

Britain and the Muslim World

Britain and the Muslim World:
Historical Perspectives

Edited by

Gerald MacLean

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P U B L I S H I N G

Britain and the Muslim World: Historical Perspectives,
Edited by Gerald MacLean

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During the two years of planning, I learned to rely on the good sense of a number of people, most notably Nadjé Al-Ali without whom I would have lost direction more often than I did. Nadjé, I cannot thank you enough for helping make the event as successful as it undoubtedly was.

Largely unrecognised in this volume, but absolutely central to the success of the event are the speakers who opened the conference with presentations designed to address a general rather than academic audience and thereby to open up the terms of a conversation in which the various disciplines might find common understanding and direction. Amanda Burrell informed and delighted us with her discussion of being a woman documentary film maker working among Muslim women both in Britain and in Islamic countries. In his talk, which closes the present volume, Tim Llewellyn used his experience as Middle East Correspondent to shed light on how the BBC has come to shape the ways it broadcasts news of Islamic countries. Maureen Freely and Ahdaf Soueif discussed how they see fiction serving women’s perspectives and interests in representing Islam to English readers, a theme picked up in terms of biographical and historical writing about Muslim women in a subsequent conversation and discussion with Nadjé Al-Ali and Ghada Karmi. Simon Broughton ended the day by presenting *Sufi Soul*, the documentary film he made with William Dalrymple tracing the geographical and generic varieties of Islamic music. Thanks too are owing to Amanda at CSP and to Joshi at Computer Solutions (Chagford) without whom the peculiarities of Word might well

have beaten me. Finally, special thanks to Ziad for essential encouragement, and Donna for her patience.

INTRODUCTION

BRITAIN AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

GERALD MACLEAN

This volume brings together a substantial selection of papers developed from presentations at the 2009 conference on “Britain and the Muslim World: Historical Perspectives.” A key achievement of this conference was assembling specialists from diverse academic fields and bringing them into dialogue with each other, and with experts from outside the academy, in order to combine knowledges in hopes of producing a fuller understanding of the long history of cultural interaction between Islam and Britain. During the three days of the conference, more than sixty papers and presentations were delivered by delegate speakers from several academic disciplines—history, international relations, economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, migration and diaspora studies, gender studies, art history, music, and comparative literatures—as well as novelists, auto-biographers, journalists, music and media experts. Although speakers from a number of countries—Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia—were inexplicably denied visas to travel to the UK, the event was nevertheless a truly international conversation among delegate speakers from Canada, Finland, France, Holland, India, Poland, Spain, the Egyptian, Palestinian and SE Asian diasporic communities, as well as the UK and US. The conference programme and a selection of abstracts of the presentations can be found online at eric.exeter.ac.uk/exeter/

As Rajani Sudan observes in the opening of her chapter, the title of the conference provided topics of regular discussion, debate, disagreement, and even inadvertent amusement. In his keynote lecture, “The Muslim World and British historical imagination: Rethinking ‘Orientalism’,” Humayun Ansari usefully cast doubt on the term “Muslim World” for its misleading generalisation and evident lack of historical specificity.¹ In our times too, as delegates discussed, such a phrase cannot help but signal the alarming tendency to refer to “Muslims” that has replaced the practice of referring to people from Islamic states in terms of their national identity.

In another sense too, the term can be said to be vague: since being a Muslim differs considerably in different places it follows that a Muslim world would be a world of differences, if it could be said to exist at all. Placed together, and in different historical contexts and perspectives, “Britain” and “the Muslim World” cannot help but mean different things to different people. They are seldom more than shifting signifiers, place holders for ideas, values and attitudes as much as signs pointing to shifting geo-political areas and peoples.

Yet there is an important difference between them. While changing historical meanings of “Britain” tell the story of a specific place and the various peoples who have lived there at different times, those meanings and that story have largely been defined and narrated by those claiming to be, in some sense, Britons. The revisionary histories of colonial and post-colonial “India” produced by the Subaltern Studies Group have amply illustrated where the fissures and margins of this self-authorised “English” discourse of “Britain” appear most vividly. The English-language term “Muslim World,” however, cannot help but differ from “Britain” since it imposes ideological uniformity in the absence of comparable geographical specificity and, regardless of who is using the term, spreads an imaginary standardization of belief across widely different cultures and regions. A brief glance at how the term has appeared in the titles of books, periodicals and organisations during the last hundred years reveals something of its conflicted and contested past.

There have been changes over the last hundred years. When it first appeared in 1911, the academic journal *The Muslim World* was titled *The Moslem World*. Rightly enough, the journal continues to enjoy a deserved and unassailable reputation for scholarship in its field, which it defines as “the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations.” The editorial of the first issue pondered the circumstances of the journal’s birth in language characteristic of its times:

The question may well be asked, is there a place for a new quarterly concerning the Moslem World? Surely there is no lack of recent literature on Islam. Witness the enormous bibliography on the subject, both historical and philosophical, in all the principal languages of Europe and the Levant, not to speak of the attention given to the Moslem problem politically, the spread and disintegration of Islam as a religion, its cultural value or weakness and the marked unrest of all Moslem peoples, by the secular and religious press to-day. There are even publications exclusively devoted to the scientific study of Mohammedanism.²

Linked to US missionary efforts in Islamic countries from the start, the journal’s scholarship has outgrown its orientalisising origins and today is

unlikely to promote “the scientific study of Mohammedanism” except as the genealogy of an old-fashioned term.

