", *Mülkiye*, 13 (1 Şubât 1325 [14 February 1910]), p. 57.
23. Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 185.
24. Kreiser, "Abdülğanî Senî – ein aufgeklärter Imperialist", pp. 12, 14.
25. Rüşdî, *Yemen hatırası*, pp. 69–70.
26. See Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Arştırmaları Merkezi, İstanbul (hereafter: TDV. İSAM.)/Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 16-1008-A, memorandum, Yemen commission, 16 Mart 1325/29 March 1909, p. 2.
27. See TDV.İSAM./Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 16-1020, memorandum, chief of general staff, Division General (*ferik*) Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, n.d. This is probably the first page of a memorandum by Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa that is dated 6 Temmuz 1325/19 July 1909 and archived as TDV.İSAM./Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 15-1005.
28. See TDV.İSAM./Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 15-1004, memorandum, chief of general staff, Division General Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, 10 Mart 1325/23 March 1909, pp. 3–4.
29. TDV.İSAM./Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 15-1005, memorandum, chief of general staff, Division General Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, 6 Temmuz 1325/19 July 1909, p. 1.
30. See M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 146–7.
31. See Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 78.
32. Quoted after Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, p. 78.
33. See Memdüh [Paşa], *Yemen ku'ası hakkında ba'z-i mü'tala'ât* (Dersa'adet: Numüne, AMal 1324/1908–9), p. 92.
34. See Mehmed Memdüh, *Miftâḥ-i Yemen* (İstanbul: Maḥba'a-i Hayriye ve Şürekâsi, AH 1330/1911–12), pp. 19–20.
35. 'Abdülğanî Senî, "Siyaset-i idâre", pp. 57–8; see also TDV.İSAM./Hüseyn Hilmi Paşa Evrakı 15-1004, memorandum, chief of general staff, Aḥmed 'İzzet Paşa, to Yemen commission, 10 Mart 1325/23 March 1909, pp. 5–6.

CHAPTER 5

Islampolis, Cosmopolis: Ottoman Urbanity Between Myth, Memory and Postmodernity

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On the morning of 23 January 2007, mourners gathered before the Istanbul headquarters of the Turkish–Armenian *Agos* newspaper at the point where, four days earlier, the editor-in-chief had been murdered. Within an hour their numbers had grown by tens of thousands. Together, they formed an enormous cortège that embraced the hearse carrying the body of the slain civil rights activist to the church. From verandas and windows along the route, or via televisions, computer monitors and cell phone cameras around the world, millions witnessed a silent multitude whose hands were held aloft with placards bearing black and white photographs of a middle aged man’s haggard face. “We are all Hrant Dink”, read signs in Turkish, English, Kurdish and Armenian. In the same streets where his teenage assassin reportedly bragged of having “shot the *gavur*”, an *Agos* reporter heard Muslim young people shouting, “Long live the Armenians”.¹

By their silent witness, Istanbul’s citizens defied the hatred that had cut down one of their own. A resounding answer to those who would stop the dialogue between Turks and Armenians, the marchers formed the largest protest against racism and religious discrimination in the history of the Middle East. The ultra-nationalist lawyers who persecuted Hrant Dink, the prosecutors who had indicted him by deliberate misinterpretation of his words, the judges who convicted him of Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which makes it a crime to “insult Turkishness”,² the bigots who staged menacing rallies before the court room and academic conferences and the police who had ignored the threats against him, were all now forced to yield the streets to those who believed in his path of truth, reconciliation and coexistence. The municipal government hastily announced it would be releasing doves and passing out carnations. The bureaucratic machinery in Ankara facilitated delegations of dignitaries and poli-

ticians from the Republic of Armenia, the United States and the European Union. Under the glare of the international media's spotlight the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) belatedly dispatched cabinet members to the funeral at Saint Mary's Church.

The students, intellectuals, office workers and labourers who joined this solemn procession represented the ethnic and religious majority of a megalopolis of more than twelve million inhabitants. Muslims far outnumbered the Armenian mourners, a community that has been reduced to less than 60,000 souls. Shoulder to shoulder with their compatriots, Turkey's Christian and Jewish citizens, they formed a great human wave that swept along the roads from Şişli to Taksim, Beyoğlu and Tarlabaşı. Before crossing the Golden Horn on their way to the church in Kumkapı, the mourners walked through streets and neighbourhoods that official histories seek to erase; they passed what had been the homes of Armenians who had been deported in 1915, the small factories of Jews and *Dönmes* – descendants of the followers of Sabbatai Zevi (1626–76) – whom the *Varlık Vergisi* (a discriminatory wealth tax) had bankrupted or sent to forced labour camps in 1942 and the display windows of Greek-owned businesses along İstiklal Caddesi that had been shattered and looted during the 1955 pogrom.³

Istanbul's streets, neighbourhoods, mosques, churches and synagogues bear silent witness not only to twentieth-century atrocities. They also testify to centuries of urban life shared by many peoples and cultures. For an Ottoman historian whose sources largely deny access to the subjective realms of this multi-religious encounter, it is hard to repress the urge to ask how these individuals of diverse backgrounds and persuasions perceived themselves and others when they assembled in this multicultural funeral procession. What so moved a young man, who had never known an Armenian or had a Jewish neighbour, to join this march? What spurred him to embark on a day's bus ride from the eastern city of Van to take part in Dink's funeral?

Social media archives the emotions and thoughts of those who participated in the funeral procession or watched it from afar. One young Turkish woman text-messaged her immediate reactions to an American friend from the funeral cortège:

I look around me; everyone is here: friends, young, old, men, women, students, grandmas, children, Turks, Armenians, Kurds, other minorities, business people, artists, activists, political groups . . . 100,000 people beating as one heart, with one mantra: we are all Hrant Dink, we are all Armenian. I am surprised, I am shocked. I don't know if I am crying with sorrow of his death or for this overwhelming feeling of unity . . . We are all here to embrace Hrant Dink and what he stands for: Peace and Reconciliation of the peoples of Anatolia . . .⁴

Other observers left less charitable commentary about their countrymen and women on the worldwide web. A Turkish scholar, studying abroad, whose heartfelt words were circulated among the Armenian diaspora's websites, chided her compatriots that "yesterday was not the first time we shot Hrant Dink in the back", adding

even if it was not us, even if it was not our mothers, fathers, grandfathers who actually held the swords and the rifles that took Armenian lives, the catastrophe of 1915 remains ... a crime committed in our name, it remains to be a crime against humanity and human plurality committed in the name of "Turkishness".⁵

Armenians who watched this extraordinary event from afar registered many different emotions: bitterness, anger, surprise and hope. A year later, a Turkish–Armenian who attended an Istanbul commemoration on the anniversary of Dink's death confessed:

As an Armenian taking part in the rally, I was there only because Hrant Dink is Armenian, and was killed, from what I understood, exactly for his nationality. However, for those thousands of people protesting in the street, he was much more than an Armenian. Yesterday I also found out, that he is one of the symbols of Turkey's future.⁶

In today's Istanbul historical narratives continue to collide daily. When its dwindling Jewish, Greek, Armenian and Süriyani/Syriac communities struggle to maintain their cultural heritage in the face of a new, religiously exclusive sociability, when Kurdish workers and Alevi worshipers challenge the official ethno-religious uniformity in celebrations and ceremonies, and when critical intellectuals, activists and thoughtful citizens of all backgrounds pursue justice, truth and rights for all, they test the frontiers of past, present and future. Hrant Dink gave voice to the silences in the official history.⁷ Each time he demanded respect for his multiple identities – as a person who was *Türkiyeli*, a "Turkish citizen" but not an ethnic "Turk", as a Christian by religion and as an Anatolian by history – he mediated between seemingly irreconcilable worlds. He scolded members of the Armenian diaspora in Europe and North America who chose to humiliate and defame contemporary Turks rather than to educate a generation indoctrinated by propaganda and purged textbooks while he challenged Turkish society to acknowledge the massacres, expropriation and genocidal deportations of Ottoman Armenians during the First World War. In publishing an article concerning the Armenian birth of Sabiha Gökçen, Atatürk's illustrious adopted daughter and the first female military pilot, for whom Istanbul's second airport is

named, he braved the wrath of the Turkish military command and secret service to demonstrate the inextricably intertwined fate of his peoples.⁸

Rather than being an obstacle to historical reconstruction of the multi-religious past of the Ottoman Empire, the physical re-enactment of the shared space of what had once been one of the world's most culturally complex cities serves to provoke new questions about cosmopolitanism as a generic concept and multi-religious urbanity as a lived relationship in time. The words of Hrant Dink and the persistence of Turkish citizens who march, discuss and hold vigils to bring about the truthful accounting and cultural reconciliation that he strove for point to questions that have either not been raised or have been answered with too little reflection on the specific dynamics of ethno-religious diversity within the coordinates of pre-modern cities. These struggles point to the elusive patterns of togetherness that governed an urbanity that was neither the bewildering, Babel-like cosmopolis portrayed by European visitors, nor the paternalistic *hoşgörülü* ["tolerant"] Islampolis represented in the Turkish Republic's textbooks. In forswearing the adjective cosmopolitan for the implicit multi-religiosity and multi-ethnicity of Ottoman urbanity, this essay pays homage to the historicity of place and the social morphology of peculiar, metropolitan settings, such as Istanbul and Izmir in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite and because of their acute vulnerability to the dictates of power and nature, it was the peculiarity of these pre-modern urban environments, I argue, that fostered multifaceted ties and cross-cultural cooperation even as they facilitated forms of communal autonomy and, in the twentieth century, provoked rupture.

THE ANXIETY OF DIFFERENCE

In refocusing my attention on Ottoman urbanism as a specific locus of inter-religious and inter-ethnic contact, reflection on the previous historiography on "Muslims and non-Muslims", believers and *dhimmis*, is unavoidable. Few studies have had greater impact on an emerging branch of inquiry than the two-volume set of essays, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (1982).⁹ Three decades ago, its historians undertook the laudable project of examining the religious diversity of the Ottoman state and its peoples. Yet they did so within peculiar coordinates: the essays divided the empire into two parts. In binding essays on "the Arab lands", apart from those on Ottoman Anatolia and the Eastern Balkans, the "central lands", its editors, Bernard Lewis and Benjamin Braude, posited historiographical boundaries in conformity with the prevailing nationalist and area studies paradigms. With few exceptions, these essays discussed the experience of subordinated groups in terms of binary relationships between *a* subordinated group, identified or confined within a church or community, and *the* Muslim political authority. Most authors, too, attributed

change in this dyadic rapport to the intervention of western European churches and governments rather than the shifting positionality of social groups within the Ottoman polity and world economy.

The volumes opened with a legalistic overview of the concept of the *dhimma/dhimmi*. But almost no attention was paid to the implications of distinct settlement patterns on the Ottoman experience of cultural diversity, such as its Mediterranean metropolises, small Balkan towns, Syrian port cities and Eastern Anatolian countryside and pasturelands. Despite the dominance of the city in the historical imagination and transmission of all major faiths, sustained reflection on the urban environment itself, a hub of inter-regional commerce, governance, military force and high population density is strangely absent. Thus, Benjamin Braude, who performed an important service to a nascent programme of study by identifying the anachronistic usage of nineteenth-century notions, such as the *millet*, with respect to communities of non-Muslims during earlier centuries and recognising the “imagined community” projected by church-centred narratives, did not really consider how the physical setting itself might have shaped many aspects of inter-communal relations.¹⁰ Certainly, the patents between Christian churches and the Ottoman state were modelled after the so-called “pact of Umar” through which the new Muslim authority pledged to protect the religious and communal rights of “peoples of the book” in exchange for their financial, legal and sumptuary subordination to the religious majority. However, the endurance of these relationships, as legend and as organisational praxis, depended on more than the goodwill of the victor. Despite the bloodshed and the asymmetry of power, the agreement (of which we have no written copy) that bound the Greek Universal Patriarch and Conqueror, Sultan Mehmet II (1432–81) owed to an urban realpolitik: the necessary cooperation of sovereign and subjects within a setting of physical proximity and economic dependence.

Multidisciplinary studies, especially on cities, have helped us to re-evaluate these distinctly Ottoman settings. Unlike earlier capital cities, such as Brusa/Bursa in western Anatolia which evolved from a provincial marketplace to the centre of a small principality, the transformation of Constantinopolis into “Islambol” (a wordplay on the vernacular Greek “the city” and the Turkish “brimming with Islam”) epitomised an imperial, urban policy, an ethno-religious engineering (*sürgün* and *şenlendirme*) that stamped newly conquered cities.¹¹ Although Ottoman administrators did not leave the conquered countryside unchanged, forcibly relocating Muslim populations from Asia, including nomadic pastoralists, and implanting new strata of military officers, Sufi networks and Islamic judges in the Balkan and Aegean countryside, they could not fundamentally overturn the pre-existing confessional composition or the bases of the agrarian economy. By contrast, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century conquests

radically reworked the social morphology of cities. Trabzon, converted from a predominantly Christian Greek city-state to a Muslim-majority port within a generation, represented one extreme.¹² In other cities, imperial policies favoured religious admixture rather than uniformity: in addition to creating an Islamic physical infrastructure of mosque-complexes, pious endowments and commandeering non-Muslim properties for new palaces, garrisons and the residences of its officialdom, the empire transplanted Jews and Orthodox Christians from other regions into the urban grid. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this ethno-religious urban “renewal” in cities was ongoing: Sephardic refugees were directed toward Thessaloniki/Salonika while Belgrade’s native Jewish population was resettled in the emerging port city of Izmir.¹³

If aspects of this characteristically Ottoman urbanity endured until the very end of the empire, it was not simply because of the outgrowth of sultanic policies toward what had been the Christian cities and towns in the Balkans or the lack of internal dynamism among the multi-religious inhabitants of former Mamluk cities in Syria and Egypt. The great cultural diversity that defined Ottoman cities was continually refracted in a Mediterranean mirror in which Catholic port and inland cities, intentionally or not, remained their contraries.¹⁴ Where in the eighteenth century a Jew of Aleppo, a Greek of Istanbul or an Armenian of Diyarbekir might choose to settle in one of many mixed or relatively homogeneous *mahalle* of his native city and remain a fully imperial subject whether at home or abroad, the Jew or Muslim in Venice, one of the most cosmopolitan cities of western Christendom, was physically confined to a special neighbourhood or locked in his lodging in the *Fondacco dei Turchi*. The Jewish charters of residence in Venice explicitly precluded Jews, born of parents who had lived for generations in the republic, from claiming to be a *cittadini* of the city. The ghetto, a pre-eminently urban institution that constrained movement and occupation in cities like Rome well into the nineteenth century, constituted a spatial signifier, as one scholar has recently argued, for a distinctly Latin Christian sovereignty.¹⁵

To point to the glaring differences in the cultural composition and social morphology among the Mediterranean’s Catholic and Muslim urban settings should not lead us to presume that Ottoman cities were either havens of social tranquillity or utopias of tolerance. In pre-modern times large administrative cities with their garrisons, tribunals and other state institutions conferred greater personal security on their inhabitants than the “lawless” countryside, particularly in the seventeenth century.¹⁶ In the teeming neighbourhoods of Istanbul in particular, crimes against persons and property were widespread.¹⁷ In addition to the extremes of wealth and poverty, the extraordinary personal power of elites and the abject vulnerability of the enslaved, many city-dwellers were recent arrivals and strangers. These migrants included peasants and

artisans put to flight by corrupt officials, famine and marauding mercenaries; single men and women who found petty crime and prostitution their only means of survival and transient populations of demobilised soldiers and sailors (both Muslim and Christian). If non-Muslims were disproportionately represented among such eighteenth-century migrants due to increased rates of the poll tax, which led them to occupations that provided cash income,¹⁸ they, along with their Muslim neighbours, were victims of theft, murder and rape.

Fears of crime as well as the continual human flux of populations from distant imperial provinces provoked anxieties among and between communities. For Jews and Christians, subordinates to the dominant Muslim community whose polemics over the relative truths of their “empty” faiths were typically of little concern to either the ulema or imperial authorities, the friction of daily life together could and did manifest itself in crude public demonstrations of distain such as epithets against the other’s religious beliefs and even the burning of effigies. Yet rather than proof of an enduring “mutual contempt and hostility” between the city’s confessional groupings,¹⁹ the very gestures and bigoted expressions which offend modern sensibilities must have served to maintain confessional boundaries in congested neighbourhoods. Moreover, in pre-modern times they discharged the anxieties provoked by proximity and difference in ways that fell far short of large scale physical aggression between groups.

Certainly it was this quotidian urban experience in such large Ottoman cities that gave rise to a specifically eighteenth-century Turkish literary genre based on insults. In one of the better-known texts, the *Risale-i Garibe* (“The Treatise of the Strange/Grotesque”) an anonymous, presumably Muslim author revels in a verbal virtuosity that expresses the profusion of ethnic stereotypes.²⁰ His insults fly, targeting what seems to be the unbearable diversity of peoples crowding eighteenth-century Istanbul. Romanians are “treacherous”, there are “Jew-Poles”, Albanians “speak Turkish incorrectly”, Georgians “don’t know how to use the oar” and Armenians “meddle in every affair and trade”. But it is precisely the author’s juxtaposition of characters whom he might plausibly pass in his daily activities within the *mahalle* with unlikely types – Hindus, “cursed” Yezidis and Buddhist Kalmyks “dogs” – whose appearance even in Istanbul’s markets or in an Anatolian *caravanserai* could only have been a rare, if not extraordinary event, that turns what might otherwise be read as pure bigotry into a form of social satire and a means of multicultural catharsis.

The *Risale*’s barbs and invective do not spare Istanbul Muslims, rich or poor. From Üsküdar to Eyüb, Muslims are accused of impiety, lasciviousness, hypocrisy, corruption and arrogance. Muslim prostitutes pass for respectable women and wealthy Muslim matrons abuse their servants while lavishing affection on their pet dogs and cats, which are even given human names! Neophyte Muslims convert to avoid paying the poll tax or as a pretext for begging before mosques.

The city's officials and officers are liars, drunkards and thieves who steal from the public weal and charities. In fact, the urban anomie depicted in the *Risale* is not really the result of the cacophony of idioms and cultural practices, though these irritated the author to be sure. Rather, his berating of the variety of ethnic groups and religious communities living in the city serves to frame a potentially more dangerous critique aimed at the Muslim authorities. It is the municipal officials who are to blame for the city's collapsing infrastructure, evidenced by corruption and immorality and seen in everything from the actions of its citizens of all religions to the defective goods sold in the marketplace and the filth in its public baths.

THE OVERLAP BETWEEN COMMON AND COMMUNAL SPACES

If the *Risale* fails to identify the exact nature of the resentment, disdain, affection or distrust between Istanbul's Muslims, Christians and Jews, the multiplicity of characters that crowd its pages leave no doubt that it was impossible for urban inhabitants to avoid one another. Some of Istanbul's eighteenth-century suburbs were predominately Muslim. However, the most populous boroughs, including Üsküdar, remained home to many different confessional communities.²¹ Istanbulites jostled one another and European residents in the streets of Galata and in the city's many open and covered markets. Jewish and Muslim boatswains ferried women and children across the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. Craftsmen and merchants haggled over products and bought raw materials from one another. Tradesmen exchanged services: Jewish butchers sold the hindquarters of slaughtered animals to Muslim butchers. Everyone relied on neighbours of other faiths to police the morality and safety of the young and vulnerable.²² In the high-priced real estate of a densely packed social site where conflicts over private space were common and neighbours tried to build courtyard walls higher to prevent prying eyes, even those who wished to remain separate in life could not avoid spending eternity with others, buried side by side, in crowded cemeteries.²³

The streets and markets were not the only places of multi-ethnic and multi-religious encounters, there were also interiors where the city's residents met regularly. One of the most significant of these was the imperial *kadi* or Ottoman-Islamic court.²⁴ As litigants and defendants, both Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the empire's towns and administrative cities brought their disputes over guild practices, borrowed money and crimes great and small, before Muslim judges. In Damascus, Jews and Christians even took cases concerning disputed inheritance and divorce to the Islamic court, preferring the impartiality of the *kadi* to the opinion of their own religious authorities.²⁵ Jewish *responsa* reveals that Muslims and Christians in Istanbul also testified in cases presented to rabbinical courts.²⁶

There were other interiors that hosted multi-religious gatherings. Jews, Christians and Muslims visited each other's workshops and shops. However unusual it may have been, on occasion mixed religious company gathered in private homes for weddings and parties.²⁷ If the coffee and *boza* houses in much of Istanbul tended to be religiously exclusive, the taverns of Pera saw not a few Muslims customers imbibe wine with Ottoman Christian and Jewish tradesmen and European merchants. For centuries the bathhouses remained an inter-faith milieu in Syrian and Anatolian cities.²⁸ Jewish women eagerly awaited this weekly outing. They made their way in groups for safety in the streets and for the pleasure of company in the bathhouses where they washed themselves, preened, relaxed, ate, drank and played music. The urban bath played an important role in cross-cultural socialisation. Despite differences in language, this informal milieu for men and women opened a conduit for the transmission of gender standards, norms of masculinity and femininity, as well as for the sharing of musical forms and cuisine.

Although the inequalities faced by non-Muslims remained palpable in a daily life marked by differentiated clothing, distinct calendars of worship, diverse languages and mannerisms, these obstacles did not prevent them from laying claim to the physical beauty of a city whose monuments, houses of worship and popular housing were products of their own hands. In his Turkish-language poem after the 1766 earthquake, the Armenian folk poet Minas Ceryanoğlu (1730–1813) lamented the devastation of “our beautiful, garden-girded Isdanbol [sic]” and its terrible toll on a city that was “one big family”.²⁹ Expression of a shared ownership of a material setting, including of the mosques and minarets of the dominant religious group, may seem all the more surprising when we consider the fate of many non-Muslim congregations. The Karaite Jews of Istanbul, whose synagogue had been relocated to Karaköy after the Ottoman conquest, again forcibly ceded their building to the future Yeni Câmi, a project undertaken by the Queen Mother (Valide-Sultan) Safiye Sultan (d. 1603) but which was only finished in 1663.³⁰ Fires provided an excuse for Muslim municipal authorities to grab Jewish and Christian real estate in Istanbul or, as in eighteenth-century Izmir, to delay permits for the rebuilding of non-Muslim houses of worship for decades.

Non-Muslims were not alone in experiencing the inequities of an early modern city. All or parts of many poorer inner-city neighbourhoods were torn down to make room for celebrations and processions for the circumcisions of princes and the marriages of princesses in the eighteenth century.³¹ After urban rebellions, such as the janissary and guild uprising of 1730, it was poorer Muslims who bore the brunt of political purges. The Muslim elite converted state property into family endowments; wealthier guildsmen gained quasi-proprietary rights over urban ateliers and hereditary claims to guild offices. In fact, not all non-Muslims

lost in this privatisation of imperial space and authority: courtiers who built new palaces along the Bosphorus in Beşiktaş and Bebek must have encouraged their Jewish, Armenian and Greek bankers and commercial agents to follow them. By the early nineteenth century, the fact that many of the neighbourhoods in Ottoman cities, from Istanbul to Diyarbakir, remained quite mixed in terms of the religious identities of their inhabitants belies any systematic policy on the part of the state or Muslim religious authorities to impose a segregated urban plan.³²

The shared vulnerability of neighbours, whatever their faith, in the face of the many natural disasters that convulsed these cities precluded individual or communal *schadenfreude*. In the aftermath of fires, earthquakes and floods, Istanbul residents braved the elements together: those who lacked housing either left town or shared rooms with neighbours and entire neighbourhoods slept in tents in the streets in fear of aftershocks. When floodwaters polluted wells or filled them with sand, everyone felt thirst. In an Armenian coda to his post-earthquake dirge, Minas Ceryanoğlu enumerated the destroyed palaces, khans and toppled minarets; he mourned his co-religionists and sadly recalled the moans of his Muslim and Jewish neighbours trapped beneath the rubble.³³ An Armenian witness to the flood of 1789 wrote movingly of Christians who had died without forgetting to mention the tragedy of Hussein of Cengelköy whose two young daughters were swept out to sea.³⁴

If most Muslim elites did not deign to devote more than passing mention to non-Muslims, and then only to chastise those who overstepped their status, neither did they recriminate them for some of the city's worst disasters. Derviş Efendi-zade Derviş Mustafa Efendi left a record of the great Istanbul fire of 1782.³⁵ Over the course of more than four days, the flames spread rapidly, incinerating people, houses and monuments in many quarters of the city. He dutifully recorded the fact that the fire began in a Jewish house in Balat, but did not dwell on its source. Rather, after carefully analysing the combination of natural and human causes that turned a small house fire into a conflagration – including the strong winds which blew embers from one neighbourhood to another, the lack of rain and the poor training of the city's firefighters – Derviş Mustafa Efendi pointed an accusing finger at the Muslim ruling classes: the tragedy that befell the city, he concluded, was divine retribution for their immoral and selfish behaviour toward the city's poor.

FROM OTTOMAN URBANITY TO "PHILANTHROPIC COSMOPOLITANISM"?

In the nineteenth century unprecedented events drove a wedge between the many different social and cultural groups that made up Ottoman cities.³⁶ The precarious balance of power between the empire and its rivals in Europe and the Black Sea reverberated through town and countryside from the Aegean coastline

to the Gulf of Basra. Wars with Czarist Russia and then with the new Balkan states strapped the resources of urban centres in particular: Ottoman citizens furnished strategic manufactures and paid extraordinary taxes; after the conflict they paid the empire's indemnities while enduring shortages of raw materials and food. The fears and resentments of the majority were stoked not only by the nationalism among Balkan Christians but also by new trade concessions to foreign merchants that benefited their local Christian and Jewish brokers and agents. The adoption of novel forms of sociability, from Masonic lodges and social clubs to chambers of commerce and theatres,³⁷ diverted Muslims, Christians and Jews from the streets, bathhouses and marketplaces where they had once shared moments of laughter at puppet shows, heard the chanting and hymns of other faiths and comforted each other in moments of collective distress.

If nineteenth-century Ottoman cities proved more susceptible to inter-faith violence, it may owe to the fact that even as many of the older zones of shared contact disappeared, the close quarters of the city remained highly communicative. Neighbourhoods quickly turned into rumour mills, where information – true and false, feared and hoped for – spread quickly from ear to ear. The sultan's informants in Istanbul's coffee and *boza* houses have left us fragments of conversations overheard during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century.³⁸ Most of these conversations were mundane; the documentation reveals residents grumbling about taxes and the like. Surprisingly, both Christians and Muslims shared worries about the impact of Sultan Mahmud II's sumptuary reforms, which mandated uniform dress and the fez, on intra- and inter-communal relations. Yet otherwise mundane complaints and innocent rumours could fan mistrust and provoke suspicions in new circumstances: when the Morea emerged as a single, religiously uniform, Greek "nation"; when Mehmet Ali Pasha's armies marched deep into Anatolia; or when citizens anticipated a Czarist fleet sailing through the Bosphorus, how could the experience of Ottoman urbanity remain unchanged? Parochial beliefs, cultural anxieties, and petty grievances took on decidedly new meanings when the intrigues of the Great Powers threatened to destroy the very premises of the territorial empire.³⁹

In addition to these geopolitical strains upon the urban social fabric were the contradictory legal and political consequences of the Tanzimat (1839–78) legislation. The great promise of a bill of rights for all, promulgated in the Gulhâne Rescript of 1839, was undercut by the timetable and modalities of implementation dictated by the Great Powers (many of which had only begun to emancipate their own Jewish, Protestant and Catholic religious minorities). If the new *millet* congresses, formed for each non-Muslim confessional grouping according to the 1856 Imperial Rescript, furnished sectarian communities of Christians and Jews with an outlet for cultural and political expression, it would take another generation before Ottoman citizens of all faiths and ethnic back-

grounds could assemble together in the first constitutional parliament of 1877.

