



LECTURE

# Escaping the Global Event: Pan-Islam and the First World War

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*The First World War is often seen as marking a transition from a world of empires to that of nation-states. As perhaps the inaugural global event, it is understood as making possible the international order we still inhabit. Yet the war also gave rise to powerful movements that sought to oppose and even dismantle this order. Soviet communism provided one such challenge and pan-Islamism another. While Lenin's desire to convert a war between states into one between classes turned into the dream of an alternative international order, the world's largest pan-Islamist movement in India retained its non-statist imagination. Like Gandhi's Noncooperation Movement, of which they were a part, India's pan-Islamists radicalized the language of empire rather than turning to religion for a new internationalist ideal. And they did so by aiming to escape the war as a global event.*

The story we usually tell about Islam in the First World War has to do with the Ottoman Empire's entry into it galvanizing pan-Islamic sentiment around the globe. No more so than in British India, home to the world's largest Muslim population, which had also provided a disproportionate number of troops for the war's prosecution. There it led to demands that the caliph should retain his authority over Islam's shrines and so territories in the Middle East, resulting in public assurances by the viceroy and prime minister. Emerging with the perceived betrayal of these promises at the war's end, the Khilafat movement was placed by India's Muslim leaders under the direction of a Hindu, the man soon to be known as Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>1</sup> It became part of his first countrywide mobilization, the Noncooperation Movement of 1920–22, which sought to hold Britain to her word.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than being a religious adjunct to an emerging national movement, pan-Islamism was one of three global mobilizations involving India at the time.

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<sup>1</sup>The standard works dealing with the Khilafat movement are Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York, 1982); Azmi Özcan, *Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain* (Leiden, 1997); and M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918–1924* (Leiden, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>The most recent and serious study of noncooperation is David Hardiman, *Noncooperation in India: Nonviolent Strategy and Protest, 1920–22* (London, 2021).

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The first was Gandhi's campaign to protect the rights of Indians across the British Empire that resulted in the abolition of indenture in 1917 at the height of the war.<sup>3</sup> The second, starting in the early years of the twentieth century, was a movement of revolutionaries dedicated to India's independence, often set within visions of pan-Asianism. Many of these militants were members of the Ghadar Party, named after the Indian uprising or mutiny of 1857 against the East India Company.<sup>4</sup> The party brought together Punjabi farmers and labourers in the United States with Bengali and other intellectuals shifting between the Americas and Europe, Afghanistan, and Japan.

Khilafat was the final global movement of this period, soon to be followed by communism as a new ideal among Indians of all religious persuasions. All three had a multireligious and often shared membership, with a number of projects in common, and so they hang together even in the interreligious tensions that each occasionally exhibited. Of them all the Khilafat movement was by far the most popular. It is difficult to say where nationalism began and internationalism ended in any of these movements, to say nothing of their respective criticisms of the nation-state as a political form, while the religious dimension was as much present among Hindus and Sikhs in Ghadar as among Muslims in Khilafat. These were not, in other words, elements distinctive to pan-Islamism, and even put its autonomy in doubt.

Neither noncooperation nor Khilafat was defined by nationalist ideals. Both Gandhi and his Muslim supporters spoke the language of loyalty and sought the empire's inner transformation. Remarkable about pan-Islamism during this period, moreover, was how easily it shifted from the caliphate to other ways of thinking about Muslim freedom. Instead of considering these shifts ideological breaks in which the Ottomans were abandoned for some other political ideal, we might acknowledge that Muslim mobilizations were never attached to political institutions. That is why we see otherwise inexplicable turns among the pan-Islamists, for example how some of those who left "infidel" India for "Islamic" Afghanistan proceeded onwards to the newly established Soviet Union and returned as socialists.<sup>5</sup>

While they were much taken up with the caliphate, therefore, the pan-Islamists had little time for the caliph himself and were willing to define his office in parliamentary and even republican terms. Never an important figure in the Khilafat movement, the Ottoman Sultan stood for something other than his own authority. He represented only one example of the limited place that politics should occupy in the life of Islam. More popular were Ottoman military men like Enver and Mustafa Kemal Pasha, even when the latter abolished the caliphate and made Turkey a secular republic. This indicated not the fickleness of Muslim opinion, but the

<sup>3</sup>For his own account of this movement, see M.K. Gandhi, trans. V.G. Desai, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Ahmedabad, 1950).

<sup>4</sup>For a somewhat adulatory study, see Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, 2011). The most sophisticated treatment of the Ghadar movement is to be found in the second chapter of Shruti Kapila's *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, 2021).

<sup>5</sup>See, for this, K. H. Ansari, "Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Indian Muslim Socialists," *Modern Asian Studies* 20/3 (1986), 509–37.

unimportance of the caliphate as a political principle. Its authority did not define Muslim solidarity but was a changeable form meant to protect the primacy of Islam's social order.

Rather than representing a remnant of some premodern political imagination, in other words, or even a new internationalist one, the Khilafat movement sought to create Muslim solidarity outside political institutions and was deeply suspicious of the state in particular. Unsurprising at a time when the Soviet Union was also grappling with ideas about the state's "withering away," pan-Islamism's focus on limiting the reach of political institutions and differentiating them from solidarity as a social form nevertheless seems to have inherited more from anarchism than from bolshevism. A significant stream of Muslim thought beginning in this period would even repudiate sovereignty and expel it from the state by reserving it for God.<sup>6</sup> All of which meant that the Khilafat movement could not situate itself in the political framework set in place by the First World War and had to repudiate its role altogether.

### A war of no importance

Arguably the inaugural global event, the First World War has not until recently enjoyed any scholarly or popular attention in the subcontinent—this despite the fact that British India contributed the largest Allied army to the conflict, which had important ramifications for its social, economic and political life. One reason why it lacked interest for Muslims in particular was because pan-Islamic concerns both pre-dated the war and continued well after its ending. The high points of pan-Islamic activism in India were during the Tripolitan and Balkan Wars of 1912–13, and then again at the end of the First World War between 1919 and 1922, when the Ottoman Empire was broken up and its Middle Eastern portions were divided between Britain and France.

With the abolition of the caliphate by Turkey in 1924, pan-Islamist attention turned to the threat posed by Arab claimants to the title and the Jewish settlement of Palestine. We can therefore add another set of dates to the ones listed above, all of which decenter the war in Muslim narratives. But I shall not adopt the historian's trick of shifting dates to question the integrity of a historical event. I want to argue instead that the war was deliberately provincialized in pan-Islamist debates because they were critical of its concern with sovereignty and the privilege this gave to political considerations that could only marginalize Muslim desires, which came to be focused on Islam as a set of new social relations instead.