The “Muslim World” appears to have started life as a twentieth-century phrase that arose to serve the interests and efforts of Christian missionaries who had their eyes on international events. As if to signal the Young Turk Revolution against the Ottomans, the term appeared for the first time in 1908 when Samuel Marinus Zwemer’s *The Moslem World* set the pace: it was published in New York by the “Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada.” Declaring “the present political division of the Mohammedan world” to be “a startling challenge of opportunity,” Zwemer offered extended discussions of the “Social and Moral Evils of Islam,” and expressed the firm conviction that “Islam as a religion is doomed to fade away in time.”³ The dissolution of the Caliphate in 1923 encouraged further interest among Christian missionaries. In 1925, the London-based Church Missionary Society published *The Moslem World in Revolution*, authored by William Wilson Cash, bishop of Worcester. That same year, John Raleigh Mott, on behalf of the International Missionary Council, edited *The Moslem World of Today* (1925). Mott aimed to persuade readers that “the abolition of the Caliphate” had irrevocably weakened “the sense of solidarity and moral unity of the Moslem peoples” such that the “threatened and impending disintegration of Islam calls for an adequate substitute. Only Christ and His programme can meet the need.”⁴ Unsurprisingly, missionary zeal has a tendency to construct the Muslim World as something to be understood in order for it to be converted. Yet later in the century, in John Saunders’ annotated collection of documents and extracts, *The Muslim World on the Eve of Europe’s Expansion* (1966), the notion of a Muslim World arrives via crusading rhetoric and takes ominous shape as an inveterate and irreconcilable enemy of “the Christian Powers.”⁵ What might be surprising is that the English phrase was also being picked up by Muslim authors from outside the US and UK.

During the course of the century, the term “Muslim World” began appearing in titles of studies by Muslim thinkers and writers who were publishing in English from India, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines. Published in 1931, Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah’s *History of the Muslim World* provided summary historical facts about the rise of Islam and the “Muslim States” of that moment. Composed as a series of narratives resembling a fact-packed secondary-school text book, the study was designed “to bring a knowledge of Islamic history to the nations of the West ... from the pen of an Islamic writer.”⁶ This aim of informing “the West” will, in some sense, have an effect on most uses of the term “Muslim

World” by Islamic writers in English, even as it assigns those writers considerable power and authority to define Islam. Perhaps to avoid that responsibility and thereby achieve even greater authority in addressing the West on behalf of Islam, *The Muslim World: Basic Information about the Member Countries of the Islamic Secretariat* appeared anonymously in 1974: it was published in Jeddah or Lahore.⁷

In Syed Abul ‘Ala Maududi’s *Unity of the Muslim World* (1976), the term signals a different endeavour, that of bringing about greater agreement among Muslims by dissolving “the curse of Nationalism,” and marks the practice among Islamic writers of using the English language to address an international audience of Muslims.⁸ Published in Kuala Lumpur, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi’s translations into English from French and Arabic of essays by the Algerian intellectual Malik Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World* (2003), provides a further case in point.⁹ The use of English would also appear to support an Islam-based cultural ecumenicalism, such as characterises *The Muslim World Book Review*, published since 1980 by the Islamic Foundation based in Leicester, UK.

Since 1962, however, the most explicitly political use of the phrase appears with the Muslim World League (*Rabita al-alam al-Islami*), an internationally-based NGO hosted by Saudi Arabia that opens its list of objectives with “advocating the application of the rules of the Shareah [sic] either by individuals, groups or state.”¹⁰ As in the usage of Christian missionaries, here the Muslim World appears to be conceived of as a place in need of reform, a world in need of being changed. Conversion to Christianity? or stricter conformity to Islamic law? The aims and ideals might differ drastically, but in both the case of the Christian missionary seeking knowledge in hopes of converting, and that of the Islamic reformer, the term itself seeks power and authority over that which it describes. This is a tendency that the sceptical might describe as authoritarian: who, after all, can claim to speak for all Muslims everywhere?

