IV. (Re)constructing the Origin

The critique of South Asian religions by European missionaries as well as orientalists, and increasingly by science in the second half of the 19th century, triggered the establishment of several religious reform movements. A very common approach to refuting European critique was the reconstruction of an unadulterated, original form of the respective religion, as the colonialists viewed the present state of the respective religions as decayed in comparison to a former golden age. We have seen this approach already in the preceding chapter on Khan's *Essays* wherein the author aimed to refute Muir's critique with reference to the inherent implications of the Quran to inherent implications of the Quran beyond its explicit commands. Khan aimed at reconstructing these implications on the basis of early Islam. The preceding chapter thus raised the question of how this golden age of early Islam is understood, which will be discussed in this chapter in detail. The two primary authors I will discuss here aim to rediscover original Islam through historical studies of its early period. I will examine how these authors position their historical reconstruction of Islam in relation to the dominant discourse of science and rationalism as a marker of European influence, and in what sense Europe is perceived as an explicit or implicit *telos* of history. The overarching question is therefore how this positioning affects the authors' conceptions of the reconstruction of origin.

The authors under discussion will be divided roughly into two groups. The first group will be represented principally by Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali and his historical poem, *Madd va jaẕr-i Islām* (*The Flow and Ebb of Islam*). This group can be described as comprising the first generation of the close associates of the reformer and founder of the Aligarh movement, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. The second group, represented primarily by Ameer Ali, is characterised by the choice of English as the language of the authors' works, which enabled them to address another audience. Authors within this group are distinctive with respect to their attempt to abolish Europe as the *telos* of history and to present Islam self-referentially, without reference to Europe.

In the following discussion, I will first give an introduction to Hali and summarise the content of his poem. In the subsequent section, I will then present an analysis of this poem that incorporates Hayden White's theory of historiography.

1. Reconstructing the Origin

1.1 Hali (1837–1914)

> Thus, if one people has progressed and another stays behind, then the people remaining behind [*pas-māndah*] should not lose hope. For, if not on the way then finally at the destination both will meet. And it is also not impossible that the lagging caravan draws level with the leading caravan still on the way.[1]

In this quote from his article "Kyā Musalmān taraqqī kar sakte hain?" ("Can Muslims Progress?"), Hali concisely summarises the wide-ranging problem of progress (*taraqqī*) with the metaphor of two caravans travelling on the same route. Obviously, he compares the second caravan with the current state of decay in Islam. In emphasising, however, the possibility that the second caravan, having set out later, may still catch up with the first, he instills hope for the improvement of South Asian Muslims' situation.

Khwaja Altaf Husain (1837-1914), better known by his *nom de plume* (*taḫalluṣ*), Hali, was born in Panipat in southeast Punjab, roughly 100 km north of Delhi. He received a traditional education in Arabic and Persian. During a period of unemployment in the aftermath of the upheaval of 1857, Hali began to compose poetry in Urdu and then came to be acquainted with the famous poet Ghalib (1797-1869), who became his teacher. In 1871, Hali left for Lahore and started to work in the Government Book Depot as a corrector of English books translated into Urdu. Through this employment, he became acquainted with European thought despite his lack of knowledge of English. During his time in Lahore, he organised – in cooperation with Muhammad Husain Azad – literary assemblies (*mušāʿirah*), which aimed to establish a new literary style of *necarī* poetry (Urdu-ised of English *nature*) emphasising realistic and moral themes. Hali also participated in these assemblies, but most of his poetry did not attain long-lasting recognition. What made him famous was his preface to his *Dīvān*, a collection of poetry. The preface was later reprinted separately several times as *Muqaddamah-i šiʿr va šāʿirī*, wherein he outlines a detailed vision of this new literary style. When he left Lahore in 1874/75 for Delhi, he came to be closely associated with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), whose ideas deeply impressed him. In the following years, Hali supported Ahmad Khan's writing on social and educational reforms.[2] His articles

1 Altaf Husain Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṯr-i Ḥālī* (Lāhaur: Majlis-i Taraqqī-i Adab, 1967), 172.

2 Christopher Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1; *EI*, "Ḥālī".

on religion and Islam, however, lack originality and mostly resemble the work of Ahmad Khan.

Hali's poem *Madd va jaẕr-i Islām* (*The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, 1879), popularly known as *Musaddas-i Ḥālī*, had a major impact and brought him several admirers. It created a whole tradition of poetic imitations in the same vein.[3] The form of *musaddas* differs from the most popular genre of Urdu poetry of his time, the *ġazal*, in both its length and the consistency of its theme. While the *ġazal* consists of a certain amount of half-verses which are usually not connected through a shared theme but only through rhyme, the *musaddas* has a total of six lines with the first four rhyming with one another and the remaining two rhyming amongst themselves (*aaaa bb, cccc dd,* etc.).[4] At the time of Hali, the *musaddas*-form had acquired much popularity in the *marṡīyah*, a genre first and foremost related to the bemoaning of the events of Karbala. While Hali's *Musaddas* incorporates the theme of bemoaning to some extent, ho it is not with respect to the Karbala but to Muslim civilisation in general.

After recognising the immense success of his *Musaddas*, Hali revised the poem in a second edition in 1886 and added a *ẕamīmah* (supplement) of 162 verses to the 294 stanzas of the original *Musaddas*.[5] The 1902 edition was issued with an additional supplement, the *ʿArẕ-i ḥāl* (Petition), of 63 verses. Both supplements, however, could not reach the expectations raised by the *Musaddas*. The *ẕamīmah* was "regarded as a somewhat pale postscript to it [i.e. the *Musaddas*], and the Petition […] is a still less organic addition thereto."[6]

1.2 *Musaddas*

The *Musaddas* is a historical poem which "contrasts the past glory of Islam with the current status of Muslims to arouse their sense of honour and shame."[7] The dichotomy of the two concepts, *taraqqī* (progress) and *tanazzul* (descent, decay or degradation), is the main theme of this poem. After some introductory stanzas, Hali begins to depict the pre-Islamic period, the so-called period of ignorance

3 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 1, 36-48.

4 *EI*, "musammaṭ."

5 The Musaddas was reduced to 294 of originally 297 stanzas in its second edition (Shackle: Hali's Musaddas, 11).

6 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 12.

7 Christina Oesterheld, "Campaigning for a Community: Urdu Literature of Mobilisation and Identity", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 54: 1 (2017), 47.

(*jāhilīyat*). This era is unequivocally described as a dark chapter of the history of Arabia:

> No shadow of civilization had fallen upon it [i.e. Arabia]. Not even one step of progress had come there.[8]

The following stanzas proceed in listing the evils and coarseness of pre-Islamic Arabian society. Hali starts with the inhospitality of the climate of the desert, which had not been cultivated by the Arabs, and continues with the likewise unploughed state of their minds. He goes on criticising the ubiquitous idol worship, which had even occupied the Kaaba in Mecca. He then bemoans the disunity and continuous quarrelling of the Arab tribes, and denounces their disrespect of women while emphasising the evils of gambling and alcohol.[9]

According to Hali, only the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad brought the Arabs out of this period of ignorance and showed them the truth of the monotheism of Islam. Hali states that Muhammad taught them essential moral and social lessons, which he does not further concretise:

> His teaching so prevailed over habit that those who had been addicted to falsehood came to be seekers of the true God.
> All their vices were changed into virtues. Their frames were endowed with the spirit.
> The stone which the masons had rejected came at last to be set at the head.[10]

Hali thus idealises the early period of Islam as a time when the entire Muslim society lived according to the message of Muhammad, and when all of the previous evils of pre-Islamic society had been abolished:

> When the community had received all God's bounty, when the apostleship had discharged its function,
> When there remained among men no argument to advance against God, when the Prophet decided upon departure from the world,
> Then he left behind as heirs of Islam a people which has few parallels in the world.
> All men were obedient to Islam. All men came to the aid of Muslims.
> Men were true to God and the Prophet. Men treated orphans and widows with compassion.

8 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 105.
9 Ibid., 105-109.
10 Ibid., 121.

> All were disgusted with the way of unbelief and falsehood. All were drunk with the intoxicating wine of truth.[11]

The Muslim community had been perfected during the time of Muhammad to the point that, during the reign of the first Caliphs, Muslim society was also unparalleled. Hali herein constructs a sharp dichotomy between the pre-Islamic period and the early period of Islam, with both being presented as mere black and white depictions lacking any differentiated representation. He contrasts the pre-Islamic period with the early period of Islam and describes it as a time of degradation in every way, be it with respect to social or moral conditions, etc. On the other hand, the early period of Islam is depicted as a perfect society. Thus, only after the spread of Islam did progress appear in Arabia, upon which "no shadow of civilization had fallen […] [and where] [n]ot even one step of progress had come […]."[12]

In the following stanzas, Hali proceeds to describe the "general darkness" (*ʿām tārīkī kā zamānah*) which spread over the whole world, thus referring to the Dark Ages in Europe and likewise in India and Persia:

> At the time that the idea of progress came to them, a darkness was spread over the inhabited quarter of the world.
> Over every people lay the shadow of decline, which had caused them all to fall from the heights.
> Those nations which are the stars of heaven today were all hidden in the twilight of degradation.[13]

In describing at length the ignorance and state of degradation of all civilised countries at the time of the appearance of Islam, Hali applies this idea as a contrasting point of reference for the "advances of the Muslims" (*musalmanoṉ kī taraqqīyāt*). The following stanzas then describe the various aspects of progress of Islam's early period. It is not possible to quote all of the stanzas of the different *taraqqī*s but a brief glance at the headings Hali added to the poem will suffice as a concise overview. He begins by describing the "revival of learning" (*iḥyā-i ʿulūm*) through the resurrection of ancient Greek philosophy and lauds the "quest for knowledge" (*ṭalab-i ʿilm*) in every science and artform. In the following passage, the Arabs' achievements in the fields of architecture and agriculture are elucidated to contrast with their former inability in the pre-Islamic period. Wherever the Muslims appeared – in Spain or Baghdad, India or Egypt – they left monumental buildings

11 Ibid., 123.
12 Ibid., 105.
13 Ibid., 125.

and flowering gardens. Hereafter, Hali praises the Muslims' achievements in the fields of astronomy, history, rhetoric, and medicine:[14]

> In short, all those arts which are the basic stock of religious and worldly prosperity,
> The natural, divine and mathematical sciences, and philosophy, medicine, chemistry, geometry, astronomy,
> Navigation, commerce, agriculture, architecture – wherever you go to track these down, you will find their footprints there.[15]

But then Hali discontinues this description of the various aspects of Muslim progress and recognises a "decay of the people of Islam" (*tanazzul-i Ahl-i Islām*). It remains uncertain as to when Hali sets the beginning of this decay. After bemoaning the Muslims' devastated state, he abruptly praises the "efficiency of the Europeans" (*Ahl-i Yūrap kā ẓabṭ-i auqāt*), and shows an appreciation for the prosperity and the nobility of the manners and habits of the Hindus, who inhabit the same land as South Asian Muslims.[16] Yet, only the Muslims are incapable of progressing in their current state. Hali compares them to a devastated garden "which in no way bears even the name of freshness, whose green sprays have been scorched and have fallen off."[17] On the other hand, all of the other nations are compared with gardens which are already flourishing: "although their plants have not put forth leaf and fruit, they do appear ready to bloom".[18]

Thus, again, Hali gives an entirely undifferentiated, black and white depiction of the state of the different religious communities. Here, however, the dichotomy of decay and progress is completely reversed. This time, Islam is attributed the label of decay, whereas the Europeans are unequivocally identified with progress.