Such a conception of Muslim solidarity even represents the only serious victory of an anarchist sensibility in the postwar period. But it was not a merely Muslim

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<sup>6</sup>By reserving sovereignty for God, Islamists have sought to replace political government by social governance, with Muslims managed by regulations whose authorities are placed outside the state. Its earliest exponent was the journalist and theologian Abul Kalam Azad, the Khilafat movement's chief theorist, whom we shall encounter later in these pages. See Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25/3 (July 2015), 389–418. For a description of this idea in the work of the preeminent Islamist thinker, Abul Ala Maududi, see Faisal Devji, "Islamism as Anti-politics," *Political Theology Blog*, at [www.politicaltheology.com/blog/political-theology-and-islamic-studies-symposium-islamism-as-anti-politics](http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/political-theology-and-islamic-studies-symposium-islamism-as-anti-politics) (accessed 2 Aug. 2013).

issue, since Gandhi, more than anyone else at this time, theorized the dominance of the social over the political. Already in his manifesto, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* of 1909, he had recognized that the great danger of revolutionary nationalism was that it ran the risk of simply replacing white faces with brown ones by inheriting and even strengthening the colonial state's order of violence. For he didn't see much difference between this state and its metropole, correctly noting that each depended upon the other for its existence.<sup>7</sup>

From his South African activism starting late in the nineteenth century until the end of the First World War and beyond, Gandhi had worked to radicalize loyalty to the British Empire in order to transform the vast concourse of humanity it represented for the benefit of its rulers as well as subjects. He could do this because sovereignty (*swaraj* or self-rule) was understood not in collective or institutional terms, but as a quality dispersed among individuals whose nonviolent practices were meant to revolutionize social relations and therefore political ones by default. It didn't much matter, therefore, what kind of political regime existed, with the European categories of empire and nation, monarchy and democracy seen as equally superficial.

Gandhi's loyalty to the empire was independent as well as radical because it was detached from the aims and propaganda of the colonial state. His acts of organizing an Indian ambulance corps during the Boer and Zulu wars in the first years of the twentieth century, as well as at the First World War's commencement in 1914, were all marked by an unconcern with which side was right or wrong in each conflict. In fact, his own sympathies were with the Boers and Zulus in the first two wars, and he insisted on serving their wounded as well as those of the British. Indian participation in these South African events was an excessive gift of loyalty meant to force Britain to recognize their rights as citizens of the empire.

With the Great War this reasoning changed slightly, as Gandhi, who reached London in 1914, grappled with the problem of abstaining from the conflict while yet living under the protection of the Royal Navy.<sup>8</sup> Since he thought this amounted to benefiting from violence, Gandhi decided that volunteering for ambulance service on the western front would at least cancel out the sin of such vicarious participation in the war by deliberately putting himself at risk. The ambulance corps was meant to break the chain of *karma* that linked its members to violence. The closer Gandhi approached the war, in other words, the more distant he was from its aims and ethos, having turned it into the scene for a quite different moral trial.

Gandhi's engagement with the war was intermittent during its course. It only became significant at the formal end of hostilities in 1919 with the emergence of Khilafat. Apart from setting up an ambulance corps among Indians in London in 1914, his only other dealings with the war came in 1918, when, in response to the viceroy's plea, Gandhi embarked upon a largely unsuccessful mission to recruit soldiers for it in India. Between these years it was as if the war didn't exist, so minor were his references to it.

<sup>7</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>For Gandhi's dealings with the war see Faisal Devji, "Gandhi's Great War," in I. Talbot and R. Long, eds., *India and the Great War* (London, 2018), 191–206.

As with the ambulance corps, Gandhi's arguments for recruitment were independent. On the one hand, India's participation in the war was meant to achieve home rule for her and equality within the empire, though he insisted that this could only happen by unconditionally supporting the government and not by way of a deal. This was another example of Gandhi's anti-contractual and so anti-liberal and anarchist political vision, for which the freedom of voluntary and unconditional action was crucial. On the other hand, Gandhi offered far more intriguing reasons than home rule to his allies, not all of whom shared his belief in nonviolence.

By making themselves responsible for recruitment, Gandhi contended, Indians would automatically "socialize" the army by switching the allegiance of soldiers to their own countrymen and civilians outside government. In the process they would also allay the risk of military rule at the end of the war, when large numbers of soldiers owing allegiance to the British returned and were used against the nationalists. But he also thought that in order to claim their freedom, Indians should learn to risk their lives, which made the war into an arena for another kind of political morality. Indeed, recruits might even be able to demonstrate the power of nonviolence on the battlefields of Europe.

However serious, disingenuous or bizarre these ideas, Gandhi's loyalty was detached from any colonial instrumentality and so free. He had already disengaged from the war and even from British rule while still participating in both. At the same time as he was conducting these famous experiments, pan-Islamists were pursuing a similar course of action by radicalizing the language of loyalty in their quest for a socially defined freedom. In both cases this entailed grappling with the humanitarian logic of colonial rule. For given the limitations of representative government in places like India, British rule had to be justified as the unilateral gift of good governance in the name of humanity, one whose acceptance created an obligation among its subjects even without their formal consent.

In the language of Thomas Hobbes, the legitimacy of representative government is called sovereignty by institution, while that lacking consultation and consent is known as sovereignty by acquisition. The latter's legitimacy is therefore derived from its gift-like character, one that increasingly came to be defined in humanitarian terms within the British Empire. The German jurist Carl Schmitt linked such humanitarianism to the fact that Britain's vast and globally dispersed empire lacked territorial integrity.<sup>9</sup> It was therefore defined by a universalistic and territorially unattached politics of which humanitarian intervention, as we call it today, emerged as the principal modality.

In the domestic affairs of individual colonies, governance as a form of humanitarian intervention was represented by the unilateral gift of law and order, economic improvement and the protection of women, children, and minorities. In international affairs it took the form of a moral imperative that was often lawless, as when Britain's abolition of slavery required the Royal Navy to impound human cargo even in foreign ships outside British waters. Maeve Ryan has recently

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<sup>9</sup>Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea: A World-Historical Meditation*, trans. Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (New York, 2015). See also Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York, 2006).

described how abolition remade the empire into a world system within which emancipated slaves were dispersed, resettled and meant to repay the debt they owed Britain for the gift of their freedom.<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi's politics of unconditional loyalty sought to return the colonial gift and create an obligation among India's rulers instead. But he did this without invoking humanity, which he saw as an imperialistic category because of the hubris and violence entailed in any claim to speak on behalf of the species.<sup>11</sup> In rejecting the colonial gift, however, the Khilafatists proposed a properly transactional relationship in its place while also claiming to act in the name of humanity. And to do this they turned to the Indian uprising as their chief precedent, an event Gandhi rarely cited but which had become a crucial reference for Indian revolutionaries, evident in the naming of the Ghadar Party. In this way the First World War was deprived of its integrity and absorbed into a narrative about the events of 1857.