Yet the notion of a “Muslim World” has continued to serve scholarly purposes. In 1996, Shabir Ahmed explored *The Roots of Nationalism in the Muslim World*, and two years later Masudul Alam Choudhury published the suggestively titled *Reforming the Muslim World*. The rhetorical implications of these titles, if not the books themselves, suggest that the Muslim World is a problem, something about which something needs to be done. This is a concern that continues in works such as Maimul Ahsan Khan’s comprehensive study of *Human Rights in the Muslim World* (2003).¹¹

Once the 1990s became the 2000s, things changed yet again. The notion of a Muslim World took on new urgencies in the wake of the Cold

War and, following the attacks on New York in 2001, the US discovery that it had become a victim nation. Most recently, in recognition of how the concept of the Muslim World has now become an unavoidable key concept in US foreign policy, M. Saleem Kidwai edited a volume of studies on *US Policy towards the Muslim World: Focus on Post 9/11 Period*. Kidwai and his contributors seek to explore, understand, and respond to US “strategic interests” in order to “bring America and the Muslim world into a more constructive relationship.” By contrast, Al-Rashid Cayongcat’s polemical study, *US-British Neo-Colonial Conspiracy in the Muslim World* (2005) might provoke some scholars into wishing to disassociate themselves from the term.¹² Just as ominously, Angel Rabasa’s *The Muslim World after 9/11* published in 2004 by the RAND Corporation (“Objective Analysis: Effective Solutions”), contains studies exclusively concerned with maintaining and sustaining US military hegemony in a space—the Muslim World—currently occupied by the new post-Cold War enemy.¹³ *Booknews* described Rabasa’s book thus:

Prepared for the United States Air Force, this report looks for ideologies within the Muslim world that the US can use to promote democracy and stability, identifies factors that produce religious extremism and violence, identifies key cleavages and fault lines that can be used to advantage, and identifies possible strategies and sets of political and military options that the US can use to exploit such opportunities.¹⁴

Things have indeed changed since 1911; that transparent embracing of “political and military options” would surely have disconcerted the founding editors of *The Moslem World*.

The “Muslim World,” then, is what Gayatri Spivak would call a *catachresis*, a rhetorical figure lacking an adequate referent, one that is most often used to call into being an imaginary space where all Muslims are considered to be in need of conversion, or unification, or reform.¹⁵ In retaining the phrase from the title of the 2009 Exeter Conference in the title of this collection of studies, I trust that even the most casual reader picking up the book will recognise from the subtitle, “Historical Perspectives,” that the “Muslim World” is intended to signify a subject for scholarly debate and not a normative or coercive category. Of greater concern to me, at least, is that the historical scope of this volume, ranging as it does from the early modern period to the present day, captures only the last five centuries of the broader historical range of the conference at which notable presentations by John Tolan, Hugh Goddard, Humayun Ansari and others focussed our attentions on important connections with earlier centuries. Nevertheless, the early modern era is an appropriate

place from which the launce an investigation to start since it was during the course of the sixteenth century that English commerce with the Islamic Mediterranean initiated a new age of Anglo-Muslim encounters and exchanges.

The papers collected here range from that early-modern moment to the present day and have been arranged in rough chronological sequence. Unsurprisingly, certain themes emerge during specific historical moments. The opening papers explore key sites of contact where Britons and Muslims entered into various uneven and unequal kinds of negotiation and dialogue—commerce, religion, diplomacy—in the centuries before Britain set about establishing an eastern empire. Om Prakash details the importance and scope of the entrepreneurial activities of private Britons trading between Indian Ocean ports, most especially after the East India Company withdrew from these activities in 1661. Eva Holmberg traces how seventeenth-century English-speaking travellers were at once fascinated and appalled by what they saw of Muslims, Jews and eastern Christians performing their religious rituals, often dismissing these activities as mere theatricality. Kate Arthur examines literary, historical and artistic records to show how different kinds of performativity were at work in the diplomatic missions of Robert and Teresia Sherley to the Court of St James on behalf of the Safavid Shah ‘Abbas and the Anglo-Persian silk trade. In her study of how Elihu Yale links the Indian Ocean trade and East India Company with the establishment of an influential New World university, Rajani Sudan draws our attention to how, by the end of the seventeenth century, circuits of mobile capital were setting precedents for what we now recognise as transnationalism, globalisation, and the commodification of knowledge.

Further complications to any simplistic understanding of Anglo-Islamic relations in the eighteenth century, when colonial Orientalism may be said to begin coming of age, are provided by the next four studies which chart the material, cultural, and intellectual influences of Muslim societies on the lives and letters of Britons. After tracking how the British Enlightenment was evidenced by not only a public sphere of coffee-houses, imitating those of the Ottoman world, but also a theory, practice, art, and literature of equestrianism resulting from importation and naturalisation of eastern horses, Donna Landry suggests that investigating the Ottoman past may usefully remind us of “Enlightened” possibilities that have not been adequately understood. Humberto Garcia further develops the case for the importance of Islam within intellectual and religious life in Enlightenment Britain by demonstrating how the first serious study of Islam by an English Muslim, the forced convert Joseph

Pitts, was revised in order to engage with contemporary controversies over toleration and religious belief.

These excursions into Islamic influences on the Enlightenment give way to questions of how Islamic influences also shaped national identity formations. Georgina Lock revisits Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters about her travels among Muslims by reading them as performances of an enlightened, well-informed and intellectual female identity that is at once specifically English yet has inspired subsequent generations of international artists, dramatists and film-makers. By turning to Lady Mary's oft-neglected son Edward, Bernadette Andrea shows in what ways the life and writings of this English "Turk" offer alternatives to "the us-them" binary of classic Orientalist thinking.