In cities, the Tanzimat produced contradictory results. On the one hand, no longer could the imperial elite or Muslim religious officials unilaterally determine changes to the urban plan. Greater political rights gave Jews and Christians a voice in municipal policies. For example, in the aftermath of the terrible Pera fire of 1870, non-Muslim property owners successfully blocked the Istanbul municipality's plan to widen streets at their expense by expropriating private homes and commercial properties.⁴⁰ On the other hand, greater security of property and real estate helped to entrench wealthier groups in ethnically homogeneous *mahalle*. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the records of middle-class patrons of the Ottoman Bank point to increasing spatial segregation of the nascent Ottoman bourgeoisies. With the exception of certain newly integrated suburbs in Istanbul and Izmir, well-heeled Christians, Muslims and Jews preferred to live apart and keep their own company.⁴¹

All the same, it must be remembered that these new, later nineteenth-century residential patterns affected only a small portion of the city's inhabitants. While the newly settled Levantine merchants and foreign missionaries took shelter in the suburbs, for those who remained in urban centres natural disasters continued to level cultural differences.⁴² Despite new precautions, epidemics ravaged Ottoman coastal and inland cities and towns over the nineteenth century. The terrifying bubonic plague epidemic of 1812 was followed by two dozen outbreaks of the plague in the Aegean region alone during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴³ Quarantine stations in Ottoman port cities would mitigate older contagions but new diseases continued to make land: Asian cholera, initially carried from Russia and later brought by pilgrims returning from the Hijaz, became a recurrent event in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hundreds of thousands of Ottoman citizens died from cholera in the five major epidemics that struck the empire in the half century before the First World War.⁴⁴

Despite considerable attention to the modernisation of the urban plan, which included European-influenced monumental architecture, enlarged thoroughfares, street lighting and new modes of transportation, state involvement in social welfare during the nineteenth century remained circumscribed. For centuries, it had been the soup kitchens and other endowments that provided support for the poor, widows and orphans, founded by pashas, princesses and queen mothers, that served to blunt the sharp inequalities that might lead to social unrest.⁴⁵ Other than forgiving taxes and regulating the prices of staples, such as bread, in times of dearth, the imperial state did little to address perennial urban problems of unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, homelessness and illness. While charity continued to be the province of wealthy individuals and religious organisations throughout the nineteenth century, involvement in philanthropic

activity among urban populations appears to have intensified. Whether it was the tough Jewish youth of inner-city Izmir who set up a charitable association to aid women after an outbreak of childbed fever, or the middle-class Christian and Muslim ladies of Istanbul who pledged their spare time to uplift their poorer co-religionists,⁴⁶ the imperative of providing relief for those less fortunate crossed social classes. Dozens of new charitable societies were officially approved by the state between 1876 and 1908.

The repressive apparatus of the government of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1908) and the widening cultural gulf between Muslims and non-Muslims notwithstanding, the Ottoman regime acceded to many of these altruistic impulses. To prevent politicisation of these philanthropies, the regime monitored their income and activities and made sure that trusted minority and Muslim elites led the better-funded and larger organisations. Although same-faith organisations raised little question, inter-faith fundraisers did alarm the regime. Charity balls and lotteries that spilled over confessional boundaries threatened religious norms and the confessional policies of the Hamidian regime. State officials were especially wary of the dubious morality of the lottery, *piyango*, as a form of gambling.⁴⁷ Yet as participation in *piyango*s spread from minority communities in the Aegean islands to coastal cities and the general population, popular pressure prevailed. By 1883, provincial governors regularly issued permits for lottery drawings, albeit restricting the funds involved to a maximum of 50,000 *piastres*.

The very existence of such inter-communal fundraisers suggests the new social realms of communication and novel cultural possibilities of late Ottoman urbanity. Did such fundraising activity represent a bridge between the shared past and the increasingly fractured public space of the nineteenth-century city? Had the previous centuries of shared urbanity under Muslim rule given way to a modern cosmopolis or, as Nadir Özbek suggests, an emerging multi-religious public sphere⁴⁸ in which residents could begin to realise shared beliefs in the common good, social welfare and collective representation? Or was the combination of altruism and avarice that informed the act of gambling for charity merely a metaphor for a transitory cosmopolitanism, a brief intersection of parochial identities and interests amid the centrifugal forces tearing apart the Ottoman city?

Inspection of an Ottoman lottery ticket from Izmir – to be exact, number 2,979 of the 4,000 printed – in the author's possession might provide a semiotic chart or linguistic mapping of the structure of this cosmopolitan public sphere in the last Ottoman decades. In this case, the ticket represents a fundraising endeavour sponsored by a Jewish philanthropic society in 1874 (Jewish year 5634). Centred within the nearly square (20.5 x 22.5 mm) sheet is the caption *loteryah* [*lotería*] in Rashi-Hebrew letters followed by a Ladino description of its

nities). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the “12 membres notables de cette Société” who launched the lottery did so independently of the increasingly influential Francos, the French Jewish missionaries of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.⁴⁹ After years of controversy, pitting Izmir’s rabbinical authorities against the French Jews who were bent on “modernising” Ottoman Jewry, the Alliance had just succeeded in establishing the first boys’ school with a French-language curriculum. A few years after this lottery, the first Alliance girls’ school also opened its doors.

Could this rivalry with the Francos explain in part, the Izmiri Jews’ recourse to lotteries? The community had other means for raising funds. The Jewish hospitals were funded by the *Gemillut Hassadim* (Acts of Loving Kindness) association in addition to foreign donations while the *Ozer Dalim* (Help for the Needy) societies were dedicated to the care of underprivileged brides, stranded travellers and the sick.⁵⁰ Yet the needs of the community continually outstripped its means. In appealing for help from their non-Jewish neighbours, the community elders must have considered the cause carefully. An indisputably deserving group, such as orphans, would elicit sympathy even across communal fault lines. Marriage was both a universal bond and a social investment, the bedrock of urban stability. Many of the Jewish orphans who were approaching marriageable age must have been survivors of the cholera pandemic of 1864, a tragedy that had struck Izmir’s Muslims and Christians with equal ferocity.

Translation of the ticket into Ottoman Turkish was therefore more than a formal requirement. The prominence of the Ottoman Turkish in the right-hand corner reflected not only deference to the state or the dominant group, but perhaps a recognition of the Sephardim’s longstanding political affinities with the Ottoman authorities, including the now defunct and disbanded local janissary units. In any event, Jewish relations with their Muslim neighbours could only have been better than their relations with Izmir’s Greeks. Only two years before the lottery, a Greek accusation of the ritual murder of a Christian boy had ignited violence against the Jewish community.⁵¹ Greek mobs attacked Jews and their property; tens of shops and houses in Karataş and in the more mixed neighbourhood of Kemeraltı were torched. In addition to loss of life, a long blockade of the Jewish *mahalle* had pushed the poor to the brink of starvation.

Judging from the size and prominence accorded to the Greek translation on the upper left-hand corner, the lottery’s organisers knew they could not ignore their Greek neighbours. Whether or not individual friendships or business relations between Jews and Greeks had survived the recent violence, Jewish leaders could only concede Greek commercial clout and numerical superiority. Indeed, given the tendency of under-enumeration of minority inhabitants by the official census takers, Greeks likely made up a plurality of the urban population during

the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵²

Other inter-communal relationships remain in the shadows. Although they were only half the size of the Jewish community itself, Armenians were important enough to the fundraisers to be part of the linguistic hierarchy of the lottery ticket. In fact, the Armenian majority may have shared Jewish concerns about the impositions of the Francos, given the pressure on the Apostolic Church by native and overseas missionaries. Together with Catholic and Protestant denominations, Armenians made up the smallest of the four largest ethno-religious components of the city. Yet, the Jewish organisers depended upon their skills for printing and perhaps translating their ticket. Catholic Armenians, who had developed a Turkish vernacular written in the Armenian characters, published many works in Armeno-Turkish. The presumably Catholic printer of the lottery tickets, B. Talikian, who affixed his imprimatur and the date of printing, 6 February 1874, clearly possessed a well-equipped shop. Setting the type for the Hebrew, Greek, Armenian and Latin texts, he used a lithographic technique to overprint the ticket with the Ottoman *rik'a* script.

Although the lottery ticket offers some fascinating visual suggestions about the positionality of religious groups constituting this late Ottoman urban setting, it would be imprudent to suggest that this lottery demonstrated the emergence of an inter-communal public sphere, much less constituted a form of “print cosmopolitanism”. The peculiar strengths and weaknesses of each Ottoman religious community acquired more distinct political and sociological relief as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Despite help from their French co-religionists, the Jews of Anatolia remained one of the empire’s smallest, albeit determinedly urban, populations. By and large, Ottoman Jews showed little inclination toward territorial nationalism. Given their size, they remained dependent on the good will of their non-Jewish neighbours. Although the Jewish community of Izmir was one of the largest in the empire (after Salonika and Istanbul), only one out of every nine of late nineteenth-century Izmir’s roughly 210,000 inhabitants was Jewish.⁵³

Throughout the empire, but especially in Izmir, their demographic inferiority to both the Greeks and Muslims was compounded by the relative poverty of the Jewish community. Of the estimated 3,500 Jewish families in the city, only about a hundred could be considered well-to-do, not a few of whom had already opted for Italian and Dutch passports.⁵⁴ If about half of Izmir’s Jewish families clung onto the rungs of the lower middle-classes, earning their wages as tradesmen, labourers and shop-owners, more than a third of the total, by dint of destitution or dedication to religious study, depended on co-religionists for their support. As they contended with the wrenching economic and political changes of the late empire, Ottoman Jewish philanthropy had the most to gain by courting an older inter-communal sense of Ottoman urbanity despite their struggle to

maintain their cultural and organisational autonomy in the face of the Francos' *mission civilatrice*.

CONCLUSION: THE POSTMODERN ERASURES OF ISTANBUL/ISLAMPOLIS

The vernacular sources and lottery tickets considered in this essay are but flickering images of an Ottoman urbanity long past. They provide no conclusive answers to the question of individual and collective emotional responses to the multi-religious and multi-ethnic environment of the city. Yet it is safe to say that if the 1874 lottery ticket of the Jewish Society fell to earth today in Izmir, few of Turkey's urban residents would understand its meaning. Ladino, and other Jewish vernaculars, have been overtaken by the languages of western Europe and, for the many Turkish Jews who immigrated to Israel, by modern Hebrew. The Muslim majority no longer uses Arabic script and few citizens read Ottoman documents. Most of the peoples who formed large and prosperous urban communities are gone: the Greeks and Armenians who wrote poems, memoirs, religious texts and novels in Turkish (using Greek and Armenian characters) either fled before persecution, were murdered, forcibly converted to Islam or, in the case of thousands of the Greeks of the Aegean coastal region and smaller islands, were deported to Greece after 1923.⁵⁵

These citizens, along with their cultures, practices and languages, were the foundation of an Ottoman urbanity that was uprooted between the last decade of the empire and the first decades of the republic. Many of the Muslim refugees from the former Ottoman Balkans and Czarist Russia who arrived in Ottoman cities (as well as in the countryside) at the end of the empire never truly experienced urban life together. The young Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935), one of the key ideologues of Turkish nationalism, was such a late Ottoman citizen.⁵⁶ A Tatar born in Simbirsk along the Volga River, he and his mother arrived in Istanbul as inter-faith relations deteriorated, particularly during the anti-minority pogroms that followed the 1896 Armenian Dashnak Party's takeover of the Ottoman Bank, a desperate attempt to bring world attention to the Hamidian massacres of Christians in Cilicia and Anatolia (1895–7).⁵⁷ Understandably, the young Akçura – who contemplated the future of the empire in his *Uç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (*Three Political Paths*) in Cairo,⁵⁸ four years before the Young Turk Revolution (1908) – dismissed out of hand the possibility of forming “an *Osmanlı Milleti* [an Ottoman nation]”, akin to “the American nation in the United States of America”. For that matter, the pan-Islamic project, too, seemed hopelessly vague and unrealisable: far too large for a defensible territorial unit or to create a uniform cultural project.

The post-1913 Ottoman leadership set the empire on Akçura's third, religio-ethnically exclusionary path, one that successive Turkish Republican

governments have never repudiated. From the First World War onward, this exclusionary programme dictated the last Ottoman government's policies of genocide in both Ottoman cities and in the Anatolian countryside. With the declaration of the republic in 1923 and the establishment of a new capital city in Ankara, nationalists sought to leave many of the contradictions between the republican present and the Ottoman past safely behind.⁵⁹ Over the course of a few decades, discriminatory policies and pogroms further reduced the minority populations of the Turkish Republic. As Turkey's rapid urbanisation began, Muslim migrants from villages and small towns sought work in factories and an education for their children. They joined bureaucrats, teachers, businessmen and resettled Muslim refugees from the Caucasus, Central Asia and later the Balkans in industrialising cities such as Izmir, Istanbul, Bursa, and Ankara. In 1927, one of every four Istanbul residents spoke Greek, Armenian or Jewish/Ladino; by the mid-1960s, more than 95 percent of its population was Muslim and either Turkish or Kurdish speaking.⁶⁰

A rapidly changing cultural demography in the cities demanded a new political formula as well. Over the last decade and a half, rural migrants swept religious parties to power, first in the Turkey's largest cities and then in national elections.⁶¹ Beginning his career as mayor of Istanbul in 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan promised that moral rectitude could rein in corruption and provide ordinary people with true representation in municipal government.⁶² His administration delivered water and sewage to the poor in the *gecekondu* neighbourhoods made up of recent and semi-legal settlements that ring the city of Greater Istanbul. His and subsequent Islamically-inflected administrations turned the city's waterways into public spaces lined with flowers and tea gardens where families could spend their free time at little or no expense. It was Ottoman Istanbul, rather than Republican Ankara, that became emblematic of the Islamist reform agenda, symbolising the (re)birth of lifestyle of overt piety and religiosity and witnessing government aims to reimagine the Islamic imperial past with respect to the modern, *layik* or "secular" nation-state.⁶³

It is interesting to consider that, while many secular Turkish intellectuals feared the motives of these newcomers to state office, Hrant Dink was not one of them. Dink hoped that the new, religious parties would break the sclerotic hold of Kemalism and the military on the Turkish state and serve as the midwife of a truly democratic order.⁶⁴ Yet after more than a decade in power, the urban policies of the new political leaders reveal much about their relationship to the imperial past. The new Islampolis/Istanbul does part company from the Republican imaginary. Yet the silence concerning Ottoman urbanity continues. In sprawling middle-class suburbs and housing developments, the party faithful maintain their distance from the multitudes, turning their back on the last multi-religious neighbourhoods of the inner-city. The monumental shopping

malls created by “Islamic capital” pay no homage to the Jewish women peddlers (*kiera*) who brought finery to the harem, or to the non-Muslim merchants whose taxes build the empire. Tourists are invited to marvel at the city’s architectural landmarks, such as the Dolmabahçe Sarayı and the Süleymaniye Mosque, without being informed of the Armenian architects and Greek stone masons who built them.⁶⁵ In 2010, when Istanbul became Europe’s Cultural Capital, significant cultural opportunities were missed. Had the Justice and Development Party mayor publically celebrated the 1877 *Meclis-i Mebusan* (the first Ottoman parliament), where Turkish, Arab, Kurdish, Cypriot, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, Jewish, Armenian, Maronite Christian, and Greek representatives deliberated imperial legislation, he might have educated Turkish citizens as well as members of the European Union about what a truly inclusive, multi-ethnic government once looked like.

In Turkey today, urban history and democratic change remain closely intertwined. From Mardin to Izmir and from Kars to Iskenderun, Turkey’s non-Muslim populations embody a fragile but critical link between the Ottoman past and the Mediterranean’s democratic future.⁶⁶ As researchers who navigate parochial memories, cosmopolitan imaginaries and postmodern cityscapes strive to steer clear of the extremes of “dhimmitude” and facile accounts of Ottoman *convivencia*,⁶⁷ we must continue to reflect on the varied motives and emotions of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious multitude who peacefully and respectfully claimed Istanbul for all its inhabitants on 23 January 2007. Far better than any academic historian, the civil rights leader they mourned understood the costs of loosing and the value of recovering an Ottoman urbanity: asked why he, in the face of threats to his life and daily insults, choose to remain in Turkey, Hrant Dink explained that his Armenian-ness could never be insular or freestanding. His identity was forged by a “dialectic” between a millennial Anatolian heritage and the quotidian sights and sounds of the Muslim society that surrounded him.⁶⁸

NOTES

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3. Esra Özyurek, “Introduction”, in Esra Özyurek (ed.), *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse: University of Syracuse, 2007), pp. 1–15.
4. “My friend F.T. writes from Istanbul, where she almost-live-blogged the funeral of journalist Hrant Dink”, Chris Corrigan, posted 25 January 2007. Retrieved 12 December 2007, from <http://chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/?p=1082>.
5. Fatma Mındıkoğlu, “After Shooting Hrant Dink in the Back”, *Azad Hye*, a Middle

- East Armenian Portal, posted 20 January 2007. Retrieved 15 January 2010, from http://www.azad-hye.net/article/article_view.asp?re=725sdl11.
6. Onnik Krikorian, “Rally in Istanbul Marking 1 Year Anniversary of Hrant Dink’s Assassination”, Global Voices Online, posted 19 January 2008. Retrieved 15 January 2010, from <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/01/20/turkey-remembering-hrant-dink/>.
 7. Hrant Dink was one of the participants in the first conference to discuss the genocide in Turkey, “The Demise of Empire and the Ottoman Armenians: Questions of Scholarly Responsibility and Democracy”, which despite law suits, threats and other delays, was finally held at Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey on 24–5 September 2005. For his and other contributions, see Murat Belge, Halil Berktaş, Selim Deringil, Edhem Eldem, et al., *İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermeniler Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları* (Istanbul: Bilgi University, 2011).
 8. “The ‘Secret of Sabiha Hatun’, Hripsime Sebilciyan, an Armenian from Gaziantep”, *Agos Newspaper*. 6 February 2004. Ersin Kalkan, “Sabiha Gökçen mi Hatun Sebilciyan mı?”, *Hürriyet*, 21 February 2004. Retrieved 19 January 2011, from <http://hurasiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?viewid=373270>.
 9. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, 2 vols (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982). For an overview of the state of the literature, see Molly Greene, “Introduction”, in Molly Greene (ed.), *Minorities in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Marcus Weiner, 2005), pp. 1–12.
 10. Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System”, in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 69–88.
 11. Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinople/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 207–26.
 12. Heath Lowry, *The Islamization and Turkification of Trabzon, 1461–1483* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 1981).
 13. Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 26–9.
 14. Ariel Salzmann, “The Moral Economies of the Pre-Modern Mediterranean. Preliminaries to the Study of Cross-Cultural Migration during the Long 16th Century”, in Vera Costantini and Markus Koller (eds), *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community: Essays in Honour of Suraiya Faroqhi* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 453–78.
 15. Stephanie Beth Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).
 16. Yaron Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultan* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 137–9.
 17. See Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
 18. Ahmet Tabakoğlu, *Gerileme Dönemine Girenken, Osmanlı Maliyesi* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1985), pp. 139–44. At the end of the century, Ottoman courts oversaw not only the probate and confiscation of inherited goods from their direct agents, such as the janissaries and pashas, but also from non-Muslim religious dignitaries, such

- as the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul. See Fatma Müge Göçek, “Ottoman Archival Information on Jews: The Inheritance Register of the Chief Rabbi of Galata (1770)”, in Avigdor Levy (ed.), *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994) pp. 705–16.
19. Mark Mazower, *Salonica City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 65.
 20. Anonymous, *XVIII Yüzyıl İstanbul Hayatına Dair: Risale-i Garibe*, (ed.) Hayati Develi (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1998).
 21. For a confessional tour of the many neighbourhoods and suburbs of the city, see P. Ğugas İnciyan, *18. Asırda, İstanbul*, (trans.) Hrand D. Andreasyan (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1976), pp. 92–138.
 22. Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul*.
 23. Rhoads Murphey, “Communal Living in Ottoman Istanbul”, *Journal of Urban History*, 16 (1990), pp. 115–31. İnciyan, *18. Asırda, İstanbul*, pp. 22–3. Until the new graveyard at Kuzkuncuk was opened, Jews and Armenians were also interred in the Edirnekapı graveyard.
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 25. Najwa Qattan, “Dhimmi in the Muslim Court: Legal Autonomy and Religious Discrimination”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31 (1999), pp. 429–44.
 26. Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultan*, pp. 126–7, 145.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Ibid. Jean-Claude David, “L’espace des chrétiens à Alep. Ségrégation et mixité, stratégies communautaires (1750–1850)” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 55 (1990) pp. 150–170.
 29. Kevork Pamukciyan, *İstanbul Yazıları. Ermeni Kaynaklarından Tarihe Katkılar I*, (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2002), pp. 65–7.
 30. Marc David Baer, “The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36 (2004), pp. 159–81.
 31. Ariel Salzman, “The Age of Tulips: Confluence and Conflict in Early Modern Consumer Culture (1500–1730)”, in Donald Quataert (ed.), *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 83–106.
 32. See note 21. For general trends, see Cem Behar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun ve Türkiye’nin Nüfusu 1500–1927* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1996).
 33. Pamukciyan, *İstanbul Yazıları I*, pp. 65–8.
 34. Ibid. pp. 107–9.
 35. Derviş Efendi-zade Derviş Mustafa Efendi, *1782 Yıllı Yangınları (Harik Risalesi, 1196)*, (ed.) Hüsametdin Aksu (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), pp. 19–20. For a list of fires, see Pamukciyan, *İstanbul Yazıları*. pp. 25–8.
 36. For examples of the sharply divergent historical opinions on the impact of Western European and Great Power intervention on Ottoman inter-religious relations from the late eighteenth century onward, see Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Engin Akarlı, *The Long Peace: Ottoman-Lebanon, 1851–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

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39. Ariel Salzman, “Citizens in Search of a State: The Limits of Political Participation in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808–1913”, in Michael Hanagan and Charles Tilly (eds), *Extending Citizenship, Reconfiguring States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), pp. 7–65.
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41. Edhem Eldem, *A History of the Ottoman Bank* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Historical Research Center, 1999), pp. 299–303.
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44. Gülden Sarıyıldız, *Hicaz Karantina Teşkilatı (1865–1914)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996).
45. See Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
46. Nadir Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism and the Hamidian Regime, 1876–1909”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37 (2005), pp. 59–81.
47. Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity”. pp. 59–61. See also Mete Tuncay, *Türkiye’de Piyango Tarihi ve Milli Piyango İdaresi* (Ankara: Milli Piyango İdaresi, 1993).
48. Özbek, “Philanthropic Activity”. pp. 65–78.
49. Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1990), p. 53.
50. Paul Dumont, “Jewish Communities in Turkey During the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century in the Light of the Archives of the Alliance Israélite Univer-selle”, in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, p. 237. See Henri Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne, XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1998).
51. Dumont, “Jewish Communities in Turkey”, pp. 222–3.
52. Orhan Sakin, *Osmanlı’da Etnik Yapı, 1914 Nüfusu* (Istanbul: Ekim, 2008), pp. 180–2. Official census figures must be used with caution: Muslims 100,356; Greeks 73,676; Jews 24,069; Armenians 10,061.
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54. Dumont, “Jewish Communities in Turkey”; Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*.
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 57. Selim Deringil, “‘The Armenian Question is Finally Closed’ Mass Conversions of Armenians During the Hamidian Massacres of 1894–1897”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51 (2009), pp. 344–71.
 58. Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) *Uç Tarz-ı Siyaset (Three Political Paths)*, (Turkish text ed. and trans.) David S. Thomas. Retrieved 22 January 2010, from http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam9.html.
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 60. Alanur Çavlin Bozbeyoğlu, “1927–1965, Döneminde İstanbul’un Etnik Yapısındaki Değişime”, *Eski İstanbullular Yeni İstanbullular*, pp. 82–94.
 61. See Çağlar Keyder *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*. (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); and Cihan Z. Tuğal “The Urban Dynamism of Islamic Hegemony: Absorbing Squatter Creativity in Istanbul”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 29, 3 (2009) pp. 423–37.
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 63. Jeremy Walton, “Horizons and Histories of Liberal Piety: Civil Islam and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey”, (University of Chicago: unpublished dissertation, 2009), pp. 149–50. On the changing culture of smaller cities and its negative impact on those perceived as “different,” see Binnaz Toprak, Nedim Şener, Tan Morgül and İrfan Bozan. *Türk Türkiye’de Farklı Olmak Din ve Muhafazakârlık Ekseninde Ötekileştirilenler* (Istanbul: Metis, 2009).
 64. Üstün Bilgen-Reinart, “Hrant Dink: Forging an Armenian Identity in Turkey”, *Open Democracy*, posted February 2006. Retrieved 19 January 2010, from http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/dink_3246.jsp.
 65. Hasan Kuruyazıcı (ed.) *Batılılaşan İstanbul’un Ermeni Mimarları* (Istanbul: Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları, 2010). Ömer Lütfi Barkan, *Süleymaniye Camii ve İmaretî (1550–1557)*, 2 vols (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1972–9).
 66. Nedim Şener, an award-winning investigative researcher who published the most complete account of state involvement in Dink’s murder, *Hrant Dink Cinayeti ve İstihbarat* (Istanbul: Destek Tarihi, 2007), was released from prison in March 2012 after being accused of complicity in Dink’s murder. Over the past two years the Justice and Development Party government’s delegation of sweeping authority to special prosecutors and the police under the pretext of checking terrorism and threats to democratic process has resulted in the arrest of hundreds of journalists, elected politicians, human rights activists, university faculty and students (in addition to military officers).
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CHAPTER 6

Cosmopolitan Cursing in Late Nineteenth-Century Alexandria

WILL HANLEY

In 1889, a dispute broke out in an alley in Damanhur, a large town near Alexandria. As Mohammad Effendi Safwat, tax collector for the local government, passed along the alleyway, he met Mohammad Abu 'Agila, a twenty-five-year-old merchant of Tunisian origin, who was coming out of his house. The tax collector seized the encounter (and indeed may have planned it) to serve the Tunisian with a demand for payment of back taxes on his property. The Tunisian replied that, as a foreign subject, he was not required to pay any such tax. Witnesses claimed that he threw the assessment papers to the ground and trampled them. In the course of their argument, one or both of these men uttered an Arabic phrase that was later rendered into French as "*maudit soit ton père*" ("curse your father").

A certain vision of cosmopolitanism – ethereal yet worldly, bohemian yet wealthy – takes the Alexandria of Forster, Cavafy and Durrell as its key site.¹ In this vision, Alexandria is not a Muslim context. Arabs, Muslims and indeed ordinary people feature only as a non-cosmopolitan backdrop that accentuates the exceptional character of the leading players. As this book demonstrates, the cosmopolitanism of Muslim contexts warrants different treatment. This essay recasts Alexandria as a site where a Muslim majority encountered non-Muslim and foreign minorities. Cosmopolitanism – curiosity about boundary crossing underpinned by a universalist ethical project – demands this inclusive frame of reference. This vision of cosmopolitan Alexandria – a society of mundane communication and the management of minor misunderstandings – is a more accurate depiction of the past, and a more realistic basis for thinking about cosmopolitan projects in the present day. The alleyway curse reveals a cosmopolitanism more genuine, if perhaps less glamorous, than the polyglot literature of elite salons.

In a sense, the Tunisian was correct: under the Ottoman–European capitulations agreements, foreign subjects were indeed exempt from most local taxation, as well as prosecution before state courts of the local government.² We know about this altercation because the Egyptian government pressed charges against the Tunisian on behalf of its tax collector. The case was heard by the French consular court in Alexandria, which had extraterritorial jurisdiction over its imperial subjects.³ Over ten pages, the court’s register records a manoeuvre repeated countless times in the late nineteenth-century Muslim world: the transposition of an interpersonal dispute into the language of a modern, Western, state court. Typically, this transposition involved two steps. The first was legal: in this case, the prosecution classified the tax collector’s injured dignity as that of a public official, and the insult to his person became an insult to the authority he served. The second step was linguistic: the language of the alley was translated for the court, and the voices of the actors were isolated and recorded.

This particular case amplified the typical process of transposition. The legal and linguistic meaning of the curse, exchanged by two Arabic-speaking Muslims, was obscure to the three French-speaking Catholic assessors who presided over the trial. Efforts to probe the meaning, intent and justicability of this insult dominated the hearing, and the tribunal resorted to an unusual source of expertise to inform its deliberations. After being questioned on what he had seen, each witness was asked, in a sort of ethnographic survey, his opinion of the insult itself, and, as a point of law, whether it was a punishable offence.

In interpreting the curse, witnesses insisted on the importance of context. One neighbour, a dyer, testified that the insult “was without importance when exchanged between friends, but if addressed to a stranger triggers a complaint to the Tribunal”. Another dyer said that “curse your father” should not really be considered an insult; while the words could be spoken in anger, they could also be a joke. A guard at the French consular agency in Damanhur agreed: it was a “*plaisanterie*” between friends, but an actionable offence between strangers. A certain Gamal, an unofficial government messenger who was given a bit of food for his work, suggested that “curse your father” was a serious insult when used amongst locals (“*entre habitants du pays*”), and could be considered defamation. The social and legal meaning of the insult, according to this testimony, depended on the relationship between the cursers; the signified – the curse on the father itself – had little independent force.