### A mutinous precedent

Already in 1909, the year Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, the revolutionary Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who would go on to become a founding father of Hindu nationalism, published *The Indian War of Independence*.<sup>12</sup> The first book to celebrate the Indian uprising's partnership of Hindus and Muslims against the British in the name of a Mughal emperor, it was, like the future Mahatma's tract, promptly banned. But the uprising was also an important reference point for the colonial state, representing its worst fears of sedition and disorder. This was why even "loyal" Indian troops were always poorly armed when compared to their British counterparts, with the former's regiments shadowed by the latter's just in case they needed to be disarmed.

The only epistolary attempt we know about during the war to seduce soldiers from their duty by counseling rebellion in the cause of Islam took the form of a letter sent anonymously from Agra on 1 March 1916 to Risaldar Habibullah of the 6th Cavalry in Karachi.<sup>13</sup> It does not mention the caliphate or Islam's holy sites in the Middle East, which became the two most important references for the Khilafat movement. Instead, it invokes the threat that Britain's prosecution of the war posed to India's caste and religious plurality. This is a theme that falls entirely within the narrative logic of the Indian uprising, whose sepoys had complained of their caste and religious identities being compromised by bullet cartridges greased with animal fat as well as Christian proselytism.

The uprising, in other words, was by no means a rhetorical flourish for the Khilafatists. Indian soldiers on the western front continued to use terms and ideas familiar from 1857, including a conception of loyalty premised upon being true to the salt of the government that paid and cared for them. As Abd-ul-Rahman Khan of Jacob's Horse wrote from France to his brother in

<sup>10</sup>Maeve Ryan, *Humanitarian Governance and the British Antislavery World System* (New Haven, 2022).

<sup>11</sup>See, for this, Faisal Devji, "Gandhi, Hinduism and Humanity," in G. Flood, ed., *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice* (Oxford, 2020), 375–97.

<sup>12</sup>V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence* (Bombay, 1946).

<sup>13</sup>David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914–18* (New Delhi, 2014), 169–70.

Mianwali on 12 December 1915, “On active service there is no furlough or leave or pension, but whose salt we have eaten, to him the debt must be paid. While I live, I will remain in my valour and will exalt the name of my tribe.”<sup>14</sup> The care expected of the British consisted in their respecting the caste and religious practices of their Indian troops, such as the varied dietary restrictions that obliged the army to run multiple kitchens staffed by cooks of appropriate lineage for Hindu, Muslim and Sikh sepoys.

Even before the pan-Islamists came up with their transactional theory of loyalty detached from British aims and ideas, Muslim sepoys in France or Mesopotamia continued the Indian uprising-era tradition of fighting for the glory not of their king or country so much as their religion and caste.<sup>15</sup> As Mahomed Usuf Khan wrote from France to a friend in India on 8 May 1916, “We pray God that some opportunity be given us that we may be able to use our sharp and glittering swords for the destruction of the Germans, and place our names on the tongues of the entire world.”<sup>16</sup> Pensioner Jan Mahomed Khan, writing from Rohtak to Fateh Mohamed Khan of the 6th Cavalry in France on 24 March 2016, counselled loyalty to the king because it “would not be surprising if this war has been permitted in order to encourage the propaganda of Islam. God seems to have adopted this means of spreading the truth to the furthest corners of the earth.”<sup>17</sup>

When the Khilafat movement took up the Indian uprising as its precedent for a new kind of relationship with the colonial state, it was not only echoing a military reality, but claiming the religious liberty that its supporters believed had been guaranteed by the British as a consequence of the uprising, for the queen’s proclamation of 1858 had halted British reprisals for the uprising, promised Hindus and Muslims equal treatment under the law and forsworn interference in their religious beliefs and practices. The proclamation had long been held by Indians to constitute their charter of freedom, or magna carta as it was often described, despite the irritation of colonial administrators who saw it as a symbolic document lacking the force of law. In their eyes the proclamation was a gift since it was unsolicited and involved no consultation.

A good example of the way in which the queen’s proclamation was deployed by Indians at the time can be found in a 1919 biographical sketch of the Congress leader and Hindu revivalist Madan Mohan Malviya. Written in Urdu by the journalist Abul Ala Maududi, who would go on to become the first and most influential Islamist thinker in South Asia, this text was part of the Khilafat movement’s narrative of Hindu–Muslim unity and never mentions the Ottomans. Instead, Maududi describes the 1858 proclamation as the foundation stone of Indian nationhood (*Hindustani qawmiyyat ka sang-e bunyad*) and deprecates British attempts to understand it as a rhetorical rather than constitutional document.<sup>18</sup> All that is required, he argues, is for the colonial state to abide by the proclamation’s principles, which allow Indians to demand justice in all aspects of their lives.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 114, 116, 128, 182, 236–7, 295–6, 328.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>18</sup>Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya: Halat-e Zindagi* (Patna, 2010), 9.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 10.



F. W. Buckler, the most perceptive British authority on Muslim political thought during this period, recognized in the resort to the queen's proclamation a Mughal theory of legitimacy. In his 1922 article on the Khilafat movement, Buckler took to task the European scholars who described Muslim claims about the caliphate as specious.<sup>20</sup> While they were right in thinking that Indians had not entertained any special veneration for the Ottomans before the uprising, this was because the Mughal emperors had themselves claimed to be "khalifas of the age," a designation that was for them more mystical than imperial, and modeled on the claims of the Safavid emperors, who were for so long their rivals. The competing claims and relations of the Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans, maintained Buckler, together constituted what he called the *Respublica Moslemica* by their shared norms.

While Buckler had named it after the *Respublica Christiana*, this order was not purely Muslim but one within which non-Muslim actors like the Greek patriarchate, the Marathas or the East India Company could participate, if only as vassals. And just as the Ottomans claimed Constantine's title of Roman emperor long before they took the caliphate from its last Egyptian incumbent, so, too, did the Mughals claim Hindu titles and became the spiritual preceptors of noblemen holding different faiths, with the title of caliph or Sufi elder meant only for their Muslim subjects. Even when such non-Muslim groups ended up becoming more powerful than their suzerains, they had to operate within the terms of this order at the imperial or international level, while at the same time formulating regional orders of legitimacy for themselves.

By accepting and then flouting this order, the Company broke its compact with the Mughal emperor and laid the groundwork for the Indian uprising. This event in turn brought together Hindus and Muslims under the nominal authority of the last emperor, who continued to represent spiritual, if no longer much temporal, power. But the uprising's defeat swept away both the East India Company and the Mughal Empire. In the logic of the *Respublica Moslemica*, then, the queen's proclamation was understood as restitution both for the Company's crimes and for those of the last Mughal and his mutinous troops. It was meant to reestablish a political compact between Indians and an imperial order, though no longer one that was able to claim any religious authority of its own.

Only when this essentially Mughal compact was threatened, Buckler argues, did Muslims turn to an external authority like the Persians or Afghans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to the Ottomans following the Indian uprising, at a time when the former countries were no longer in a position to intervene in Indian politics. Yet these foreign powers were seen not as new rulers but, to use contemporary terms, as the instruments of an "international intervention" by the *Respublica Moslemica* to reestablish India's political order. The British Crown played just this role after the uprising, while nevertheless staying on to become part of a new compact as if it was a placeholder for the vanished Mughal Empire.