The next chapters offer original studies of how the culture of the English-speaking peoples during the nineteenth century continued to take shape in response to, and under the influence of, different kinds of encounter with Islam and its civilizations. In what promises to be his final rant at Edward Said, Robert Irwin discovers that the "Muslim Orient" was only a very minor theme in English literary Orientalism of the nineteenth century, and argues that, since its brief appearance in the first three decades does not correspond with Orientalist trends in art or music of the era, a unitary theory of "Orientalism" must prove inadequate for detailed cultural analysis. By focussing on the career of Owen Jones, Abraham Thomas provides a succinct history of the massive impact of Islamic motifs and colour schemes on British design, from architecture to playing cards, during the second half of the century.

Several of the studies on twentieth-century topics explore the place of Islam in the spiritual lives of British Muslims. In assessing accounts by and concerning Lady Evelyn Cobbold, the first English-born Muslim woman to undertake and write about the pilgrimage to Mecca, William Facey discovers a woman in some sense typical of her era and class, one who adopted Islam while seemingly oblivious to the public and social implications of her faith. Gerard Wieggers evaluates the career of Dr Sayyid Mutawalli ad-Darsh, whose *fatwas* provide an important guide to understanding the lives of British Muslims and current debates over the problems they face living in a secular state.

Among the most pressing of those problems is that of language: how can Islam be translated into an English, or British, language and socio-cultural polity and landscape? Ziad Elmarsafy explores problems with existing translations of the Qur'an to advance the deconstructive argument that the Qur'an cannot not be in need of a better translation. Ahmed Masoud offers new English translations of poems and extracts by

Mahmoud Darwish by way of exploring idioms adequate for expressing the delicate nuances of Palestinian protest literature.

The next three chapters offer reports on fieldwork conducted among Muslims living in Britain today, and explore how the recent past has shaped their lives, opportunities, expectations, sense of identity, and understanding of Islam. Examining three decades of Muslim immigrants in Newcastle, Sara Hackett uncovers high degrees of integration that belie arguments claiming that the immigration of Muslims into Christian communities feeds into and aggravates pre-existing divisions and conflicts. In her interviews with second-generation Muslim women living in Cardiff, Marta Warat discovers new forms of “multiple identity” emerging that embrace the challenges of being both Muslim and Welsh or British (but not English!). Developing previous research on the relation between peace and violence in multi-religious urban areas, Vincent Biondo also uses fieldwork in Cardiff to explore successful tactics for advancing the aims of interfaith dialogue, arguing that these crucially depend upon local efforts for their success.

The roles of the various media in representing to the British public Islam, Muslims, and countries with majority Muslim populations or Islamic governments has been, and continues to be, a major concern. Examining three post-9/11 British television dramas representing Muslim life in Britain, Peter Morey finds that Muslim life in Britain today is being “framed,” represented within a limited field of possibilities and debates that serve to isolate Muslims from mainstream British society in ways that mark them out for surveillance and control. Tim Llewellyn ends the collection with some all-too sobering reflections on how the BBC has come to report news from the Middle East.

Notes

¹ A revised version of Professor Ansari’s paper is scheduled for publication in the *Journal of Middle East Studies*.

² *The Moslem World* 1: 1 (January 1911), 1.

³ Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *The Moslem World* (New York: “Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada,” 1908), 192, 168. This zealous and profoundly racist tract is the earliest book listed in the British Library Catalogue and the National Union Catalogue of the Library of Congress with “Muslim World” in its title.

⁴ William Wilson Cash, *The Moslem World in Revolution* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1925); John Raleigh Mott, ed., *The Moslem World of To-day* (London: Hodder, 1925), vii, viii, ix.

⁵ John Saunders, ed., *The Muslim World on the Eve of Europe's Expansion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 1.

⁶ Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, *History of the Muslim World* (Calcutta: Empire, [1931]), i.

⁷ *The Muslim World: Basic Information About the Member Countries of the Islamic Secretariat* (np: no, [1974]). See The British Library Catalogue for uncertainty over publication details.

⁸ Syed Abul 'Ala Maududi, *Unity of the Muslim World* (1967; rpt. Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1976), 1.

⁹ Malik Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, ed. and trans., Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003).

¹⁰ See muslimworldleague.org

¹¹ See Shabir Ahmed, *The Roots of Nationalism in the Muslim World* (London: Islamic Book Company, 1996); Masudul Alam Choudhury, *Reforming the Muslim World* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998); Maimul Ahsan Khan, *Human Rights in the Muslim World: Fundamentalism, Constitutionalism, and International Politics* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2003).