Hereafter, the Europeans' progress is not further elucidated. In the remaining stanzas of his Musaddas, Hali addresses what he sees as the various reasons for the decay of Muslim society. He criticises the aristocratic and prosperous Muslims' lack of interest in social and political affairs. Hali finds them occupied with the idle pastime of flying pigeons or addiction to opium, etc.[19] However, his criti-

14 Ibid., 127-14.

15 Ibid., 141.

16 Hindus apparently play a subordinate role in this context and are not mentioned further after the few stanzas given above. For Hali, rather seem to serve as admonishers for the Muslims, with regard to the possibility of progress for non-Europeans, as well.

17 Ibid., 143.

18 Ibid., 143.

19 Ibid., 195. These are typical tropes of the so-called decadent Nawabi-culture of South Asia, which is criticised by virtually all Muslim reform movements. They are also found in early novels such as Nazir Ahmad's famous *Taubat an-Naṣūḥ* or Bengali satires.

cism is not restricted to the elite class, but likewise includes the general degeneration of Muslim society and its loss of the qualities and values which the Muslim *shariat* teaches. According to Hali, no respect for or interest in learning remained in the Muslim community. Neither books nor real learned men and religious scholars existed. T Instead, he sees those who claim to be learned as fraudsters lacking any knowledge. Others are criticised for their dissemination of hate against both Muslims and non-Muslims. In Hali's view, these Ulama (*ʿulamāʾ*) brand one another as infidels and, thus, disunite the Muslim community. They complicate the originally simple religion of Islam and overemphasise outward aspects:[20]

> The commands of the Holy Law were so agreeable that Jews and Christians were filled with love for them.
> The entire Quran is witness to their mildness. The Prophet himself proclaimed, 'Religion is easy.' [*ad-dīn yusr*]
> But here they [i.e. the Ulama] have made them so difficult that believers have come to consider them a burden.[21]

For Hali, Muslims have abolished the Holy Law and gone astray from the teachings of Islam. Conversely, he considers the progress of Europe to be a result of its acknowledgement of the very principles which Islam teaches:

> Those who act on the basis of this weighty utterance today flourish upon the face of the earth.
> They are superior to all, high and low. They are now the central axis of humanity.
> Those covenants of the Holy Law which we have broken have all been firmly upheld by the people of the West.[22]

This raises the question of how exactly Hali defines Holy Law. Is it the *sharia* in today's common notion as religious law that, for example, prescribes dietary regulations, the practice and timing of prayer, etc.? The overarching issue at stake here thus becomes Hali's conception of Islam and religion in general. The above quoted stanzas proclaiming the simplicity of Islam give a hint in this regard, but the *Musaddas* does not provide an explicit answer. However, in his article "*Ad-Dīn yusr*" ("Religion/*dīn* is Easy"), Hali emphasises that the tenets of Islam are not absurd or incomprehensible (*muḥāl*), and nor are its regulations a burden to men. Instead, he depicts Islam as an essentialised framework which is free of any bigotry or overemphasis of regulations on outward rituals. But in the progress of time, this "true *dīn*" has been distorted, and its essential purpose veiled:

20 Ibid., 169-171.
21 Ibid., 171.
22 Ibid., 163.

> In short, as long as this pure *dīn* maintained its original form [*apnī aṣlīyat par barqarār*], there was nothing which restricted man in his joy, his pleasure, and his freedom. But, alas, over time, additions [*ḥāšiye*] began to be connected with it. Over time, the additions increased to such an extent that it became difficult to distinguish between the addition and the original [*matn aur ḥāšiye meṉ tamīz karnī dušvār ho gaʾī*]. The original began to disappear.[23]

In his article, Hali thus sets out to describe the various types of additions which led Muslims astray from the essential principles and purposes of their religion. In turn, he considers these additions to be the central reason for Muslim decay:

> The mundane achievements [*duniyavī taraqqīyāt*] did not only cease in the course of this [i.e. the additions] but they were exchanged with the state of decay [*tanazzul ke sāth mubdal*] [...].[24]

I will not reproduce all of the additions here in detail. It will suffice to discuss Hali's main argument. He distinguishes between two types of statements by Muhammad: the first type of statements relate to the Divine regulations (*aḥkām-i ilāhī*), which are perceived as sharia. The second type of statements are described as mere *rāʾe* (opinion):[25]

> The first of these two types of teachings [*taʿlīm*] was his [i.e. Muhammad's] official duty [*manṣabī farẓ*] which he has been sent for. […] This [type of teaching] was named *sharia* and its violation has been described as going astray. The second type of teaching, which pertains to the way of life [*muʿāš*], was completely separate from his official duties; neither has this type been declared as binding for the community, nor is its contravention prohibited.[26]

This line of argument is very common and applied abundantly in this time period. Chiragh Ali, a close associate of Ahmad Khan, also argued in a similar vein and thus provides insights into determining Hali's views on Islamic law, as well as his conception of Islam and religion in general. In his *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States* (1883), Ali outlines a programme of certain reforms in Muslim Law. In his introduction, he points out that his book is to be understood as an answer to European critique claiming the utter inflexibility of Islam. In European representations, Islam is depicted as a fossilised system. Chiragh Ali in particular mentions Malcolm McColl's article, "Are Reforms Possible under Mussulman Rule?" (1881). In the

23 Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṯr*, 7.
24 Ibid., 23.
25 Ibid., 10.
26 Ibid., 7.

subsequent pages of his introduction, Ali sets out to refute this critique in two ways: on the one hand, he aims to counter the view that Islam is inflexible and, on the other hand, he envisages a reinterpretation of the concept of religion. He argues against an equivocation of the religion of Islam and the social system associated with Islam. He then proceeds by distinguishing between the essential part of Islam and its social system. In his opinion, the latter has often been equated with Islam, thus wrongly implicating their inseparability. Chiragh Ali argues with reference to the abundantly quoted "date-*ḥadīṯ*":

> There is a tradition related by the Imám Moslim to the effect that Mohammad the Prophet while coming to Medina saw certain persons fecundating date-trees. He advised them to refrain from doing so. They acted accordingly, and the yield was meagre that year. It being reported to him, he said, "He was merely a man. What he instructed them in their religion they must take, but when he ventured his opinion in other matters he was only a man."[27]

Based on this reference, Chiragh Ali concludes a distinction of two spheres intended by the Prophet himself. Thus, Muhammad's acts and statements must not be understood as being divine *per se*, but rather must be distinguished with respect to the pertaining sphere (religious or societal/mundane):

> This shows that Mohammad never set up his own acts and words as an infallible or unchangeable rule of conduct in civil and political affairs, or, in other words, he never combined the Church and State into one. […] It is incorrect to suppose that the acts and sayings of the Prophet cover all law, whether political, civil, social, or moral.[28]

Hence, Muhammad's acts must not be supposed to be inherently of divine character. The Prophet is depicted first and foremost as a human being, bereft of an infallible status. His deeds are denied any religious character *per se*. This understanding paves the way for Chiragh Ali's argument to disclaim the critique of an inflexibility of Islam. He rejects the characterization of Islam as a social system and acknowledges Muslim law as a common law originating in the variegated context of the appearance of Islam:

> [I]slam as a religion is quite apart from inculcating a social system. The Mohammadan polity and social system have nothing to do with religion. Although Mohammadans in after days have tried to mix up their social system with the Korán, just

27 Chiragh Ali: *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms: in the Ottoman Empire and Other Mohammadan States* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1883), xxxvi.
28 Ibid.

> as the Jews and Christians have done in applying the precepts of the Bible to the institutions of their daily life, they are not so intermingled that, "it is hard to see they can be disentangled without destroying both."[29]

Chiragh Ali, therefore, aims to restore the original form of Islam as being free from any linkage to a social system with a canonical law. Instead, he describes a concept of religion fundamentally differing from the one presupposed by the European critics scrutinising Islam. This presupposition of an entanglement of religion with a social system in Islam results, according to Chiragh Ali, in a misrepresentation.

The reference to the "date-*ḥadīṯ*" allows Chiragh Ali to contextualise and historicise certain aspects of Islam and Muslim law, thereby dismissing some as being unrelated to the essence of Islam. In this essentialisation, he presupposes a concept of religion which neglects a concrete, inflexible, canonical law. Hence, he abolishes the assertion of an entanglement of religion with social affairs with respect to Islam:

> Islam exists as a religion distinct from a social system, though Muslims in various phases of their history confused the individual or cumulative experience of their social systems with the Quran.[30]

Returning from this discussion of Chiragh Ali, it becomes obvious that Hali likewise applies this argument of essentialisation. As has been shown above, he too acknowledges a distinction between a religious and a secular sphere, thus denying an entanglement of Islam with social affairs:

> Now that government has performed its proper function, Islam has no need for it left.
> But, alas, oh community of the Glory of Man, humanity departed together with it. Government was like a gilt covering upon you. As soon as it peeled off, your innate capacity emerged.[31]

Hali therefore does not acknowledge governance as an essential part of Islam. It was rather a requirement of former circumstances. Its abolishment, however, does not mean any essential damage to Islam as religion. For, as he further elaborates in his "*Ad-Dīn yusr*", the essential purpose of religion is rather "the refinement of morals and the perfecting of the soul" (*aḫlāq kī tahẕīb aur nafs-i insānī kī*

29 Ibid., xxxiv.

30 Aziz Ahmad: *Islamic modernism in India and Pakistan: 1857 - 1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 61.