In the absence of an Islamic authority transcending the variety of schools and sects in colonial India, the Ottomans represented the only remaining pillar of the *Respublica Moslemica* internationally. As long as Anglo-Ottoman relations were

<sup>20</sup>See F. W. Buckler, "The Historical Antecedents of the Khilafat Movement," *Contemporary Review* 121 (Jan.-June 1922), 603-11.



good, and the Ottoman Empire's survival not at risk, its role had no political significance in India. But this situation changed in the war's aftermath, once it became clear that the Ottomans would lose their empire. When the Khilafatists took up the Turkish cause, they were not asking for its armed support but rather working to reestablish the caliph's authority, as the Indian uprising had sought to do that of the Mughals. Except they did so by invoking Britain's obligations to her Muslim subjects in a clear sign of the transactional nature of their relations with the empire.

Perhaps the most dramatic elaboration of this kind of transactional loyalty was made in the 1921 trial of the most important leaders of the Khilafat movement, including the brothers Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. These men were accused of a "Criminal Conspiracy to seduce Mahomedan Officers and Soldiers in the Army of His Majesty the King-Emperor" by speaking for a resolution at the Khilafat Conference held in Karachi that July which declared "that it is strictly forbidden for every Muslim according to Islamic Shariat to serve, to enlist in the army, or to raise recruits, and it is the duty incumbent on every Muslim and particularly on the Ulema to bring the religious commandments on this subject home to every Mussalman in the British Indian Army."<sup>21</sup>

Added to this were other charges linking them to a fatwa voicing similar sentiments and anonymous pamphlets sent to Muslim soldiers. While the jury eventually threw out these charges, the accused were nevertheless sent to prison by the judge. The defendants made their case on the basis of the religious freedom guaranteed them by the queen's proclamation. To this was added the widely advertised promise by the viceroy at the war's commencement, promising that the religious sentiments of India's Muslims would be respected and their holy places in the Middle East protected from interference, and finally the pledge of Britain's prime minister in 1918 that the caliph would not be deprived of his capital or territories "predominantly Turkish in race." Yet the shrines were taken from the caliph's control and divided between semicolonial dependencies run by Christian powers or their Muslim clients.

As Gandhi would do at his trial for sedition the year after, Muhammad Ali refused to defend himself, asked to be given whatever punishment the court decided and maintained that it was the "Government itself that is on trial. It is the Judge himself who is on trial. It is the whole system of public prosecutions, the entire provision of law that are on trial."<sup>22</sup> In doing so he was repudiating the legitimacy of the colonial state as a neutral third party, treating it instead as a party to the crime of which he was being accused. The queen's proclamation, he argued, was a compact that limited the Muslim's duty of obedience to military command in particular by giving priority to his conscience: "Gentlemen of the Jury, the Proclamation came, as you know, after the greased cartridges affair and the Mutiny, and it was to repudiate precisely this unlimited connotation of military duty that it was issued in 1858."<sup>23</sup>

Freedom of conscience, moreover, was not simply a minor constitutional matter but stood at the very foundation of British sovereignty, since the queen's own

<sup>21</sup>*Historic Trial of Ali Brothers and Others, Part II, Proceedings in the Sessions Court* (Karachi, n.d.), 123.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

authority, however ceremonial, required her anointment as a Protestant and pledge to serve as *Fidei Defensor*. All of this made religious toleration not a liberal or humanitarian gift but a kind of theological presupposition of modern politics. For as he pointed out, loyalty to the state was premised upon oaths taken in God's name. As the trial record illustrates, this contention appears to have had a striking effect in the courtroom. "Can I not say to the Judge—can I not say to the Jury if these people are not true to their God, can they be true to their King? (Pin-drop silence prevails in the house)."<sup>24</sup> Religion, then, imposed an obligation upon the state:

Had not religious toleration been proclaimed by the proclamation of the Queen in 1858, the Queen would not have been recognised by a single Hindu or by a single Christian or by a single Mahomedan. We could come in only as Mussalmans just as we are and with this little book of ours (showing the Quran). If the Quran had no use for us, the Queen could have said: "Gentlemen, you are welcome but not with that book" and we would have remained in the faith. But the Queen wanted us, just as we were, even in spite of this book. And what about the Queen herself? She has to go before the Archbishop of Canterbury and to declare that she was a Protestant and would continue to remain so and to be Defender of that Faith.<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad Ali went on to make two claims. The first was,

My law is this that no soldier shall be asked to kill another Muslim unless for a just cause—a just cause according to my religious law. If the King accepts me as I am, with all this law, and I come in. Ask me to go against this law, I walk out of the Empire or kick you out of it.<sup>26</sup>

The second was that he and other Muslims were obliged to propagate this duty to their coreligionists, including asking soldiers to leave the army.

It is not enough that I should not go to war. I have got to go and induce other Muslims also not to go to war to fight their brothers. I shall induce him in every possible way. I must take the rifle out of his hand—but not by force, not by compulsion but by clearly expounding our religious law. We are saved only when we have saved these people from going to fight and kill other Mussalmans.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from sticking to the letter of the law in trying to demonstrate the defendants' conspiracy, the Crown's religious arguments were familiar ones. They comprised questioning the obligations that Muhammad Ali described both theologically and historically. Prosecutor and judge both referred to the fact that not all sects of

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 78.

Muslims agreed with him, that India's Muslims had historically never owed allegiance to the Ottomans, and that the law meant for a religiously diverse country could not be defined by the theological prescriptions of some, especially when these might include violent acts like child sacrifice. Muhammad Ali responded by questioning both the historical and the theological right of the British to define what was and was not Islamic orthodoxy:

But even if it was a case of a particular sect, do you mean to say that the Proclamation of the Queen in 1858 required at that time that each and every one of the 300 millions of the people of India must be agreed all the heavens and the whole earth and all the planets and the Man in the Moon and all the men in Mars—every one must be agreed that this was the one true and correct faith and it was then that the Queen's Proclamation provided protection?<sup>28</sup>

He went on to point out the illogic of the public prosecutor in raising nonexistent issues like child sacrifice while ignoring the violence demanded by his own government:

The P.P. asked me—he said to me if some body believed in human sacrifice and your child is demanded you will be the first to seek the protection of the law. In any case, as a Non-Co-operator these days, I do not want to seek the protection of his law. Neither do I believe that there is any sect that can demand such a sacrifice from other people. The only sect that can demand human sacrifice of other people's children is the sect of the Militarists.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the court, therefore, Muhammad Ali was not claiming the status of a third party for Islamic law, one which possessed a universal mandate, but rather insisting on its constitutional presence within secular jurisprudence. Whereas an Islamic state might be free to cut off the hands of thieves and to stone adulterers—the kind of punishments which the judge had mentioned to warn against, invoking Scripture—Muhammad Ali contended,