¹² M. Saleem Kidwai, ed., *US Policy towards the Muslim World: Focus on Post 9/11 Period* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), x; and Al-Rashid Ikogan Cayongcat, *US-British Neo-Colonial Conspiracy in the Muslim World* (Shah Alam: BookDigital, 2005). See also Birgit Schaebler and Leif Stenberg, eds., *Globalization and the Muslim World: Culture, Religion, and Modernity* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), a collection of studies written exclusively by US and European scholars, and contrast their efforts with Amer Al-Roubaie, *Globalization and the Muslim World* (Shah Alam: Malita Jaya, 2002), which identifies "secular socio-cultural trends that may not necessarily be suitable for development in non-Western societies," 103.

¹³ Angel Rabasa, et al., *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004). This volume is, surprisingly, entirely silent on Libya.

¹⁴ *Reference and Research Book News*, 20: 2 (May 2005), 47; see booknews.org.

¹⁵ Sanjukta Banerji Bhattacharya puts it thus: "...the often-touted term, the 'Muslim World', is a misnomer, because there is no monolithic Muslim world as the divergent current foreign policies of Islamic and Muslim countries bear evidence," "'Islam' and US Foreign Policy," in Kidwai, ed., *US Policy*, 1-21; this passage 1. In the current context, Spivak's reflections on the similar formation "original Indian nation" provides a recent useful gloss on her use of catachresis; see *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 141-2 n.

CHAPTER ONE

BRITISH PRIVATE TRADERS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

OM PRAKASH

My work on the Indian Ocean trade in the early modern period has involved a considerable amount of engagement with the Arab, Persian and the Indian Muslim traders. Indeed, ever since the ninth century or so, it was the Muslim traders, who without any question, had dominated the Indian Ocean trade. If one looked at the structure and the mechanics of the Indian Ocean trade from the vantage point of India, it is clear that whatever major Indian trading region that one took into account—whether it was Gujarat on the west coast of India, Coromandel on the south-east coast, or Bengal on the eastern coast of India—it was the Muslim traders who dominated both the coastal as well as the high-seas trade from the region. In the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, these traders included not only the ordinary traders, but even the Mughal Indian royalty and nobility who actively engaged in high-seas trade both from the Gujarat as well as the Bengal ports.

Following the establishment of the English East India Company in the year 1600, Britain became an important participant in the Indian Ocean trade. By far the single most important component of the British trading enterprise which engaged with the Muslim traders of the Indian Ocean was the private British traders. It is this component that this paper will deal with. The British private traders' relationship with the Muslim traders of the Indian Ocean pertained to areas such as the use of each other's ships for freighting goods, joint ventures on specific routes and voyages, raising loans on *respondentia* and so on.

India and Indian merchants had traditionally played a central role in the successful functioning of the Indian Ocean trading network. In part, this indeed was a function of the midway location of the subcontinent between

the Middle East on the one hand, and South-East and East Asia on the other. But perhaps even more important was the subcontinent's capacity to put on the market a wide range of tradeable goods at highly competitive prices. By far the most important of these goods were textiles of various kinds. While these included high value varieties such as the legendary Dhaka muslins and the Gujarat silk embroideries, the really important component for the Asian market was the coarse cotton varieties manufactured primarily on the Coromandel Coast and in Gujarat. There was large-scale demand for these varieties both in the eastern markets of Indonesia, Malaya, Thailand, and Burma as well as in the markets of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa.

The key position of India in the structure of Asian trade was also reflected in the important role of the Gujarati and other Indian trading groups in the actual conduct of this trade. This role, if anything, was strengthened during the course of the fifteenth century which witnessed the fragmentation of the Indian Ocean trade into well-defined segments. From this point on, the trade between the Middle East and the west coast of India was shared between the Arabs/Persians and the Indians. As far as the trade between the west and the east coasts of India, on the one hand, and the Eastern Indian ocean region, on the other, was concerned, it was now left almost exclusively in the hands of Indians—the Gujaratis more than anyone else, but also the Chettis, the Chulias, and other groups from the Coromandel Coast, besides the Oriyas and the Bengalis.

Gujarat was a major trading area in the subcontinent and the Gujaratis had traditionally been a dominant group among the Indian mercantile communities. Over the course of the fifteenth century, the trading activities of this group increased to a point where it emerged probably as the largest of all the groups engaged in trade in the Indian Ocean. In the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century, the ship-owning maritime merchant community operating from Surat—the principal port of the region—was in good measure Muslim, though by no means exclusively so. The most important of the Surat maritime merchants at the turn of the eighteenth century was Mulla Abdul Ghafur, a Bohra Muslim owning as many as seventeen sea-going ships with a total dead-weight carrying capacity of well over 5,000 tons. The prosperity of this affluent merchant family lasted several generations.

In what way did the coming in of the Europeans into the Indian Ocean, following the discovery of the sea-route via the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the fifteenth century, alter the basic structure and dynamics of the Indian Ocean trade, with special reference to the trade to and from India? Stated very briefly and succinctly, the answer to this query has to be that

nothing very much happened in that regard except that the volume and value of the trade in the Ocean registered a distinct increase. Given the fairly sophisticated and developed organization as well as the structure of production and trade that the Europeans encountered on their arrival in the East, the only meaningful option available to them was to integrate themselves within the existing structure and become yet another unit operating within it. That is precisely what they did, except for occasional episodes of aberration which do not need to detain us here.