Clearly, the Tunisian and the tax collector were not friends, and the curse was no joke. But the court, working to distinguish one Muslim Arab from another, showed further curiosity about the difference between these men who shared language and religion. In what sense were they strangers? How did the altercation reveal lines dividing Arab Muslim society? Naturally enough, the court

sought to impose its own legal and social categories onto the field of insult. Could there have been a religious dimension? A Christian from the town, not present at the incident, when asked his opinion, said that the curse was nothing between friends, but serious if said to a Muslim. What about nationality? A dyer said that the tax collector had replied “curse your father, and your protection”. While “protection” seemed a plausible line of difference, only a few witnesses provided support for this idea. This line of questioning proved inconclusive, and the witnesses were unable to satisfy the court’s sense that a hidden social code might clarify the offence.

In the end, the judges resorted to the most legible divide, that between officials and the population. They trusted the authority of the local headman, who had been present during the incident. He testified that in the native justice system, this particular phrase normally led to a twenty-franc fine and five days in prison, but was pursued only if there were witnesses and judgement could be assured. As a result, the insult was rarely punished. As far as the court was concerned though, the charge itself turned on yet another distinction, that between officials and ordinary people. The French code had a rich vein of law protecting the dignity of public officials, and the Tunisian was pursued on this basis.⁴ But something was lost in the translation between Egyptian and French officialdom, and the court (citing “continuous jurisprudence”) found that the foreign (i.e. non-French) tax collector could not be considered a public servant according to French law.⁵ The charge was thus reduced to a private insult. Because there was no clear consensus among the many witnesses, the court again deferred to the account of the neighbourhood headman, a man “beyond reproach”, who said he heard nothing. The Tunisian was acquitted.

Easy communication is a hallmark of the cosmopolitan, but that communication is typically genteel and literary. Cursing is a more puzzling form. It certainly qualifies as communication: without some bond between curser and cursed, words intended as insult are gibberish. As Thomas Conley argues in his recent study of insult, the practice is “at once ‘antisocial’ and constitutive of social relations”.⁶ In a multilingual, multicultural context, this paradox is even more striking: insulting speech drives people apart, but it requires intimate knowledge of the culture and language of the other in order to have this effect. Effective cursing seems to demonstrate exactly the sort of boundary crossing that cosmopolitanism should entail. But while most notions of cosmopolitanism cast a warm and rosy glow, cursing brings a dimmer pallor to social description. Combining the two may clarify our view of each. This paper examines a handful of curses from turn-of-the-century Alexandria. It considers, in turn, the challenge of cosmopolitan communication, the meanings of the curses themselves, and the case of insults against officials, who became the law’s ideal cursing

victims. The closing section suggests several connections between this example and broader debates about cosmopolitanism.

The cursing that makes its way into court records was often a public act: insults had to be uttered in a public place to meet the juridical definition of defamation. One morning in 1885, for example, one man stood before another at a café where they were regulars and shouted: “you are a thief, an assassin. I thought you honest, but I was wrong . . . I’m not only going to say it here, I’m going to other places where you’re known and tell them what you are.” And indeed he did go on to say the same words elsewhere.⁷ Such determined public cursing required a vocabulary comprehensible to most bystanders. Conventional accounts of cosmopolitan Alexandria hold that its lingua franca was French.⁸ These public insults were (probably) uttered in French, but records of non-elite practice show the marginality of Alexandria’s francophone elite.⁹ Systems of communication were improvised, and depending on circumstance, Italian, Greek, Arabic, Maltese, English and French could serve as common languages. Because courts often recorded details about language choice, significant data about this inherently social characteristic are available. These data make it clear that while language use did not conform in any strict sense to nationality or citizenship, language formed a natural bond between certain categories of people and a barrier between others. Cursing in the streets reveals the practical polyglossia that was the medium of everyday communication.

Cosmopolitan insults emerged from their linguistic context to assume a place in the shared language of the city. While the Arabic “*maudit soit ton père*” had to be translated for the court, other taunts made their way untranslated into court transcripts. Two Maltese men looking for trouble in the street, for example, used the Greek word *pallikari*, which means tough young man or brave: “Tonight I want to fight. Whatever ‘pallikari’ is in the Haret el Maltie let him come and fight as I am not afraid of anyone.”¹⁰ The resulting assault was tried at the British consular court. Neither the Maltese toughs nor the court’s clerk spoke Greek, but the word was reproduced unproblematically in the court record. Many residents of Alexandria were promiscuous language users: Maltese and Italians signed their names in Arabic letters when necessary or convenient; Greeks used Arabic signet seals. To communicate in a mixed society, people used insults of convenience in the same way that they used languages, alphabets and nationalities of convenience.¹¹

On the other hand, despite the cosmopolitan myth of language transparency, the archival record shows that much social experience involved opacity: malentendus, misreadings, misunderstandings and meanings inaccessible to outsiders. When one could not make him or herself understood by another, and when there was a presumption of bad faith, the barrier was both linguistic and moral. The whole field of exchange across languages was sometimes the locus of blanket

animosity. This was the case in an 1886 brawl. In the aftermath, two battered sailors testified that their opponents spoke French to each other and “looked French”. They reported that one of the men had said to them “*sacré bleu* or *sacré bousse* or *sacré boof*”. One of the sailors, confident of his comprehension, told his companion that this phrase meant “bloody bugger”, and the fight was on. (It turned out that the men were not speaking French at all.)¹² Linguistic misunderstanding was an essential element of everyday cosmopolitan communication. Misunderstandings marked the key social boundary around the speech of the inexperienced, those lacking social and linguistic fluency, who produced and received unintended insults.

This was a porous boundary with both openings and barriers. The struggle to understand the curse that opened this paper is just one example of the uneasy translations required to unravel such cases. There are many others. When Sa‘id Habib al-Daraghi insulted his father-in-law Hamida ben Khalifah in the courtyard of the building where he kept his shop, he certainly did not do so in French.¹³ The court record reads “*cochon, maquereau, teneur de C.*”, but, as in the story that opens this essay, this was a translation for the benefit of the judges. The same was true of the words *Hundsfott* (“scoundrel”) and *Schwindler* (“charlatan”), used by a Romanian pharmacist (and French protégé) named Ladislav Lucaci against the Austro-Hungarian medical doctor Pecnik as the men were leaving a medical meeting.¹⁴ Another brawl broke out in a raucous beer shop near the port just before midnight on 31 December 1879. One Maltese witness testified that “. . . there was music – we were dancing – there were girls. I asked one of the girls to dance with me – she said I do not know you – I then asked prisoner [the accused] to tell her to dance with me. He said he was not a Dragoman.” The prisoner, accused of stabbing and shooting, was also Maltese. He took offence at the suggestion that he should act as dragoman (or translator), which is to say that he should facilitate communication on behalf of another. While alcohol and bravado were contributing factors, the position of intermediary itself was also despised in this instance.¹⁵

The linguistic challenge of even rudimentary communication, of which effective cursing is a central example, shows one limit of easily imagined cosmopolitanism. Genuine boundary crossing depends on a more patient social ethic than the actors in these cases displayed. Hospitality is a critical mechanism in cosmopolitan visions, notably Kant’s seminal 1795 essay on perpetual peace.¹⁶ It is prescribed as an international ethic for the treatment of strangers, for instance in the formulation of asylum laws.¹⁷ But defective and failing hospitality in everyday practice, of the sort just seen, rarely receives the attention it warrants. Although this is a failure of implementation rather than principle, it had very real consequences for the misunderstanding majority. This evidence tends to

support more gradualist and tentative cosmopolitan models, which are often criticised for their caution.¹⁸

Many curses were misunderstood, but in what way did the content of the curse matter in the first place? In December of 1882, the Alexandria police charged a local subject with assault and with insulting Islam (*sabb al-diyana al-muhammadiya*).¹⁹ Peaking with inferno, riot, bombardment, invasion and occupation, 1882 was a year of extraordinary tension.²⁰ According to the narrative of a mixed city breaking along sectarian and national lines, this insult appears easy to interpret. In this case, however, the man who insulted Islam bore the unmistakably Muslim name of Muhammad Ramadan. What then was the meaning of his insult? Speech acts (such as cursing), like identity labels (which abound in cosmopolitan settings), possess content and form. When one Muslim insulted the religion of another Muslim, it was clearly the person and not the religion that was being cursed. In this case, the damage to the religion must be considered collateral: one person said to another “curse your religion”, and that religion happened to be the same as the religion of the curser. And yet the offense was classified (here by a native rather than foreign authority) as an injury against Islam itself. It was a curse that (in the eyes of the court) did not depend on context, it was one of the “inherently abusive” phrases that Thomas Conley argues are so vanishingly rare.²¹

It may be helpful here to propose a simple cursing typology. Montagu’s classic history of swearing is typical of the genre: it is a scholarly genealogy of the origins of terms and concepts that populate a swearing lexicon.²² But it is utterly specific to a single tradition, that of the English-language texts that are its source. In this sense, it is of little help in understanding cosmopolitan cursing. Anecdotally, it is clear that most of Alexandria’s insults probed a similar set of moral and social boundaries: parents, women and family honour were key themes, as was religion; in a sense, the terms thief, assassin, pimp, bugger and whore were stock insults. But neither Montagu’s reading of these concepts, nor the finely-shaded distinctions in Muslim jurisprudence on blasphemy are sufficient to describe Alexandria’s curses.²³ Instead, we might best analyse Alexandria’s curses by their effects, which crossed all social and cultural boundaries. In doing so we follow the logic of the legal institutions that recorded them. Broadly speaking, there were three kinds of effect: speech injury (both to individuals, in the form of defamation, and to God, in the form of blasphemy), social injury (to public order, in the form of actual or potential violence incited by speech acts) and civil injury (to the state, by disrespect of its servants).²⁴

This is a rather narrow list in light of present day debates over cursing in Muslim contexts. In his recent work on Islam and religiously injurious speech,

for example, Andrew March argues (against prominent critics of Western secularism) that blasphemy can produce the broadest possible range of injuries: emotional and social (to the believer) and religious (to the belief system itself).²⁵ But the insult to Islam cited above was one of very few such prosecutions in the legal records of Alexandria. More often, even these most weighty words were judged entirely by context, which is to say that their effect superseded their meaning. In 1900, a port policeman named Hassan Al-Sa'aran told an eighteen-year-old French subject named Salomon Brakkha to step away from the edge of the quay. Brakkha's retort, something like "I'll get whoever makes me leave here to leave his religion", was, the court noted, considered an insult according to local customs. Here too it is clear that the insult required translation, both literally and figuratively.²⁶ The court did not consider the case serious, however, and the fine was the desultory sum of five francs. Modern readers might be tempted to classify this conflict between a French-protected Jew and a local Muslim along sectarian lines. But such conclusions must be approached with caution. Many of the most devastating critiques of cosmopolitan (and indeed multicultural) societies hold that they are about signalling, about the form of diversity, but provide limited space for its true realisation.²⁷ In other words, the content is of little importance.

While the bias to misunderstanding discussed earlier might dampen cosmopolitan expectations, the bias to context offers a more hopeful and practical formula. We must consider one further facet of Alexandria's evidence that may shed light on cosmopolitan dilemmas, however: the bias to power. By the turn of the century, the law came to shield a certain class of individuals – officials – from all insults, over and above the religious and national lines that are presumed to mark obvious boundaries in mixed cities.

Two decades after 1882, a French subject named Mahmud Hassan Ghimé was gambling with students outside Alexandria's *École des Frères*. When children who had lost their money started to cry, a police officer named Mustafa 'Allam came over to investigate the commotion. Mahmud called Mustafa a pimp and the son of a dog, then said that all police were pimps and that their religion was cursed ("*maudite*", the records says).²⁸ Again, all evidence suggests that both men were Muslims (and of course the religion of most policemen was Islam), and the blasphemy was not pursued. Instead (as in the opening story), it was officialdom that gave these curses their most actionable force.

Insults to officials have special status in the legal records of Alexandria. The emerging cosmopolitan class of officialdom provided a legible frame for the prosecution of curses. Whereas insults between private individuals depended on a close investigation of the whole context, insults to officials could be classified unilaterally: if the official felt insulted, it was enough. As we saw in the opening

story, translation of this feeling into the legal context was not always successful. Often, however, it was. Edouard Maroque, a French citizen, was arrested when a man he was walking with called a mounted policeman, Sulaiman ‘Ali Ghazal, a “blind donkey”. The court did not consider this case conclusive: “because it happened at nine o’clock in the evening, it would have been impossible for the policeman, who was crossing a crowded alley at full gallop, to tell who had said something he didn’t like”. Maroque’s mistake came later, at the police station, when he was overheard calling a police captain a “Maltese captain pig”.²⁹

This growing category of cursing was compounded by official sensitivity to offence, which only added to the repertory of insults available for use. A Tunisian facing a policeman in Kafr al-Zayat (a town outside of Alexandria) managed to roll all insults into one stream: “*maudit soit ton père, maudit soit ton gouvernement, fils de chien etc.*” (“curse your father, curse your government, son of a cur, etc.”).³⁰ Officials themselves could also draw on this stock: a guard mocked a man who was especially officious in challenging a fee increase by calling him “*chef de village*” (“Mr. Biggety-Big”).³¹ It will be noticed that none of the insults cited thus far invoked national, ethnic or racial categories (except for the Maltese captain, who was probably most upset to be called “pig”). The boundaries that mattered in vulgar speech were linguistic, spatial, moral and official.

Modern officialdom cut across social and indeed class lines, reshaping and constraining numerous social categories. It was a dispenser of benefits, such as employment. In this role, it could also be a lightning rod for injurious speech. The Maltese Carmelo Psaila, for example, brought a civil dispute with his sister-in-law to court in 1890. He claimed that she had shouted, in public, that he had won his government job by pimping his own daughter to his superiors. In her statement, the sister-in-law corrected him: she had actually said it was his wife. The court awarded him one farthing in damages.³² As Ann Stoler has recently argued, archival sources are at their best in telling these stories of officials, who were their own best constituency.³³ It is not surprising, therefore, that legal reflection on the nature of the insults made a clearer and clearer distinction between the lawmakers and the litigants. In 1911, for example, a policeman named ‘Ali Sid Ahmad Musa arrested Yussuf Makluf Huta’s eleven-year-old son because he was playing in the street with a wagon belonging to the municipality. The men began to argue, and Yussuf, a French subject, was arrested for insulting a policeman. “The insults (which probably went in both directions) are, as it were, traditional in this country”, the court ruled. “Undoubtedly, the accused uttered them almost on instinct, as occurs in all discussions which take place in the street.” The altercation was not of great importance, but because “the police would lose all authority if this sort of abuse went completely unsanctioned”, the father was sentenced to six days in prison.³⁴ Context again overwhelmed content – the street was a site of routine cursing, produced on instinct, but the

dignity of the forces of order was the primary concern. Officialdom became a means to simplify the complex social transactions that cursing registers, to make the practice legible for prosecution before Alexandria's courts, and to preserve the dignity of the powerful.

The conventional image of cosmopolitan Alexandria fails to describe its historical reality because it requires the conjuring of a faceless, voiceless non-cosmopolitan mainstream of poor Muslim Arab Egyptians who, by definition, cannot be cosmopolitans. They exist, submerged as a sort of human ballast, in order to elevate the cosmopolitan pinnacle. They are the context that creates cosmopolitan Alexandria, from which they are excluded by definition.³⁵ Exclusion plays a similar role in certain key works of modern political theory. The just, liberal state described by John Rawls, for instance, insists resolutely on its boundaries.³⁶ Will Kymlicka's multicultural citizenship is a project restricted to a handful of Western liberal democratic nationalisms.³⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah's cosmopolitanism is marketed to (and flattering of) elites.³⁸ Clearly, this exclusion is a theoretical rather than empirical shortcoming: an abundant and growing literature (including this book) shows that Muslim and non-Western cosmopolitanisms exist.³⁹ But the challenge is not to expand existing models of cosmopolitanism to include Muslims. The problem is to describe a cosmopolitanism that does not require the non-cosmopolitan.

The historical example treated in this essay is intended to qualify the received image of Alexandria. I also believe that the question of cursing has some relevance to modern-day efforts to grapple with a complex, globalised society. Political theory seeks usable pasts, and it seems to me that the story told here is useful in two ways.

First, this story corresponds to the stakes of modern-day politics. Cosmopolitanism is not merely about cultivating a broad cultural palette. It is about tackling injustice: cosmopolitanism, like cursing itself, is meaningful only when it is dangerous, when it hurts. Craig Calhoun's brilliant "Class Consciousness of Frequent Fliers" provides a glimpse of actually existing cosmopolitanism – elitist, consumerist, neo-liberal, secular – as a *plaisanterie entre amis*.⁴⁰ Echoing David Harvey, he depicts a capitalist cosmopolitan class that rejects communitarianism by celebrating postmodernism and neglecting local particularities.⁴¹ This cosmopolitanism corresponds exactly to Alexandria's conventional image. The remedy, Calhoun argues, is to battle the Western, capitalist cosmopolitan consensus by making room for multiple national and religious solidarities. This is the task of more difficult cosmopolitan projects, which are full of uncertainty and risk. And here it is essential to note that Muslim experiences and Muslim symbols (the veil, human rights, democracy, terror) provide the content for the genuinely dangerous debates that most incisively challenge the present-day

globalised slate of liberatory programmes: feminism, multiculturalism, human rights, cosmopolitanism.⁴² These debates are unresolved, obviously, and their danger is palpable in much Western liberal treatment of Muslims, who have in many ways assumed the suspicious figure of the “rootless cosmopolitan” once assigned to Jews.

The second usable past that everyday cosmopolitanism of the sort presented in this paper might contribute to contemporary theory is the virtue of the banal. I have argued that cosmopolitan cursing exhibited biases to misunderstanding, context and power. The effort made in the opening case to probe the meaning of the insulting words themselves was ultimately fruitless when it came time to issue judgement. In practice, difference was managed through attention to the concerns of the actors involved. A similar concern for the effects rather than the ultimate causes of cosmopolitan conflict might assuage present-day debates. In debates over the Islamic veil in Western states, for example, the insistence on principle has blocked an approach at once less fraught and more profound, which acknowledges that there are relatively few burqas and, on a collective scale, their effect is almost negligible. These historical data support cosmopolitanism theory that privileges local context and is wary of the misunderstandings and the bias to power that results from insistence on pure principle.

NOTES

1. See especially Michael Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and Philip Mansel, *Levant : Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
2. For a brief introduction to the capitulations, see John E. Wansbrough, et al., “Imtiyazat”, in H. A. R. Gibb (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1986). The best in-depth study is Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls, and Beratlis in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
3. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, Fonds Alexandrie: Jugements (hereinafter CADN-AJ) 525/#14 (D’office c. Mohamed Abou Eghela [‘Agila?], 29 March 1890). Partial transcript of testimony in CADN-AJ 553, pp. 103–7.
4. In this case, the charge arose from Article 224 of the Code Pénal of 1810: “L’outrage fait par paroles, gestes ou menaces à tout officier ministériel, ou agent dépositaire de la force publique, dans l’exercice ou à l’occasion de l’exercice de ses fonctions, sera puni d’une amende de seize francs à deux cents francs.”
5. It had become an established principle of French jurisprudence that minor agents of foreign governments were not treated as public officials.
6. Thomas M. Conley, *Toward a Rhetoric of Insult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. vii.
7. CADN-AJ 520/#25 (Alfred Levi c. Jean Baptiste Esquier, 10 April 1885).
8. The leading studies of Alexandria’s modern history are Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie, 1830–1930 : Histoire d’une Communauté Citadine*, 2 vols. (Le Caire: Institut Français

- d'Archéologie Orientale, 1996) and Michael J. Reimer, *Colonial Bridgehead: Government and Society in Alexandria, 1807–1882* (Cairo: AUC Press, 1997).
9. See Khaled Fahmy, “For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor: Some Critical Notes on the History and Historiography of Modern Alexandria”, in Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (eds), *Alexandria, Real and Imagined* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 263–80; and Khaled Fahmy, “Towards a Social History of Modern Alexandria”, in Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (eds), *Alexandria, Real and Imagined* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 281–306. More generally, this is the argument of Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
 10. Foreign Office records, National Archives, London (hereinafter FO) 847/27/2 (Regina vs Francesco Zammit, 1897).
 11. We should read such temporary appropriations cautiously. On nationalities of convenience, see my forthcoming *Nationality Grasped: Identification and Law in Alexandria*.
 12. FO 847/11/11 (Regina vs Andrea Grima and Guglielmo Farrugia, 1886).
 13. CADN-AJ 528/#40 (Héméda ben Califah c. Saïd Habib El Daraghi, 23 August 1895).
 14. CADN-AJ 529/1896/#46 (D’office c. Ladislav Lucaci, 4 December 1896). Note: “Hundsfott” could perhaps be “Hundsspott”?
 15. FO 847/2/54 (Regina vs Giuseppe Pace, 1880).
 16. “The law of cosmopolitanism must be restricted to the conditions of universal hospitality.” Quoted in Jacques Derrida, “On Cosmopolitanism”, in David Held and Garrett Wallace Brown (eds), *The Cosmopolitanism Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 419.
 17. For example, Marguerite La Caze, “Not Just Visitors: Cosmopolitanism, Hospitality, and Refugees”, *Philosophy Today* 48, 3 (2004), pp. 313–24 and Garrett W. Brown, “The Laws of Hospitality, Asylum Seekers and Cosmopolitan Right”, *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, 3 (2010), pp. 308–27.
 18. See, for example, the responses in Şeyla Benhabib, et al., *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
 19. Dar al-Watha’iq al-Qawmiya [Egyptian National Archives] – Dabtiya Iskandariya (hereinafter DWQ-DI) 738/73. Thanks to Emad Helal for an illuminating discussion of the meaning of insults to religion in this and other cases.
 20. Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians!: The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt 1878–1882*, St Antony’s Middle East monographs no. 14 (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre St Antony’s College Oxford, 1981); Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s ‘Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Donald Malcolm Reid, “The Urabi Revolution and the British Conquest, 1879–1882”, in M. W. Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2: Modern Egypt, From 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 217–38.
 21. Conley, *Toward a Rhetoric of Insult*, pp. 9 and 25.
 22. Ashley Montagu, *The Anatomy of Swearing* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).
 23. Andrew F. March, “Speech and the Sacred: Does the Defense of Free Speech Rest on a Mistake About Religion?”, *Political Theory* (2012): pp. 13–4, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1642754.

24. This is an abstraction, based on more technical distinctions. For example, French law offered special categories for insulting language, and one-fifth of all criminal cases before the consular courts of Alexandria between 1880 and 1914 (110 of 558) involved insults. British law defined speech crimes more narrowly (as libel); only five such cases appear in the criminal records during the same period, but there were also thirteen civil suits for libel.
25. March, "Speech and the Sacred" and Talal Asad, et al., *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities and University of California Press, 2009).
26. CADN-AJ 531/34 (D'office c. Salomon Brakkha, 1900). The offending phrase is given as "celui qui me fera partir d'ici, je lui ferai sortir sa religion", which the court said were "paroles considérées comme un outrage, selon les habitudes locales". A year later, Brakkha was jailed for six days for insulting another local policeman, who intervened to stop him hitting a child. CADN-AJ 532/22 (D'office c. Salomon Brakkha).
27. For example, the argument and responses in Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, *Multiculturalism : Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
28. CADN-AJ 533/p9b (Moustapha Allam c. Mahmoud Hassan Ghimé, 1903).
29. He was only fined five francs, however: CADN-AJ 529/1897/#17 (D'office c. Edouard Maroque, 2 April 1897).
30. CADN-AJ 529/1896/#12 (D'office c. Abdel Kader Aly Haikal, 28 March 1896).
31. CADN-AJ 532/p137 (D'office c. Hassan Ahmed Haikal, 10 June 1903).
32. FO 847/20/50 (Carmelo Psaila vs Riccarda Zahra, 1890).
33. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
34. CADN-AJ 536/p138b (D'office c. Youssef Maklouf Houta, 29 September 1911). "... les injures proférés probablement de part et d'autre, ont dans le pays un caractère pour ainsi dire traditionnel; que l'accusé les a proférés sans doute presque instinctivement, comme il arrive dans toutes les discussions qui ont lieu sur la voie publique . . ."
35. For a detailed exposition of this argument, see Will Hanley, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies", *History Compass* 6, 5 (2008), pp. 1346–67.
36. This despite efforts to globalise his model, such as Joseph H. Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders", *The Review of Politics* 49, 2 (1987), pp. 251–73 and Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice Without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
37. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Will Kymlicka, "Territorial Boundaries: A Liberal Egalitarian Perspective", in David Miller and Sohail H. Hashmi (eds), *Boundaries and Justice: Diverse Ethical Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 249–75.
38. This, it seems to me, is a great failing of Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, 1st edition, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).
39. See also Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For a refreshing approach to cosmopolitan literature, see Deborah Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Culture, Society, and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008).
40. Craig Calhoun, "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique

- of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 4 (2002), pp. 869–97.
41. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989).
 42. For instance, Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2003); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) and Joseph Andoni Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

CHAPTER 7

Kebabs and Port Wine: The Culinary Cosmopolitanism of Anglo-Persian Dining, 1800–1835

NILE GREEN

My fare is really sumptuous this evening: Buffalo's humps, tongues, and marrowbones ...

The Journal of Meriwether Lewis, 13 June 1805

INTRODUCTION

Although better known for their commercial and scientific achievements, the travels of the small exploratory parties, which between 1750 and 1850 contributed to what William Goetzmann termed the “second great age of discovery”, were also parties of gastronomic discovery.¹ The intensified patterns of social interaction that emerged as these journeys became regularised into repeatable routes of commerce and diplomacy fed a growing appetite for travel writing in which the discussion of food habits played a significant and practical role.² Although largely recorded in the general books of travel that placed commercial and ethnographic data alongside geographical and historical observations, this literature of cultural description was practical in nature. In a period in which Anglo-Saxon hegemony was far from established, knowledge of “manners and customs” laid the social basis for developing what were still, on their frontiers at least, empires of negotiation.³ The collection of this knowledge was not unique to Euro-American travellers and from around 1800 there emerged a corresponding travel literature in Persian concerned with European cultural practices. As Britain's imperial meridian widened, members of the court and bureaucratic elite of Iran were dispatched on similar fact-finding missions to Britain.⁴ Despite the growing imbalance of power, as increasing numbers of Iranian elites reached Britain, there emerged a considerable reciprocity of practice and process in the methods

of travel and knowledge production in Persian and English.⁵ Within this pattern of reciprocity, travellers on both sides brokered exchanges through food culture. Such elite culinary interaction was not inherently new and owed much of its character to an older emphasis on the civility of diplomatic personnel.⁶ What was new to the decades after 1800 was the emergence of a substantial two-way literature, in Persian no less than English, of Iranians describing English foods no less than Englishmen describing Iranian foods. It is this literature that allows us to capture at a distance of two centuries something of the flavour of a tenuous cosmopolitanism that emerged through common dining.

As British interests incrementally extended from India to the Persian Gulf and as Iran sought allies against an expansive Russian Empire in the early 1800s, the underlying causes of the increase in travel between England and Iran were political in nature. But as each party of diplomats and scholars spent time in the other's country, the ramifications were also cultural. Indeed, the cultural, political, intellectual and commercial elements of these travels and of the knowledge they produced were interdependent. The most enduring cultural product of this period of exchanges is the set of travelogues composed on each side in Persian and English. The following pages draw on these writings to explore the perceptions and descriptions of food cultures on both sides of the exchange in order to assess to what degree these adventures of the palate amounted to a pattern of culinary cosmopolitanism. The main sources are drawn from the circle of Iranian and British travellers that surrounded the embassies of Abu al-Hasan Khan to England in 1809–10 and of Sir Gore Ouseley to Iran in 1810–12, in particular the travelogues of Abu al-Hasan himself and of the young Iranian statesman Mirza Salih Shirazi, who spent four years between 1815 and 1819 studying the ways and languages of the English as the foundation of what would become his own diplomatic career.⁷

Before moving on to the accounts themselves, let us focus a little more closely on the significance of such commensality or food sharing. As O. A. C. Anigbo has noted, “the principle of commensality is eating together for a purpose” and a substantial anthropological literature has now explored in detail how “rituals of dinner” serve as profound purveyors of meaning, from hierarchy and status to belonging and exclusion.⁸ Amid the globalised food industry of the twenty-first century, it is easy to take the interaction of food cultures for granted. But amid the nascent global interactions of the early nineteenth century, common food experiences were far from universal and in many contexts the simple act of eating together faced profound cultural barriers on one side of the table or the other. In India, British interaction with Hindus was restricted by caste taboos that presented food sharing as polluting, taboos which in a diplomatic context were all the more vexing for their more scrupulous observation by elites.⁹ In Africa, the obstacles were often on the British side, as travellers were confronted

with foodstuffs and eating practices that seemed repulsive to their own sensibilities.¹⁰ In other regions, food sharing was not the most important mode of social interaction and the sharing of commodities other than food was often more important. Diplomatic interactions in Eurasia had long relied on the exchange of robes, a practice whose uncertain implications caused considerable concern to East India Company officials before their own social rituals gained leverage.¹¹ In the westward expansion of America, travelling negotiators had to adjust to an Amerindian culture of interaction based around ritual pipe smoking that survived well into the 1800s.¹² Like robe giving and pipe smoking, food sharing was an important medium of interaction. It was also one that, in the greater scheme of global interactions, was similarly held by Christians and Muslims.