31 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 145.

takmīl).[32] Thus, both Hali and Chiragh Ali present a concept of religion claiming inwardness and, hence, emphasising the distinction of religion from a social system with concrete regulations and prescriptions.

But still, even if not explicitly stated, Hali's concept of religion does not appear to be implicitly restricted to inward reality and morality. If the *Musaddas* is read closely, it becomes clear that Islam is – in its unadulterated early period – also described in relation with progress: thus, in Hali's view, Islam is not merely limited to morality. As Hali writes in the introduction to the first edition of the *Musaddas*:

> [I] have given a sketch of the miserable condition of Arabia before the appearance of Islam, in the period known in the language of Islam as the Jahiliyya. I have then described the rising of the star of Islam, how the desert was suddenly made green and fertile by the teaching of the Unlettered Prophet, how that cloud of mercy at his departure left the fields of the community luxuriantly flourishing, and how the Muslims excelled over the whole world in their religious development and worldly progress [*dīnī va duniyavī taraqqīyāt*].[33]

Chiragh Ali goes even further, and describes Islam as inherent progress:

> Islam is capable of progress, and possesses sufficient elasticity to enable it to adapt itself to the social and political changes going on around it. The Islam, by which I mean the pure Islam as taught by Mohammad in the Korán, and not the Mohammadan Common Law, was itself a progress and a change for the better.[34]

Thus, both Hali and Chiragh Ali essentialise Islam, which allows them, on the one hand, to reject the critique of an inflexibility and inadaptability of Islam and, on the other hand, to present the inherently progressive character of Islam. This move, however, results in a linkage of Islam with *worldly* progress, which transcends the border of the allegedly separate spheres of religion versus social affairs, and instead merges them. Religion is, hence, not restricted to inward aspects of morality, but is perceived to enable progress: the teachings of Islam being a crucial requirement for the same. Consequently, religion asa general principle appears to transcend its essential sphere, reaching also into the mundane sphere of worldly progress.

32 Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṣr*, 3.
33 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 95.
34 Ali: *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms*, 10.

1.3 Progress and Decay

Both Hali and Chiragh Ali discuss the dichotomy of progress and decay in relation to the essence of Islam. The latter, states that "the pure Islam as taught by Mohammad in the Korán, and not the Mohammadan Common Law, was itself a progress and a change for the better."[35] Ali thus aims for a disentanglement of the common law from essential Islam. In its essence, Islam is perceived as being progressive. However, Ali's equivocation of the common law with Islam and, thus, its sacralisation to a divinely inspired, inflexible code of law proved to be an obstacle for progress. He argues that the decay of Islam is unequivocally related to the adulteration of this essential Islam. Subsequently, this shift was accompanied by an incapacity for discerning the purpose of the teachings of Islam:[36]

> This [in reference to a quoted *ḥadīṯ*] makes clear that neither *vuẓū* [ritual ablution] nor *ġusl* [ritual bath], neither *namāz* [prayer] nor *rozah* [fasting], neither *ḥajj* [pilgrimage] nor *zakāt* [alms] and likewise any external orders were an end in itself [*maqṣūd bi-aẕ-ẕāt*] but were rather tools for purifying the (esoteric) inner [*taṣfīyah-i bāṭin*], healing the soul [*muʿālajah-i nafs*] and the perfecting of morals [*tahẕīb-i aḫlāq*].[37]

Furthermore, both authors emphasise that Islam in its unadulterated form never proved to be an obstacle to progress. As has already become obvious from the long description of the significant enumeration of achievements Muslims made during the early period in Hali's *Musaddas*, Islam was rather perceived as a stimulating factor for progress.[38] Chiragh Ali even equates Islam with inherent progress.[39]

35 Ibid.

36 Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṯr*, 23.

37 Ibid., 16.

38 Ibid., 162-163.

39 This trope of decay is very common in virtually any reformist approach of 19th and early 20th century South Asia, not only in the context of Islam or Hinduism. With respect to the former, the preceding chapter has already discussed various declarations of a Muslim decay, reaching back even to the 18th century. With respect to Hinduism, first of all Ram Mohan Roy has to be mentioned who similarly called for the return to the sources of tradition in order to rediscover original Hinduism, freed of its various misinterpretations: "Rammohan repeatedly states his conviction that reason and common sense go hand in hand with the true meaning of the sacred texts. […] The Brahmins have usurped the study and the transmission the Vedic texts as one of their prerogatives. They have tried to conceal the sacred tradition behind the 'dark curtain of the Sungscrit language,' although they themselves have long since lost access to its real meaning" (Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 205). In a similar vein, also later reformists, first and foremost Vivekananda, argue for a rediscovery of "original" Hinduism. Likewise, Dayananda Sarasvati states that the proper un-

But how is this progress to be understood? To answer this question, it will be necessary to concisely discuss the concept of progress and its implications for historiography. In the following section, I will discuss Hayden White's approach to historiography in order to provide a theoretical framework for my analysis of the concept of progress and the structure of a historical narrative.

Progress is a concept which presupposes a linear succession of events. According to Georg Henrik von Wright, progress inevitably requires a *telos*, a destination of the successive chain of events in history. Wright puts the *telos* in "a distant future," thus implying a striving towards a distant destination.[40] This distant destination serves as point of reference for identifying an event as progress or decay. This conclusion then forms a referential axis for measuring the chain of successive events with three crucial stages: the past, the present, and the future destination of perfection. An event of the present is measured with respect to its approximation to the future *telos* in comparison to the past. While Wright describes the *telos* as a universal destination of all history, Hayden White's analysis of historiography makes this universality very questionable. In his *Metahistory*, he describes a three-stage structure which shapes the interpretation of history:

> First the elements in the historical field are organized into a chronicle by the arrangement of the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence; then the chronicle is organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a "spectacle" or process of happening, which is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle, and end.[41]

White distinguishes a historical story from a chronicle insofar as the latter is open-ended while the former is the extraction of a three-stage compound of events. Events, however, do not have any self-referential meaning, acquiring it only through their arrangement within a historical story:

> It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and „fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part

derstanding of the Vedas had not been preserved, which culminated in tremendous misconceptions and the loss of the originally Indian knowledge of science, which is "ultimately dependent upon India and the Veda" (Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 245).

40 Georg Henrik von Wright: "Progress: Fact and Fiction," in The Idea of Progress, ed. Arnold Burgen and Peter McLaughlin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 2.

41 Hayden V. White: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975) 5.

> in the historian's operations. The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs. […] The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.[42]

White thus makes a clear distinction between a chronicle and a historical story. The former is a mere register of events. The events subsequently follow each other without implying any obvious mutual link. The chronicle can be continued *ad infinitum*. The historical story, however, is always divided in a tripartite structure with the crucial parts of beginning, middle, and end. This implies the integration of some events and the omission of others in this structure and, thus, assigns them a meaning within a coherent narrative that they do not possess inherently. Rather, meaning is acquired only through its integration in the tripartite structure of history. Events by themselves do not have any self-evident meaning. Only within the contingent framework of the historical narrative are chronicled events presented as allegedly self-evident. The introductory event is deemed to predict the subsequent events, finally resulting in the end of the story. The end of the story is presupposed as an inevitable result which was already indicated by every event of the story. Every event is read with respect to its destination, the end of the story.

Nevertheless, the mere chronicle of events does not imply this allegedly self-evident meaning. The identification of the conclusive reference point predetermines the selection of the preceding events and their organisation in the tripartite structure. The beginning, thus, does not in fact predict any necessary subsequent chain of events. Rather, the conclusive point of reference affects the selection of events from the chronicle, which assumes the self-evident meaning of events.
That said, none of its individual parts can claim self-evidence. Only within this tripartite structure are the elements arranged within a referential system. Neither the beginning nor the end of the story can be found in the elements themselves. The assertion of one single, universal *telos* therefore becomes questionable, as every story establishes its own contingent *telos* which fundamentally structures the perception and selection of the preceding events. *Telos* is a plural concept, created within the structure of every story. It cannot be reduced to a singularity, but is rather a contingent creation, differing with every story. History is merely a construct of the tripartite structure.

In the same way, the origin cannot claim any authenticity or genuineness. In his article "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault describes the search for the

42 Ibid., 6-7.

beginning as the shelter of authenticity and genuineness as a myth. The historian's quest for origins, Foucault argues, does not reveal any essence which facilitates an originality, an authentic point of reference. In the beginning, no timeless, inviolable identity can be found.[43] Rather, he argues, the beginning is likewise characterised by multiplicity and diversity:

> What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity. […] The lofty origin is no more than "a metaphysical extension which arises from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth." We tend to think that this is the moment of their greatest perfection, when they emerged dazzling from the hands of a creator or in the shadowless light of a first morning.[44]

Foucault recognises an insurmountable diversity present already in the beginning. He thus refutes the attempt of historiography to reveal authenticity as an attempt to veil this disparity. Historiography aims to establish one hegemonic trajectory. Hence, the search for authenticity must always remain a construction, as origin itself is already varied. It does not refer to any singular essence.

The historical practice is rather a universalising project of the present. The historian imposes the present on the past: the past is interpreted from the perspective of the present. The chronology of history, which pretends that the origin is the starting point, is instead reversed in the historian's practice. As Foucault states:

> The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective. Historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their works which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy – the unavoidable obstacles of their passion.[45]

The present therefore fundamentally shapes the perception of the past. It is the inevitable starting point of any historical scrutiny.

This adds an important aspect to White's structural analysis of historiography. The latter focuses on the tripartite structure within a story which shapes the interpretation of the past. Foucault goes one step further and recognises the present context of the historian in addition to the internal structure of a story. For Foucault, the historian and his context become part of the analysis. White, however, exam-

43 Michel Foucault: "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. (Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142.