Each of the principal European corporate enterprises operating in the Indian Ocean, starting with the Portuguese Estado da India in the sixteenth century, and followed by the English, the Dutch and the French East India companies in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, included a component consisting of employees and others belonging to that particular nationality and engaged in trade in the Indian Ocean on their private account. It is useful to remember that the policy and attitude that different corporate enterprises adopted towards the private traders of their particular nationality differed dramatically from one to the other, from outright hostility at one end of the spectrum to formal collaboration at the other, with a whole range of variation in between.

The prime example of sheer hostility by a corporate enterprise towards private trade by its employees was that of the Dutch East India Company. This was the direct outcome of the Company's own large scale involvement in the intra-Asian or port to port trade within the Indian Ocean from the very beginning as an integral part of its overall trading strategy. In order to prevent employees from emerging as rivals, their participation in the port to port Indian Ocean trade was banned. In the case of the Portuguese, the relationship between the Estado da India and private traders engaged in the Indian Ocean trade ranged from open hostility to substantive patronage in the form of the concession system. The ultimate in formal cooperation and collaboration between a given corporate enterprise and the private traders of that nationality, however, was achieved by the French in the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1719, the newly organized Compagnie des Indes decided to participate in port to port Indian Ocean trade as well. It was, however, immediately obvious to the factors at Pondicherry that the Company's financial and other resources were simply not adequate to allow a meaningful participation in this trade on its own. A decision was therefore taken to invite employees as well as other traders, both Indian and other Europeans, to collaborate with the Company. This unique venture lasted about twenty years between 1722 and 1741.

There can be very little doubt that by far the most important group of European private traders operating in the Indian Ocean, particularly during the eighteenth century, was that of the British private traders. The English East India Company itself had withdrawn in 1661 from its marginal participation in the port to port Indian Ocean trade, and by a series of “indulgences” issued in the late 1660s and the 1670s had formally allowed its servants to participate in this trade on their private account. While there was never any formal collaboration between the English Company on the one hand and its servants and free merchants on the other, the British servants did indeed make full use of their official position to promote their private interests. At times, this even involved manipulating the official policy of the English Company to the detriment of the Company in its corporate character.

The British private merchants’ trade embraced both the westward as well as the eastward sectors of the maritime trade from India. In addition to the ports on the west coast of India itself, the westward sector included the ports in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The eastward trade embraced, in addition to the two littorals of the Bay of Bengal, the Malacca straits, ports in the Indonesian archipelago, the Philippines and the South China coast. In each of the two sectors, it was common for these traders to carry, in addition to their own goods, Indian merchants’ goods on freight. There was demand for this service notwithstanding the fact that the rates charged by the British were distinctly higher than those offered by the rival Indian and other Asian ship-owners. The explanation was only in part in terms of the generally more efficient sailing and the greater immunity the English ships offered against piracy. Often the English ship-owners were willing to assume the ownership of the freight cargo making available to the freighter the fairly substantial customs privileges enjoyed by the British in many parts of Asia.¹

As I just pointed out, the British private traders operated from ports on both the east and the west coasts of India. Over the seventeenth and the early years of the eighteenth century, the Coromandel ports—that is, ports on the south-east coast of India—witnessed British trading activity on a much larger scale than did ports in Bengal. Masulipatnam was the principal port used on the Coromandel Coast, but around the turn of the century more and more private British shipping moved on to Madras. In Bengal, the principal port used was Hugli until it was replaced by Calcutta in the early years of the eighteenth century. In course of time, Calcutta emerged as the most important port of British private trade from India. On the west coast, British private trade began at Surat in the early years of the seventeenth century, but moved on to Bombay in the eighteenth century.

Among the important private British traders operating from Coromandel during the second half of the seventeenth century were the governors of Madras. Two of these, Elihu Yale and Thomas Pitt, were particularly active and are known to have amassed huge fortunes, estimated in the case of Yale at a massive £200,000. Other governors with significant private trading interests included Edward Winter, William Langhorn, Streynsham Master, Gulston Addison, Edward Harrison, and Joseph Collet. Among the chiefs of the English factory at Masulipatnam, major private traders included William Jearsey, Richard Mohun, and Robert Freeman.