My bargain as a Muslim with an Islamic Government is different from my bargain as a Muslim with a non-Muslim Government. From non-Muslims I do not require that they should do anything for me, except permit me to hold my own religious opinions and act upon them with impunity. My religion can impose its obligations only upon me, and not upon others.<sup>30</sup>

Even when invoking the authority of Scripture, in other words, Muhammad Ali was careful to remain not only within the language of loyalty, whose compact he

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

thought had been betrayed by the colonial state, but also within a secular dispensation:

But what is it after all that Islamic law demands to-day? For what offence does it seek the secular Law's protection? Not for human sacrifice! I do not say—"shoot your officers—kill them"! No, on the contrary I demand that they be not guilty of the human sacrifice of their Muslim brothers—of fratricide. When you took them to fight the Germans on the outbreak of the War, I did not say—"Do not fight with them". I do not say, if there is disorder in Karachi and Muslims are rioting, that Muslim soldiers should not go and stop that.<sup>31</sup>

The colonial state turned out to be far more insistent on religion than were the pan-Islamists. On the one hand it defended orthodoxy by repeatedly questioning the theological bona fides of the defendants. And on the other it invoked the most fearsome examples of Islamic law, as well as what the judge and public prosecutor took to be the Hindu practice of child sacrifice, to caution against relying upon religion in public life. Against this position, Muhammad Ali adduced Scripture and precedent in a secular way and within the context of British constitutionalism. In a direct reference to Lord Macaulay's provision in the Indian Penal Code banning offences against religious sentiment, he insisted that it was not what he called "good religion" that was protected by law, but religious feelings whether they were correct or not. In other words, whatever it was that Muslims believed, the state was obliged to limit itself to their feelings rather than doctrine:

The law gives the man who worships it its protection. Why does it do so? It is not because the man's religion is good but because of the man's feelings. Because the framers of the law say that it is not good religion that they seek to protect but it is the man's religious feelings. It is not the objective religion but the subjective feelings of the man too that have to be protected.<sup>32</sup>

The Karachi trial of 1921 nicely represents the radicalization of loyalty in the Khilafat movement, and the anchoring of its argument in the Indian uprising. Clearly religion was important to the movement precisely because it emerged within a secular yet undemocratic context for which Islam was defined in liberal terms as freedom of conscience. And while scholars recently have been much taken with the romance of revolutionary nationalism, I would like to suggest that it is this radicalization of loyalty that was both more creative intellectually and important politically.<sup>33</sup> But more than tying their loyalty to a compact between equals and thus constitutionalizing their relations with the colonial state, the Khilafatists went on to repurpose the humanitarian vocabulary of imperialism.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>33</sup>For the political ambiguity of revolutionary pan-Islamism during the war see Faridah Zaman, "Revolutionary History and the Post-colonial Muslim: Rewriting the 'Silk Letters Conspiracy' of 1916," *South Asia* 39/3 (2016), 626–43.

## Humanitarian Islam

During the war, assorted Indian revolutionaries and members of the Ghadar Party set up shop in Kabul with German and Turkish help, organizing anticolonial plots while unsuccessfully trying to get the king to throw in his lot with the Central Powers. Significantly, when Afghanistan did go to war with India for three months in 1919, very deliberately after the hostilities of the world war had ended in order not to be drawn into them, it was neither for revolutionary nor pan-Islamic reasons but to successfully claim autonomy from the British. Muslim divines and militants who had little interest in the Germans or even Turks also saw in Afghanistan a base from which Islamic society might be reformed and modernized to face the challenge of imperialism.

Most astoundingly, in 1920 some twenty thousand to sixty thousand peasants, landlords and even petty officials left the North-West Frontier, Punjab and Sindh in an act of religious emigration (*hijrat*) modeled on that of Muhammad himself in Islam's early days. This was because they thought British India had become a place where they could no longer practice their religion freely. Echoing the Khilafatists' arguments, these emigrants spoke of Britain's betrayal of her compact with India's Muslims. A typical narrative of this kind was described by Lt. Col. W. J. Keen, the district commissioner of Peshawar, writing to Sir Hamilton Grant, chief commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, to report his conversations with a number of those crossing the border:

At each place expression was given to practically the same sentiments, which were that they and their fathers before them had been loyal to the British Government and they had fought for us in the Mutiny, in many frontier wars, in Egypt and elsewhere and last, but by no means least, in the Great War, and they had no wish whatever, to be severed from Government, but wish for nothing better and to go and fight again for it, but their religion forbade them, for we had a hand in taking away the Holy Places from the Sultan of Turkey upon whom they looked as *Khalifa*. They begged that I would tell you that they wish to remain loyal if only Government remove this grievance.<sup>34</sup>

While they may not have cited him, nothing more Gandhian than this nonviolent act of noncooperation can be imagined. And, indeed, the comparison between Islamic duties and Gandhian activism was very frequently made. Here, for instance, is what one of the Khilafatists, a medical doctor named Saifuddin Kitchlew who was tried in 1921 for sedition in Karachi, had to say about it:

As a non-co-operator I can be either violent or non-violent according to the laws of Shariat. I am entitled to use force when I have the power to do so, or stay where I am and practise non-violent non-co-operation. The use of physical force for me in the present circumstances is out of the question. Hijrat or emigration is impracticable for seventy millions of Mussalmans.

<sup>34</sup>Dietrich Reetz, *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful. A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920* (Berlin, 1995), Appendix, 6.

Non-violent non-co-operation, therefore, is the only thing that a Mussalman in this country can practise to satisfy the dictates of his conscience and the Commandments of God. I am, therefore, a non-violent non-co-operator just as the Prophet of Islam was during his life at Mecca.<sup>35</sup>

A Sikh convert to Islam who had gone on to study at the famous seminary of Deoband, Obeidullah Sindhi was sent to Afghanistan in 1915 by his preceptors to organize Muslim resistance to what they saw as Britain's betrayal of her compact with the empire's Muslim subjects. Spending seven years in Kabul, Sindhi visited the Soviet Union and became one of the earliest Islamic socialists, while also helping establish a provisional Indian government in Kabul with Raja Mahendra Pratap and Moulvi Barakatullah of the Ghadar movement. But Sindhi was not much interested either in Germany or in the caliphate. He urged the young Muslim militants who arrived in Afghanistan from places like Lahore and Peshawar to forsake their dreams of proceeding to the Middle East.