44 Ibid., 142f.

45 Ibid., 156-157.

ines the implications of the tripartite structure, emphasising the referential character of the end of the story. Events receive meaning only within this structure and through their reference to the end. None of the parts of this structure can have a claim for self-evidence. The beginning as well as the end of the story are a contingent choice and, thus, may differ with every story. Likewise, the *telos* cannot claim any singularity, but is a decision of the historian. This is precisely where Foucault comes into play: he exposes the limitation of the historian's viewpoint according to his present context. Past circumstances and views cannot be revived and, thus, are reread from the from the historians' present socio-cultural perspective. The parts of the historical story are, hence, subject to a retroactive process of projection. The present is projected onto the past.

In the following discussion, I aim to apply this theoretical approach to Hali's *Musaddas* and his presentation of two stories of the history of Islam. I will interrogate the ways in which the rearrangement of events and the relocation of the end of the story culminate in a reinterpretation of their meaning. How is the original, unadulterated Islam conceived of, and how does Hali utilise the structure of historiography to propose his interpretation?

When Hali as well as Chiragh Ali reject European critiques of Islam as inflexible and immutable, they instead aim to present an abstract interpretation of Islam which is characterised only through a few principles – namely *tauḥīd* (unity of God), which is described as fundamental teaching with all fundamental rites and regulations emerging from this.[46] This permits them to present Islam as highly adaptive and flexible, adjusting to any circumstances. Hence, both authors describe Islam – in its "original," unadulterated form – as inherently progressive. In the following section, I will analyse this claim taking into account my examination of historiography above. This discussion will address how Islam is presented as progressive, while European critique explicitly states the contrary. Furthermore, it asks, how is progress perceived? What is the referential *telos* of progress?

Hali's *Musaddas* can be divided into two narratives. The first describes, in a nostalgic vein, the various achievements of Muslims in the early Islamic period. To understand the claim for Islam's progressive character, it is crucial to read Hali's two historical stories in the context of White's tripartite structure. Hali's glorification of early Islam rejects the approach of European critique which, firstly, presupposes Islam to be an immutable, canonical complex of laws and regulations, and, secondly, measures this fixed view of Islam against contemporaneous Europe. Hali as well as Chiragh Ali refute this approach as being unjustified. They state that the Islam which European critics take as their point of reference

46 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 114-117.

must not be understood as eternal, but rather must be read within its historical context. They set out to compare this Islam not with modern Europe, but instead with pre-Islamic Arabia. While "[n]o shadow of civilization had fallen upon it [i.e. Pre-Islamic Arabia]" and " [n]ot even one step of progress had come there," I will situate Muslim achievements during the early period of Islam within a historical continuum.[47] The *telos* of this first historical story is set in the early period of Islam. This restriction of the continuum to the structure of the tripartite historical story permits Hali and Chiragh Ali to present Islam as a distinct break from the past, thus constructing a dichotomy between pre-Islamic and Islamic times.[48]

Both authors, however, emphasise that this particular expression must not be perceived as final and immutable, as European critique assumes.[49] On the contrary, the essential principles of Islamic teachings must be examined, for only those demonstrate the inherently progressive character of Islam. Both Hali and Chiragh Ali present a rather abstract definition of Islam, focussing on its core essence.[50] Christopher Shackle states in his introduction that Hali attempts "to disentangle a culture's self-perceptions from its historical involvements with worldly power, so that the kernel of its identity might become self-dependent and insulated from the revolutions of political fortune".[51] This distinction of a core essence of Islam signified through certain overarching principles permits the rejection of the charge of immutability, instead permitting the characterisation of Islam as progressive.

But the *Musaddas* does not end with this nostalgic glorification of a former golden age in Islam. This golden age is rather instrumentalised to disentangle the progressive essence of Islam from the overarching point of reference that is Europe. The second story, however, has to include the European *telos*. It reverses the preceding one and bemoans the present decay of Muslim society, thus having a clearly different referential continuum. The *telos* of European achievements serves as the reference point for the contemporaneous situation of Muslims. While Hali praises the Europeans, he depicts the state of Muslim society as one of devastation:

> Neither their wealth remained intact, nor their prestige. Their fortune and prosperity forsook them.
> Sciences and arts took leave of them one by one. All their virtues were destroyed by degrees.

47 Ibid.,105.
48 Ibid., 127-129; Ali: *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms*, 10.
49 Ali: *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms*, i-ii.
50 Ibid., 10.
51 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 52.

> Neither religion nor Islam was left. Only the name of Islam was left.[52]

The protagonists of both stories – the first presenting a nostalgia for the golden age of Islam, the second its decay – are the Muslims. But in terms of White's analytical framework, they differ in the extent to which the protagonist corresponds with the *telos* of the story. Because the teleological reference point is identified with the protagonists, the first story culminates in a golden age narrative of progress. Thus, the *telos* and protagonists correspond in Hali's first historical narrative. The preceding state of pre-Islamic Arabia serves as a negative example, as it is measured on the grounds of the *telos* of Islam. The latter can thus be distinguished as progressive. The second story, on the contrary, begins with this golden age of Islam, but ends with the progressive state of modern Europe: thus, the protagonists and *telos* diverge. Consequently, this second story reads as a story of decay, for the Muslim protagonists are measured not against their own telos but against modern Europe. Because the *telos* of Europe is presupposed as the reference point for the universal conception of progress, Muslims thus face the inevitable characterisation of lack. Moreover, Europe's progress is universalised, disallowing a multiplicity of possible progresses. Progress in general is equated with the particular progress of Europe.

This train of thought takes us back to Hali's above-mentioned metaphor of different caravans travelling on the road of progress:

> Thus, if one people has progressed and another stays behind, then the people remaining behind [*pas-māndah*] should not lose hope. For if not on the way then finally at the destination both will meet. And it is also not impossible that the lagging caravan draws level with the leading caravan still on the way.[53]

Significantly, Hali describes the singularity of the destination of progress in this metaphor. It is not obvious whether he equates the Europeans with the destination or whether they are understood as likewise travelling on this same road as another leading caravan. The latter would imply a distinction between Europe and progress. The preceding lines, however, make clear that, at least within this metaphor, the leading caravan is deemed to refer to the other peoples of South Asia (*hamwaṭan qaumeṉ*).[54]

In Hali's *Musaddas*, it thus becomes obvious that Europe and "Western science" are perceived as *telos*:

52 Ibid., 143.
53 Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṡr*, 172.
54 Ibid., 172.

> The results of Western science and art have been apparent in India for a hundred years,
> But bigotry has put such blinkers on us that we cannot see the manifestation of Truth.
> The theories of the Greeks are implanted in our hearts, but we do not believe [*īmān*] in the revelation [*vaḥy*] presently granted us.[55]

It is important to take his choice of words here into consideration, for the last stanza applies key religious terminology to western culture. It is first significant that Hali applies the quranic *īmān* (belief) instead of the general term *yaqīn* (belief).[56] Furthermore, he terms the distribution of Western science as *vaḥy* (revelation), a *terminus technicus* otherwise restricted to the divine revelations of prophets.[57] This wording puts Europe and European knowledge in an unequivocally religious setting and suggests that Hali literally equates the narrative structure of the two stories. The Europeans, thus, take up the role of the Muslims who brought progress to pre-Islamic Arabia.[58] Therefore, in the second story, the Europeans are

55 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 187.

56 Platts gives the following meanings for *yaqīn*: "Certain of sure knowledge, certainty, assurance, confidence, conviction, belief, opinion; truth, true faith, infallibility, evidence" while *īmān* is first and foremost related to God: "Belief (particularly in God, and in His word and apostles, &c.); faith, religion, creed; conscience; good faith, trustworthiness, integrity," (John T. Platts: *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English* (New Delhi: Manoharlal, 1993), 115, 1250).

57 According to Platts, the following are the meanings of *vaḥy*: "Revelation; anything (divine) suggested, inspired, or revealed (by vision or otherwise); inspiration," (Platts: *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English*, 1183).

58 In his *Urdū adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, Nasir Abbas Nayyar reads Hali's *Musaddas* as nationalist poetry and interprets it as an attempt to identify the muslim nation's *origin* or *essence* in Islam. According to Nayyar, Hali introduces or rather acknowledges a dichotomy of East and West, respectively representing religion versus reason and science. Thus, Hali based his interpretation of nation on Islam. However, this reading by Nayyar seems to be quite questionable in view of the above given analysis wherein Hali deliberately blurs this strict bifurcation. Hali links Islam to the hegemonic discourse of science and, thus, introduces a lineage of Muslim philosophy and science. This of course does not imply that he revokes a dichotomy between East and West. Yet, he links Islam to essential elements which are associated with the West. Hence, does Nayyar not omit a crucial aspect of the *Musaddas* in reducing it to a text of nation-formation instead of reading it as a lament on the present situation of Islam, having lost its link to its own essence? To put it in other words, is the *Musaddas* in the first instance discussing Islam as a category of identity or rather redefining Islam and its relation to the hegemonic discourse of science and reason? Even though the aspect of identity cannot be denied with regard to Hali's attempt to link Islam with crucial aspects of the category of the "West", the question of identity seems to be secondary, as it is not a demarcation of the category of Islam that stands at the forefront, but rather its linkage to the hegemonic discourse. Cf. Nayyar: *Urdu adab kī taškīl-i jadīd*, 68-71.

described as the "prophets" of their time and "Western science" as their revelation. This second story emulates the structure of the first, but diverges, as mentioned, with respect to its teleological reference point. Here, Hali acknowledges the Europeans and their knowledge as telos, thus putting Muslims in the position of the pre-Islamic Arabs who are in need of divine revelation. The revelation of Islam is, thus, equated with Western science as a modern form of revelation. The progressive position is inhabited by the inheritor of the respective *telos*. Consequently, this positioning is of crucial importance for the interpretation of historical events. As per White, they do not inherently possess any self-evident meaning, but receive their meaning only through their positions within the tripartite structure of historical stories, with their relation to the end of the story serving as the point of reference which structures the whole story. Thus, the golden age of Islam receives two different interpretations. While this golden age signifies Islamic progress when it is equated with the *telos* of the first story, when placed at the beginning of the second, it becomes the starting point for the decay of Muslim society. Hali now depicts the Muslim protagonists as being detached from *telos*, and henceforth measured on a basis other than themselves.