While the bulk of the British private trade from Coromandel would seem to have been conducted on the account of individual merchants, there were several alternative patterns in use as well. Some of the governors of Madras organized “joint stocks”—that is, large syndicates of investors who would buy shares in one or more ships under the governor’s management. A large segment of the English community had a stake in Madras’s shipping, either as part owners or as lenders of *respondentia* loans. Such loans were secured on the cargo of a ship at a rate adjusted to the risk and the length of the voyage, the risk being on the lender.²

Partnership ventures among two or more individual merchants were also quite common. Thus Richard Mohun, Mathew Mainwaring, and George Chamberlain are known to have been partners in trading ventures based on a 4/9, 3/9 and 2/9 share respectively. On occasions, a vessel was owned jointly by several persons, the profit earned from its trips being shared proportionately.³ In the case of voyages to China, large partnerships are known to have been formed to invest in the ships, including not only Englishmen at Madras, but also those in Surat, Bombay, and the Malabar ports. Many of these voyages seem to have started and finished at Surat.⁴

Joint ownership, financing and management of ships occasionally also included Indian merchants. For example, in the trade between Madras and South-East Asia, there was collaboration between Governor Harrison of Madras, Governor Joseph Collet of Benkulen (who had earlier been in Madras and after a few years returned there as governor) and Sunku Rama, the chief merchant of the English Company at Madras.⁵

The private English trade with Manila and Macao often involved Armenian, Spanish, and Portuguese intermediaries. The Madras merchant, John Scattergood, had as his business partners at Malacca the Chinese Captain Chan Yungqua, and the Portuguese João de Matta. Through these two persons, Scattergood arranged second-stage investments in voyages to Trengganu, Siam, Aceh, Banjarmasin, and Java. In 1720, de Matta was entrusted with the goods shipped on the *Bonita* to sell as he thought fit in the straits of Malacca and adjacent ports in return for a 5% commission.⁶

The private British trade in Bengal had started out late in the seventeenth century at the Hugli and Balasore ports. Following the founding of Calcutta in 1690, the bulk of the English trade had been shifted to that port. The principal trading links of the Calcutta shipping at this time were westward—with Surat, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea—with the principal export goods being textiles and sugar. Carrying Indian merchants' freight cargo was an important component of the enterprise. Ships were operated both on individual accounts as well as on partnership basis. In the eighteenth century, the Governor and the Council had also managed to set up a large joint stock enterprise involving several "freight" ships. There is also evidence of Indians lending money to the English merchants on *respondentia*, and some instances of their having shares in English owned ships.

The early years of the eighteenth century witnessed a remarkable growth in the volume of British private shipping at Calcutta. The fleet consisted of about twenty ships in 1715: by 1730 the number had doubled. The buoyant westward trade was largely responsible for the growing prosperity of the private English ship-owning merchants of Calcutta.⁷

The short-haul trade from Calcutta in the westward direction included that with the Coromandel ports, Sri Lanka, and the Maldiv Islands. There was a fair amount of trade with Masulipatnam and Madras, mainly in stores and provisions such as rice. West of Cape Comorin, the Malabar ports of call of the Calcutta shipping included Anjengo, Cochin, Calicut, and Tellicherry where pepper was procured for the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf markets. While some of the ships proceeded from Malabar directly to the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf, others stayed on the coastal circuit and went on to Goa, Bombay, and Surat. The last mentioned was by far the most important westward port of call for the Calcutta shipping. The goods exported there included, in addition to textiles and sugar, a large volume of raw silk, while the principal item imported was raw cotton. That the rise in the English trade was most probably at the expense of that of the Surat merchants is strongly suggested by the Dutch shipping lists. In the early eighteenth century, these lists recorded a total of about fifty Surat ships being put to sea each year with Bengal as an important destination. By the 1730s, the number of Asian ships trading between Surat and Bengal had been reduced to a trickle. By the 1760s, a stage had been reached where the Calcutta "freight ships"—the joint stock run by the Governor and Council—had so complete a monopoly over the main return cargo from Surat, namely Gujarat cotton, that their owners could fix its selling rice in Bengal.⁸

The two principal ports in the Persian Gulf frequented by the Calcutta shipping were Gombroon in Persia and Basra in Iraq. Against the usual exports of textiles, raw silk, and sugar, the principal import from the region consisted of precious metals. Commodity imports included copper, rosewater, Shiraz wine, dates, and horses. As in the case of the trade with Surat, this was a major route for the Indian merchants as well and the competition the private English merchants operating on the route had to face was stiff.

Many of the Indian merchants, however, used the English ships to freight their goods. By about 1710, the practice of sending to the Persian Gulf at least one Calcutta ship each year and sometimes two or more had become fairly established. In 1717, it was estimated that two ships a year carried about 500 tons of Bengal goods to Persia.⁹ Following the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722, the focus shifted from Gombroon to Basra. In the 1720s and the 1730s, the number of ships sent annually to Basra normally fluctuated between two and four, though in an unusually good year such as 1738-9, it could even be five.¹⁰

As for the Red Sea, the principal ports of call were Mocha and Jiddah and the principal item imported again precious metals. By about 1720, the bulk of Bengal's exports to the Red Sea would seem to have been carried in private English shipping. At Mocha, English merchants' goods paid only a 3% customs duty as against 9% paid by the Asian merchants. At Jiddah, the corresponding rates were 8% and 10% except that the Asian merchants' goods were over-valued in such a way that the real burden of the customs duties on these merchants amounted to as much as 12% to 17%.¹¹

Adverse political conditions in the western Indian Ocean, combined with the instability in Bengal in the 1740s following the Maratha incursions into the province, provided a damper on the trade between the two regions. A rise in the prices of the Bengal goods made them increasingly less competitive. Thus sugar from Java and China undersold Bengal sugar. Even the Bengal textiles were said to be losing out in western India and the Persian Gulf.