These young men were instead to dedicate themselves not only to building alliances with their coreligionists in Central Asia, but also to working for the development of Afghanistan into an exemplary and free Islamic society by the inculcation of European-style education, law, military discipline and administration. Sindhi argued that Afghanistan had always played a crucial part in India's freedom. The Mughals, he recalled, had invoked Afghan assistance against their overly powerful vassals the Marathas. And the British could only think of removing the Mughals once they had cut the links between Delhi and Kabul by occupying the Punjab.<sup>36</sup> He also pointed to the fact that, already in the early nineteenth century, disciples of the famous divine Shah Abdul Aziz of Delhi had left India to organize jihad against Sikh and then British rule from Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup>

Sindhi's historical narrative of Muslim resistance, in other words, gave short shrift to the Ottomans and their caliphate, despite being set in the midst of the First World War and pan-Islamist ferment. Since the Khilafatists never considered themselves Ottoman subjects, their relations with the caliphate had to be defined in other and distinctly nonpolitical ways. This was important given that their argument against Britain was grounded in a debate about loyalty and the freedom of conscience it was meant to guarantee. Religious obligations to prevent the unjust killing of Muslims, as we have seen, and to keep their holy places under the caliph's authority, stood first in defining Muslim solidarity around the world. But this solidarity also and even primarily manifested itself in modern forms of humanitarianism.

In 1911 the jurist and historian Syed Ameer Ali, who had been appointed the first Indian privy councillor in the early years of the twentieth century, founded the British Red Crescent Society for work among Ottoman subjects. Not content with raising funds for the clothing, shelter and medical care of the Ottoman victims of colonial wars, in 1912 Muslims in India dispatched a medical mission to work

<sup>35</sup>*Historic Trial*, 119.

<sup>36</sup>Maulana Obeidullah Sindhi, *Zati Diary* (Lahore, 1946), 75.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

with Turkish troops and refugees from the Balkan War.<sup>38</sup> They even formed an Indo-Ottoman Colonisation Society that planned to resettle these refugees in new Anatolian colonies funded by Indian Muslims and named after their own towns in the Gangetic plain. Although this plan came to nothing, given the outbreak of the First World War, the colony became an important site for thinking about humanitarian action that soon became what we would today call development.

From agricultural to housing settlements, the colony names all manner of residential forms in India and Pakistan. Building canal colonies, for example, was a crucial way in which the British settled and developed agricultural land in the Punjab. The Hijrat movement of 1920, conventionally seen as the archetypical example of pan-Islamic atavism, also belongs within this logic. It did not take the form of a disorganized melee or pilgrimage, and much to the surprise of British officials even resulted in a significant reduction of ordinary crime.<sup>39</sup> It was instead a highly institutionalized operation that aimed at the settlement of new agricultural land and the development of Afghan administration.<sup>40</sup> The Afghan government certainly seems to have seen the Indian émigrés as agents of development and also objects of humanitarianism in their own right, thus making for a mutuality of purposes.<sup>41</sup>

Although very few of their projects could be realized, the rules proposed by the Khilafat Emigration Committee after consultation with the Afghan king on 11 August illustrate a vision that cannot be differentiated from other projects of humanitarian development by their theological character, including as they even do Hindus among the potential emigrants. The agreement includes provisions to set up emigrant colonies in Afghanistan; the employment of teachers, doctors and skilled labourers from among them; the recruitment of Indians into the Afghan army; assistance allowing them to practice trades and professions; and the provision of food and monetary aid to the indigent.<sup>42</sup>

It is possible to see the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 as the last instance of this pan-Islamic logic of colonization and development in a humanitarian cause, one whose task was to create a new kind of society beyond the control of any state. During the Khilafat movement this state had been the British Raj, and for the partisans of Pakistan some two decades later it had become a Hindu Raj. But humanitarianism had to be conceived differently from the colonial model it nevertheless drew upon. And the way the Khilafatists did this was by dwelling obsessively on the allegedly nonracial, nonnational and therefore truly universal character of Islam's brotherhood. In the account of his life in Kabul, for example, Obeidullah Sindhi remarks that Islam's most important characteristic was its recognition of and appeal to humanity without distinction of race, tribe, caste or nation.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>See, for this, Burak Akcapar, *People's Mission to the Ottoman Empire: M. A. Ansari and the Indian Medical Mission, 1912–13* (New Delhi, 2014).

<sup>39</sup>Reetz, *Hijrat*, 56.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 58–9.

<sup>41</sup>For a study of utopian modernism in this period of Afghanistan's history see Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empires* (Cambridge, MA, 2017).

<sup>42</sup>Reetz, *Hijrat*, Appendix, 27.

<sup>43</sup>Sindhi, *Zati Diary*, 92.



Their focus on Islam as a religion standing for human equality had as one of its consequences the Indian pan-Islamists' unwillingness to acknowledge the caliphate's ethnic or dynastic character. This meant that when there was a move by the Sharif of Mecca to claim the caliphate with British support, at least in part on the basis of his ancestry and guardianship of Islam's holiest shrine, Muslim authorities like Abul Kalam Azad, perhaps the most important pan-Islamic theorist who would go on to become a leading figure in the Indian National Congress, refused to countenance it. For them any claim for which personality, family, ethnicity and nationality was a source of legitimacy had to be repudiated.<sup>44</sup> The Indian repudiation of race, therefore, came to include dynastic forms of rule as much as ethno-national ones.<sup>45</sup>

Yet by questioning such dynastic claims, Azad and other Khilafatists were compelled to downplay the Ottomans' theological status even as they championed it. As with Muhammad Ali at his 1921 trial, Azad realized that it was the colonial state which depended on purely theological arguments about Islam. The Ottomans, Azad argued in a famous speech to the Provincial Khilafat Conference in Calcutta on 29 February 1920, were caliphs partly because of the historical exigencies that had allowed them to survive into the present, and partly by default, since unlike almost all of their predecessors they faced no Muslim rivals.<sup>46</sup>

It was also true that the Ottomans, like their predecessors, hardly ever instantiated the virtues required of the caliphate. But, Azad continued, this was the case with all history, whose story of compromise, deceit and subservience could not, however, erase the truth it so ill represented.<sup>47</sup> In a more elaborate argument mounted in the published version of his speech, Azad described two versions of the caliphate, a primary or true form and a secondary or pragmatic one. It was the caliphate's ideal form that was problematic, with disagreements over Muhammad's succession differentiating Shia from Sunni. Only its secondary or practical form allowed for Muslim unity, since every sect agreed that it was better to obey any power that protected Islam, however sinful it might otherwise be.<sup>48</sup>

### Sacred sites and secular space

While Azad's claims about the caliphate provide us with another illustration of pan-Islamic secularism, his focus on the sacred sites that the Ottomans were meant to protect seems to do the opposite. In his Calcutta speech, Azad recalled how the war had been justified by Muslim scholars on the basis of British assurances of its secular character and promises not to interfere with Islam's sacred

<sup>44</sup>For an account of Azad's disagreement on this score with Muslim thinkers in the Middle East see John Willis, "Debating the Caliphate: Islam and the Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad," *International History Review* 32/4 (2010), 711–32.

<sup>45</sup>For a discussion of how this insistence played out politically in the postwar Middle East see Roy Bar Sadeh, "Worldmaking in the Hijaz: Muslims between South Asian and Soviet visions of Managing Difference, 1919–1926," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 66/1 (2024), 185–212.