The second story still acknowledges the progressive character of a golden age, albeit one born in classical Greece. However, its regulations, which were perceived in the first story in comparison to the preceding period as being progressive, are perceived negatively – as exhibiting a fixation of temporary regulations and a loss of the inherent, eternal principles. This shift in the teleological reference point, again, implies the comparison of an external conception of progress with a self-referential insufficiency. That said, progress is not a universal and self-evident concept, but necessarily requires a particular, an exemplary point of departure, to be abstracted into an allegedly universal concept. Consequently, the particular *telos* applied as a point of reference is raised to a perfect manifestation of the concept, a *genus*-category, as the concept is perceived as preceding the particular. As Michael Bergunder writes:

> [T]he point of comparison usually has a privileged relationship to one of the two or more elements that are to be compared, and the other is predicated on that relationship. […] if the general term A', which serves as the point of comparison, is only an abstraction of element A, then A is the prototype for A'. Prior to the comparison, B (or C, D, etc.) must be declared similar to A via A' in order to make the comparison possible.[59]

59 Michael Bergunder "Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity: A Postcolonial Perspective on Comparative Religion," in *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Andreas Nehring

This is a process of abstraction in disguise, as – in my discussion of White's approach above – the *genus*-category pretends to be prior to the particulars. In point of fact, a singular particular is applied as archetype for the whole *genus*-category. Only in this way does the particular acquire the position of *genus*. This culminates in a self-referential relation of one particular with the abstract concept, whereas other elements of comparison inherently possess a lack of distinctness with regard to the referential particular and, thus, to the *genus*, as well. The self-referential relation of the exemplary particular with the abstract concept provides the former's compliance of all specificities of the *genus*. The other particulars inevitably lack this self-referential relation and, hence, the compliance of all specificities of the concept: they are measured instead against the exemplary particular, the representor of the *genus*.

At this stage of discussion, it is crucial to take Hali's distinction between Muslims and Islam into account, for this will explain the relation of the two stories in further detail. As discussed above, he emphasises a separation of historical developments and an essence of Islam. While the Muslims of the early period of Islam acted entirely in accordance with this essence, later Muslims became incapable of discerning this essence and did not recognise the deeper meaning of religious practices. They rather insisted on an empty shell, according to Hali, and became detached from the essence of Islam. These later Muslims of the second story deemed the practices of the early period of Islam to be divinely inspired, eternal and immutable universals, thus losing touch with the overarching principles. He blames the Ulama for illegitimately leading the people astray from these simple principles:

> It is a shame that our Ulama have discussed the outward commands in such depth and accuracy that the subject of sharia has changed entirely […].[60]

Hali misses the importance of faith (*īmān*) in those discussions, however, and bemoans the fact that the actual purpose of Islam has been forgotten behind this overemphasis of outward practices, namely "the refinement of morals and the perfecting of the soul" (*aḫlāq kī tahẕīb aur nafs-i insānī kī takmīl*).[61] This note, as has been discussed, has to be read as an attempt to construct an essence of Islamic principles which is distinct from historical developments and fixations. In Hali's

(London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 37.

60 Hali: *Kulliyāt-i naṯr*, 20.

61 Ibid., 3, 20.

view, this essence has been adopted by Europe, whereas Muslims fell prey to bigotry and conservatism, rejecting any adaptations and insisting on the unmodified preservation of early practices, thus abandoning the deeper principles of Islam.[62] Consequently, by equating the *teloi* of the first and the second story, Hali identifies both as being the essence of Islam. In the second story, however, Muslims have gone astray of this *telos* while the Europeans adopted it, hence having progressed. This allows Hali, on the one hand, to present the Europeans' dependence on Islam as well as, on the other hand, the Muslims' ability to progress again if the essence of Islam is discerned and separated from contemporaneous bigotry:

> Those covenants of the Holy Law which we have broken have all been firmly upheld by the people of the West.[63]

If, however, Hali equates the *teloi* and assumes them to be essentially the same – namely, the essential principles of Islam – the question of their relationship, or perhaps interdependence, arises. Is the *telos* of the second story a mere adoption of essential Islam?

In point of fact, Hali's description of the "original" Islam rather appears as a retroactive relocation of the *telos* of Europe to the early period of Islam: a closer examination of the proposed achievements and aspects of progress which Muslims attained in comparison to the pre-Islamic period reveals striking resemblances to the points of critique put forward by European critics. Although Hali's *Musaddas* does not refer to any particular critic, the preceding chapter on Muir's critique of Islam showed several crucial points which are repeated here in a very reminiscent way. The most prominent aspect in this respect is, of course, the previously discussed accusation of the immutability of Islam, which Hali rejects in his reference to the simplicity of Islam, denouncing the Ulama's overemphasis on outward practices and regulations. Hali and likewise Chiragh Ali instead point out that the actual purpose of religion as being faith and morality.[64] This permits them to concurrently reject the second big critique of the entanglement of religion and social affairs as a requirement of historical circumstances, as they do not pertain to the essence of Islam.[65] The third crucial point of critique refers to the rights of women,

62 Ibid., 7.

63 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 163.

64 Chiragh Ali refers in his response to Malcolm McColl's article, "Are Reforms Possible under Mussulman Rule?", as has been discussed before.

65 Shackle: *Hali's Musaddas*, 145. This argument has been observed in the same vein in Khan's *Essays*. Khan stresses the necessity to distinguish between religion and a *majmūʿah-i aḥkām* (a catalogue of commands) and calls attention to the time-bound character of the latter. Those are human interpretations which superpose the eternal principles

which is a ubiquitous concern of 19th century South Asia.[66] Hali tackles this charge with help from the progressive depiction of Islam in the first story, which sets it in comparison to the pre-Islamic period in order to point out a progressive improvement in women's rights. Thus, in abandoning modern Europe as point of reference, the same circumstances which are criticised by European critics are presented in this transformed context as being rather progressive. Hali, however, is cautious in his historicisation of those circumstances, restricting them to their respective contexts. He emphasises only the progressive spirit of Islam without aiming to universalise its historical circumstances: the regulations of the early period of Islam must not be perceived of as immutable. Rather, the intentions of the early Muslims must be comprehended and reapplied.

But even within this recontextualising historicisation, by relating women's situation in Islam only in reference to the preceding circumstances, for example, Hali cannot evade the ubiquitous *telos* of modern Europe. Thus, even the first story is interpreted with reference to this *telos*. For how is progress defined? Progress remains inseparably tied to the *telos* of the second story, which is reimagined and recognised in the "original" Islam. Hali's ordering of history is consequently no revivification of an origin, but rather has to be understood as a reconstruction originating in the *telos* of Europe. European critique thus forms the perception of "original" Islam.

2. Abolishing the *telos*

This analysis of Hali's Musaddas can therefore be said to reveal that this abstract essence of Islam is rather a retroactive projection of the *telos* of Europe – despite the author's reference to an "original" Islam which has to be recovered and revived with respect to its eternal principles. This obvious linking and adaption of the dominant discourse has been opposed by the second group of authors, as shall be discussed in the following paragraphs. Their most prominent representative among them is perhaps Ameer Ali, whose texts whose texts I will primarily examine. This analysis will be complemented by texts of Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh (1842-1908)

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and implications of the abstract essence of Islam. Khan developed this approach in response to Muir's critique of an ossified Islam, assuming an incapability to reform. Cf. Chapter 3.

66 Cf. Pernau: *Ashraf into Middle Classes*, 124-26. This aspect has been called upon by Khan in his *Essays*, too. In response to Muir's "evils" of Islam, Khan stresses the improvement of the situation of women in Islam. Cf. chapter 3.

and Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953), who are generally in conformity with Ameer Ali's ideas.

Ameer Ali (d. 1928) was born in 1846 in Chinsura, Bengal, in a twelver-Shia family. His father acknowledged the necessity of a European education, so all of his sons received a Western education. Nevertheless, his father also insisted on a Muslim education for his sons. Thus, a Maulwi was employed to teach the children in Urdu and Persian in the evenings after school.[67] Ameer Ali received his college education at Hooghly Collegiate School. During this time, Maulwi Karamat Ali Jaunpuri became a significant influence on Ameer Ali. Karamat Ali had composed the *Māḫaẕ-i ʿulūm*, which Ameer Ali together with Ubaidullah later translated as *Makhaz-i Uloom*, or *A Treatise on the Origin of the Sciences* (translation published in 1867, original unknown). The author therein discusses "the transmission of knowledge between Greek, Islamic and European societies" and outlines the theory that all sciences originate from Arab peoples.[68] Science seems to be perceived here in a Neo-Platonic vein which is reminiscent of natural religion, which presupposes an emanation from a First Being structuring the world in natural laws.[69]

From 1869-73, Ameer Ali resided in London for his studies. During this time, he also published the first edition of his most influential book, *The Spirit of Islam*, initially entitled *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*. In 1873, he started a career as an advocate when he was employed in the High Court of Calcutta. In 1890, he eventually became a judge of the Bengal High Court. Aside from this, Ameer Ali was politically active and in 1877 he founded the National Muhammadan Association.[70] Though he resided mostly in London during his retirement, Ameer Ali actively engaged himself in supporting Islamic causes and the advancement of South Asian Muslims. In 1906, he co-founded the Muslim League and became president of its London branch. Subsequently, he also supported the Khilafat Movement and began to renounce his support for the British government in India. However, his major achievements were not made through his political engagement, but rather through his publications on the history of Is-

67 Martin Forward: *The Failure of Islamic Modernism? Syed Ameer Ali's interpretation of Islam* (New York: Lang, 1999), 20.

68 Avril A. Powell: "Ali, Syed Ameer." http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Ali,_Syed_Ameer.

69 "[S]cience and learning were first introduced into Greece through the instrumentality of the Syrians, the Phoenicians and the Egyptians. All these people are extinct Arabs, whose traces and detailed accounts do not exist," (Syed Keramut Ali: *Makhaz-i Uloom: or A Treatise on the Origin of the Sciences* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1867), 46); "As almost all things in nature are regulated by general laws, therefore there must be a Perfect Wisdom governing the same &c." (Syed Keramut Ali: *Makhaz-i Uloom*, 5).