Beyond this shared theoretical recognition of commensality, its actual practice was rendered easier through the use of broadly familiar foodstuffs that resulted from older patterns of Eurasian trade and the related ecologies of food production between the Middle East and Europe. An Iranian might find English food habits unusual but never incomprehensible and rarely repulsive, and the same was true vice-versa, particularly through the impact of Britons returned from India on food culture in England.¹³ Since the Christian English lacked any clear food taboos beyond the modifiable criterion of “taste”, food sharing was an obvious first choice for diplomatic interactions with other peoples.¹⁴ And while Muslim travellers were in principle restricted by the dietary regulations of shari‘a, in practice such restrictions were often more honoured in the breach than the observance. This was particularly the case with alcohol consumption, which in any case had a long history in the food culture of Persianate elites, for whom the bonds of shared drunkenness had a history that reached from the epic heroes of the *Shahnama* and bibulous *männerbund* of the emperor Babur.¹⁵ In the larger global context of social interaction in the second age of discovery, English and Iranian elites therefore faced relatively few barriers for culinary sociability. In a period in which the strangeness of new peoples was increasingly confronted through the experience and literature of travel, the sharing of food offered a simple but effective means for what was a fragile but nonetheless face-to-face cosmopolitanism.

Food culture is never static and over the longer term such patterns of culinary interaction forged inroads into the actual substance of food cultures on both sides.¹⁶ Recent work has shown how, by the eighteenth century, British food culture had been massively infiltrated by dietary commodities introduced mainly from the First British Empire and by the early nineteenth century Britain was receiving a second wave of influences from the Second British Empire in the East.¹⁷ Whether as “Worcestershire” sauce and coronation chicken or *kalbas* sausage and *dubbal-roti* sliced bread, as the nineteenth century wore on, discrete food items and recipes were adapted to the palates of England no less than Iran

and India. It is not our purpose here to trace these longer-term developments, but rather to focus on a shorter period in which (for its participants at least) respective food cultures appeared to be stable. Whether such stability actually was the case is not the point (and the increasing interactions of the period suggest it hardly can have been).¹⁸ Instead, the aim here is to show how experience and understanding of eating habits fitted into a wider body of cultural knowledge collected, in Persian no less than English, to smooth the way for elite and principally diplomatic interactions. This need to contain food practices in coherent and thereby useful prose had an innate tendency to present food cultures in terms of stable systems. As a result, writers in both Persian and English tried to codify their dining experiences into coherent systems described in such a way as to enable their readers to master the rules and participate. Like travel writing more generally in this period, the description of food culture was intended to be practical and instructive. If the tone of the English sources had not yet attained a Victorian gravitas, surrounding the enjoyment of food were the grand politics of the high table. Even so, pleasure was central to the purposes of such sociability and so, in the early 1800s no less than today, such culinary interactions formed the easiest of cosmopolitanisms because they were the most enjoyable. In this way, shared food and drink became more than diplomatic devices: they became brokers of understanding and even affection. It is something of that levity of the table that is sought in the pages that follow.

DINING TOGETHER: ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE HIGH TABLE

It is easy to imagine that Muslim visitors to Regency England faced all manner of ritual injunctions restricting their dining with Christian hosts: was wine being drunk at table, for example, or pork being served; indeed, was any of the meat on offer halal? From a theological or even a prescriptively multiculturalist reading of Muslim mores, we might imagine that the moveable feast of Regency high society presented Muslims with religious obstacles to the conviviality of shared food and drink. In practice, this seems not to have been the case. While there certainly were Muslim travellers for whom the difficulty of accessing, for example, halal meat was a cause of upset (such as the eighteenth-century Bengali scholar, Mirza I'tisam al-din), we have no evidence that this was the case with our chief exemplar, Mirza Salih, who did not mention the issue of haram and halal food, nor the "problem" of alcohol, in the entire course of his travelogue.¹⁹ Nor was he alone in this gastronomic liberalism, for the travel diaries of the Indo-Persian traveller Mirza Abu Talib between 1799 and 1803 and of the Iranian ambassador Abu al-Hasan Khan between 1809 and 1810 substantially cohere with Mirza Salih's attitudes in the following decade. Of course, the possibility remains that Muslim travellers also prepared more licit foods on their own account, and in

the case of Abu al-Hasan Khan, who travelled with a substantial entourage, this does seem to have been the case. But the facts remain that, firstly, even if they did so, they did not consider this worth making a point of in their travelogues (which were after all written for an audience of fellow Muslims for whom we might easily consider such matters to be of importance) and, secondly, when eating either in public or as guests, they joined in with the dining customs of those around them. Although it might be argued that shari'a is traditionally accommodating to the difficulties experienced while travelling, the journals of such figures do not suggest personalities especially concerned with or learned in the finer points of dietary law. Instead, the dinners, dances and high teas that Mirza Salih and his fellow travellers enjoyed in Regency England suggest that social interaction between "Muslims" and "Christians" was anything but predictable through the theoretical prescriptions of religious law.

Compared to the culture of the vigorous sportsman that would emerge from the public schools of Victorian Britain, Mirza Salih's picture of the Regency English in his travelogue is of a surprisingly domesticated people. The picture he presented of the typical Englishman's daily cycle was remarkably quotidian: he dressed, shaved, took breakfast, went to work (usually, *pace* Napoleon, in a shop!), came home and ate supper (enjoying cheese or sweets for his pudding), before reading and retiring to bed.²⁰ Turning to food customs, he then gave a description of the kinds of food that were eaten in England. What is striking about the account is its vivid awareness of the intersections between food, economy and class. Mirza Salih's discussion of British foodstuffs included a section on the Atlantic fishing industry, for example.²¹ Transcribing the English term for the fish in question, he described how a certain fish "which they call *haran* [herring]" is usually salted and can then be stored for years. Such is its importance, he added, that in Scotland no fewer than 15,000 fishermen are employed in catching its vast stocks, with many more people employed in the subsidiary jobs of transporting and selling herring. Many other people in England and Scotland, he added, are similarly "busy in catching a fish that they call *kad* [cod]", which after being salted is then traded with France, Germany, Italy and other countries of Europe.²² Most striking of all is Mirza Salih's awareness of the fact that much of the cod was ultimately acquired from fishermen operating in the ports of distant *niwfirlund*, that is, the Newfoundland for which there was no existing name in Persian.

In a reflection of the class with whom he was mixing, Mirza Salih then described the main foodstuffs of the gentry as comprising beef, veal, mutton, venison and boar, alongside chicken, pheasant and goose.²³ Detail mattered and a good sense of the thoroughness with which Mirza Salih observed English eating habits can be found in his account of eating practices as such, which covered everything from the times at which the English ate to the etiquette

they observed while doing so.²⁴ Breakfast, for example, was said to consist of either coffee or tea, along with bread, butter and a “half-cooked” egg; aged cow’s tongue (“which is delicious”) was also sometimes eaten.²⁵ Before he ate breakfast, Mirza Salih explained, the Englishman would dress in the clean and elegant clothes that his servants had laid out for him and by the time he and his family sat down to eat, a knife, fork and spoon would have been laid out on a table in front of a chair for each person, a method of eating which was of course quite foreign to Iranian floor-and-hands eating. Before even arriving at the breakfast table, Mirza Salih repeated, it was necessary to don appropriately elegant dress, to wash one’s hands and face and, for men, to also shave. However fine the plates and cutlery, no one was allowed to exchange utensils with another person at table.²⁶ One also needed to display good manners and make polite table talk throughout the mealtime.

Noting the different dinner times for workers, artisans and gentry, Mirza Salih then described the manner in which British families always ate together, men, women and children, no matter how large the family. Not only did women eat with, and even sit between, men at table, the master of the household always placed his wife at the head of the table and himself sat opposite her at its foot.²⁷ A shift in the social order of eating, then, from the “sitting atop” (*bala nishastan*) by which only male hosts and their chief guests sat at the head of the table in Iran. Even so, the scene in the special English dining room was a graceful one, with white tablecloths and clean napkins laid out. Dinner itself consisted of a meat broth, followed by fish, chicken, what Mirza Salih described as “kebab” (presumably England’s famous roasts) and other “elegant foodstuffs”, none of which one was allowed to touch with one’s hand. Afterwards, servants brought sweets, then what Mirza Salih referred to by the Persian combination “cheese and herbs” (*panir u sabzi*), followed finally by wine served with fruit and almonds.²⁸ Lest wine drinking among women seem too shocking to his countrymen, he added that English women never took more than one or two glasses of wine themselves and that the drunkenness of any guest was considered a grave offence. As we have already seen, such travelogues were not intended to be idiosyncratic or personal memoirs, but practical and instructive works aimed at smoothing the way for future interactions. In the Persian ethnography of the Russians that was written during the Iranian embassy to Saint Petersburg in 1830 (which Mirza Salih accompanied as by then an accomplished cultural intermediary), we thus find a parallel description of Russian dining habits.²⁹ Served with gold cutlery and crystal glassware, dinner in the imperial capital was presented as a much grander affair than the bourgeois manner of the English.³⁰ As with the account of English dining, the description of Russian food customs was primarily intended to serve as practical and preparatory advice for future Iranian travellers, primarily those in state service.

The topic of food also led Mirza Salih to the subject of hunting. In an implicit contrast to the hunting practices of Iranian elites which Mirza Salih's friend Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833) described in his account of Iran, Mirza Salih noted how England's hunters were mostly limited to rabbit, adding that some of the aristocracy also kept deer on their land.³¹ In contrast to the wide variety of animals still found in the mountains and on the plains of Iran, aside from rabbit and deer, the English hunter had to make do with the humble quarry of the bird and fox. When we compare this to the fact that, during his stay in London from 1809–10, Ambassador Abu al-Hasan liked to begin his days with a ride in Regent's Park hurling javelins (*niza*) at his retainers, the sporting life of John Bull must have seemed tame indeed.³² But here too there was room for exchange. When Abu al-Hasan returned to Iran in Malcolm's company, to amuse as well as feed one another en route, the British and Iranian parties demonstrated their ways of hunting and, as Malcolm noted, "if we were amused by the field diversions of the Persians and Arabs, they were equally so with our mode of hunting".³³ Nonetheless, Abu al-Hasan took back with him to Iran a pack of English fox hounds as a present for the crown prince, 'Abbas Mirza, for in spite of the difference in particulars, the aristocratic pastime of the hunt was itself held in common. Between Iran and England in the early nineteenth century, as it would in imperial India still more, the hunt formed an important medium of elite interaction.³⁴

In another section of his *safarnama*, Mirza Salih gave an account of England's emergent culture of consumption by way of the tea garden, coffee house and what he termed the public "kitchen" (*ashpaz-khana*).³⁵ While this might seem unremarkable to the modern reader, it is worth emphasising the sheer novelty of a restaurant culture. Through its provision of an ostentatious setting for dinner for a class lacking a grand dining room and servants of their own, the restaurant was an innovation that signalled the rise of the bourgeoisie.³⁶ Even if the "restaurant" as such had not yet truly developed in Regency Britain, and was still regarded as a characteristically French phenomenon at this time, the public "kitchens" and "hotels" that Mirza Salih described were novel to an Iranian audience. While early nineteenth-century Iran did have its travellers' inns or *musafir-khanas* at which a sojourner might find shelter and even food, he would have to be a needy traveller to do so.³⁷ When travelling in their own country, Iranians who could afford to do so would typically set up their own camps, surrounded by their own guards and attended by their own cooks and servants. The same was true for dining in one's native city, where one would entertain at home – whether in the public or *biruni* section of the house or better still in the pavilion of a private garden – rather than resort to a public "kitchen". There was as yet no Iranian middle class who desired imitation aristocratic dining rooms in which to show off in public.³⁸ The public gathering places of early nineteenth-

century Iran were not the showy hotels that Mirza Salih observed in London and which he described as being not only impeccably clean but as serving food with fine plates and silver cutlery.³⁹ Still, even here there was common ground to be found and it is possible to gauge the degree of culinary familiarity and difference that Mirza Salih experienced through his varying resort to either native Persian words or English loan-words to describe what he saw in London. While for tearooms and coffee houses he found easy Persian equivalents in the *chai-khana* and *qahva-khana*, for the “hotel” and the “inn” he was forced to transcribe the English terms into Arabic script. Driven by a similar sense of familiarity to the Iranian tradition of sweetmeats, Mirza Salih also wrote about the pastry and sweet shops to which he said the English retreated when tired and in which one could be served all kinds of sugary or fruity confections by the young women who worked there.⁴⁰ In order to describe what were surely sticky puddings of a very English kind, he again drew on his native vocabulary of gastronomy by labelling them as *shirini*, *halva* and *nakh band*, sweets which his Iranian readers would recognise at once. As the future founder of Iran’s first newspaper, Mirza Salih also pointed to the fact that London’s coffee houses were places to which people retired to read the *kaghaz-e akhbar* or “newspaper”.⁴¹ Food culture, then, was also a medium for other forms of cultural adaptation and exchange.

FROM FOOD TO HOSPITALITY: PATTERNS OF ELITE SOCIABILITY

While it would be naïve and plainly false to suggest that all Muslim visitors were well treated in Regency England, in the early nineteenth century their presence was still relatively uncommon and, for elite and wealthy travellers at least, that rarity lent them an enhanced status. In the diary of the residence in England of the Indo-Persian gentleman Mirza Abu Talib between 1799 and 1803, we find strident compliments on English hospitality towards a Muslim traveller. In Mirza Abu Talib’s words, “hospitality (*mihman-gharib*) is one of the most esteemed virtues of the English; and I experienced it to such a degree, that I was seldom disengaged. In these parties I enjoyed every luxury my heart could desire. Their viands (*ta’am*) were delicious, and wines (*sharab*) exquisite.”⁴² Amid his endless invitations, Mirza Abu Talib appears to have been a solitary Eastern star in this scene, though a few years after his departure the still brighter presence of Ambassador Abu al-Hasan took his place on the London social circuit. Not only did Abu al-Hasan supply the thrill of the exotic in an age of fashionable orientalism, he was considered a wit and dandy to boot. As the pseudonymous mannerist Philoxenus Secundus described him in a book he wrote on Persian etiquette for would-be hosts of the Iranian delegation, the ambassador was “a fine handsome dark man”, albeit one who “was sometimes much annoyed by the insatiate admiration, fixed stare, and intense regard of the British ladies”.⁴³ Such

was the prestige of his presence at London's soirées in 1809 and 1810, and again on his return between 1818 and 1819, that at the insistence of his proud hosts, newspapers regularly publicised his attendance at dinners.⁴⁴

Abu al-Hasan's diary gives us a good idea of Iranian assessments of the gatherings he attended, one of which comprised that British custom which continues to confound foreign visitors to the present day: the fancy dress party.⁴⁵ At this breakfast (*brak fas*), the ambassador witnessed the spectacle of scores of Englishmen dressed up not only in the old standbys of ancient Romans and hoary seadogs, but also in the more fashionably oriental manner of Iranians, Turks and Indians (*bih libas-e Iran va Turani va Hindi*).⁴⁶ Amid the exchange of clothes, food, drink (wine?) and "kebab" (*ta'am va sharab va kebab*) was being served in the little garden where the people gathered.⁴⁷ Abu al-Hasan noted in particular a man with a thick false beard made of cat's or goat's hair, who was said to be dressed as an Iranian and to be able to speak Persian, though when Abu al-Hasan spoke with him, he was quickly divested of his pretensions to sartorial no less than grammatical accuracy and left helpless and bewildered (*'ajiz va hayran*).⁴⁸ By way of recompense, Abu al-Hasan provided a more accurate recreation of Iranian life in the parties he hosted at his lodgings in Mansfield Street for such diplomats as James Morier and Sir Gore Ouseley, where he provided Iranian food prepared by the domestic staff who had accompanied him from Iran. According to a newspaper report in the *Morning Post* of 21 December 1809, the ambassador hosted his Persophile friends to "an entertainment, called in the Persian language a *Pillau*; it was composed of rice and fowls stewed together with spices". To try to give British readers a better sense of the exotic feast, in the same way that Mirza Salih resorted to the familiar language of kebabs and *halva*, the English report added in plainer terms that "the [Persian] dish was prepared in the same way as marinaded chickens".⁴⁹ From this dinner, as well as his later culinary experiences in Iran itself, Gore Ouseley's own kitchen arrangements changed, such that in future he would be serving Persian food to his own guests. When in December 1827 the German traveller Prince Pückler-Muskau was invited to dine at Ouseley's country house, he recorded that he was served "some Oriental dishes, and drank genuine Schiraz [wine] for the first time in my life".⁵⁰

The most vivid picture of this reciprocity between Iranian and English dining is found in an account of the residence of two Iranian princes in London in the mid-1830s written by their official host or *mihmandar*, James Baillie Fraser (1783–1856). There we find the following opinions of the Iranians recorded about the food they encountered in London:

[W]hen asked what dishes they preferred, the usual reply was, "Oh! anything; just what you English eat." There were, however, exceptions: some dishes they would not eat; two have been mentioned already, – turtles and lobsters.

To these at first was added oysters; and, in fact, their aversion seemed to extend to all shell-fish with one exception, and that, strange enough to say, was shrimps. To these, or something of the sort, they had been accustomed in the south of Fars, and [Prince] Timour especially was very fond of them.

To turtle and lobsters they obstinately maintained their antipathy, refusing to taste them, although mock-turtle soup was one of their favourite dishes; but one day, as a dish of nice scalloped oysters was put on the table at Mivart's, I pressed Timour Meerza to taste a little bit.⁵¹ He confessed that the dish looked very well, and smelt very well; and after a queer imploring look at his brothers, and a glance of irresolution at the morsel, he put it in his mouth. His countenance betrayed that the taste was not displeasing; he asked for another morsel – swallowed it – and then desired the whole shell to be sent to him. This he gobbled up without a word; and then, turning to his brother, said, “*Dadâish*, by your head, it is capital! what fools we have been! Saheb Fraser, pray order that dish of these same oysters be set down at table every day we dine here. *Ajaib-cheezee ust!* – A wonderful sort of thing it is!” In fact, after this, he ate so much of them, that they were, I do believe, a principal cause of a sharp illness that he had soon after.⁵²

There is certainly an element of teasing, even cruelty, in Fraser's pushing of the horrid crustaceans, not least in view of their “abhorred” (*makruh*) status in Islamic dietary law (though, again, neither of the princes apparently mentioned this). Even so, as *mihmandar*, it was Fraser's task not chiefly to pander to the princes' wishes but to safely introduce them to English ways. And, amid this diplomatic cultural exchange, Fraser also described how Persian techniques of cooking found their way into the English kitchen at James Mivart's famous Claridge's Hotel.

Another dish of which they became very fond was a preparation of cream, under the name of *Charlotte Russe*. The Wali, in particular, was a great admirer of it, and ate, as he always did when he got what he liked, to excess, making all of the time puns and bon-môts in Persian on the sweetness and fairness of his favourite dish as compared with the living Charlottes of his acquaintance. Still, after they had been for some time in London, they began to long for some of their Persian fare; and, as one of their servants was a cook, by the assistance of Mr. Mivart's *artiste* the matter was easily managed, and pillaws of various sorts, and sundry stews, *mutemjâns*, *fizenjans*, *moosommahs*, *cookoos*, and vegetables *à la mode de Perse* – made their appearance at their table. That same *artiste* of Mr. Mivart's, if he had the true gastronomic genius, must have got some good hints for new dishes; for though the Persian cookery deals

much in butter, and may be too greasy for many palates, it has points that proper modification could not fail being turned to good advantage.⁵³

Fraser's account of the Iranians' exploratory gastronomy is not only of interest as a period piece, but also for its hints at the reciprocity of English and Iranian food learning. The English share in this bill of exchange appears most clearly in the interest taken in the cultivated table talk studied by this class of Iranians, who, on this count, claimed Philoxenus Secundus did "resemble the French in the days of Gallic civilization more than any other nation of Europe".⁵⁴ We can glimpse something of this display and delight in witticisms, puns and *bon-mots* in Fraser's account of the princes at table, comparing the sweet cream *charlotte russe* with limpid-skinned ladies of the same name. Memorised, improvised, or parodied, poetry was central to this art, and both the Persian and Arabic literary traditions preserved a vast treasury of verse on the pleasures of the sweet life.⁵⁵ (We would do well to remember that when Britons wrote in condemnation of Islamic morality in the nineteenth century, it was not as today for their puritan denial of the good life but for what they considered the excessive sensuality of Islam.)⁵⁶ Since Iranians expected any man of culture to carry a collection of rare verses or anecdotes in his repertoire, the entry of the Iranian travellers to London society led to English attempts to participate in this culture of dinner talk. As we have already seen, the desire of London hosts to master or at least appreciate this conversational art had in 1812 led Philoxenus Secundus to publish his *Oriental Recreations* on the correct forming of verbal *nuqtas* and *latifas*. A number of Abu al-Hasan's own gallantries were described by way of example: when an English lady "wished to know if he believed in talismans, he said the ladies were the only talismans he knew".⁵⁷ Not every Englishman was ready to adapt this line of charm and for his part, George, the Prince Regent, chose the rather blunter approach of telling Abu al-Hasan his own favourite *latifa* about the length of his brother's penis (*zakar*).⁵⁸ In an age of sensibility, it is scarcely surprising that the Indo-Persian traveller Mirza Abu Talib found his more refined conversation had a pleasing effect on his hosts, recording that "my society was courted, and that my wit and repartees, with some *impromptu* applications of oriental poetry, were the subject of conversation in the politest circles".⁵⁹ This was, after all, the time of Jane Austen no less than the Prince Regent and it is probably no coincidence that the cultivated elites of Iran found a better reception in the mannered society of the Regency than in the more bullish age of the Victorians. In 1818, the year of the publication of Austen's *Persuasion*, set in Bath, Mirza Salih and his aristocratic companion Mirza Ja'far made a tour of that city.⁶⁰ Among the elegant villas, they cut sufficient dash that, on leaving, a local newspaper reported that "they will be followed by the good wishes of all who witnessed their friendly and ingratiating manners".⁶¹

ILLCIT LIBATIONS? THE QUESTION OF ALCOHOL

Not content with attending society gatherings, Mirza Salih also sought the company of England's intellectual elite and in doing so dined at the grandest academic tables in the land. This occurred during his several visits to Oxford and Cambridge in 1818 and 1819, where he toured some of the richest colleges of the universities at the height of their Regency extravagance, dining at Trinity and Queens' College, Cambridge and New College, Oxford.⁶² We can be confident that Mirza Salih was capable of holding his own at these dinners and his surviving letters in English testify to an effortless command of idiom.⁶³ There is also independent testimony of his sociability – according to a report in *The Times*, “he has much humour, and is social and easy, particularly with ladies” – and we have in any case already seen his informed summary of English table manners.⁶⁴ Unlike the latter-day Spanish visitor to Oxford described in the novelist Javier Marias's semi-autobiographical *All Souls*, one suspects Mirza Salih was far from confounded by the gongs and whispers.⁶⁵ While Mirza Salih left no details of the food he ate on these occasions, accounts of the college meals from the period allow us to reconstruct something of the gastronomic scene that confronted him. One such description appears in the diary of Reverend James Woodforde (1740–1803), who transcribed several menus from New College in the years before Mirza Salih ate there. During the period in which these dinners were held, Woodforde was vice-warden of the college and so in a comparable position to the “grandee” (*bozorg*) of the same college whom Mirza Salih claimed invited him.⁶⁶ Woodforde described one New College dinner as comprising nothing less than “two fine Cods boiled with fryed Souls round them and oyster sauce, a fine sirloin of Beef roasted, some peas soup and an orange Pudding for the first course, for the second, we had a lease of Wild Ducks roasted, a fore Qu of Lamb and sallad and mince Pies.”⁶⁷

Although this grand repast was admittedly a Christmas dinner, Woodforde's account of more everyday dinners for college guests were little less substantial. A more quotidian entry in his diary records, “I gave my company for dinner, some green Pea Soup, a chine of Mutton, some New College Puddings, a goose, some Peas, and a Codlin Tart with Cream. Madeira and Port Wine to drink after and at dinner some strong Beer, Cider, Ale and small Beer.”⁶⁸ While it would be tedious to list sample menus for every college at which Mirza Salih ate, New College was by no means exceptional in the munificence of its table. Even a humbler institution like Queens' College, Cambridge – where Mirza Salih dined on several occasions as the guest of the professor of Arabic, Samuel Lee (1783–1852), and the evangelical college dean, William Mandell (c.1785–1843) – could lay out a similarly lavish spread. Presided over at the time of Mirza Salih's visit by the president and natural scientist, Isaac Milner (1750–1820),

who with his awesomely protuberant belly was one of the most renowned gastronomes of Regency Cambridge, it was said at this time that Queens' "public dinners were very merry, but the private ones were quite uproarious".⁶⁹ Mirza Salih may have been entertained to hear that most of the popular alcoholic cups at the university were given ecclesiastical names. Clerical fellows like his Oxford host Reverend John Hill might round off their suppers with a cup of pope, cardinal or cider bishop, the latter a concoction of cider, brandy and "two glasses of calves-feet jelly in a liquid state".⁷⁰ Even if such drinks did not qualify as the kind of knowledge Mirza Salih thought worthy of recording, there remains a pleasing symmetry in the fact that his travels coincided with the golden age of the punches that formed England's most lasting offering to the cosmopolitan drinker. As an early nineteenth-century handbook, *Oxford Night Caps*, explained, "the liquor called *Punch* has become so truly English, it is often supposed to be indigenous to this country, though its name at least is oriental. The Persian *punj*, or Sanscrit *pancha*, i.e. five, is the etymon of its title, and denotes the number of ingredients."⁷¹ If "punch" came from the East, then, like a latter-day Walter Raleigh, Mirza Salih's friend Sir John Malcolm had for his part tried to introduce the potato to Iran, where for a short while at least it carried the correspondingly hybrid name of *alu-e malkum* ("Malcolm's plum").⁷²

Against the bibulous background of the Regency, it is striking that Mirza Salih made scarce reference to English alcohol consumption in his travelogue, other than noting that English women drank only one or two glasses of wine at table and that even men who became openly drunk were considered disgraced.⁷³ While we might easily take this as an attempt to politely pass over what he regarded as a reprehensible custom, the more likely answer is that wine drinking was sufficiently common among Iranian elites to be unworthy of special mention.⁷⁴ Looking beyond the travelogue itself, however, firm evidence survives of Mirza Salih's wine consumption in England in the form of a series of letters he wrote to His Majesty's Customs Office. Hoping to avoid paying import duty, Mirza Salih expressly testified that the seventy-four bottles of champagne and three dozen bottles of brandy and other *liqueurs* dispatched from Boulogne to his London address had been ordered "for my own use".⁷⁵ It is possible that on leaving Iran for England, Mirza Salih had been granted the same culinary *passpartout* as Ambassador Abu al-Hasan a few years earlier. For as Philoxenus Secundus wrote of Abu al-Hasan, "He drank wine at table with the Prince [Regent], because his master had given him permission to conform to the customs of the English on open great occasions."⁷⁶ Diplomacy, then, was a powerful motor for this cosmopolitanism of the table. Given the fact that wine consumption was quite commonplace in the circles of the Qajar court, why such a special dispensation was deemed necessary is another matter. In the early nineteenth century, several European diplomatic travellers to Iran testified to the scale of alcohol

consumption they witnessed there. Writing of the Russian embassy to the court of ‘Abbas Mirza in 1817, the German diplomat Moritz von Kotzebue praised the Iranians as “valiant toppers”, noting how on several occasions he witnessed how they “drank off a bottle of rum at once, without appearing to suffer any inconvenience from it”.⁷⁷ Recollecting one banquet hosted by ‘Abbas Mirza, Kotzebue remarked that “the wine, at dinner, was very good, and the Persians quaffed it off, as well as the liqueurs, in immense quantities”.⁷⁸ Among the elite class with whom Kotzebue mixed at court, wine played a role in promoting conviviality that corresponded to that on elite tables in Europe. We can surmise the practical role which wine played at such diplomatic dinners in facilitating communication across the barriers of language and culture, loosening tongues to sally into foreign languages and summoning, however transiently, the sympathies of conviviality. Yet we would be missing the trick if we did not recognise the basic fact of alcohol as pleasure that underwrote its broader function as a social lubricant. In Persian terms, this intangible élan was summed up in the term *kayf*, a state rather than an ingredient that could potentially be found in the intoxicants of any country. As one of the Qajar princes was wont to ask whenever offered a new alcoholic beverage in London, “Has it *kayf*?”⁷⁹

This is not to say that Iranian consumption of alcohol was without its contradictions.⁸⁰ But once again, we should not allow the theoretical constraints of Muslim religious law to hide the fact that, as individuals with their own moral agency, such travellers made their own decisions and compromises. Theology is in any case an adaptable tool and, naturally enough, there were Iranians who excused their alcohol use by making their own interpretations of Islam rather than submitting to clerical rulings. We hear of one such case in the travelogue of Reverend Henry Stern (1820–85) who, like other Christian missionaries of the period, was keen that Muslims should follow their own laws strictly if they would not follow his. When the aptly-named churchman refused to give an Iranian a bottle of *arak* on the grounds that it was forbidden under Islamic law, the disappointed Iranian then “swore by Ali, and all the 124,000 Mahomedan prophets, that sherab and arrack were only interdicted to those who prayed; but as he never prayed, he could not be included in the law”.⁸¹ Wine was, then, quite available at home, a fact that also brings us to the powerful link between food, travel and homesickness. In James Baillie Fraser’s account of his time with the Iranian princes in London during the mid-1830s, we thus hear one of the princes reminiscing about homemade kebabs and shiraz wine:

And as for wine, – ah! you know the wine of Sheerauz, – and we had the best of it, to be sure: for each of us there was never less than two *jouingees* (glass bottles holding at least half a gallon a-piece); and we thought nothing of him who should leave a drop of that; ay, and a good bottle of *arrack* (spirits) to

boot, perhaps; and we had champagne and madeira also, from [the Iranian port of] Busheer. Ah! those were days of enjoyment!⁸²

Ultimately, though, it was tea rather than wine that formed the most important culinary commodity that the Iranians and English held in common. If Mirza Salih was reticent on the topic of his champagne purchases, his travelogue does reveal him as a keen tea drinker and he described a range of occasions on which he enjoyed taking tea with his English hosts. Not least among these was Reverend John Hill who, during Mirza Salih's visit to the university in October 1818, took him for tea each day at his house on the High Street in Oxford.⁸³ As with the case of alcohol, the widespread use of tea that Mirza Salih noted as taking place in English homes as well as the special tea gardens (*baghcha*) that resembled the shady *chai-khanas* of Iran lent room for common rituals of sociability. As a commodity being traded in vastly increasing quantity in the early nineteenth century, it is tea that points us to the interdependence of culinary, commercial and political interactions. Not only did the nineteenth century see Britain's role in the production and trade of tea increasing through its control over India and global shipping networks, it also saw a massive expansion of tea consumption in Iran in response, leading in both Iran and Britain to a replacement of coffee houses by tea shops as spaces of sociability.⁸⁴ Later in the century, the Iranian historian 'Abd Allah Mustawfi reckoned Iranian tea imports as comprising 1,350 tons of white tea from China and 450 tons of black tea from India, most of which arrived on English ships.⁸⁵ Through the mediation of commerce and consumption, by the early nineteenth century the sharing of tea was becoming an internationalised ritual of conviviality. Like the other patterns of shared dining we have examined, it was one that allowed English and Iranian elites to find niches of culinary sociability in one another's worlds in a way that was still not possible between people from many other parts of the world. Mirza Salih's repeated references to the tea drinking habits of the English, and of the popularity of their tea gardens, hinted to his Iranian readers a culture of sociability that they shared with the distant people of *Inglistan*.