<sup>46</sup>Abul Kalam Azad, "Masalah-e khilafat," in Mahmud Ilahi, ed., *Khutbat-e Khilafat* (Lucknow, 1988), 11–46, at 19.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>48</sup>Abul Kalam Azad, *Masalah-e Khilafat-o Jazirat-ul Arab* (Calcutta, 1920), 49.

sites. Moreover, the Turks had attacked Britain and her allies first, thus rendering the Ottoman promulgation of *jihad* illegitimate in religious terms.<sup>49</sup> While the war had been legitimate, then, the peace that followed it was not since the British broke their promises by taking over the sacred sites of the Arabian peninsula. They even engineered conspiracies in Mecca to destroy the caliphate by supporting the Arab Revolt.

What did such references to sacred sites mean in the pan-Islamist narrative? The holy places of Arabia, of course, had long been a focus for Muslim concern in India and elsewhere, with Mecca, Medina, Najaf and Karbala having been attacked at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Wahhabi forces riding out of Nejd. When the Ottomans reasserted control over these cities, celebrations were held in India, though the threat of Wahhabi iconoclasm continued to be an important subject of Muslim debate there. During the Great War these sites remained the focus of Muslim attention, among soldiers on the western front as much as among emigrants heading for Afghanistan as part of the Hijrat. And while some imagined that the British had destroyed their shrines as the Wahhabis did, others considered Christian control over them itself sacrilegious.

Of the one actual and two attempted Muslim mutinies during the war, including that of the 130th Baluchis at Rangoon and the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore, only one was undeniably religious in inspiration. This was the would-be mutiny of the 15th Lancers in February 1916, as they were ordered to march from Basra to the front. But whether they were launched to demand better pay, as in Rangoon, or to refuse being posted to the European front or elsewhere in the empire, as in Singapore, all these mutinies were transactional or radically loyal rather than nationalist in their rhetoric. Instead of repudiating imperialism, they set limits to British authority by refusing to obey only certain orders while acceding to others.<sup>50</sup> This, of course, had been the case with the 1857 Indian uprising as well, whose sepoys had rebelled against what they saw as the East India Company's betrayal of its compact with them.

Most of the regiment in Basra refused to proceed to the Mesopotamian front on the ground that they would not fight the Turks in the vicinity of the holy places of Karbala, Najaf and Baghdad. And indeed, the proscription of any bloodletting, including the hunting of animals, in the vicinity of cities like Mecca had long been a commonplace. Urdu poetry, for instance, deployed as one of its stock themes the image of gazelles so tame that they ate from the hands of pilgrims in the Hejaz. Fighting the Turks was not itself a problem, in other words, only doing so in the proximity of Islam's sacred sites. Here, too, we see loyalty mixed up with rebellion in a way that made a transactional relationship of it.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Azad, "Masalah-e khilafat", 33.

<sup>50</sup>See, for example, Lal Baha, "The Trans-frontier Pathan Soldiers and the First World War", *Islamic Studies* 25/4 (1986), 387–93; Heather Streets-Salter, "The Local Was Global: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915," *Journal of World History* 24/3 (2013), 539–76; Satarupa Lahiri, "Desertion—Betrayal or Escape: A Narrative of Indian Soldiers Who Deserted the Army during the First World War," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017), 754–61.

<sup>51</sup>See Humayun Ansari, "'Tasting the King's Salt': Muslims, Contested Loyalties and the First World War," in H. Ewence and T. Grady, eds., *Minorities and the First World War* (London, 2017), 33–61.

From Muslim concerns to viceregal pronouncements guaranteeing their protection, shrines were at the forefront of the Khilafat movement. Already in 1913, the Ali brothers and their religious preceptor, Abdul Bari, had founded the first pan-Islamic organization, significantly called the Anjuman-e Khuddam-e Kaaba or Society of the Servants of the Kaaba. They clearly preferred to focus on their religion's holy places rather than on the caliphate directly. But did this focus indicate the deep religious sentiments that these holy places evoked among Muslims, however cynically some of their leaders might invoke them? I want to argue that much more than some traditional form of devotion was involved in these repeated references to Islam's sacred sites.

Writing during the Khilafat movement's aftermath in 1926, Savarkar, the Indian revolutionary turned Hindu nationalist, had what he saw as its extraterritorial loyalties in mind when arguing that Muslims should become second-class citizens. He saw the devotion of India's Muslims and also Christians to sacred sites in Arabia and Palestine as an illustration of their divided loyalties. Savarkar sought to conflate religious or social practice with political allegiance but could only do so by making India itself into a sacred site whose worship was required if one was to be considered fully Indian. Instead of distinguishing religious from political allegiance and accusing Muslims of being fanatics in their dedication to the former, he demanded such fanaticism only for India as a holy land.<sup>52</sup>

Savarkar's reasoning tells us about the new importance that conceptions of sacred space came to have for Hindus as well as Muslims during this period. But his attempt to eliminate any difference between religious and political territoriality misconceived the pan-Islamist argument. For the point of stressing the importance of Islam's holy places was precisely to distinguish them from the Ottoman state, however partial India's Muslims may have been towards it. The Khilafat movement's leaders were careful to separate Islam's social reality from the sovereignty that was nevertheless required for its protection.

This way of deploying religious sites to dispute the territorial vision and claims of sovereign power was not an unfamiliar one. In his manifesto of 1909, Gandhi had described India's geography not in colonial or cartographic terms, but by superimposing another kind of map onto it. He saw in the providential placement of Hindu sites of pilgrimage an alternative mode of mapping India's borders, both in a theological vision of space and through the ritual movement of believers.<sup>53</sup> Gandhi's conception of India, while Hindu, was not meant to be the only such vision of it. Unlike Savarkar's image of India's sacred geography, framed by river and sea and posed against Muslim and Christian rivals, Gandhi's invocation of an India constituted by the movement of pilgrims was set against its colonial cartography.

This critical, rather than merely traditional, conception of religious geography in Gandhi and Savarkar can be seen in the pan-Islamic imagination as well. Despite his concern for Islam's sacred sites, for example, Azad had no particular attachment to them as objects of devotion. In keeping with the reformist and somewhat puritanical tradition to which he and many other pan-Islamists belonged, Azad was

<sup>52</sup>V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Bombay, 1942).