70 Forward: *The Failure of Islamic Modernism*, 23-24.

lam and his long-term stance on the need for a reinterpretation of Islam. He furthermore rejected several "misconceptions" of Islam and prejudices levied by European critics.[71]

2.1 Ameer Ali

In terms of language, the second group of authors have written their works entirely in English. Most of the works of Hali, Chiragh Ali and Ahmad Khan are written in Urdu.[72] This shift to English by the second group addressed a different and rather smaller audience of Europeans and Western educated Muslims, the latter constituting a minority within the Muslim community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Perhaps the authors of this group deliberately chose English as their medium in order to avoid the critique of the traditional Ulama, which Ahmad Khan and others in the Aligarh movement had to face. English and Western education, which the Aligarh movement advocated, was still a topic provoking fierce reactions on behalf of several Ulama at this time: acquaintance with English was thus restricted and only a small audience could read books written in English. Hence, English could serve as a medium allowing authors to express quite radical thoughts without having to fear heavy reactions, given that their audience was like-minded. This was presumably the case, however, as those able to comprehend their works had likely received an education that laid the foundation for critical interpretations of traditional Islam as advocated by the Ulama.[73]

Ameer Ali's perhaps most crucial effort was his disregard of Europe's claim of a universal standard of progress and the implicit compulsion to measure Islam against these European societal standards. Like the authors of the first group, he too assumes it is necessary to historicise Islam and to measure it within its context of origination. In his *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (1873), Ali states:

71 Powell: "Ali, Syed Ameer."

72 Only some exceptions such as Chiragh Ali's *The Proposed Political, Legal, and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States* and Ahmad Khan's *Tabyīn al-kalām fī tafsīr at-Tūra va al-Injīl ʿalā millat al-Islām* or *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible* and *A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* were written in or translated into English.

73 Forward: *The Failure of Islamic Modernism*, 116.

> No religion of the world, prior to Islâm had consecrated charity, the support of the widow, the orphan, and the helpless poor—by enrolling its principles among the positive enactments of the system.[74]

This quote clearly resembles the argument of the first group: Islam has to be measured by its achievements with respect to the preceding conditions. In Ali's argument that Islam be taken as the reference point of *telos* in comparison with pre-Islamic Arabia, Islam proves to be a progressive force which brought unprecedented improvements. This argument is also repeated by other authors of the second group and shall not be discussed here further, as its structure has been analysed in detail above with respect to Hali's *Musaddas*.[75]

Furthermore, this second group of authors also seeks to ensure the flexibility and adaptability of Islam. They emphasise the temporal and contextual character of the regulations of early Islam and emphasises the necessity of their adaption to contemporary circumstances. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, who – according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith – is first and foremost remembered for his translation of German orientalists in English, states in his lengthy essay, "Thoughts on the Present Situation:"[76]

> Islam, stripped of its theology, is a perfectly simple religion. Its cardinal principle is belief in one God and belief in Mohamed as his apostle. The rest is mere accretion, superfluity. The Qur'an, rightly understood and interpreted, is a spiritual guide, containing counsels and putting forward ideals to be followed by the faithful, rather than a *corpus juris civilis* to be accepted for all time. It was never the intention of the Prophet – and no enlightened Muslim believes that it ever was – to lay down immutable rules, or to set up a system of law which was to be binding upon humanity apart from considerations of time and place and the growing necessities arising from changed conditions.[77]

Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953) argues in a similar vein. He was born in Bombay, a barrister in British India and the author of several books on Islam. He is most prominently known for his translation of the Quran into English. In his article, "Moral Education: Aims and Methods" (1930), he rejects any overarching code of

74 Sayyid Ameer Ali: *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (London, Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1873), 182.

75 Cf. Abdullah Yusuf Ali: *Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Articles and Reviews* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2009), 133; Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh: *The Islam of Mohamed* (s.l.: s.n., 1909), 1.

76 Wilfred Cantwell Smith: *Modern Islām in India: A Social Analysis* (Lahore: Ripon Print. Press, 1947), 60.

77 Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh: *Essays Indian and Islamic* (London: Probsthain, 1912), 284.

morality: "There is no such thing as a universally accepted moral code, good at all times and among all nations or sets of people."[78] For the author, early-period Islam likewise cannot make a claim for such universality. Rather, the underlying principles of those regulations must be comprehended and, subsequently, translated according to the respective context:

> Through all the phases of his life, he [i.e. Muhammad] showed an example of living faith, unflinching courage, and uniform gentleness and kindness. […] But how do we translate all these precious gifts into our everyday lives? Unless we do so, they are without meaning as far as we are concerned.[79]

Thus, Khuda Baksh as well as Yusuf Ali, much like Hali and other members of his group, refer to the essential principles of Islam which must not be wrongly equated with the juridical regulations of the Islam from the early period.

While this thought process conforms to ideas presented in the previous chapter, Ameer Ali introduces an even more radical interpretation as follows:

> There is no doubt that in the suras of the intermediate period, before the mind of the Teacher [i.e. Muhammad] had attained the full development of religious consciousness, and when it was necessary to formulate in language intelligible to the common folk of the desert, the realistic descriptions of heaven and hell, borrowed from the floating fancies of Zoroastrian, Sabaean, and the Talmudical Jew, attract the attention as a side picture, and then comes the real essence - the adoration of God in humility and love. The *hooris* are creatures of Zoroastrian origin, so is paradise, whilst hell in the severity of its punishment is Talmudic.[80]

This quote reveals two crucial aspects of Ameer Ali's reformist ideas, which set his argument apart from those previously discussed. First, unlike all of the authors discussed above, Ameer Ali assigns a divine character to early Islam's regulations rather than placing them within a confined historical context referring only to an overarching, abstract essence. Instead, Ameer Ali extends the argument of historicisation even further: he describes certain concepts in the Quran as being inherited from other religions. According to Ameer Ali, Muhammad referred thusly to different traditions, which were popular in the Prophet's time in Arabia and could be referenced in order to communicate Islam's ideas. Thus, he terms Muhammad's

78 Ali: *Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Articles and Reviews*, 322.

79 Abdullah Yusuf Ali: *Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Lectures, Speeches and Addresses* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2009), 113.

80 Sayyid Ameer Ali: *The Spirit of Islam: A history of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam with a Life of the Prophet* (London: Methuen, 1965), 197.

an "eclectic faith."[81] This foreshadows the second and even more striking aspect of this quote: Ameer Ali implies a spiritual development of Muhammad, during which Muhammad also draws on the concepts of other religions. This, consequently, he illustrates a personal involvement of Muhammad in the composition of the Quran:

> A careful study of the Koran makes it evident that the mind of Mohammed went through the same process of development which marked the religious consciousness of Jesus. […] The various chapters of the Koran which contain the ornate descriptions of paradise […] were delivered wholly or in part at Mecca. Probably in the infancy of his religious consciousness, Mohammed himself believed in some or other of the traditions which floated around him. But with a wider awakening of the soul, a deeper communion with the Creator of the Universe, thoughts, which bore a material aspect at first became spiritualised. […] Hence, in the later *suras* we observe a merging of the material in the spiritual, of the body in the soul.[82]

Here, Ameer Ali makes clear that Muhammad's spiritual development is not merely a passive process: instead he argues that a "careful study of the Koran" will show that this development is also reflected in the spiritual depth of the message. This assertion differs tremendously from the traditional concept of the revelation and composition of the Quran. While the classical understanding of revelation is perceived as being the passive reception of a message transmitted by God, in Ameer Ali's conception, God does not appear as an active participant in this process.[83] Rather, Muhammad is described as the active composer of the Quran.[84] Thus, the depth of the message increases according to Muhammad's development of religious consciousness. Ali comprehends this consciousness as the "awakening of the soul, a deeper communion with the Creator of the Universe."[85] He does not perceive God as having any active part in the composition of the Quran. In Ameer Ali's view, then, the Quran is rather a human product of an outstanding man, distinguished through his conscious connection of God.

Accordingly, Ameer Ali rejects, again in concordance with Khuda Bakhsh and Yusuf Ali, a universality in the interpretation the early period of Islam. He instead

81 Ibid., 192.

82 Ibid., 200f.

83 *EI*: "waḥy."

84 Ameer Ali's work does not explicitly develop a concept of revelation, but it refers to ideas similar to those we have seen already in Khan, namely that the uncreated message takes a particular manifestation in the heart of Muhammad. Thus, God remains the originator of the message. Yet, only according to Muhammad's personal comprehension and spiritual development does this message take shape in a human language, further restricting the Divine message to the limits of human language. Cf. Chapter 3.

85 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 200.

identifies two classes of prohibition pronounced by Muhammad: first, quantitative prohibitions, as for example the "prohibition against excess in eating and drinking and others of the like […] were called forth in part by the peculiar semi-barbarous epicureanism which was coming into fashion among the Arabs from their intercourse with the demoralised Syrians and Persians."[86] Such are conceived of as contextually related and, thus, not of eternal character. On the other hand, qualitative prohibitions as the "absolute prohibition of swine's flesh […] arose, as is evident, from hygienic reasons and this prohibition must remain unchanged as long as the nature of the animal and the diseases engendered by the eating of the flesh remain present."[87] Thus, Ameer Ali's argument is very much reminiscent of the previously discussed authors: the contextualisation and historicisation of certain regulations of early Islam, which had been perceived as immutable and eternal, are criticised as being untimely for the present circumstances. Hence, the effort to essentialise Islam and reduce it to mere principles is a common feature in this discourse on the history of Islam. While Yusuf Ali denies the universality of moral codes so that they must always be contextualised in their application, Khuda Bakhsh rather repeats the first group's assertion in acknowledging Muhammad merely as a spiritual leader. The regulatory principles are not perceived of as an essential part of Islam, thus reproducing the distinction of two spheres which are not to be equated, as thoroughly discussed above.[88]

Ameer Ali's approach transcends this discourse of the essentialisation of Islam through history insofar as he not only historicises and contextualises the message of the Quran, but he also deprives the Quran of its divine character. Instead of God, Muhammad is perceived as its composer. This permits Ameer Ali to freely contextualise the message of the Quran not only with respect to the capability of the audience, to which the message had to be adjusted in order to be comprehensible, but but equally with respect to Muhammad's spiritual development. Revelation comes to be conceived of as a rather active compositional process which is dependent on the religious consciousness of the composer while God stands in the background. For Ali, the message of the Quran is thus less divine than human. This radical idea violates the traditional perception of the Quran as being literally revealed by God: "The orthodox view of the dramatic form of the Ḳurʾān is that God is the speaker throughout, Muḥammad is the recipient, and Gabriel is the intermediary agent of revelation […]."[89] However, while Ahmad Khan had to face

86 Ibid., 187.

87 Ibid.

88 Cf. above & Ali: *Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Articles and Reviews*, 322-323; Khuda Bukhsh: *Essays Indian and Islamic*, 284.