The shipping to Surat continued to maintain a good level in the 1740s. But there was a sharp decline in the 1750s when the value of the English-owned silk and textiles was reported to be only 10% of what it had been in the peak years of the 1730s. As for the Persian Gulf, the outlook was so poor in 1747 that the Bengal Council decided not to send a freight ship at all to Basra. Gombroon was captured by the French in 1759, and formally abandoned by the English East India Company in 1763. The Red Sea proved by far the most stable of the western Indian Ocean destinations.

One ship per annum continued to ply between Calcutta and Mocha, as well as between Calcutta and Jiddah right through the 1760s. It was only in the 1770s that the English trade between Calcutta and the Red Sea was finally abandoned.¹²

The private British merchants' trade from the west coast of India was carried on mainly from the port of Surat in the seventeenth century, and increasingly from that of Bombay in the eighteenth. In addition, a certain amount of trade was carried on from the Malabar ports of Anjengo and Tellicherry. As on the rest of the Indian seaboard, persons holding senior positions in the Company hierarchy dominated the trade. This group included George Oxenden, Gerald Aungier, and John Child, each President at Surat between the 1660s and the 1680s. With the two ships that he owned, Oxenden carried on a vigorous freight trade to Persia. He reportedly turned a debt of Rs.50,000 into an estate worth Rs.300,000 at his death. Oxenden's ships were purchased by Aungier in association with a number of Surat merchants who included Mohammad Chellaby, member of a distinguished merchant family of the city. Eventually, Aungier and associates owned as many as five vessels. John Child reportedly left his wife £100,000. Charles Boone, governor of Bombay in the second half of the 1710s, and Robert Cowan, governor between 1729 and 1734, together with his associate Henry Lowther, chief at Surat, were other important members of this select group.¹³

Turning next to the British private traders' eastward trade from India, one finds that it consisted essentially of three segments—South-East Asia, the Philippines, and China. The first of these stretched from ports such as Pegu, Tenasserim/Mergui, Phuket, Kedah, and Aceh—all on the eastern littoral of the Bay of Bengal—to Ayutthaya in the Gulf of Siam. The port frequented in the Philippines was Manila and that in China Canton. In an analysis of British private trade with the region, it is useful to distinguish between the period before about 1760 and that after. This is because the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a substantive growth in the relative weight of the eastward trade in the overall trading operations of the private British merchants from India. More than half a century ago, Holden Furber described this turning from the west to the east as an important element in the "commercial revolution" in the Indian Ocean. The great expansion in the eastward trade in the post-1760 period, carried on by the private British merchants, was the outcome basically of a substantial growth in the trade with Canton which, in turn, was related in a large measure to the growth of English power in the Indian subcontinent. The English had become the actual rulers of Bengal, they were the dominant power on most of the Coromandel Coast, and they had

strengthened their position in western India. The special position of the English Company, and by association of that of the private British merchants, vis-à-vis the suppliers and producers of goods in regions such as Bengal, significantly increased the margin of profit from private trade. This was reflected in a sharp increase in the volume of trade in high-value commodities such as Bengal opium which, together with Bombay cotton, provided the basis of the enormous increase in the trade with China. This trade, incidentally, also served as an important vehicle for the transmission home of the large private British fortunes made in India. The newly found power and the expanded resource base had now enabled private British shipping to go beyond the Asian networks within which it had until then operated, and create new ones of its own.

The changing destination pattern of the eastward trade had its counterpart in the changing relative weight of the various Indian ports where English shipping directed at the region originated. Over the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, the bulk of the English trade with South-East Asia, which accounted for an overwhelming proportion of the total trade with the eastward region, was carried on from the Coromandel Coast. This picture underwent a complete overhaul in the second half of the eighteenth century when the Madras shipping essentially took a back seat and the bulk of the eastward trade was carried on by the private English shipping based at Calcutta and Bombay.

The so-called “commercial revolution” in the Indian Ocean, started in the 1760s and completed by the 1780s, consisted in the first place of a clear domination of trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea by private English shipping based at Calcutta and Bombay, and in the second, of an increasingly central and indeed dominant position of the trade with China and Malaya in the private English merchants’ trade from India.

The starting point of the China trade was the growing involvement of the English East India Company in the import of Chinese tea into England. By 1758-60, tea was already accounting for a quarter of the total English Company imports from Asia into Europe. As with most Asian commodities, however, Chinese tea had to be paid for mainly in specie. Once Bengal revenues became available to the Company following the acquisition of revenue collection rights in 1765, the Directors asked the Bengal Council to ship Rs. 4 million annually to Canton. But this was not found feasible, and indeed after 1768 no specie could be spared from Bengal.

As far as Indian goods were concerned, Gujarat cotton and Bengal opium were the only two items with a large market in China. Opium was a contraband item and the Company obviously could not handle it on its