<sup>53</sup>Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 9.

suspicious of the devotions that ordinary Muslims paid such sites, considering them to be more or less idolatrous. Following Ibn Saud's conquest of Mecca and Medina in 1924–5, he would even approve the Wahhabi destruction of such shrines, while at the same time deprecating the violence and divisiveness it involved.<sup>54</sup>

John Willis points out that while Azad's equanimity at the destruction of tombs belonging to the Prophet's family caused outrage among some Khilafatists, it followed logically from his conception of Mecca as a city meant to "join humanity's scattered hearts and dejected souls."<sup>55</sup> For as we have seen in his negative views of dynastic claims to the caliphate, Azad's vision of Islam's universality had to do with its supposed denial of racial, national and genealogical hierarchies. In order to constitute the symbolic home of the human race, then, Mecca had to be valued not for the shrines of Islam's saintly progenitors but as the site of humanity's emergence as a historical entity in its alleged egalitarianism. Arabia represented a symbolic and historical rather than ritual landscape for him.

And yet Azad did not locate Islam's historical center within a geopolitical setting but rather in a cosmological one, describing what he calls the law of center and circle (*markaz wa dairah*) everywhere in nature. The Sun, for instance, was at the center of the solar system conceived as a circle of planets forming its radius. Similarly, plant life radiated out from its center in the root and animals had the heart at their center.<sup>56</sup> These centers were crucial for the existence of natural forms and could survive without the latter to regenerate new life. Their circumferences, however, could not exist without such centers. The law of life that Azad described in nature also defined the artificial life of societies, with the Hijaz constituting the geographical center (*markaz-e arzi*) of Islam for historical reasons, while the Muslim world served as its circumference.<sup>57</sup>

The caliphate, for its part, represented Islam's social rather than political center (*markaz-e ijtimai*), with a circle of its own overlapping that of Islam's geographical radius.<sup>58</sup> While Islam's geographical center, in other words, was permanent and possessed no political character, its social heart was changeable and defined by the ability to protect the former in military and other ways. This function was placed in the keeping of the caliphate, which, far from being a hereditary institution, could become manifest in any form of authority even if it did not bear the title of caliph.<sup>59</sup> All this was necessary because Azad saw Islam as a fundamentally social religion that required not one but two separate centers for its existence, each with its overlapping circle.<sup>60</sup> And in making this argument he was able to turn the internationalist vision of geopolitics into a geometrical one appropriate for a cosmology.

<sup>54</sup>See John M. Willis, "Azad's Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34/3 (2014), 574–81.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 574.

<sup>56</sup>Azad, *Masalah-e Khilafat-o Jaziratul-Arab*, 25.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 28.

## Conclusion

One of the lesser-known consequences of the First World War was the defeat of anarchism as a significant ideology in Europe and America. The decline of anarchism had as much to do with the emergence of the Soviet Union during the war as with its suppression by the victorious allies. But if anarchism went into a permanent recession in the West, it continued to provide a number of Asian, African and anticolonial movements with their antistatist ideals. Gandhi was the most important and self-professedly anarchist figure of the postwar world, notwithstanding his eventual compromise with the nation-state. But modern Islam, too, moved in an increasingly anarchist direction after the war and certainly after the caliphate's abolition.

Like Gandhi but also Lenin, many Muslim thinkers during this period considered the modern state to be an instrument of oppression and a relic of colonialism, whether or not it became a national one. And while they may have compromised with its sovereignty for the time being, these men sought to build up an Islamic internationalism that actively subverted the state-based international order. Eventually they would expel the sovereignty that defined such an order by attributing it to God alone, thus reducing human politics from what Lenin, following Engels, called the "government of persons" to the "administration of things." And this was, of course, meant to proceed from the famous "withering away of the state." While such anarchist ideas were postponed by the Soviets to an indefinite future, they came to comprise a mainstay for Muslim political thought.

I have traced the genealogy of this anarchist imagination to the radical loyalty of the Khilafat movement and its efforts to redefine Britain's humanitarian imperialism in Islamic terms. With the caliphate's abolition, this theme became explicit, and we can see it described in Mohammad Barakatullah's 1924 book *The Khilafet*. Barakatullah, let us remember, was a member of the Ghadar Party and had been a high official in the provisional Indian government established in Kabul during the war with German and Turkish support. His book, published in the year of the caliphate's abolition, argued that however problematic this act, neither Turkey nor any other Muslim state was in any case capable of hosting the institution in an era of absolute Western dominance.<sup>61</sup> To deal with this situation, Barakatullah turned to the history of Christianity, urging Muslims to abandon temporal for spiritual authority:

In the Christian dispensation it was Constantine the Great who had made the spiritual power as an engine for the temporal authority. It took one thousand years to separate the spiritual from the temporal government. In the Islamic dispensation it was Moaviyah who had made the *Khilafet* an instrument for the *Sultanet*. After thirteen centuries only now the Islamic people have got a chance to elect the successor of the Prophet in a true sense of election.<sup>62</sup>

Going back to the founding narrative of the caliphate, Barakatullah proposed not only to realize its myth of election in a thoroughly modern fashion, but also to

<sup>61</sup>Mohammad Barakatullah, *The Khilafet* (London, 1924), 54.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

do so by separating the institution from political power. What he envisioned seems, at first glance, to be a version of the League of Nations, with all Muslim denominations and countries electing representatives from among the most learned philosophers, historians and scientists, in addition to religious authorities, who then choose a caliph from amongst themselves. This organization was to be committed to the spiritual solidarity of the Muslim world, as also the reform of its educational, scientific and economic foundations. It was meant to provide, as well, an example of human freedom and equality to the West, since “Judaism and Christianity in their power and glory are adrift off their moorings and cannot save humanity from the impending catastrophe.”<sup>63</sup>

However, it soon becomes clear that more than the League of Nations, it was the papacy that provided Barakatullah with his model for a new caliphate, whose incumbent he even styled a “spiritual father.” He was nevertheless a bit embarrassed about this comparison, arguing that unlike Roman Catholicism, there exists no doctrine of infallibility in Islam, nor an ecclesiastical hierarchy and the requirement of absolute submission to the Church. In other words, the papal model was better suited to Islam than to Christianity in its promotion of human freedom.<sup>64</sup> What Muslims could learn from the history of Catholicism, however, was the manner in which it dealt with the Reformation and subsequent secularization of the state in Europe. Barakatullah thought that these checks to its political power allowed the Church to shift its energies to persuasion and humanitarianism in the world outside the West by way of compensation.<sup>65</sup>

Like all India’s pan-Islamists, Barakatullah did not see Mecca or any other part of Arabia as a home for the caliphate. Instead, he suggests Constantinople and Cairo, the institution’s last two capitals, as its possible bases, though in his opinion India and Egypt were the only countries whose Muslim populations understood “the importance of the khilafet’s being a spiritual organization without any connection whatsoever with the temporal power.”<sup>66</sup> This was due to their common experience of colonialism, and recognition of the invariably oppressive power of the modern state. Barakatullah’s vision of a revived caliphate was not taken up by other Muslims, though it closely followed the contours of pan-Islamist thinking. But it survived in Islamic thought as the idea of a democratic authority set outside the state’s sovereignty in social life.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>67</sup>For a recent account of the caliphate’s survival as a democratic form, though not one whose anarchist refusal of sovereignty the author recognizes, see Andrew F. March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2019).