CONCLUSIONS

As the nineteenth century wore on, the reach of such common commodities as tea widened and spread the mutually intelligible social rituals that accompanied them. In part, then, the rise of culinary cosmopolitanism was a by-product of the more globalised consumption patterns of the nineteenth century by which different societies came to increasingly share the same foodstuffs.⁸⁶ Such economic exchanges led to unexpected forms of culinary interdependence, which would ultimately lead to the modern dependence of the sacrificial rituals of the hajj

on live sheep exports from Australia and New Zealand.⁸⁷ Yet in the period with which we have been dealing, aside from such luxury products as tea and spices, economies of food exchange were generally still regional and for Iranian and British travellers in the early nineteenth century, their respective food cultures appeared sufficiently different as to render explanation and comment. For in line with the larger aims of this volume, what we have seen in this chapter is not the existence of some kind of overarching “Islamic” cosmopolitan ideal, but rather the emergence from the social interactions of Muslim Iranians and Christian Britons in a particular time and space of a specific and certainly limited kind of cosmopolitanism that this chapter has dubbed “culinary cosmopolitanism”. As an actual rather than a theoretical or idealised cosmopolitanism, this culinary cosmopolitanism was part of the much larger pattern of interaction between cultures and their commodities that characterised the period and served in particular as a mode of sociability between mobile diplomatic or otherwise high status elites. Like several of the other Muslim cosmopolitanisms explored elsewhere in this volume, it was a socially active practice that emerged as an interacting border between two culture zones. While what we have seen was a specific case, it was not a unique case, and other early crossers of culture zones forged their own versions of culinary cosmopolitanism. A few years before the Persian princes were exploring the cooking of Mr Mivart in London, we thus find the South Indian traveller Enugula Virasvami (c.1780–1836) describing the foodstuffs being introduced by the British into India. As the cosmopolitan experience challenged the received language available to him, as in the Persian account of Mirza Salih, Enugula Virasvami occasionally had to introduce the English terms for these new food commodities into his Telegu account.⁸⁸ Whether with South Indian Hindus or Iranian Muslims, culinary, like other forms of cosmopolitanism, demanded the adaptation of existing cultural systems (whether linguistic or philosophical) in order to make conceptual space for the experience of the (in this case edible) other. Emerging in historical context, cosmopolitanisms involve the remaking of culture rather than the reliance on a pre-existing and unchanging cosmopolitanisms, whether Muslim or otherwise.

Even so, as a result of ecological connections and an older history of commerce, on a global level similarities often outweighed differences, and we have seen how both the British and Iranian parties were able to understand, adapt to and even enjoy the differences they encountered. While it might be argued that the consumption of different foods scarcely qualifies as even the weakest of cosmopolitanisms, what rendered such acts of consumption culturally significant was the social context from which they were (for the traveller at least) inseparable. Again, as we have seen elsewhere in this volume, this was an active and actual rather than a notional and theoretical cosmopolitanism. The figures we have examined not only physically ate other people’s food, but ate it in the company

of other people and used their distinct etiquettes of dining. In so doing, they not only adjusted to other sets of ingredients and manners, but confronted and conversed with the manners and members of another and, during this period, little-known society. In this way, the simple need for calorific intake set in motion a series of further interactions with both cultures of etiquette in the abstract and individual people in the concrete. If these culinary transactions did not possess the philosophical rigour of the intellectualised cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century, then in springing from the tougher soil of living encounters with another people, this was at least a face-to-face cosmopolitanism.⁸⁹ Even if they were frequently couched in diplomatic flattery, the interactions and immersions in food cultures that we have seen were therefore pragmatic rather than moralistic. Intended as it was to serve the practical purposes of elite governmental exchange, and disseminated through travel books of ethnographic advice, this was a no less deliberate cosmopolitanism than the voluntary commitments of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. And as a vehicle for affinity and even affection with another people, the sharing of food also released the subtle but potent agent that is pleasure.

NOTES

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10. J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 71–5.
11. G. Minault, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India", in S. Gordon (ed.), *Robes of Honour: Khilat in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003) and more generally S. Gordon (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
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 22. *Ibid.*, p. 308.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
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 29. Muhammad Gulbon (ed.), *Safarnāma-ye Khusraw Mīrzā bih Pūterizbūrgh va Tārikh-e Zindigāni-ye 'Abbās Mīrzā Nā'ib al-Saltāna bih Qalam-e Hājji Mīrzā Mas'ūd* (Tehran: Mustawfī, 1349/1970), pp. 362–5.
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 40. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, p. 293. For a rather less decorous picture of pleasure-seekers and women workers in this period, see J. Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

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43. Philoxenus Secundus, *Persian Recreations*, pp. 21–2.
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57. Philoxenus Secundus, *Persian Recreations*, p. 39.
58. Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, *Persian at the Court of King George*, pp. 151–2 and Mursilvand, *Hayratnāma*, p. 211.
59. Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan*, vol. 1, p. 198 and Mīrzā Abū Tālib Khān, *Masīr-e Tālibī yā Safar-nāma-ye Mīrzā Abū Tālib Khān*, p. 107.

60. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, pp. 320–8, 349–52. For a translation of the Oxford section of the travelogue, see N. S. Green, “The Madrasas of Oxford, 1818”, *The Oxford Magazine*, 253 (2006).
61. “The Persian Princes”, from a “Bristol newspaper”, reprinted in *Caledonian Mercury*, 14 December 1818.
62. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, pp. 321, 349–50.
63. UK National Archives (formerly Public Record Office), F.O. 60/23, various letters written in the hand of “Mohammed Saulih”.
64. “The Persian Princes”, *The Times*, 7 December 1818, p. 3.
65. J. Marias, *All Souls* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2000), particularly pp. 39–49. Marias offers his own advice for academic diners abroad: “Fortunately, in a language not one’s own, it’s easy to make a pretence at listening and, by pure intuition, to agree or enthuse or now and again make some (obsequious) comment”.
66. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, p. 321. Mirza Salih named his host at New College as Mr Dunmill, though the actual warden at the time of his visit was Samuel Gauntlett.
67. J. Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson, 1758–1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 86–7.
68. *Ibid.*, p.98.
69. H. Gunning, *Reminiscences of the University, Town, and County of Cambridge, from the Year 1780* (1854), cited in “Milner, Isaac”, see also *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). On Regency Oxbridge reaching its zenith of hard drinking and prostitution around 1820, see S. Rothblatt, “The Student Subculture and the Examination System in Early Nineteenth Century Oxbridge”, in L. Stone (ed.), *The University in Society*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 254–5, 270–2.
70. Anonymous, *Oxford Night Caps: A Collection of Receipts for Making Various Beverages used in the University* (Oxford: Slatter & Rose, n.d. [1827]), p. 5.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
72. Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia*, vol. 1, pp. 37–8.
73. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, p. 313.
74. R. Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), chapter 7.
75. UK National Archives (formerly Public Record Office), F.O. 60/23, letter no. 22 (dated 3 April 1823) and no. 24 (undated). The letters were written during his second visit to England.
76. Philoxenus Secundus, *Persian Recreations*, p. 34.
77. M. von Kotzebue, *Narrative of a Journey into Persia in the Suite of the Imperial Russian Embassy in the Year 1817* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), p. 123.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
79. Fraser, *Narrative of the Residence of the Persian Princes in London*, vol. 1, p. 193.
80. For a survey of earlier contradictions in Muslim attitudes towards alcohol, see D. S. Feins, “Wine and Islam: The Dichotomy Between Theory and Practice in Early Islamic History” (PhD thesis: University of Edinburgh, 1997).
81. Stern, *Dawnings of Light in the East*, p. 148.
82. Fraser, *Narrative of the Residence of the Persian Princes in London*, vol. 1, p. 290.

83. Shīrāzī, *Majmū'a-ye Safarnāmahā-ye Mīrzā Sālih Shīrāzī*, p. 321.
84. On cultures of coffee consumption, see B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) and R. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffee-Houses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985). For a global history of tea, see A. Macfarlane and I. Macfarlane, *The Empire of Tea: The Remarkable History of the Plant that Took Over the World* (New York: Overlook Press, 2004), while on increasing tea consumption in Iran, see Matthee, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, chapter 9.
85. Abdollah Mostofi, *The Administrative and Social History of the Qajar Period: The Story of My Life*, 3 vols (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1997), vol. 3, p. 783.
86. On the colonial trade and the globalisation of sugar consumption, see S. W. Mintz, "Time, Sugar and Sweetness", in C. Counihan and P. Van Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2008).
87. M. C. Appleby, V. Cussen, L. Lambert and J. Turner (eds), *Long Distance Transport and Welfare of Farm Animals* (Wallingford: CABI, 2008), chapters 6 and 8.
88. N. Rao and S. Subrahmanyam, "Circulation, Piety and Innovation: Recounting Travels in Early Nineteenth Century South India", in C. Markovits, J. Pouchepadass and S. Subrahmanyam (eds), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), especially pp. 342–3.
89. On this earlier intellectualist cosmopolitanism, see M. C. Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

CHAPTER 8

Abdur Rahman Chughtai: Cosmopolitan Mughal Aesthetic in the Age of Print

IFTIKHAR DADI

The Lahore-based artist, Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897–1975) is generally considered the first significant modern Muslim artist from South Asia. His art developed with an awareness of the early modern Islamicate cosmopolitan world, especially with Safavid Persia and Mughal India. But this relationship was also shaped by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century factors – the loss of symbols of political power in South Asia to colonialism beginning in the late eighteenth century, reaching its full dismemberment in the wake of the 1857 mutiny, and the further loss of the external identificatory symbol of the Ottoman Caliphate, which was dissolved in 1924. Chughtai revisits and renews the cosmopolitanism of the early modern era, but does so in a manner that self-consciously foregrounds the impossibility of inhabiting a continuous tradition. Rather than referencing the twentieth-century Muslim world beyond South Asia, especially when decolonisation was beginning to bring about the rise of fractured and divided nation-states, his art draws selectively upon its own cosmopolitan tradition. Referencing this tradition involves a complex operation, in which tradition is lived and remembered practice in some cases, but also available discursively, not only through the increasing availability of classical works in print but also as a result of orientalist art historical scholarship of Mughal and Islamic art. Modern South Asian art is also shaped by a complex encounter with Western orientalism.

This essay focuses on the critical reception of Chughtai by Urdu literary critics and authors from the 1920s and through essays on the artist in English. This complex interaction between Urdu literary concerns and the emerging understanding of Persian miniature, Mughal painting and other painting traditions in India shaped the horizon of Chughtai's career. Apart from his volu-

minous painterly output, Chughtai served as a partisan and provocateur in locating himself in the rediscovery of a complex inherited painterly tradition. The artist articulated his views in a series of important essays on aesthetics in Urdu. His work must also be situated in relation to his brother Abdullah Chughtai's scholarly research into Mughal and Persian painting, calligraphy, architecture and ornament, as forming a broader revival of Mughal aesthetics during the early and mid-twentieth century. Mughal nostalgia serves to decentre the artist's identification with a specific national site, projecting it instead onto earlier Islamicate and Persianate cosmopolitanism in order to evoke a broader aesthetic ideal, but this evocation is characterised by both optimism and melancholy.

BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE

Painting in the Punjab since the mid-nineteenth century consisted of a variety of practices. The Punjab had been under Mughal rule earlier and was subsequently under Sikh rule before the British began exerting direct control over much of it in the middle of the nineteenth century. Various practitioners of miniature Mughal and Sikh painting continued their work through the nineteenth century, but under increasingly difficult circumstances. Emerging from the mid-nineteenth century were art schools founded in India under British patronage, which provided technical training based on arts and crafts principles. The Mayo School of Art, based in Lahore, was founded in 1874 and heavily emphasised the renewal of traditional craft skills rather than fine art.¹ Chughtai's formation as an *artist* was shaped by the mediation of ideas of subjectivity and imagination that emerged in the wake of the Bengal school rather than by the commercial possibilities available to illusionist painters or to the small number of miniature "copyists". Despite his reliance on the Mughal tradition, Chughtai's modernity lies in his insistent foregrounding of his own subjectivity; the development of a style associated with, yet distinct from, the Bengal school; and his friendship with the literary and intellectual circles in Lahore that sought to create a discursive framework in which his paintings might be understood.

The rise of the Bengal school was associated with the emergence of a lively intellectual environment and debate on art and aesthetics during the first third of the twentieth century in Calcutta.² Much of this research and debate was carried out in illustrated journals in Bengali and English that were devoted to art. By 1915, the self-consciously orientalist Bengal school style had become dominant in Bengal, and by the 1920s it had assumed virtual hegemony over the notion of "Indian" art across India.³ The Bengal school inaugurated a new paradigm of artistic subjectivity, marking an important break from the roles the makers of art and crafts had occupied earlier. The higher role accorded to the



Figure 8.1 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Mughal Artist*, c. 1950s. Etching. Dimensions 24.7 x 20.9 cm. (Collection of Nighat and Imran Mir. Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.

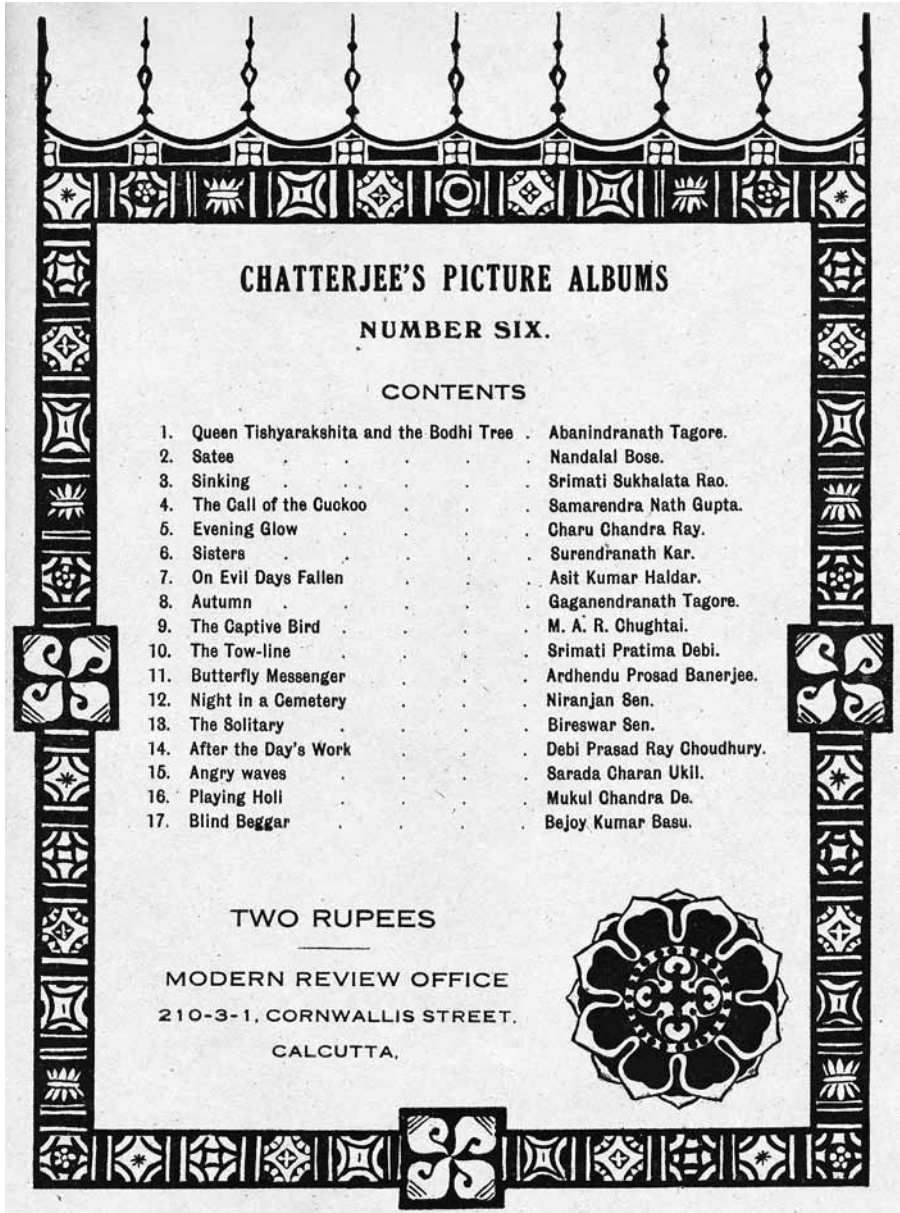


Figure 8.2 Cover of *Chatterjee's Picture Albums*, a series of bound plates in full colour. 29 x 21 cm.

artist was fully separated from that of the artisan. The artist was now viewed as autonomous from base patronage and invested with transcendent ideals. The Bengal school and its allied critics placed Buddhist and Hindu aesthetic precedents at the heart of national aesthetic practice. Although it could not be ignored due to its prominence, the Mughal contribution to Indian art and architecture was viewed as Muslim, and was interpreted as being secular, courtly and foreign, and thus less sincere than religious and “national” art. Mughal architecture and painting had assumed a paradoxically central and marginal role in the emergence of the Bengal school and its promoters. The rediscovery of Mughal aesthetics by British and Indian scholars and by artists and critics associated with the Bengal school is central to understanding the work of Abdur Rahman Chughtai.⁴

Abdur Rahman Chughtai was born in 1897 in Lahore into a family descended from generations of craftsmen, architects and decorators. Beginning in 1912, he studied at the Mayo School of Art. Earlier, he apprenticed with his uncle Baba Miran Bakhsh, a *naqqash* who maintained a workshop in a chamber at the Mughal-era Wazir Khan Mosque.⁵ Here Chughtai was introduced to the practice of Mughal architectural ornamentation.⁶ Beginning in 1915, Chughtai began teaching in the Mayo School in the photo-litho department. Beginning in 1917, Chughtai began sending his work regularly to Calcutta for publication. The presence of his work in Calcutta-based journals became pivotal to his early success – his paintings published in *Modern Review* starting in 1917 brought him national prominence.⁷ The 1920 exhibition of the Punjab Fine Arts Society showcased artists from the Punjab and also showed work mailed from other parts of India, including work by the Bengal school artists based in Calcutta. Chughtai’s work in this exhibition attracted considerable attention from the press.⁸ Chughtai’s success at such venues during the 1920s permitted him to secure a living through princely and market patronage rather than having to depend on government employment. Chughtai continued to promote the idea of a Punjab school or Lahore school into the 1930s, but the Punjab school of painting failed to cohere as a group, and indeed, apart from Chughtai, the other artists are now largely forgotten.⁹ Thus the Punjab school failed to become a strong rival to the Bengal school, and in any case the style of painting associated with both was already coming under attack due to the rise of oil-based abstraction and modernism from the 1930s onward. Chughtai thus remains a singular Muslim artist of his generation in South Asia.

CHUGHTAI’S “HINDU” PICTURES

From the beginning of his career, Chughtai created numerous paintings illustrating Hindu mythology, which exponentially extended his patronage circuit.¹⁰

Chughtai's "Hindu" works are included in numerous collections in India but are little known in Pakistan. Chughtai also painted many other Hindu myths and festivals, and these works were reproduced in numerous journals and magazines. In painting such themes, Chughtai was no different from his contemporary, Allah Bukhsh, the academic "Krishna painter", suggesting that painting Hindu mythology was not completely unusual for a Muslim painter during the first third of the twentieth century. In his writings, however, Chughtai remains largely silent about his "Hindu" paintings, suggesting that, unlike the "Islamic" works, the former were not painterly embodiments of his discursive values.

Before the partition of India in 1947, Chughtai considered himself nominally as a national artist but painted very few "national" themes, unlike artists such as Nandalal Bose. A large illustrated volume of Chughtai's "Hindu" paintings, titled *Chughtai's Indian Paintings*, was published in India in 1951, after partition. The publication date is significant, because even after the hardening of political identities and the brutality and carnage of partition in 1947, Chughtai, residing in Pakistan, still deemed his Indian work important enough to be issued. The duality of Chughtai's Hindu and Muslim works is thus symptomatic of the difficulties the artist faced during this time of anticolonial movements, which were structurally unable to forge a unified struggle toward independence. These Hindu works nevertheless remain significant for embodying the memory of Hindu motifs in the revival of the miniature form. This syncretism will be later rediscovered and celebrated in a new miniature revival beginning in 1990s Lahore.

GENESIS OF THE *MURAQQA'-I CHUGHTAI'*

Calcutta boasted a number of illustrated journals specialising in fine arts, but Lahore lacked such journals and a corresponding discourse on visual arts. Instead, the growing city was witness to the development of a body of Urdu writing, literary criticism and debate. Lahore-based authors have constituted a virtual galaxy of the best-known Urdu writers of the twentieth century. Under the guidance of Muhammad Din Tasir, Chughtai was pulled into the orbit of the literary world of the 1920s. The publication of the *Muraqqa'-i Chughtai'*, possibly the most significant published work Chughtai produced during his long career, is a direct result of this engagement.

Published in 1928, the widely celebrated *Muraqqa'-i Chughtai'* is an illustrated edition of the Urdu poetry (*divan*) of the poet Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869). In undertaking this project, Chughtai was undoubtedly guided by his belief that "Muslims have contributed more to art by way of *muraqqa'*s and books than any other nation".¹¹ Produced with great care, with an English foreword by the poet Iqbal, the volume reproduced the complete *divan*, with more than thirty full-page illustrations, most of them in colour. Ghalib, whose poetry is considered a



Figure 8.3 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Arjuna*, illustration in *Chughtai's Indian Paintings*, 1951. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

masterpiece of the Urdu *ghazal* (lyric form), lived during the nineteenth century, was attached to the court of the last Mughal emperor and composed his Urdu and Persian poetry based on strictly traditional poetic forms and tropes, exhibiting little thematic concern for the rising sun of the British Empire. Nevertheless, since Ghalib wrote his works during the dissolution of Muslim political power, the inwardness, difficulty and philosophical character of his poetry can be understood as an internal, formal response to the widespread crisis of Muslim life in nineteenth-century India.

The term *muraqqa'* is significant, denoting codex albums composed in Timurid and Safavid Persia and in Mughal India. These albums, which can be considered scrapbooks for elite connoisseurship, were compilations of esteemed and varied examples of painting and calligraphy, framed in elaborate decorated borders.¹² In Indian albums, prized examples of Persian and Indian painting and calligraphy were inserted, and the album functioned as an important aesthetic benchmark for an age in which mechanically reproduced samples of work were absent.¹³ Usually written by officials or calligraphers, the prefaces to Timurid, Safavid and Mughal albums provide an important source of historical information about individual calligraphers, their techniques and their social status.¹⁴ Among the Mughals, the emperor Jahangir (reigned 1605–27) in particular assembled a number of albums containing some of the finest examples of painting and calligraphy.¹⁵

Chughtai reinvented the *muraqqa'* in the age of mechanical reproduction through considerable effort, enacting numerous technical and aesthetic transformations. The publication marks shifts in patronage and the primacy of print culture in the making of an artist during the early to mid-twentieth century. The idea for illustrating Ghalib's *divan* emerged not from fellow painters but from Chughtai's encounters and informal discussions with his literary friends. One immediate problem was securing an authoritative text of Ghalib's *divan*. The group sought the advice of Ghulam Rasul Mihr, a respected Ghalib scholar, to ensure that they possessed a reliable text. This is the sort of problem scholars often face when preparing critical printed editions of handwritten manuscript texts, and its recurrence here exemplifies how vestiges of manuscript traditions lingered within the emergent print culture of the twentieth century. Indeed, until recently, Urdu has primarily been printed by hand-calligraphed pages reproduced via lithography, rather than by typesetting. The break with the manuscript form was thus not as sharp, and the stylistic particularities of mostly anonymous scribes continued to be reproduced in print until the 1980s.