89 *EI*: "Ḳurʾān".

heavy criticism from the Ulama for ideas violating traditional concepts of Islam, comparable reactions cannot be found against Ameer Ali, which is perhaps linked with his choice of language. Thus, English allowed him to communicate quite radical ideas more freely since his audience was confined to a limited readership that was rather sympathetic to reformist thoughts. That said, critical reactions were not lacking, but came rather from Europeans – mostly criticising Ameer Ali's conception of Islam as unrealistic.[90]

We have seen a humanisation in Ameer Ali's interpretation of the concept of revelation, which dissociates it to a great extent from a transcendent influence that is external to the human realm. Ali does not confine human influence merely to the composition of the Quran, however, emphasising it in his conception of Islam more broadly. He acknowledges a human influence in the successive development of Islam: his history of Islam is not restricted to the structure of the two stories of Hali's *Musaddas*, with one glorifying a golden age of "original" Islam and the second focused on present decline. In all of his monographs, Ameer Ali rather presents the history of Islam within one continuous story. He is, thus, the first – at least in the sphere of the Aligarh movement – to present a pluralisation of Islam which recognises different tendencies. In his *Spirit of Islam*, identifying various spirits of Islam related to different factions. Some are also described under the heading of "The Political Divisions and Schisms of Islam," which refers primarily to the schism between Sunni and Shia and its various sub-branches. The following three chapters of his book, however, concern the literary and scientific scientific issues, covering the rationalistic-philosophical as well as the idealistic-mystical spirits of Islam. This structure is more or less repeated throughout Ali's historical monographs.[91]

Focusing specifically on *The Spirit of Islam*, however, Ameer Ali's findings in the chapters entitled "The Literary and Scientific Spirit of Islam" and "The Rationalistic and Philosophical Spirit of Islam" can be very concisely summarised as a pronounced endorsement of scientific investigation and rational reasoning. In the first chapter, Ameer Ali highlights this endorsement with reference to several traditions of Muhammad and other influential figures of the early period of Islam:

> We have already referred to the Arabian Prophet's devotion to knowledge and science as distinguishing him from all other Teachers, and bringing him into the closest affinity with the modern world of thought. […] He preached of the value of knowledge: 'Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord

90 Forward: *The Failure of Islamic Modernism*, 117-122.

91 While his *A Short History of the Saracens* gives a more detailed account of the successive caliphs without discussing religious tendencies in depth, the concise book *Islam* resembles the structure of *The Spirit of Islam* in a very abridged way.

> performs an act of piety; who dispenses instructions in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its possessors to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not […].'[92]

These introductory lines of the chapter situate Muhammad within a universalised conception of science. Muhammad is described as an advocate of knowledge, proven on the basis of the following *ḥadīṯ*. His examples do refer directly to science, however, but only to knowledge, which Ameer Ali apparently equates with science in order to verify his hypothesis. The quoted *ḥadīṯ*, furthermore, presents the acquisition of knowledge not as a merely mundane task, but describes it as having a moral aspect enabling one to distinguish between good and bad. He thus puts the acquisition of knowledge in a broader setting that reaches into the religious sphere, describing the transmission of knowledge as religious service. Science seems to be proposed as a type of knowledge which is likewise being related to divine knowledge. This assertion is further confirmed by Ali's later identification of God as the "Fashioner of the Universe" and the law of nature governing the same.[93]

In the following, Ameer Ali enlists several scientific achievements of Muslims in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, architecture, etc. in order to verify the "scientific spirit" of Islam. He identifies Islam as a crucial impetus with respect to science in disseminating rationalism:

> The impetus which Islâm gave to the intellectual development of mankind is evidenced by the fact that the Arabs were joined in the race for progress by members of nationalities which had hitherto lain absolutely dormant. Islâm quickened the pulse of humanity and awakened new life in communities which were either dead or dying [...]. 94

Ameer Ali thus emphasises the "intellectual liberty" proposed by Islam. He further recognises a particular method of reasoning inherent in Islam, which endorses scientific investigation and rationalism. In fact, this reasoning was essentially the same as that of modern science:

92 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 360.

93 Ibid., 405f. This argument of a natural religion is very common in the Aligarh movement. The universe, perceived as Work of God, is viewed as an obvious indication and evidence of His existence. The scrutiny of nature and its laws is, thus, argued to be likewise of religious value. Cf. Chapter 5.

94 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 397.

> A body of thinkers sprang up, who received the generic name of *Hukamâ* (pl. of *hakîm*, a scientist or philosopher), whose method of reasoning was analogous to that of modern science.[95]

This "intellectual liberty" was upheld as long as the essence of Islam remained unadulterated:

> Islâm inaugurated the reign of intellectual liberty. It has been truly remarked, that so long as Islâm retained its pristine character, it proved itself the warm protector and promoter of knowledge and civilisation, – the zealous ally of intellectual freedom. The moment extraneous elements attached themselves to it, it lagged behind the race of progress.[96]

Ameer Ali recognises the adulteration of the essence of Islam with alien elements as one crucial origin of the loss of freethinking in Islam and, subsequently, its decline. The most prominent reflection of this loss can perhaps be found in *taqlīd*, which Ameer Ali (like virtually all Muslim reformists in South Asia since at least Shah Waliullah (1703-62)) takes as an object of criticism. *Taqlīd* refers to the four juridical schools (*maẕhab*, Pl. *maẕāhib*) of Sunni Islam and the preservation of the teachings of their founders.[97] Reformists since Shah Waliullah criticised the unquestioned acceptance of their authority and thus a standstill in juridical matters. Like all of the authors discussed above who adhered to the reformist tradition, Ameer Ali demands a continuous reinterpretation of the sources (*ijtihād*) according to present circumstances, and apart from the fossilised *maẕāhib*. The idea of *ijtihād* can be perceived as quite popular and to a certain extent accepted in 19th century South Asia, and appears also in the texts of Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nomani, Hali, etc.

Apart from this argument, Ameer Ali furthermore blames two tendencies of Islam in particular for the decline of Islam in his time. In the third chapter on the spirit(s)[98] of Islam, after having presented the scientific, rationalistic, and philosophical spirits of Islam, he proceeds by describing the idealistic and mystical spirit:

95 Ibid., 424.
96 Ibid., 399.
97 Ibid., 185.
98 Ameer Ali does not elucidate whether he assumes the spirit of Islam to be a singular entity or whether Islam unites several spirits. The title of his book, *The Spirit of Islam*, prompts the assertion of a singular spirit whereas the table of contents presents different spirits of Islam.

> But Sûfism in the Moslem world, like its counterpart in Christendom, has, in its practical effect, been productive of many mischievous results. In perfectly well-attuned minds mysticism takes the form of a noble type of idealistic philosophy; but the generality of mankind are more likely to unhinge their brains by busying themselves with the mysteries of the Divine Essence and our relations thereto.[99]

Mysticism, which is not perceived of as being appropriate for the majority, is blamed as a philosophy that paralyses the rational faculties of the greater part of men. Ameer Ali does not confine his critique to Sufism, however. In likewise blaming Ashari theology (*aš'arīyah*), he criticises the two most prominent schools of contemporaneous Islam:

> The responsibility for the present decadence of the Moslem nations must be shared by the formalism of the Asha'ri and the quietism of the Sûfi. Mystical teachings like the following:
>
> The man who looks on the beggar's bowl as a kingly crown
> And the present world a fleeting bubble,
> He alone traverseth the ocean of Truth
> Who looks upon life as a fairy tale.
>
> can have but one result – intellectual paralysis.[100]

Asharism is the most prominent theological school of Islam, more or less synonymous with orthodoxy. Asharism and likewise Mysticism are, thus, rejected as tendencies which paralysed Muslims' intellectual faculties.[101] Both lead Muslims astray of Islam's essentially progressive and rational spirit, as he has described in the two preceding chapters.

Asharism, established in the eleventh century, was a compromise between the positions of the Qadariyya (*qadarīya*) and the Jabiriyya (*jabrīya*). Qadariyya (*qadarīya*) was to a certain extent recognised as the Mutazila (*mu'tazila*). It emphasised man's freewill (*qadar*), while Jabiriyya (*jabrīya*) stood in conflict with man's freewill, insisting on God's omnipotence. According to the Jabiriyya, God's omniscience implies predetermination. Ashari theology aimed for a reconciling of these conflicting positions in presenting a *via media*: God is conceived of as hold-

99 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 477.

100 Ibid., 472.

101 Ameer Ali does not condemn Mysticism in general. But he criticises it as inappropriate for the greater majority. In particular, the "vulgar" mysticism is criticised, cf. Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 477.

ing a conveying position in human action. Only through His intervention and mediation can man act.[102] Ameer Ali argues that Asharism adopted the Mutazila's rational reasoning, however, in a rather restricted manner:

> In order to meet the Mu'tazilas on their own ground, Abu'l Hasan invented a rival *science of reason* – the real scholastic theology of the Moslems, which, though supposed to be an offshoot of the *'Ilm-ul-kalâm* founded by the Mu'tazilas, is in many essential features different from it.[103]

Ali presents Mutazili rationalism as the inherent spirit of Islam, which Muslims had abandoned for the sake of Asharism and Mysticism, culminating in an intellectual paralysis, fossilised regulations in *taqlīd*, and general decline.