Chughtai involved his two brothers and other members of his extended family in what was clearly shaping up to be a massive undertaking. A calligrapher had to be selected to write the text, and this output had to be regularly overseen. Suitable paper had to be chosen and imported from Europe via a

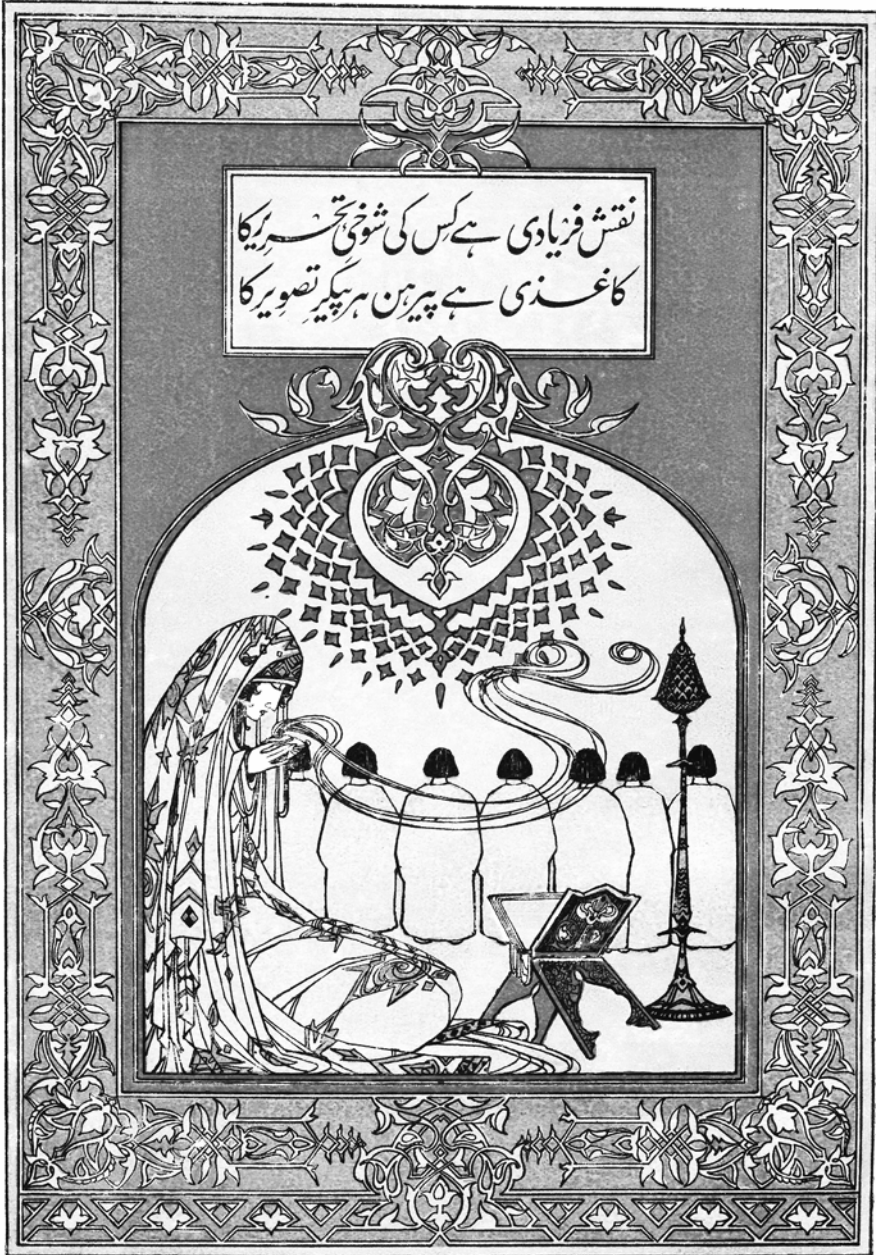


Figure 8.4 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, illustration and illumination of the first couplet of *Divan-i Ghalib* (Urdu), in *Muraqqa'-i Chughtai'i*, 1928. 23 x 16 cm. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)



Figure 8.5 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *The Wasted Vigil*, illustration in *Muraqqa'-i Chughta'i*, 1928. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

trading firm, and since the Chughtai family did not possess sufficient funds to fully pay for the paper stock, arrangements had to be made with a bank to work out an instalment-based delivery and payment plan. To print the text, the family members decided to set up a press in a room in their own house. To run the machine, they also needed a commercial-grade electrical connection in their home, which was finally approved by the city utility after three months of persistence. Samples of materials for the covers of both the normal and the deluxe edition were requested from a Manchester-based firm and, after great deliberation, Abdur Rahman placed the order. The binding of the book was entrusted to a local firm.

All this careful logistical effort was devoted only to the printing of the text and the binding of the book. The images themselves, the most important component of the project, could not be printed in India, but in London. Securing adequate funds was crucial. The Maharani of Cooch Behar reportedly contributed a considerable sum of money toward the publication in exchange

for acquiring a number of the original paintings that were to be reproduced in the *Muraqqa'*.¹⁶ This effort finally resulted in the printing of 210 signed deluxe editions priced at 100 rupees each and a larger number of normal editions priced at 17 rupees. As an artist formed by print culture for whom circulation of his work was vital, Chughtai's decision to produce two editions, a deluxe edition and a more affordable and populist one, was a strategy he followed throughout his life.

Chughtai's pioneering use of print culture sought to bring a classical Mughal and Islamic artistic form into modernity. But for the *muraqqa'* form, a distinctive Muslim contribution to world culture, the heavy reliance on imported techniques of production and reproduction demonstrate the difficulty and the considerable labour needed to transform a manuscript into a modern, mechanically produced book. The technical and aesthetic reliance on Europe for this production of the "East" also indicates the impossibility in modernity of disengaging Europe from its others. European art and design since the late nineteenth century had itself already been heavily influenced by orientalism, in such domains as painting (Matisse), book illustration and fashion. Indeed, illustrated editions of FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* had formed a veritable industry for several decades, peaking during the first two decades of the twentieth century,¹⁷ and the formal and thematic preoccupations of the Bengal school and Chughtai need to be situated accordingly.¹⁸ It is precisely at this convergence of the material and aesthetic realms of East and West, however, that Chughtai and Iqbal asserted their difference most forcefully.

IQBAL'S FOREWORD TO THE *MURAQQA'-I CHUGHTAI'*

The process that led to Iqbal contributing a foreword to the *Muraqqa'* reveals the bewilderment the Urdu literary intelligentsia faced when encountering visual art. The relationship between Chughtai and Iqbal is multifaceted and was sustained by Chughtai well after the death of Iqbal. (It culminated in the publication of the monumental work '*Amal-i Chughtai'* in 1968, which the artist claimed fulfilled the wishes of the deceased poet.) Tasir persuaded the reluctant Iqbal to write the foreword in English. The choice of writing in English is telling in itself, suggesting that Chughtai and Tasir had a wider circulation in mind for a work whose main textual element, Ghalib's verse, was not translated. Despite efforts by the literary intelligentsia to compel Iqbal to produce an aesthetic and art historical text, the foreword is a disappointing essay and reads as if it were written as an afterthought, although it was far from a simple matter for the poet to write it. The essay, which is less than three pages long, reveals Iqbal's discomfort with Chughtai's art, being basically a cursory exposition of the poet's philosophy of creation. Iqbal remained ambivalent regarding the merits

of Chughtai's illustrations of Ghalib. Claiming that he was "not competent enough to judge the technical side of painting", the poet did write that he found Chughtai's paintings "remarkable" in that as "Art [ought to be] subservient to life and personality", Chughtai might be "the ideal artist in whom Love reveals itself as a unity of Beauty and Power". However, it is patently incongruous to associate imagery of power with Chughtai, whose paintings are saturated with a pervasive atmosphere of eroticism and lassitude, and this incongruity might well be the reason for the poet's reticence in discussing the paintings themselves. Moreover, Iqbal is generally unimpressed by Muslim achievements in the arts, even from the pre-modern era:

And in so far as the cultural history of Islam is concerned, it is my belief that, with the single exception of Architecture, the art of Islam (Music, Painting and even Poetry) is yet to be born – the art, that is to say, which aims at the human assimilation of Divine attributes ... There are, however, indications to show that the young artist of the Punjab is already on the way to feel his responsibility as an artist. He is only twenty-nine yet. What his art will become when he reaches the maturer age of forty, the future alone will disclose. Meanwhile all those who are interested in his work will keenly watch his forward movement.¹⁹

This is certainly an evasive endorsement of Chughtai. In his own Urdu introduction to the *Muraqqa'-i Chughta'i*, Chughtai had praised, among others, Bihzad's use of imagination as a guide for pictorial depiction, rather than direct observation of reality itself. Chughtai – by consciously following the path of imaginative depiction that he ascribed to the legendary Bihzad – inserts himself in a history of painting that traverses the Timurid, Safavid and Mughal eras. Iqbal's ambivalent remarks on Islamic painting in his foreword do carry critical overtones on modern painting, which are reiterated in his last collection of Urdu poetry, *Zarb-i kalim*, published in 1937. *Zarb-i kalim* contains a number of poems in which Iqbal complains of the lack of life-affirming art in South Asia.²⁰ For example, the following couplet from the poem "Musavvir" ("Painter") contains a reference to contemporary painting:

I am extremely sad that the Bihzads of today,
Have lost touch with the intoxication/freshness of the timeless past/beginning
of creation [*surur-i azali*].²¹

This tension between Iqbal's philosophy of dynamism and the evocative stasis of the past represented by Chughtai emerges again in '*Amal-i Chughta'i*', and Iqbal's uncertain position on the merits of the works of "today's Bihzads",

and thus by implication, on Chughtai's art. Nevertheless, Chughtai's *Muraqqa'* is significant for orienting the artist's career toward the Urdu literary past and in relation to the emergent Urdu literary criticism. During the first third of the twentieth century, the Bengal school had pioneered the appropriation of the Mughal visual past artistically, and scholars of Mughal art and architecture were systematically exploring Mughal painting and architecture. In the aftermath of the publication of *Muraqqa'*, Chughtai and his brother Abdullah became more deeply engaged with the history of the Mughal visual tradition, the latter in his prolific writings on Indo-Persian art and architecture. In his critical essays, the artist himself had become increasingly concerned with how a modern Muslim art might engage this legacy.

EMERGENT ART HISTORY

With the publication of the *Muraqqa'*, Chughtai, now a highly successful artist, was fully drawn into the literary universe of Lahore. He designed innumerable book covers for leading writers and contributed to numerous emerging Urdu journals.²² The years from the early part of the twentieth century to the death of Chughtai in 1975 coincided with Lahore's ascendancy in the field of Urdu literature. The artist was continually concerned with the promotion of literary journals, frequently contributing cover designs gratis and paying for subscriptions as a show of support.

Instead of independent evaluation of visual art, a literary framework began to provide a substitute for evaluating Chughtai's work. With little connection with the Mayo School and unease toward the emerging abstractionists and post-cubist modernists, the artist increasingly drew his references from the Persian and Mughal painting tradition, from Ghalib and Iqbal, and from the world of literary journals and its intelligentsia. Characteristically, the *Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab*, a society that promoted Urdu literature, published the only volume of critical essays on Chughtai, and most of the essays (with the exception of a few translations from European art historians) were contributed by eminent Urdu writers and literary critics.

However, the launching of the journals *Nairang-i khayal* in 1924 and *Karavan* in 1933 by Tasir in collaboration with Chughtai were important efforts by the pair to include visual art as an integral dimension of the emergent intellectual culture of the early to mid-twentieth century.²³ Tasir accorded great importance to the role of visual art in *Karavan*. He had stressed in an earlier essay that "Urdu is utterly bereft of any theory [*nazariya*] of [visual] aesthetics [*jamaliyat*]."²⁴ Since there were few galleries (*tasvir khana*) in India, it was all the more imperative to publish masterpieces of art, in order to familiarise "untrained minds". But few editors of other journals were able to judge the merits of visual art and, moreover,

deemed efforts to understand visual art as an unworthy task. Tasir proceeded to stress that viewing exemplary images was necessary to train viewers to understand the objectives (*ma'ruzat*) of painting. Otherwise, their observations on art would remain based on literalist readings of visual images and would be

... exactly analogous to that Europe-afflicted [*europa zada*] young man who, by drawing a [literal] cartoon [of imagery of the *ghazal*'s beloved] with an arrow for an eyelash, a dagger for an eyebrow, and a narcissus for an eye, thought that he had "permanently demolished the poetry of Iran and India." But our journals, far from offering correct criticism [*tanqid*], are unable even to recognize the names of artists, and in their ignorance publish the masterpieces of Bihzad and Botticelli next to the obscenities of Frith and [Ravi] Varma.²⁵

Here, Tasir excoriates sentimental and illusionist paintings exemplified by Frith and Varma, recognising painting's visual codes in sympathy with the *ghazal*'s symbolic universe, thus privileging metaphoric and allegorical readings of visual art over realism.

Tasir's intellectual scope and his vision of catalysing art criticism in Urdu was, however, short-lived. *Karavan* ceased publication after its second issue, ending a remarkable publishing experiment that Abdullah Chughtai claimed would never be repeated. The demise of the journal meant that there was no longer any Urdu journal seriously focused on the visual arts, a situation that continues today, although literary journals have included occasional essays on art. In general, art criticism has been either written in English and published in illustrated magazines and newspapers or, when written in Urdu, has continued to privilege artists and work that forge a relationship to literature, rather than attending to artistic form as an independent value in its own right. Thus the collected essays on Chughtai, for example, are written either originally in English by Western scholars or by eminent Urdu writers and critics. This failure to institute a durable tradition of art criticism has meant that the modernists who rebelled against Chughtai were also compelled to work out a visual aesthetic without a prepared discursive ground.

AESTHETIC VALUES OF CHUGHTAI'S ORIENT

Chughtai and his critics have also perceived painterly values in his work that distance him from the Bengal school, and they have sought to place him in continuity with Islamic art. Critics saw Chughtai blazing a new way of connecting tradition with the present and expressed their amazement at the very possibility of interpreting poetry in visual images. The broader reference to tradition was



Figure 8.6 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Eve of the Future*, illustration in 'Amal-i Chughta'i', 1968. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

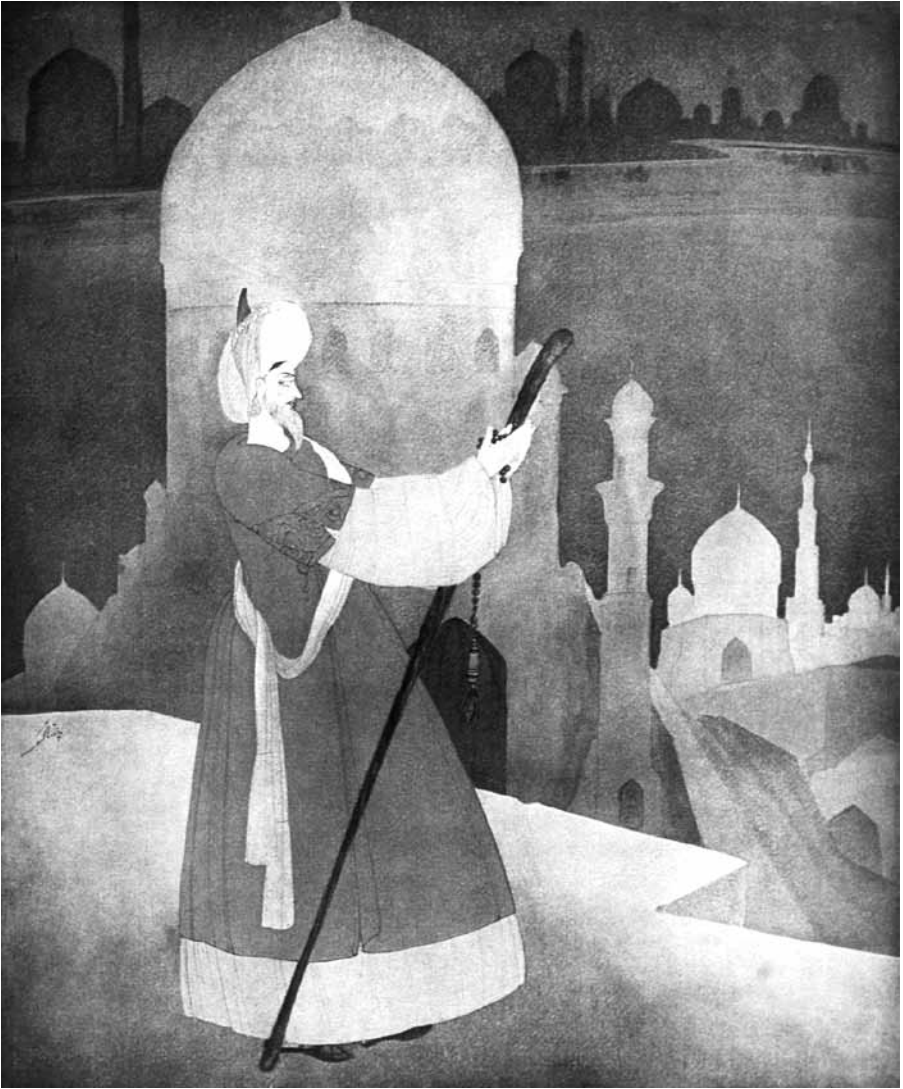


Figure 8.7 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Mourning for Baghdad*, illustration in '*Amal-i Chughta'i*', 1968. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

itself seen as complex, referring to the Persian and Mughal achievements in art and architecture, the symbolic imagery of Urdu poetry, and the Hindu and Buddhist visual heritage and Rajput painting of India.²⁶ But Chughtai and his critics have foregrounded the Islamic element.

According to art historian Tamara Talbot Rice, the artist made numerous and substantial contributions to Islamic art. He had not sought simply to return to the past, but by his emphasis on individuation of the figure he had surpassed even Bihzad.²⁷ Yaqub Zaki also considered the task before Chughtai to be more difficult than that of the legendary Bihzad, arguing that

Chughtai's art evokes a complete civilization, in the same manner in which painters such as [Antoine] Watteau, [François] Boucher, and [Jean-Honoré] Fragonard had evoked the Ancien Régime in France ... Chughtai has reached much further back from Ghalib's era, to create links with [the Mughal] era in which Muslim civilization in India was at its zenith.

Vahid Quraishi noted influences beyond South Asia, suggesting that Chughtai's art was deeply shaped by the 'Abbasid-era stories, *A Thousand and One Nights*, and was saturated in an atmosphere of a world of enchanted magic (*tilsimi rang*).²⁸ But this past was not recreated without melancholy. In Chughtai's thematic and affective recreation of the past, Zaki discerned a major shift:

Although [Mughal] civilization possessed a manly, active dimension, we find no trace of this in Chughtai's art ... He has no interest in depicting battle scenes and sieges of forts, or in painting portraits of rulers in a manner in which they were virtually deified.

This is an observation also made by Tamara Talbot Rice.²⁹

Instead, Chughtai portrays the melancholy beauties of courtly life, who are saturated with a pervasive atmosphere of self-absorption ... Emotion is frequently expressed in Chughtai by the unruly line of the dress, whereas the face is stony, impassive.³⁰

Vazir Agha and Agha Abdul Hamid underscored the sense of stasis that pervades not only Chughtai's paintings but also his fictional writings.³¹ And Salim Akhtar claimed that Chughtai's woman was not a familiar figure from everyday life but a picturisation of the classical *ghazal*'s metaphors of the beloved.³²

Critics have thus identified how Islamicate and Persianate aesthetics, Mughal nostalgia and Urdu poetic symbolism in Chughtai's world create an internal,

idealised dreamworld of beauty. Chughtai himself considered his work to have given direction again to “our painting”, which had “lost its way for some three centuries”.³³ Figurative work, especially in the case of the female figure, was seen not from the viewpoint of realism but from woman identified as the symbol of the *ghazal*'s beloved who is not a realist or bodily figure but an “other”, a sum of symbols and metaphors, totally self absorbed and indifferent, even sadistic, in inducing madness and ecstasy in the poet.³⁴

The modernisers of Urdu who emerged in the wake of the 1857 mutiny had disparaged the tropes of the Urdu *ghazal*, comparing them unfavourably with the naturalism of William Wordsworth and other English poets. Altaf Husain Hali, himself an erstwhile student of Ghalib, had mounted a forceful critique of the *ghazal*'s beloved.³⁵ According to the prominent leftist poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, however, Chughtai's contribution lies precisely in his recovery of tradition based on Persian, Central Asian and Mughal motifs. Rather than simply copying or reproducing this heritage, Chughtai gathered the “motifs, symbols, and metaphors” of various Islamic decorative arts in his work, creating a new synthesis. Faiz counters Hali's critique by saying that Chughtai rendered the beloved in line and colour in a more ravishing actualisation (*alam-i vujud*) than that of the *ghazal*'s imagined beloved (*alam-i tasavvur*).³⁶ For Faiz, this nostalgia had an efficacy in “opening the door to the lost mirages of our civilization, of which we had only a tenuous relationship, but whose forms were disappearing as if they were abandoned buildings”.³⁷ Within this dreamworld, especially in Chughtai's later work, the picture plane is fully illuminated, without any rendered shadows. Abdullah Chughtai saw this as characteristic of oriental painting, which had no reflections either, but which was defined by lines, thus making the picture evenly and fully legible.³⁸ This formal quality of illumination of the whole picture evoked a sensibility of optimism (*raja'iyat*) that Abdullah Chughtai and others discerned in Chughtai's work and which Chughtai himself asserted as an important marker of his difference from the Bengal school.³⁹ According to the artist, a major failure of the Bengal school was that its works were suffused with “monasticism, pessimism, and despair” and “denial of the self” and, moreover, there was no artist in the Bengal school who could redirect its emphasis toward the style and form (*tarz-i nigارش*) of Mughal painting.⁴

The decorative and illuminated emphasis of Chughtai's idealism was predicated upon an essential difference between Western art and oriental art, not least by Chughtai himself. Self-orientalism was already formative in the rise of the Bengal school. Iqbal also deployed a kind of self-orientalism in his poetry, to the degree that he was known by the appellation “Poet of the East” (*sha'ir-i mashriq*). However, Iqbal's references to the East – including his citation of the Qur'an itself – are strategic and fragmentary and ultimately do not cohere into a unified worldview. By a close reading of Iqbal's English and Persian writings,



Figure 8.8 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *The Desert in Love*, illustration in 'Amal-i Chughta'i', 1968. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

Javed Majeed has stressed Iqbal's weaving of fragments from Islamic intellectual history with wide-ranging references to Western thinkers.⁴¹ Iqbal's later poetry persistently addresses contemporary world politics, in which figures such as Lenin conduct a dialogue with God on imperialism and exploitation, for example.⁴² Iqbal's ideas changed during the course of his life, and the values he articulated in his later poetry denounce the evils of imperialism, capitalism and materialism, and call on Muslims to become agents of dynamism and selfhood (*khudi*). He espouses transcending racism by celebrating an Islamic universalism, yet by his use of the terms "Arab" and "Ajam", he continues to rely upon an ethnically-categorised history of Islam. Iqbal also glorifies historical Muslim martial conquests, which cannot be easily translated into practical politics in multi-religious South Asia.⁴³ Nevertheless, his poetry introduced new tropes and subjects into classical forms and paved the way for more radical poetic experiments to follow.

We have already seen how critics considered Chughtai to be similar to the painters of the Ancien Régime, evoking a complete pre-revolutionary past. The tension between Iqbal's dynamism and Chughtai's idealism is evident in the majority of the artist's work, and especially in the illustrations of *'Amal-i Chughtai'*, the decorative stasis of which is at variance from the restless strivings of Iqbal's poetry.⁴⁴ Chughtai fashioned his artistic project by negotiating the mental and cultural impasse colonialism produces upon the colonised, but also the degree to which resistance to colonialism for Chughtai was also only possible by accepting its terms, indeed by further asserting difference. Self-orientalism also meant that Chughtai was unable to countenance the idea of change and the transformations of modernity, because he associated these with the West. Consequently, Chughtai was appreciative of Western Renaissance masters but was disparaging of cubism and other forms of twentieth-century experimental art.⁴⁵

Some of Chughtai's critics and supporters took a similar stand on the essential division between Eastern and Western painting, the irrelevance of post-cubist painting, and the baleful effects Western modernism and the avant-garde had had on "our" painters.⁴⁶ To an extent, this represents a genuine impasse at which intellectuals contemporary to Chughtai found themselves. However, this anti-modernism was not shared by all, especially not by the younger generation of writers and critics, who were supportive of the emergent post-cubist modernism following decolonisation and independence. Moreover, the seemingly complete and exhaustive scope of Chughtai's individual achievement stood in stark contrast to the barrenness of modern Indo-Muslim painting between 1917 and 1947. Chughtai's secrecy and isolation elicited widespread acknowledgment that his school of painting had died with him.⁴⁷ Chughtai's career also marks both the opening of possibilities for Urdu art criticism and their attenuation during subsequent decades and certainly demonstrates that, despite heroic scholarly

efforts by the artist, Abdullah Chughtai and other isolated researchers, so far no sustained and collective effort to study South Asian Muslim visual heritage has emerged from within Muslim South Asia.

Chughtai's repudiation of realism and his recourse to imaginative form were also significant. Western painters had to draw from live models, but oriental painting was free of such constraints. Although the West was tied to the worship of materialism and could not transcend realism, the East distinguished itself by use of the imagination and "transcended the limitations of a [live] model by grounding its 'model' purely on the basis of aesthetic principles."⁴⁸ The female figure, which had become a central motif in Chughtai's work, provided another point of departure between Iqbal and Chughtai. As the artist recounts, Iqbal, being a proponent of "art for life's sake", used to complain that in fine arts there appeared to be "no subject other than the female figure. [But] Tasir and myself would look at each other and softly remark that woman is indeed life's subject [*zindagi 'ibarat*]."⁴⁹ Iqbal situated nostalgia in a strategically fragmentary and activist framework and "generally considered Mughal civilizational achievements to be a sign of a culture in decline",⁵⁰ but Chughtai found the very *raison d'être* of his art in Persian and Mughal painting and architecture and in the symbolic figure of the *ghazal's* erotic beloved.

Nevertheless, by the continued centrality of the female figure in his work and by his very refusal to paint triumphalist battle scenes or portraits of male authority, Chughtai resists Iqbal's masculinist vitalism. In this sense, the "difference" of Chughtai's illustrations in '*Amal-i Chughta'i*' in picturing Iqbal's poetry is significant.⁵¹ Chughtai's orientalism, "in contrast to Iqbal's orientalism, possesses greater degrees of beauty and refinement [*latafat o jamal kay 'anasir*]. Rather than having masculine traits [*mardana ausaf*], it has a much greater sense of femininity [*nisa'iyat*]", observes Vahid Quraishi.⁵² And although Chughtai is said to have "unabashedly objectified the bodies of women"⁵³ and is clearly not a feminist artist, his overall work nevertheless marks a crisis of masculinity that requires a reading sufficiently attentive to this dimension of his aesthetic.

Despite living through a turbulent period of South Asian history, Chughtai's paintings show virtually no overt thematic engagement with contemporary events. A late interview by Tasir published in 1952 provides further evidence of Chughtai's formalist aesthetic orientation. Tasir suggested that the primary purpose of art was to provide harmony and balance for emotions. Claiming that architecture, music and painting possessed little space for "politics of the uniform" and that although literature might be inherently more suited to address the political than the other arts, literature itself was bigger than politics, encompassing the wider world, while political life was narrow and petty. Thus, even when Chughtai ostensibly addressed themes that were potentially political, such as his Kashmir pictures and his painting *The Slave Girl*, Tasir nevertheless saw



Figure 8.9 Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *The Story Teller*, illustration in *'Amal-i Chughta'i*, 1968. Watercolour on paper. Dimensions n.a. (Reproduced with kind permission of Arif Rahman Chughtai © Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore.)

him maintaining “emotional balance” (*jazbati tavazun*) in these works. Tasir was more open to modernism, suggesting that the world of art was transnational; a world in which a painter like Matisse could draw upon Persian carpets, for example. At this historical moment, for Tasir, Chughtai represented one possible approach to art, one that inherited the force of tradition to become a catalyst for new possibilities.⁵⁴ Chughtai refused to view himself in relation to Picasso, Gauguin, Braque or Van Gogh but sought to locate himself as a classical artist working in the tradition of the great Indo-Persian masters.⁵⁵

AN ANTI-MODERNIST MODERNITY?

Chughtai’s project was predicated upon the exploration and renewal of his own heritage, rather than upon any borrowing from Western modernism. If Chughtai is indeed a painter of the Ancien Régime – as much of the criticism and his own self-perception seeks to situate him – what then is the possible relationship of Chughtai to modernism and modernity? This relationship is itself complex in its acknowledgments and silences. The immediate context is, of course, that Chughtai attempted to recreate Persian and Mughal classicism in an age of nationalism, capitalism and decolonisation, an age when addressee and patronage were in transition. The very effort to recreate classicism is thus rendered as a nostalgic project, but this nostalgia was not without its positive effect, as Faiz recognised. Rather, Chughtai was far from passive, indeed he was a pioneer in his efforts to situate and shape patronage and audience along new lines. He was intent on not simply publishing expensive, beautiful and painstakingly made books but was very keen on issuing less expensive and more affordable editions because he implicitly recognised the role of print culture as essential to his artistic formation.⁵⁶ I have already discussed his efforts to produce illustrations and covers for books and journals, frequently in a voluntary capacity, without remuneration. Chughtai was also an artist of the “Age of Exhibitions”⁵⁷ and found patronage and audiences by winning awards with the resulting exposure in newspapers and magazine reviews.

Chughtai’s subjectivity in his artwork is paradoxical – simultaneously central and absent. In his writings, Chughtai frequently stressed the individuality of the artist.⁵⁸ He was proud of creating what he considered to be a unique style, labelled “Chughtai Art” by him and by his critics.⁵⁹ The recreation of a complete and static aesthetic universe led him inevitably to disavow stylistic change *within* his art. Agha Abdul Hamid has divided Chughtai’s development into three periods, while Marcella Nesom, in her substantial and informative study, has identified five periods.⁶⁰ Nesom has also studied the signatures and dates on Chughtai’s paintings and notes that around 1929 Chughtai ceased dating his work and, moreover, reworked themes from time to time to create

similar paintings and also “occasionally reverted to previous styles”. Even when he signed and dated his earlier work, the text is so tiny that it is “difficult to read in reproduction”. Chughtai also released work for printing to journals and publications that he had done or developed much earlier. A striking example is the painting titled *Fame*, based in recognisably “Hindu” iconography and included in ‘*Amal-i Chughta’i*, a version of which had been published no less than fifty years earlier, in 1918.⁶¹ Through such strategies, Chughtai successfully confounded a clear chronological account of his development, inhabiting the nostalgic plenitude of a Muslim visual past-into-present.⁶² The presence of the “Hinduised” *Fame* in ‘*Amal-i Chughta’i*, a major late volume illustrating Iqbal’s verses, also indicates that this Indo-Muslim past also ambivalently and uncertainly included aspects of South Asia’s syncretistic culture, which was familiar to Chughtai but which became less so for subsequent generations of artists who came of age in Pakistan after 1947.

Chughtai’s avoidance of modernism in his paintings might also have been motivated by his awareness of his singular status. Unlike the literary modernists who worked in association with various literary circles, during the first three decades of his career (1917–47) Chughtai remained a towering, solitary figure upholding and modernising aspects of visual “tradition”. His work above all was suffused with a self-conscious optimism (*raja’iyat*) addressing South Asian Muslim subjectivity, which was traversing a difficult decolonising process while simultaneously being rendered a minority. Chughtai’s cosmopolitan modernity lies in his providing the South Asian Muslim intelligentsia with the practice of visual art as a serious endeavour, to which Chughtai devoted himself with a single-minded focus over a career spanning six decades. By his interpellation of himself as an artist rather than as an artisan, he firmly established artistic subjectivity and imagination in Muslim South Asia as a central motif in artistic development. By the very singularity and massive scope of his achievements and by his exhaustion of the possibilities of “Chughtai Art”, he enabled the younger modernists to repudiate his nostalgic and enchanted world and initiate a new openness toward transnational modernism. Chughtai’s association with the cosmopolitan Indo-Muslim literary universe also attempted to secure painting on a discursive and textual basis.

The search for an adequate ground for artistic practice has persisted until today, stimulating artists to continued praxis and offering them a considerable degree of freedom to inhabit new formalist, modernist and conceptual developments. The contemporary miniature painting created by the graduates of the miniature programme of the Department of Fine Arts, National College of Art (NCA) from the late 1990s onwards is often claimed to be an unbroken continuity with tradition, but also a new way of celebrating hybridity and cosmopolitanism. These are seen as formations that venture beyond the ideological

dictates of the Pakistani nation-state. However, South Asian Muslim identity in modern history has been too complex and over-determined to be easily confined in a national register. The return of the miniature today is neither an unbroken continuity with “tradition”, nor fully new in its acknowledgment of hybridity, although its playful and ironic potential is certainly a new development. But in many ways, it parallels the revival of the miniature by Chughtai, who also negotiated cosmopolitan frameworks, even while articulating an idea of a Lahore-based Muslim art. The Chughtaian and the contemporary miniatures draw upon the legacies of Mughal painting, (post)modernism and Indian vernacular painting traditions to create a kind of post-national cosmopolitan Muslim aesthetic. The miniature either arises too early, before the founding of Pakistan, or too late, when the great national drive for modernisation from the 1950s to the 1970s has been exhausted, to be unproblematically considered as national art. The contemporary miniature also unwittingly recreates Chughtai’s object of longing, the Lahore school of painting, but whose geographic locale is ironically globally dispersed and cosmopolitan, in a fashion that recalls pre-modern Muslim intellectual history and strives to participate as an equal in the globalised world of contemporary art.

NOTES

This is an abridged version of chapter 1 from the author’s book, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Reproduced with permission from the University of North Carolina Press.

1. Arindam Dutta, *Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of Its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
2. The standard studies on the Bengal school are Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Making of a New “Indian” Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
3. Guha-Thakurta, *Making of a New “Indian” Art*, pp. 311–12.
4. For a summary account of twentieth-century scholarship on Mughal and Rajput painting, see Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 81–93.
5. Two important types of practitioners were known as *naqqash* and *musavvir*. The former worked on the illumination and ornamentation of legal and ritual documents and borders of Arabic and Persian manuscripts and would at times also work as skilled calligraphers. Abdullah Chughtai notes that the colour schemes of the *naqqash* differed from those of the *musavvir*, who created miniature paintings of “animated objects”. See M. Abdullah Chughtai, *A Century of Painting in the Panjab, 1849–1947* (Lahore: Kitab Khana-i Nauras, 1961), p. 37.
6. M. Abdullah Chughtai, “Abdur Rahman Chughtai”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughtai: Shakhshiyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), p.

- 244; Marcella Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai: A Modern South Asian Artist", (PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 1984), p. 37; Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Lahaur ka dabistan-i musavviri* (Lahore: Chughtai Museum Trust, 1979), p. 35.
7. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", pp. 245–8; Arif Rahman Chughtai, *The Challenge of M. A. Rahman Chughtai to the Bengal School of Art* (Lahore: Jahangeer Book Club, 2005), pp. 16–19.
 8. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", pp. 264–65; Arif Rahman Chughtai, *The Challenge of M. A. Rahman Chughtai to the Bengal School of Art*, pp. 32–4.
 9. Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", pp. 54–5.
 10. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", pp. 275–8.
 11. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i* (Islamabad: Idarah-yi Saqafat-i Pakistan, 1987), vol. 2, p. 49.
 12. A few reproductions of *muraqqa'* albums have been published. See Stuart Cary Welch, *Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Abrams, 1987) and Imad al-Hasani, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa: Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures from the 16th through the 18th Century and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy*, 2 vols, (ed) Ivanov Akimushkin (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1996).
 13. The word *muraqqa'* denotes "patchwork" and can refer to the much-used, patched cloak of a dervish, which indicated his repudiation of wealth. David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 120 and Wheeler M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. vii. Thackston has translated many album prefaces from Timurid and Mughal albums. See also David J. Roxburgh's recent study of seven Persian albums, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
 14. David Roxburgh's detailed study of Timurid albums, *Prefacing the Image*, has attempted to extract internal criteria for writing an art history of Timurid painting and calligraphy. On Mughal albums, see Stuart Cary Welch, *Emperors' Album*, especially the essay by Annemarie Schimmel, "The Calligraphy and Poetry of the Kevorkian Album".
 15. Stuart Cary Welch, *Emperors' Album*, pp. 23–9; Milo C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India, 1600–1660* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978), pp. 26–7.
 16. Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", p. 48; G. Venkatachalam, *Contemporary Indian Painters* (Bombay: Nalanda Publications, n.d. [ca. 1940]), pp. 52–3.
 17. William H. Martin and Sandra Mason, *Art of Omar Khayyam: Illustrating FitzGerald's Rubaiyat* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).
 18. Edmund Dulac, an illustrator of *Arabian Nights* and *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, is also mentioned as an influence on Chughtai. See Ghulam Abbas and Agha Abdul Hamid, "Chand yaden", in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta'i: Shakhsiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 98–9.
 19. Muhammad Iqbal, "Foreword", in Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Muraqqa'-i Chughta'i* (Lahore: Jahangir Book Club, 1928), n.p.
 20. For example, in the poems "Funun-i latifa" (in Muhammad Din Tasir, *Maqalat-i Tasir*, [Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1978], pp. 135–77), "Musavvir" and "Hunarvan-i hind".

21. Muhammad Iqbal, *Zarb-i kalim*, in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal Urdu* (rev. ed.), (Lahore: al-Faisal Nashiran va Tajiran-i Kutub, 1995), pp. 124/586. Also see Sibte Hasan, *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1986), pp. 257–60.
22. Nesom, “Abdur Rahman Chughtai”, pp. 51–2. His cover designs include volumes by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Firaq Gorakhpuri, N. M. Rashid, Fehmida Riaz, Qateel Shifai and Imtiaz Ali Taj. I am grateful to Arif Rahman Chughtai for sharing this material with me. A few cover designs are reproduced in Arif Rahman Chughtai, *The Story-Teller: M. A. Rahman Chughtai, The Centenary Volume* (Lahore: Chughtai Museum Trust, 1997), p. 24.
23. Malik Ram, “Abdur Rahman Chughta’i”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), p. 77.
24. Tasir, *Maqalat-i Tasir*, p. 151.
25. Tasir possibly refers to William Powell Frith (1819–1909), a sentimental Victorian painter. Tasir, *Maqalat-i Tasir*, p. 531.
26. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, “Musavvir-i mashriq”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980); Vahid Quraishi, “Iqbal aur Chughta’i”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 112–13. See also comments by Chughtai himself, in *Maqalat-i Chughta’i*, vol. 1, p. 144.
27. Tamara Talbot Rice, “Abdur Rahman Chughta’i ko khiraj-i ‘aqidat”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 21. The published text is probably translated from English.
28. Quraishi, “Iqbal aur Chughta’i”, p. 112.
29. Rice, “Abdur Rahman Chughta’i ko khiraj-i ‘aqidat”, p. 21.
30. Yaqub Zaki, “Chughta’i kay fan kay baz pehlu”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 35–40. The published text is probably translated from English.
31. Vazir Agha, “Ghalib aur Chughta’i”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 214–15; Abbas and Hamid, “Chand yaden”, p. 101.
32. Salim Akhtar, “*Muraqqa’-i Chughta’i*”, in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta’i: Shakhsiiyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), pp. 190.
33. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta’i*, vol. 1, p. 16.
34. I am assuming the gender of the *ghazal*’s beloved as female, as expressed by Chughtai’s paintings. However, in the Urdu *ghazal*, the gender is typically masculine and essentially radically indeterminate.
35. Salim Akhtar, “*Muraqqa’-i Chughta’i*”, p. 190.
36. Faiz, “Musavvir-i mashriq”, p. 73. For an extended discussion of Hali’s critique of the *ghazal*, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), chapter 12.
37. Faiz, “Musavvir-i mashriq”, pp. 71–2; see also Tasir, *Maqalat-i Tasir*, p. 174.
38. M. Abdullah Chughtai, “Abdur Rahman Chughta’i”, pp. 246, 261.
39. The question of light in painting and architecture is tied to the larger question of Muslim aesthetics. Chughtai asserts elsewhere that Muslims, being confident and elevated, disliked living in caves or in cramped and dark places. Their architecture and applied arts are thus an expression of the Muslim worldview. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta’i*, vol. 2, p. 85. This view of Indian architecture was

- also expounded by colonial officials; see Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 36–8, 57.
40. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 1, p. 142, 147; Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", p. 44.
 41. Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 192–3.
 42. Sibte Hasan, "Iqbal's Concept of Man", in *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan*, pp. 231–80.
 43. Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*, pp. 193, 198–202.
 44. Noted by Quraishi, "Iqbal aur Chughta'i".
 45. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 2, pp. 224–31.
 46. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", p. 259; F. R. Haidarabadi, "Chughta'i: aik azim fankar", in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta'i: Shakh-siyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), p. 205; Saeed Abdullah, "Chughta'i ki infradiyat", in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta'i: Shakh-siyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), p. 62. Saeed Abdullah reiterates the binary that equates Eastern painting with colour and emotion and Western painting with form and reason.
 47. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", pp. 344–6; Faiz, "Musavvir-i mashriq", p. 73.
 48. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 1, pp. 90–103, especially 96, 101.
 49. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 2, p. 223. See also Quraishi's remarks on the female body, in "Iqbal aur Chughta'i", p. 113.
 50. Quraishi, "Iqbal aur Chughta'i", p. 111.
 51. M. Abdullah Chughtai, "Abdur Rahman Chughta'i", p. 336; Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 90–7.
 52. Quraishi, "Iqbal aur Chughta'i", p. 113.
 53. Lala Rukh, "ImageNation – A Visual Text", in Neelam Hussain, Samiya Mumtaz, and Rubina Saigol (eds), *Engendering the Nation-State* (Lahore: Simorgh, 1997), vol. 2, p. 93.
 54. Tasir, *Maqalat-i Tasir*, pp. 173–7.
 55. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 1, p. 16.
 56. Sadid remarked that "Chughtai used to complain that the cost of 'Amal-i Chughta'i was exorbitant and that he wished to find a way to release a less expensive popular [avami] edition." Anvar Sadid, "Chughta'i kay khutut", in Vazir Agha (ed.), *Abdur Rahman Chughta'i: Shakh-siyyat aur fan* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1980), p. 173.
 57. Musarrat Hasan, *Painting in the Punjab Plains* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1998), chapter 9.
 58. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 1, pp. 16, 19.
 59. Sadid, "Chughta'i kay khutut", p. 166. The artist claimed, "My art is recognized by the appellation 'Chughtai Art' and will always be recognized as such", adding, "My pictures have influenced women to become more refined in their dress, makeup, and grooming. When a woman attends a gathering dressed and adorned in a manner reminiscent of my paintings, observers associate her with 'Chughtai Art.'" Abdur Rahman Chughtai, *Maqalat-i Chughta'i*, vol. 1, p. 147.

60. Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", pp. 101–64.
61. For an extended discussion of this work, see Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", pp. 172–5. Iqbal reportedly appreciated an early version of this work. Arif Rahman Chughtai, *The Struggle of M. A. Rahman Chughtai for the Identity of Pakistan* (Lahore: Jahangeer Book Club, 2009), pp. 12–13.
62. Nesom, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai", pp. 102–4.

CHAPTER 9

Cosmopolitanism and Authenticity: The Doctrine of Tashabbuh Bi'l-Kuffar ("Imitating the Infidel") in Modern South Asian Fatwas

MUHAMMAD KHALID MASUD

This paper¹ examines the frequently held assumption that the quest for cultural authenticity and religious identity in present-day Muslim societies discourages cosmopolitanism. This assumption problematises the notion of cosmopolitanism as an issue of cultural authenticity. In order to understand the concept of cosmopolitanism as well as cultural authenticity in Islamic thought and practice, I have chosen to study the doctrine of *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffar* that forbids imitating non-Muslims and is, therefore, frequently cited as a decisive factor for cultural authenticity. G. E. Von Grunebaum² observed that this specific doctrine formed the basis of a sense of religious superiority that inhibited interaction with others. Focusing on the notions of similarity and dissimilarity, the doctrine defines authenticity within the theological framework of religious identity. The paper explores the origin and development of this doctrine in Islamic thought and analyses its discourse in present day fatwa literature. As the focus on the doctrine of similarity limits the meaning of cosmopolitanism, I would like first to explore the conception of cosmopolitanism that has been suggested in recent studies of Muslim societies on the subject.

PROBLEMATISING "COSMOPOLITANISM"

Cosmopolitanism in its semantic field includes political, moral, geographical and ethnic plurality. As an idea it contests the various exclusivist ideologies, most importantly nationalist and ethnic identities. A cosmopolitan perspective on Muslim societies explores how Muslim societies relate to others, and how they negotiate the concept of "other" within the frameworks of both nationalism and universalism. Roel Meijer's³ study defines the semantic field of the

concept of cosmopolitanism to include the notions of coexistence, openness and contact with other cultures, along with freedom to choose eclectically from them. Cosmopolitanism, to Meijer, suggests the openness of a society to interact with other communities and a refusal to go along with exclusivist cultural trends that oblige a person to conform to specific cultural values. Cosmopolitanism celebrates both diversity and unity. The idea of unity in cosmopolitanism refers to the ideals of humanism, which unite all human beings into one community despite the diversity of languages, cultures and religions. The notion of unity in diversity in cosmopolitanism came to be contested in the nineteenth century by the concepts of unity based on nationalism, nation state and national identity, which laid emphasis on homogeneity and similarity and excluded extra-national identities, for example religious identity. The term cosmopolitanism forms a significant part of the semantic trajectory of globalism, which is currently used to express the notion of an open and liberal society. While globalism and nationalism tend to share an emphasis on homogeneity, cosmopolitanism honours diversity. Cosmopolitanism and globalism both contest the exclusivist claims generated by nationalism. A number of Muslim thinkers today, however, contest globalism as they understand it as a hegemonic relationship between Western and Muslim societies. Muslim contestations in this regard have revived academic interest in comparative studies of Middle Eastern and South and Southeast Asian societies, often claiming that these societies are structurally opposed to globalism and cosmopolitanism. Roel Meijer observes that liberal attempts to reform indigenous cultures and to adapt them to the demands of the modern world have given way to trends that focus on defining one's own identity in opposition to Europe. In the process of creating an identity, cultural and political demarcation lines came to be drawn more narrowly, which eventually led to the disappearance of cosmopolitanism in the Middle East. Nationalist and Islamist movements in the 1930s and 1940s both termed Western concepts as alien and "imported".⁴

In order to fully appreciate the changing attitudes about cosmopolitanism in Muslim societies, the following five points must be taken into consideration. First, uncritical assumptions about the inherent opposition between Muslim and European cultures overlook the cultural shifts that occurred over time. Compared with Africa and Asia, where culturally diverse societies existed, cosmopolitanism was historically a rare phenomenon in medieval Europe because European cultures still valued integration and homogeneity. On the other hand, people of different religions and cultures lived side by side in Alexandria, Beirut, Istanbul, Delhi and various cities in Southeast Asia. Trading empires in Africa and Asia welcomed different religious and cultural communities. The Ottoman caliphate was open to cultural exchange, not only with other Asian communities but also with contemporary Europe. Percival Spear notes that during the eighteenth century the English were visibly fascinated by the local Muslim culture in India⁵

and cultural interaction between Muslims and Europeans was quite liberal and visible. Europeans adopted the local lifestyle and mastered the Urdu language well enough to compose poetry.⁶ Europeans and local intellectuals and scholars had close relations with each other.⁷

Second, one must also note that the cultural shift from the nineteenth century onwards began with the colonial biases of cultural superiority that defined the projects of development in terms of Western domination, not only in economic and political, but also in cultural terms. Meijer considers the increasing influence of European powers that threatened the openness in the region, along with Europe's arrogance, imperialism and racism as the major factors responsible for the disappearance of cosmopolitanism in the Middle East.

Third, the nationalist movements defined the political organisation of societies in terms of language, ethnicity and territory, and consequently damaged the cultural and religious diversity of the Middle East. Cosmopolitan Muslim intellectuals such as Muhammad Iqbal found nationalism harmful to the humanist elements in art and culture. In his words,

On the other hand, the growth of territorial nationalism, with its emphasis on what is called national characteristics, has tended rather to kill the broad human element in the art and literature of Europe. It was quite otherwise with Islam. Here the idea was neither a concept of philosophy nor a dream of poetry. As a social movement the aim of Islam was to make the idea a living factor in the Muslim's daily life, and thus silently and imperceptibly to carry it towards fuller fruition.⁸

Fourth, the Western perspective of nationalism was essentially rooted in the political ideology of power and superiority. It generated a sense of exclusivism and security that considered Muslim cosmopolitanism a threat to the West. Von Grunebaum, one of the most influential American sociologists, regarded modernising trends in Muslim societies as a threat. He warned the West against such cosmopolitan Muslim attitudes in the following words:

We in the West need to cultivate awareness that tendencies which appear to be assimilative and which actually do reflect a profound interest in the Occidental achievement and its absorption are, in the last analysis, motivated by the wish to overcome the West by taking over its hidden sources of creativeness.⁹

Fifth, uncritical references to the doctrine of *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffar* ignored its historical development. For instance, G. E. Von Grunebaum¹⁰ argues in the following extract that by forbidding imitation of the non-Muslim, this doctrine developed a sense of religious superiority among Muslims.

The attitude which is indicated toward the protected religious communities is one of polite aloofness with emphasis on superior status of Muslims; any imitation of the customs of the non-Muslims is to be avoided not because those customs would necessarily be intrinsically objectionable but because *al-tashabbuh bi'l-kuffar*, assimilation to the unbelievers, must be guarded against; cf. the poignant passage in Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), *Tafsir Surat al-Ikhlās* (Cairo, 1905), 132–3¹¹; al-Ghazali, *Ihya* (Bulaq, 1872) 2:189, records this (alleged) saying of the Prophet: When you see me do not rise as the foreigners, *al-a'ajim* do (p. 188). We find another alleged direction of the Prophet: “Do not shake hands with the protected non-Muslims, *ahl al-dhimma*, and do not greet them first”, etc.¹²

Meijer points out three major factors responsible for the disappearance of cosmopolitanism in the Middle East: first, the increasing influence of European powers allowed their arrogance, imperialism and racism to threaten the openness in the region; second, the ruling nationalist elite that symbolised cosmopolitanism was discredited due to its failure in establishing social justice, rule of law and good governance; third, the search for authenticity led to a more exclusive and introverted worldview.

However, associating nationalism with cosmopolitanism has prevented Meijer from fully exploring the contested nature of the notions of national and religious identity in the Middle East. It leads him, rather, to conclude that in this increasingly “myopic political and intellectual climate”, “[O]nly Islam seemed to provide the right guideline”.¹³

Meijer and Von Grunebaum assume that the doctrine of *tashabbuh* does not distinguish between religious and cultural elements. The doctrine refuses to imitate non-Muslim customs not because “those customs would necessarily be intrinsically objectionable”, but because similarity means “assimilation to the unbelievers” in Von Grunebaum’s words cited above. This paper offers an analysis of the modern discourses on the doctrine of *tashabbuh* in South Asian fatwas. It particularly revisits constructions of this doctrine by al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya to which Grunebaum refers in the above-mentioned article. It is important to note that, as I explain later, both al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya were worried by the encounters with alien cultures and the assimilative attitude of their contemporary Muslim societies.

THE DOCTRINE OF *ASHABBUH BI'L-KUFFAR*

Sources of the doctrine

In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an and hadith, (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), are considered primary sources. However, almost every discussion on the doctrine of *tashabbuh* cites the following saying of the Prophet reported in the *Sunan* by Abu Da'ud Sulayman (b. Ash'ath al-Sijistani (d. 888-9)): "Whoever imitates (*tashabbaha*) a people he belongs to them".¹⁴ Abu Da'ud's version is quite problematic as it differs with reports in other hadith collections. It is not reported by earlier collectors such as Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875) and Malik (d. 795). This version differs with other versions reported in Ibn Hanbal's (d. 855) *Musnad*, Abu'l Qasim al-Tabarani's (d. 881) *Mu'jam*, and Abu 'Isa Muhammad's (b. 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (d. 892)) *Jami*'. Abu Da'ud's report appears to be part of the following report by Ibn Hanbal, which is apparently the earliest on the subject:

I have been sent close to the Day of Judgment with the sword in order that God alone is worshipped without any associate. My sustenance is placed under the shade of my lance and humiliation and subjugation is ordained for those who oppose me. Whoever imitates a people belongs to them.¹⁵

Comparing the two, Abu Da'ud's version appears to be a part of Ibn Hanbal's longer version. What is more significant, Ibn Hanbal's report restricts the prohibition to the ways of belief and worship while Abu Da'ud broadens the context and shifts the subject of the hadith from the strictly religious to cultural subjects by placing it in the chapter about dress and in a section entitled *labas al-shuhra*, meaning "dress as a symbol of social status and religious identity". Other reports in the chapter forbid certain types of dress that are meant to gain reputation or to identify the wearer with other people. It is significant to remember that dress served in these societies as a marker of identity, denoting sex, social status and religion.

The following version in Tirmidhi, on the other hand, also stresses the religious context of the hadith, referring to the different ways of greeting among other religious communities.

One who imitates others does not belong to us. Do not imitate the Jews and the Christians in the ways they greet; the Jews greet raising (*ishara*) fingers and the Christians by raising palm of the hand.¹⁶

Reports by Abu Da'ud and Tirmidhi have both been subjected to technical criticism pointing to the weak links among the narrators, but that is not our present concern.¹⁷

One must not overlook that these and other hadiths point to a chequered relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims during the days of Prophet Muhammad in Medina. When the Prophet arrived in Medina, he was particularly inclined toward Jews as people of the book. He even chose to adopt some of their religious practices such as fasting on a particular day.¹⁸ Later, however, as the Jews continued to insist on their religious superiority, the Prophet began to distance himself from them. The hadith literature reveals how tense the relations were between Muslims and Jews at that time. Several hadith reports mention that the Jews in Medina used to curse Prophet Muhammad while greeting him.¹⁹ The Prophet advised his followers not to return their evil greetings with evil. The Muslims could at the most reply to these curses by simply saying “same to you”.²⁰

The Qur’an also refers to such greetings by the Prophet’s enemies; it says, “And when they come to thee, they salute thee, not as Allah salutes thee”²¹. The Qur’an prescribes as a general rule that “When a (courteous) greeting is offered you meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things”.²² Another explanation refers to preferring greetings by words rather than by gestures, as that would symbolise acts of worship like bowing and prostrating. The Prophet allowed greeting by making signs using the hands only when the persons are greeting from a distance. Although no evidence exists, it is possible that the greeting gestures by Christian and Jews had specific religious meanings. Islam did not allow the worshiping of a human even by making gestures of worship such as bowing and prostrating; even the Prophet could not be venerated in this manner.

From this brief comparison, it becomes clear that it is necessary to study the context of these hadiths. The manner of reporting a hadith also influences the understanding of the doctrine of imitation; a fuller version of a hadith limits the area of prohibition to strictly religious matters.

Development of the doctrine

Instead of a full history of the doctrine, this short paper provides a brief summary of the views of prominent Muslim thinkers such as Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Shams al-Haq al-Azimabadi (d. 1867), Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), and Qari Tayyib (d. 1983), representing the discourses in the twelfth, fourteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Twelfth century

Muslim encounters with Greek, Magi and Indian scholarly traditions posed an epistemological crisis. One of the foremost issues in Muslim theology (*‘ilm al-kalam*) was to define an epistemological framework in order to assimilate or

reject alien ideas and sciences. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) was opposed to the assimilative attitude of his contemporary Muslim philosophers and theologians and developed a theory of knowledge distinguishing religious from non-religious sciences. Developing the criteria of religious utility he approved of logic and arithmetic as useful sciences. He was the first to introduce logic into shari'a sciences.

In his very influential book *Ihya 'Ulum al-din* ("Revival of Religious Sciences"), al-Ghazali elaborated his theory of knowledge and its application. It is significant that he discussed the question of *tashabbuh* in this book not as a theological or legal subject matter but as an issue of social psychology. He dealt with Muslim religious encounters with non-Muslims in terms of love and hate relations between humans for the sake of God. He enumerated disbelief and heresy as two grounds for hate. However, he defined hate not in terms of violence but as tolerance. A non-Muslim must not be harmed if s/he is not at war. However, relationships with non-Muslims had to be approached with caution. A Muslim should not be the first to greet a non-Muslim. If a non-Muslim comes across a Muslim in a street, the non-Muslim must walk on the opposite side of the street.²³

Obviously, al-Ghazali was defining this encounter in a historical context in which Muslims dominated. One must not, however, overlook the fact that he was discussing the assimilation of the Greek sciences, which did not belong to a dominant culture; rather they were borrowed from the conquered people. It is also important that even in this context al-Ghazali was defining boundaries between the religious and cultural aspects of this relationship. Among the cultural aspects, he is careful to point out matters which are conceived as religious by non-Muslims and which may confuse religious identity with cultural identity.

Al-Ghazali cited four hadiths on the authority of Muslim, Bukhari, Tirmidhi and Abu Da'ud, all of them forbidding greetings, venerating and meeting non-Muslims. Three of these hadiths were mentioned above. Tirmidhi's hadith forbids imitating the Christian and Jewish gestures of greeting.²⁴ Another hadith forbids Muslims from standing up for the Prophet like the non-Arabs who venerate their elders by standing up on their arrival.²⁵

Al-Ghazali's views reflect the ambivalence in the Muslim attitude toward non-Muslims that necessitated peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims but discouraged close relationships with them. This ambivalence was the result of continuing wars between the two religious communities. Compared to the non-Muslim attitude toward Muslims, the doctrine of *tashabbuh* in fact allowed peaceful coexistence by separating the religious from the cultural aspect of similarity.

Fourteenth century

By the fourteenth century, Muslims had lost the dominant position that they enjoyed during al-Ghazali's days. From 1258, when they destroyed Baghdad, the Mongols remained a threat to Muslim society for at least two centuries. Nevertheless, non-Muslims continued to be a part of Muslim societies. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) complained about the increasingly permissive Muslim attitude toward non-Muslims. Referring to the hadith foretelling the schism among Muslims and their deviation in the footsteps of the Jews, he maintained that the opening chapter in the Qur'an divides human beings into three groups: those who follow the straight path, those who incurred the wrath of God and those who deviated from the right path. Ibn Taymiyya identified these respectively as Muslims, Jews and Christians. In addition to other monographs, Ibn Taymiyya's *Iqtida al-sirat al-mustaqim mukhalafat ashab al-jahim* ("The Straight Path Demands Divergence from the People of Hell")²⁶ is especially dedicated to this theme.

In this work, Ibn Taymiyya reconstructed the doctrine of *tashabbuh*, adding references to the Qur'anic verses and to Islamic history in addition to the hadiths already mentioned above. Ibn Taymiyya elaborated that the prohibition of *tashabbuh* had its roots in the Sunnah of the Prophet and in the covenants with non-Muslims in early Islam. In these covenants, the Jews and Christians in conquered areas agreed to show respect to Muslims by not wearing the same dress, headgear, hairstyle and shoes and not using the same mounts (horses) that Muslims used.²⁷

Ibn Taymiyya also refers to the Prophet's practices. For instance, Prophet Muhammad changed the prayer direction from Jerusalem to Mecca stressing a divergence from the Jewish practice. Sometimes, the Prophet simply reversed what the Jews practiced; for example, he fixed the times of prayer to be contrary to Jewish and Christian practices. The Prophet allowed Muslims the dying of hair against the Jewish practice of maintaining grey hair in old age. The Prophet also asked Muslims to oppose pagan and Jewish practices of peculiar hairstyles. For instance, the Meccan pagans parted their hair and the Prophet while in Mecca let his hair fall on his shoulders. Later, when he came to Medina, he found the Jews parting their hair in the middle of the head. Initially, he approved of this practice but later, however, he asked Muslims to distinguish themselves by not parting their hair. Similarly, he forbade Muslims from keeping forelocks hanging on the sides as the Jews did, or shaving part of the head as the Christians did.²⁸

Ibn Taymiyya also argued that various Qur'anic verses forbade imitation of non-Muslims, especially Jews and Christians. According to him the Qur'an and the Sunnah do not simply prohibit imitating what non-Muslims do; they also imply that things should be done in ways contrary to those of non-Muslims, and that non-Muslim practices should be held in contempt.

Ibn Taymiyya's reasoning on the question of imitation appears very complex and often hard to follow. Apparently, the main reason for this complexity is that the context of prohibition in the early history of Islam, which constitutes his main source of reasoning, was both religious and political; the cultural context in that period was not as distinct as it became in later centuries. It is also complicated because Ibn Taymiyya introduced the question of intention in imitating the infidels. He elaborated that "imitation" is not only doing something that others do; it also means following the same objectives as those of the non-Muslims.²⁹ Close relations lessen contempt for sinful non-Muslim practices and in most cases eventually lead Muslims to *kufr* (loss of faith).³⁰ For evidence, Ibn Taymiyya observed that Jews and Christians residing in Muslim societies often lost faith in their religions; they became less inimical to Muslims compared to those living outside.³¹ Obviously, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the relationship between culture and religion is quite complex and interactive; the boundaries between culture and religion keep shifting. Nevertheless he tried to define these boundaries by also introducing the doctrine of *bid'a* in the discussion of *tashabbuh*. *Bid'a* limited the meaning of religion to those symbols and practices that served as markers of religious identity in a religion. He argued, for example, that non-Muslim dress and food are not forbidden per se; they are prohibited only if they are specific to the religious rites of others.³² Celebrating "non-Muslim" festivals is prohibited because they are distinctly religious practices and celebrating them introduces alien religious practices and innovations (*bid'a*) into the religion of Islam.³³

Ibn Taymiyya's contemporary Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 1388), a Maliki jurist in Andalus, offered a detailed analysis of the concept of *bid'a* in his book *al-I'tisam*, because he was accused of *bid'a* by his contemporary scholars. He limited the meaning of *bid'a*, mainly to the area of 'ibadat, the matters between God and humankind, distinguishing it from other, broader areas of *mu'amalat*, which pertains to relations among human beings.

Nineteenth century

During the nineteenth century, movements for revival and reform focused on purifying Islam from a number of corruptions that Muslim societies had adopted under local cultural influences. Thus the question of cultural and religious imitation received focal attention again in the debates on *bid'a*. It is significant that in these debates Ibn Taymiyya's writings became a point of reference. For instance, Shams al-Haq al-Azimabadi (d. 1867)³⁴ argued that Ibn Taymiyya spoke about a total and comprehensive sense of imitation, which is undoubtedly *kufr* (un-Islamic) and must be forbidden because imitation signifies a sense of belonging. If one imitates sinners and non-Muslims then one would belong to

them. 'Azimabadi dismisses Ibn Taymiyya's stress on the role of intention in imitation. He cites 'Abd Allah b 'Amr, who stated that a Muslim who settles in the land of the idolaters, celebrates their festivals in imitation, and dies in that condition will be counted among them on the Day of Judgment. Although the example in this statement clearly related to the doctrine of hijra (the obligation to migrate from countries at war to Muslim territories) and referred to a different historical period, 'Azimabadi concluded that one is prohibited from imitating non-Muslims even if one does not intend to belong to them. He cited several hadiths to support his claim.³⁵

'Azimabadi shifted the emphasis from religious and cultural to political aspects of the doctrine of *tashabbuh*. He argued that the Qur'an discouraged, and sometimes forbade, alliances (*wila'*) with Jews and Christians (see, for example, Qur'an, 4:139, 5: 51, 9:23). The term *wila'* that 'Azimabadi introduced was later rendered as *tark mawalat* (non-cooperation) and became very popular during the independence movement in India.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), on the contrary, was in favour of loyalty to the British. He founded Aligarh College, a modern institution of learning for Muslims, and called upon them to adapt to new ways. He was among the few Muslims who took employment with the British. He was very critical of the doctrines of *tashabbuh* and *muwalat*, which prevented Muslims from modernisation. The ulema of Deoband, a religious institution of learning that later also became a school of thought, opposed Khan's alliance with the British and his efforts toward modernisation. In 1867 controversy arose about Sayyid Ahmad Khan when he took meals with some British officers. Some ulema declared him "Kristan", Christian because he imitated their ways. Khan wrote an article arguing that Islam allowed Muslims the consumption of food prepared by the "people of the book". In his discussion on the issue, he offered a detailed critique of the doctrine of *tashabbuh*, particularly the hadith on which this doctrine is founded. He reproduced the opinions of early scholars who found the chain of narrators in this hadith unreliable. He also argued that the term *qawm* (nation) in the text was ambiguous; it could not only mean a religious community. He also observed that the Prophet Muhammad wore a Syrian robe that was used by Christians.³⁶

The doctrine of *tashabbuh* was criticised in Tunisia as the main hindrance to modernisation; it opposed imitation of even such practices as were in conformity with the teachings of Islam. In his book *Aqwam al-Masalik*, published in 1867, Khayruddin Pasha (1889), the prime minister of Tunisia, argued that Islam supported constitutional forms of government. However this was rejected by Muslim ulema on the grounds of similarity with non-Muslims. Sayyid Ahmad Khan published extracts from this book in 1875 stressing the need for a critical study of the doctrine.³⁷

It is clear that political and cultural resistance to the West came to be defined in religious terms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Doctrines of *bid'a*, notions of taboos, purity and pollution, and alliance and friendship with non-Muslims became part of the political discourse of this period.³⁸

Twentieth century

Qari Tayyib's *al-tashabbuh fi'l Islam* (Imitation in Islam)³⁹, written circa 1929 to refute Khan's critique, illustrates the political context of the debate about this doctrine. Qari Tayyib (d. 1983) was a grandson of Mawlana Qasim Nanawtawi, the founder of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband in India, a reformist school that called for reforming *bid'a*, resisting British imperialism and cooperating with the Indian National Congress in its composite nationalism. The Deoband School opposed Sayyid Ahmad Khan for wearing English dress and adopting a Western way of life. Qari Tayyib was one of the important ideologues of this school.

Qari Tayyib's book on *tashabbuh* was meant to respond to the challenges of cosmopolitanism arising with colonial rule and to clarify the implication of the doctrine of *tashabbuh* in this context. It took an overtly comprehensive view of the doctrine, relying on the views of earlier scholars such as Shah Waliullah (d. 1762), Ibn Taymiyya and Mawlana Qasim Nanawtawi (d. 1879).

Without mentioning the name of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Qari Tayyib warned about a "new Islam under construction", that would "destroy the true image of Islam by promoting imitation of other peoples, particularly the Christians".⁴⁰ Qari Tayyib repeated Ibn Taymiyya's explanations about the authenticity of the hadith of *tashabbuh*, responding to Khan's technical criticism of the hadith. Qari Tayyib regarded the prohibition of imitation in the hadith as unconditional; *tashabbuh* applies to every non-Muslim practice. He supported his view citing the Caliph 'Umar b. Al-Khattab who forbade using water in the bath because the Arabs only took sunbaths. Qari Tayyib concluded that the hadith on *tashabbuh* called for a total prohibition, including friendship with non-Muslims and seeking help from non-Muslims.⁴¹

In his analysis of the concepts of imitation and identity, Qari Tayyib argues that the laws and teachings of earlier prophets have been abolished, and imitation of Jews and Christians amounts to their revival. The doctrine of *tashabbuh* is a safeguard against this revival. He is, however, careful to add that these ancient laws were not entirely abolished; the sharia of Islam did not abolish those laws which are still good and beneficial. He discusses *tashabbuh* as causing ambiguity to one's identity. Defining the nation (*qawm*) as a group of humans who abide by a particular path that distinguishes this group from others, he identifies "path" as meaning religion. He explains that Christians, Jews, idolaters and Muslims are distinct from each other on account of their particular beliefs and practices.

Tashabbuh bi'l-ghayr (imitation of others) destroys that distinction.⁴² Distinctions among various nations (*qawm*) and communities (*ummat*) are informed by their special characteristics, particular morals, habits and cultures. These special traits distinguish nations from one another. That is how European nations are distinct from the non-European.⁴³

Qari Tayyib distinguished between different types of human practices: *tab'i*, normal or natural habits like eating and drinking, *ta'abbudi*, purely religious matters like specific forms of worship, *'ibadat* and particular symbols like the wearing of the cross, *ta'awwudi*, non-religious customs and practices, and *'adat*, customary law. The prohibition of *tashabbuh* applies only to the second type, namely *ta'abbudi*. The imitation of *ta'awwudi*, that is, customs and social practices, is prohibited only if a clear and explicit text forbids it. Imitation is also forbidden if the text identifies a custom clearly belonging to non-Muslims as their marker of identity (*shi'ar*). A non-Muslim custom is not preferable to a Muslim practice. Finally, intention to imitate non-Muslims also makes an otherwise lawful custom forbidden.

Tayyib concluded the discussion saying that the real objective of the doctrine is to save the Muslim *umma* from confusion and destruction and to make them distinct from non-Muslims. However, this prohibition does not aim at hardship of the disregard of natural desires.⁴⁴ In order to maintain these distinctions, Islam forbids women to imitate men, and artists to imitate God.⁴⁵ Although Qari Tayyib's construction of the doctrine is more comprehensive and more restrictive than others, he still continues the Muslim thinkers' tradition of separating the religious from other aspects of imitation. It is significant that the Deoband school of thought came to support Hindu-Muslim unity and the Indian National Congress in Indian politics.

In the twentieth century, this doctrine became a source of reference in the face of the threat of Westernisation. In the following section I analyse some selected fatwas to illustrate how the muftis had to appeal to the political situation when it was difficult to declare a practice prohibited which was not originally religious.

FATWA LITERATURE

The term fatwa refers to an expert religious opinion given in response to either a question or a statement by an expert (mufti) on a particular issue. The practice of fatwa has existed throughout Islamic history but its role was enhanced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Muslims suddenly faced the new cultural, religious and political challenges of modernity, colonialism and nationalism. As the British gradually restricted the formal application of sharia, the institution of fatwa filled the gap in matters relating to marriage, divorce and so

on, which were not covered by Anglo-Muhammadan law. However, due to rapid social changes in Muslim societies, the fatwas were no longer limited to religious matters. Consequently, since fatwa was understood as God's law, the meaning and scope of religion also expanded. The following analysis of some selected fatwas reveals the ambivalence and diversity of attitude toward cultural matters.

Shah 'Abd al-Aziz (d. 1823)

Shah 'Abd al-Aziz, a son of Shah Waliullah had close relations with the British in Delhi.⁴⁶ In his comments and fatwas, he always distinguished between the cultural and religious dimensions of these relations.⁴⁷ He clarified that imitating any custom which specifically belonged to non-Muslims, for example, dress or food, was *tashabbuh* and forbidden. If it was common among non-Muslims but not peculiar to them, there was no harm in adopting it. If Muslims adopted alien practices because they were useful and convenient and not with the intention of specifically imitating non-Muslims, this imitation was not forbidden.⁴⁸ What was forbidden was the intention of imitating those customs for a religious purpose.

Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy Lakhnawi (d. 1887)

Born in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, to the family of Farangi Mahall, Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy studied in Lucknow with Shafi'i and Hanbali teachers.⁴⁹ Like Shah 'Abd al-Aziz, the muftis of Farangi Mahall also had a cosmopolitan perspective on the doctrine of *tashabbuh*. Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy was well versed in philosophy and other related sciences known as *ma'qulat* (rational sciences). As Francis Robinson notes, the ulema of this family were mostly cosmopolitan; not only had they studied and travelled within India and abroad, but they referred frequently to the principle of *ibaha* (things are originally lawful unless forbidden) in their fatwas. They were also critical of the earlier fatwas on social practices. Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy disagreed with the Hanafi authority Mulla 'Ali Qari (d. 1014) who forbade teaching women how to write.⁵⁰

Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy Lakhnawi's fatwas⁵¹ are very important for issues related to cosmopolitanism. Mawlana wrote several fatwas about mutual relations between the various Muslim sects, between Hindus and Muslims and between Muslims and Christians. Indian Muslims were divided in sects and mutual relations were discouraged. Mawlana criticised the Shi'a and Sunni muftis who declared each other *kafir*. Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy's reconstruction further refined the doctrine of *tashabbuh*; he added a fine distinction between implicit and explicit imitation. An imitation is forbidden only if one explicitly intends to imitate a non-Muslim.⁵²

On the question of colonial rule, he clarified that India under the British was

Dar al-Islam (Islamic territory), not Dar al-Harb (an enemy territory), because the rulers did not interfere in Muslim religious matters.⁵³ Similarly, learning English did not constitute an imitation of non-Muslims. *Tashabbuh* referred only to special customs and habits, which are peculiar with non-Muslims. Food, drink and dress may entail *tashabbuh*, but not language.⁵⁴ Using modern technology, like installing an electric fan in a mosque, did not mean one was imitating non-Muslims. There is certainly *tashabbuh* with the Christians, but it is blameworthy only if the intention is religious, that is, if the Christians observe it as a religious symbol.⁵⁵

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905)

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, who wrote fatwas for the Dar al-'Ulum Deoband, was frequently asked questions about social practices; whether they were *bid'a* or entailed *tashabbuh*. In his fatwas⁵⁶ he developed comparatively clear definitions of these concepts for the Indian context in which cultural relations with Hindus and Christians were generating these debates. For instance, wearing wooden sandals was not allowed by Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy because it was an imitation of Hindu yogis. When Gangohi was asked about this practice he clarified that it is neither *bid'a* nor imitation. Wearing wooden sandals was no longer specific to Hindu yogis; it had become a common practice among Muslims and Hindus, and was therefore allowed.⁵⁷

Most Muslims regarded wearing English clothes as an imitation of the non-Muslim. Gangohi distinguished between English clothes and the cross. He clarified that the cross is a symbol of Christianity, but a hat, coat and pantaloons are not. Muslims in Western countries also wore the same clothes as Christians did. In India the situation was different, however. There only Christians and Hindus wore these clothes. Adopting this practice in India is seen as *tashabbuh* by non-Muslims and therefore is forbidden.⁵⁸

Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (d. 1943)

Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi was also critical of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement for modernisation. He had declared Khan to be a heretic. He wrote fatwas for Deoband before the establishment of the special department of fatwa in the school. Regarding the doctrine of *tashabbuh*, therefore, he differed with Khan. He endorsed Gangohi's view arguing that English dress by itself was not prohibited; in Europe, Muslims also wore this dress and thus it was not forbidden. But in India, it was a mark of identity for non-Muslims and therefore not allowed.⁵⁹ Those who adopted this dress clearly intended to resemble the British.

Mufti Kifayatullah (d. 1952)

Mufti Kifayatullah was a renowned mufti of the Deoband School and belonged to Jam'iyat 'Ulama-i Hind, an ulema organisation that supported the Indian National Congress. Unlike most other muftis, he allowed close cultural relations between Hindus and Muslims. He was often questioned on this point by the Muslim masses who were cautious about Hindu customs and avoided eating and drinking with them. Movements for nationalism had brought to the fore questions of religious and cultural identity.

When asked about the Hindu practices of *qashqa* and *chandan* (ritual marks on the forehead), he explained that they were special Hindu cultural and religious ritual marks. Muslims must avoid those marks; however imitation of Hindus in this matter did not make them non-Muslim.⁶⁰ He rejected the idea that non-Muslims were "polluted". He clarified that a human body, Muslim or non-Muslim, was clean unless physically polluted. Food eaten and touched by non-Muslims was not polluted. However, since Hindus regarded the things prepared and touched by Muslims polluted, Muslims must respond with pride.⁶¹

The close alliance of the ulema of the Deoband with the Hindu leaders raised questions. One of the inquirers asked if a Muslim was allowed to pray for the well being of a non-Muslim as it was common to pray for the long life of Mahatma Gandhi who was on a hunger strike. Mufti Kifayatullah replied that such prayers were allowed but with the intention that he may live to accept guidance from God.⁶² To this cautious reply, the mufti added that Jews and Christians are "people of the book" but unnecessary relations with them may harm religion.⁶³ It was an allusion to some political parties that allied with the British. He clarified that the Qur'an characterises Christians as idol worshipers and Trinitarian, yet declares their food lawful and marriages with them permissible.⁶⁴ He elaborated that the Qur'anic prohibition against friendship with non-Muslims did not forbid all kinds of relations. Exchange of gifts was permissible. In a country like India it was impossible to not have relationships with non-Muslims.⁶⁵ Cooperation with Hindus for the purpose of freeing India from the British was inevitable.⁶⁶

In 1936, in a public meeting in Karachi, Mawlawi Muhammad 'Uthman said that Muslims had no hesitation sharing food with the untouchables. Malik Hajji 'Abd al-Aziz, the proprietor of the Punjab Hotel stood up and publicly drank the leftover water from the drinking glass of Mr Chandra, a Hindu leader participating in the meeting. A certain Muhammad Yusuf Dihlawi publicly protested against this "insult", as Islam could not allow drinking the leftovers of a person who consumed dead meat and prohibited food. The mufti explained that the leftovers of a non-Muslim were not unlawful unless they contained prohibited food. The same question was also sent to other muftis in India.

Mufti Muhammad Shafi' (d. 1976)

Mufti Muhammad Shafi', another mufti of the Deoband School, was also consulted about the above-mentioned incident of *tashabbuh*. In contrast to Mufti Kifayatullah, he was more cautious about Hindu–Muslim relations. Mufti Shafi' wrote that the food prepared by a Hindu with clean hands and clean utensils was permissible for Muslims to consume. Eating and drinking the leftovers of a human being was never forbidden. However he added the following note to his fatwa:

Since Hindus hate us, our honour demands that we also hate them. We should not buy commodities from their shops, except when inevitable. Hindus are by nature more unclean than other non-Muslims. It is therefore better to avoid their food. The food cannot however be declared legally unclean and unlawful.⁶⁷

On a similar question about sharing food with Christians, the mufti explained that not all contemporary Christians can be considered “people of the book”; most of them are atheists.⁶⁸ He added that, in principle, there was no objection against eating and drinking with them, but the practice must be discouraged because social contact with non-Muslims breeds religious sympathy for and proximity with other religions, which weakens one's faith in one's own religion.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

Muslim communities differ from each other in their historical and cultural development, yet they have been culturally cosmopolitan. Most cities in medieval Muslim societies hosted scholars, artists, traders and travellers belonging to different cultures and religions. Cultural developments in Muslim societies in language and literature, arts, architecture, medicine and other sciences owe a great deal to this cosmopolitan attitude among Muslims.

During the early nineteenth century, Indian cities like Lucknow, Murshidabad, Lahore and Delhi, for instance, exemplified Indian-Muslim cosmopolitanism. During their early encounters with the local societies, the British were not only impressed by the local cultures but, as has been noted above, some of them even adopted local manners and practices.

The situation changed in the late nineteenth century, especially after 1857 when the British Empire opted for modernisation in the British style. On account of Muslim resistance in the form of jihad movements from 1857 to 1867, the British developed a bias against the Muslim ulema. Muslims in general were already divided on cooperation with the British who posed not only a political but also a religious and cultural threat to Muslims.

Although in Islamic tradition Christians are “people of the book” and thus respected, under the influence of local notions of pollution and purity Hindus and Muslims both considered the British to be polluted and untouchable. These perceptions also influenced the doctrines of *tashabbuh* and *bid'a*, as we have seen above. Revivalist movements in eighteenth-century India had rejected the local notions of pollution and called for the reform of other Hindu influences, but these notions had continued among the masses. They were revived with the emphasis on religious and political resistance to the British during the nineteenth century.

The political perspective during the twentieth century eroded the concept of cosmopolitanism further, as the question of identity shifted the emphasis from religion to nationalism, which brought Hindus and Muslims together against the British. Muslims, however, became divided on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. The majority of Deoband scholars, such as Qari Tayyib and Mufti Kifayatullah, supported the Indian National Congress and called for Hindu-Muslim unity. Others, including Mawlana Thanawi and Mufti Muhammad Shafi', supported the Muslim nationalism of the Muslim League. The various notions of religious, cultural and political similarity complicated the doctrine of *tashabbuh*. One can note differences in the notions of “pollution” and “untouchability” not only between the muftis and Muslim masses, but also among the muftis on political lines. The muftis who supported the Muslim League admitted that Hindus were not untouchable and that sharing food with them was lawful, but added the political caveat that since Hindus considered Muslims untouchable, Muslims should avoid friendly relations. The muftis who supported the Indian National Congress accused the opponents of cordial relations with the British who were Christians and who were regarded as untouchables in the past by the muftis on the other side.

As the above discussion reveals, Muslim theologians developed doctrines like *tashabbuh* and *bid'a* to distinguish between religious and cultural practices. These distinctions suggested either expanding or limiting the scope of religion. However, continued shifting between the two played an important role in the development of Muslim cultures. Further, political context also played a significant role in pushing the frontiers of religion and culture in these theological discourses. The above analysis of the doctrine of *tashabbuh bi'l-kuffar* reveals the complex semantic, cultural, religious and political context of its development. In its early phase, the doctrine concentrated on refining the notions of similarity and dissimilarity and their religious implications, later a clear emphasis on the distinction of the religious from other aspects emerged. Next, the notion of similarity is extended to alliance, borrowing the Qur'anic term *wila*, and the doctrine becomes more political than ever in the coming years. During this development, the question of intention was introduced to distinguish between the religious,

cultural and political aspects of imitation, similarity and alliances; similarity was forbidden only if the intention, and later only the explicit intention, was to aspire for the “similar” objectives. One can see in the history of the doctrine of *tashabbuh* a continuous accommodation of the changing notions of cosmopolitanism.

The idea and practice of cosmopolitanism have also been influenced by varying cultural and political contexts. Privileging one specific cultural and political context does not suffice to understand the concept of cosmopolitanism or the doctrine of *tashabbuh*. The above discussion suggests that cross-cultural studies of such concepts and practices cannot ignore the political context of the queries. In the twenty-first-century debates on globalism, pluralism, integration, multiculturalism, Islamophobia and inter-faith dialogues have revealed further issues about cosmopolitanism and *tashabbuh* in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

NOTES

1. The paper was presented at a seminar titled “Cosmopolitanisms within Muslim Contexts: Models for the Past, Questions for the Future”, held at the Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, 21 June 2008. I wish to thank Derryl MacLean and Sikeena Ahmed for their editorial remarks and suggestions for the improvement of this essay.
2. G. E. Von Grunebaum, “Nationalism and Cultural Trends in the Arab Near East”, *Studia Islamica*, 14 (1961), p. 136.
3. See Roel Meijer (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999). This edited volume is an outcome of a seminar on “The Future of Cosmopolitanism in the Middle East” organised by the European Cultural Foundation in September 1996. The work focuses on questions of identity and authenticity as problems of cosmopolitanism in Middle Eastern societies.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
5. See for instance, Thomas George Percival Spear, *The Nabobs; A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 37.
6. Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Allahabad: Ram Narain Lal, 1927).
7. See Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Atharwin sadi 'isawi men islami fikr ke rahnuma* (“Leaders of Islamic Thought in the Eighteenth Century”) (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2008).
8. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986), p. 112.
9. Von Grunebaum, “Nationalism and Cultural Trends in the Arab Near East”, p. 136.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–53.
11. This particular edition is not available to me. In several other editions of this commentary by Ibn Taymiyya that I consulted, I could not find reference to this hadith, although the question of imitation is discussed.

12. Von Grunebaum, "Nationalism and Cultural Trends in the Arab Near East", p.145, n. 2.
13. Meijer, *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity*, p. 2.
14. Abu Da'ud, *Sunan* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam l'il nashr wa'l tawzi', 2000), chapter Dress, section Specific Dress, p. 1518.
15. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam l'il nashr wa'l tawzi', 2000), section Musnad Abd Allah b. Umar, Hadith no. 4869.
16. Tirmidhi, *al-Jami'* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam li'l nashr wa'l tawzi', 2000), chapter Privacy and Manners, section Greetings, p. 1923.
17. The scholars of Hadith, Al-Mundhari (d. 1258), al-Hafiz al-Sakhawi (d. 1497) and 'Allama Munawi (d. 1621) find Abd al-Rahman among the chain of narrators for this Hadith particularly weak; however, al-Sakhawi accepts the report because there are other hadith reports that support the similar meaning. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Ibn Hajar (d. 1448) find no weakness in the report. Ibn Taymiyya's influential views on this doctrine are discussed later.
18. Bukhari, Hadith no. 3647, 3648.
19. For instance, Bukhari mentions the following reports on the authority of 'Aisha and Anas b. Malik: Hadith no. 2718, 5565, 5570, 5786, 5922, 6414 and 6415.
20. Bukhari, Hadith no. 5758 and 6416.
21. The Qur'an, 58:8.
22. The Qur'an, 4:86.
23. Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 168.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
26. Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtida al-sirat al-mustaqim mukhalafat ashhab al-jahim* (Lahore: Maktaba Salafiyya, 1978).
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–5, 121.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–3.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
34. Abu'l Tayyib Muhammad Shams al-Haq al-Azimabadi, '*Awn al-ma'bud Sharh Sunan Abi Daud* (Cairo: Makataba Ibn Taymiyya, 1987), vol. 11, p. 74.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
36. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, vol. 4, 1873, p. 40, republished in *Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid*, (ed.) Mawlana Muhammad Isma'il Panipati (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi Adab, 1962), pp. 341–83.
37. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat-i Sir Sayyid* (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi Adab, 1962), pp. 90–4.
38. For a detailed analysis of these discussions, see Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Food and Notion of Purity in the Fatawa Literature", in Manuela Marin and David Waines (eds), *La Alimentación en las culturas Islámicas* (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1994), pp. 89–110 and Muhammad Khalid Masud, "The Definition of Bid'a in the South Asian Fatawa Literature", *Annales Islamologique*, 27 (1993), pp. 55–75.

39. Qari Tayyib, *al-Tashabbuh fi'l Islam* (Lahore: Idara Usmania, 1963).
40. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
46. See Muhammad Khalid Masud, "The World of Shah Abdul Aziz (1746–1824)", in Jamal Malik (ed.), *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History 1760–1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 298–314.
47. We are using the following Urdu translation of the Persian collection: *Fatawa Azizi* (Karachi: Saeed & Co., 1987).
48. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
49. For a scholarly discussion about the contribution of this family of scholars, see Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: Hurst, 2001).
50. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
51. 'Abdul Ḥayy Lakhnawī, *Majmu'a Fatawa Abd al-Hayy* (Karachi: Quran Mahall, 1964).
52. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 571.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 512.
56. The collection of his fatwas has been published several times. This paper refers to the following edition. Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa Rashidiya* (Lahore: Maktaba Rahmaniya, n.d.).
57. *Ibid.*, p. 627.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
59. Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī, *Imdad al-Fatawa* (Karachi: Maktaba Dar al-Ulum, 1975), vol. 4, p. 268.
60. Muftī Kifāyatullāh, *Kifayatul Mufti* (Multan: Maktaba Imdadiya, n.d.), vol. 9, p. 319.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 322.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 330.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
67. Muftī Muḥammad Shaftī, *Imdad al-Muftin* (Karachi: Dar al-Isha'at, 1977), vol. 2, p. 51.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 931.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 1015.

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