The historical pluralisation of Islam was, thus, merely aimed at discrediting and rejecting certain branches of Islam which were in conflict with Islam's "original" essence or spirit. Ameer Ali's pluralisation of Islam does not seek to present a differentiated picture of Islam with schools of equal authority. He instead reproduces a line of argument referring to an original Islam and its eternal essence. Ali's conception of pluralisation, then, amounts to a removal of the schools of thought conflicting with this essence. In a short discussion of Ernest Renan's (1823-92) lecture, *L'Islamisme et la science*[104] (1883), Ameer Ali complains about Renan's practice of comparing "the lowest form of Islâm with the highest form of Christianity."[105] Hence, Ameer Ali's emphasis on the plurality of branches in Islam appears to serve merely to discredit certain branches as "debased form[s] of Islâm," deviating from the rationalistic essence of Islam.[106] But although he does not recognise them as equally authentic forms of Islam, he assumes an underlying "origin" as the reference point for measurement, and thus does not completely exclude them from the realm of Islam.

Ameer Ali describes rationalism and the inclination toward scientific investigation as the crucial elements of the highest form of Islam. But how are they seen

102 *EI*: "Ash῾ariyya"; "Ḳadariyya"; "Mu῾tazila."

103 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 447.

104 Ernest Renan was an influential historian, in Europe mostly known for his *Vie de Jésus*. In the Islamic world, his *Averröes et l'Averroïsme* was widely received. This text was often referred to by Muslim reformists in order to counter European criticism regarding the irrationality of Islam. Interestingly, Renan himself was a strong advocate of this thesis, and in particular in his above mentioned *L'Islamisme et la science*, which provoked several reactions by Muslim authors, cf. Birgit Schäbler: *Moderne Muslime: Ernest Renan und die Geschichte der ersten Islamdebatte 1883* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016); Keddie: *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*; cf. also Chapter 6 for a discussion of Shibli Nomani's engagement in Renan's thought.

105 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 484.

106 Ibid.

in relation to Europe? In Hali, we observed a reference to Muslims' past achievements in the sciences. While Muslims subsequently abandoned the *sharia* and the progressive principles of Islam, the *sharia*, i.e. the progressive principles inherent in Islam, was adopted by Europeans leading them toward progress. While progress becomes closely linked to Europe by the first group of authors, Ameer Ali vigorously denies this connection. He, instead, vehemently rejects this *telic* connection along with assertions of European progress. Rather, European progress is depicted as fundamentally dependent on Islam:

> The first outburst of Rationalism in the West, occurred in the province most amenable to the power of Moslem civilisation. Ecclesiasticism crushed this fair flower with fire and with sword, and threw back the progress of the world for centuries. But the principles of the Liberty of Thought, so strongly impressed on Islam, had communicated their vitality to Christian Europe.[107]

Ameer Ali thus conceives of progress as a concept disseminated by Islam. He asserts that the progress of Muslims is dependent upon their dissociation from European influence, while Hali—by contrast—ascribed a divine-like character to Europe and its progress. Ameer Ali, instead, associates progress directly with Islam, discrediting European progress as a mere imitation:

> So the two failures of the Moslems, one before Constantinople, and the other in France, retarded the progress of the world for ages. Had the Arabs been less remiss at Tours, had they succeeded in driving before them the barbarian hosts of a barbarian chief, whom the ecclesiastics themselves afterwards condemned to everlasting perdition, the history of the darkest period in the annals of the world would never have been written. The Renaissance, Civilisation, the growth of intellectual liberty would have been accelerated by seven hundred years.[108]

Hence, any aspect of intellectual liberty having appeared in Europe can traced back to Islam. In fact, according to Ameer Ali, Islam could have prevented several misfortunes in European history if its conquests had been successful.

Thus, Ameer Ali denies Europe its role as *telos*. Rather, Islam in its original, rationalistic form takes up this role, and Europe is described as merely continuing the Islamic legacy. Consequently, Islam functions as the teleological point of reference and *genus*-category of comparison.

This line of argument does not stop with progress, but is applied to the concept of religion, as well. Ameer Ali implicitly criticises the European concept of religion with reference to Christianity as unfinished and deficient. In Ameer Ali's

107 Ibid., 339.
108 Ibid., 343.

views, the early death of Jesus leaves Christianity incomplete, and thus merely an abstract faith:

> The introduction of Christianity made little or no change in the views entertained by its professors concerning international obligations. War was as inhuman, and as exterminating as before; people were led into slavery without compunction on the part of the captors; treaties were made and broken just as suited the purpose of some designing chieftain. Christianity did not profess to deal with international morality, and so left its followers groping in the dark. Modern thinkers, instead of admitting this to be a real deficiency in the Christian system, – natural to the unfinished state in which it was left, – have tried to justify it.[109]

Here, Ameer Ali vigorously rejects the continuously repeated critique of Islam which intermingles religion with politics or social affairs. This European concept of religion is discredited as being founded on Christianity, a deficient and incomplete religion. This view clearly rejects Christianity's and Europe's authority to establish the *genus*-category of religion. Rather, the European critique is reversed and turned positively toward Islam. Thus, Ameer Ali aims not to measure Islam against an alien *genus*, but self-referentially with Islam as a *species* coinciding with its *genus*. Islam once again functions simultaneously as the teleological point of reference as well as the particular to be measured against it.

In a similar vein, Yusuf Ali also criticises the abstract character of the Christian concept of religion:

> People are often found saying that Islam has been too much mixed up with politics, is too much concerned with wars and invasions, and that Islam makes no difference between secular and religious matters. What appears at first sight to be a charge and a taunt is that to us our God is not only the God of heaven but also the God of this earth. Our book tells us this in express terms, and it further teaches that our religion is not for one day in the week, be it Sunday, Saturday or Friday, but that it goes with us through every day of the week and every hour of the day.[110]

Religion is essentially conceived of as a guide for one's life. In accordance with this view, Ameer Ali argues that a religion must contain unequivocal regulations, as a merely inward faith does not appeal to the majority of men. He writes:

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109 Ibid., 203.

110 Ali: *Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Lectures, Speeches and Addresses*, 136. Interestingly, M. A. Sherif interprets Yusuf Ali's texts as "distancing Islam from the political realm" and "limiting religion to the spiritual 'inner'." However, the above given quote vehemently contradicts this assertion, cf. M. A. Sherif: *Searching for Solace* (New Delhi: Adam, 2004), 182-183.

> Religion ought to mean the rule of life; its chief object ought to be the elevation of Humanity towards that perfection which is the end of our existence. The religion, therefore, which places on a systematic basis the fundamental principles of morality, regulating social obligations, and human duties, which brings us nearer and nearer by its compatibility with the highest development of intellect, to the All-Perfect – that religion, we say, has the greatest claim to our consideration and respect. It is the distinctive characteristic of Islam that it combines within itself the grandest and the most prominent features in all ethnic and catholic religions, compatible with the Reason and moral Intuition of man. It is not merely a system of positive moral rules, based on a true conception of Human Progress, but it is also "the establishment of certain principles [...]."[111]

In this quote, it becomes obvious that Ameer Ali construes a concept of religion which, in the end, is found to be implemented entirely within Islam. This apparently top-down argument is, in fact, a bottom-up process abstracting the *species* Islam to the presumably prior *genus*. Thus, the comparison of Islam and Christianity, which has been presented by European critics from the perspective of Christianity as the reference point, is reversed in this argument. Ameer Ali's comparison of Islam to itself as a teleological reference point also allows for the reversal of the European critique, wherein Christianity is now depicted as deficient.

But does this reversed critique permit Muslim authors to abandon the *telos* of Europe? Khuda Bakhsh reproduces the first group's line of argument in distinguishing an essential, religious sphere in Islam which is separate of a sphere of social affairs and, thus, takes up an intermediate position. While his ideas are more in conformity with the first group, he can be counted within the second group for his preference for writing in English. Yet, Ameer Ali and, to some extent, Yusuf Ali apply a distinct position and reject Europe's claim for a universal *telos*. Because they positively reverse European critique, and criticise Christianity on the basis of this reversed critique, they therefore reject the necessity of distinguishing between two spheres of the religious and secular, as can be found in the views of the first group and Khuda Bakhsh. For the second group, however, religion as mere faith without effect on one's life is opposed. Instead, Ameer Ali argues that the very purpose of religion must be the moral elevation of man. This requires several regulations, and the imposition of certain duties and restrictions, as the general human mind is incapable of comprehending abstract claims, instead demanding clear guidance.[112] But still, even Ameer Ali's thought cannot be reduced to a mere distinction from Europe as *telos*. He, too, recognises the dominant discourse of

111 Ali: *The Spirit of Islam*, 184f.
112 Ibid., 3f.

science and aims to establish a link of Islam with science: he emphasises the scientific spirit of Islam endorsing the quest for knowledge as well as the essentially rationalistic character of Islam in exhibiting the Mutazili tendency as the "original" form of Islam. This is a rather additive rapprochement in comparison to the negatively based definition of the concept of religion.

However, this reversal still links their counter-concept of religion to Europe: although Europe is not acknowledged as *telos*, it is referred to the negative image of Islam. European critique is not simply disclaimed, but still serves as a foundation for defining Islam – and the concept of religion in general – in utter distinction to Europe. The definition of Islam remains in dependence of Europe, yet with Europe being the anti-*telos*.

While the first group of authors aimed to re-read "original" Islam with the aim of rejecting European critique and presenting an origin fully in conformity with the demands of their own religion, albeit ultimately measured against European Christianity as a point of reference, Ameer Ali and Yusuf Ali entirely reverse European critique's self-referential *telos*. Both approaches are thus linked to defining the progress of Islam against that of Europe and Christianity. None can refer to a self-referential origin of Islam. In sum, both interpretations of the origin of Islam are dependent upon European critique.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated two approaches to the history of Islam and its conception. With respect to the prime examples of Hali and Ameer Ali, two groups of like-minded authors could be identified. While the first group (inclusive of Hali) is characterised by its preference for Urdu as a medium, the group surrounding Ameer Ali wrote exclusively in English. This classification is, however, more or less arbitrary, as the content of their writings overlaps to some extent. Chiragh Ali and Khuda Bakhsh took up an intermediate position. While the former wrote his most eminent work in English, the latter rather resembles – despite writing solely in English – the ideas of the first group. Nevertheless, in general it can be said that the choice of the medium had significant implications first on the audience addressed, with Urdu reaching a wider audience while English limited the potential audience, and second on the freedom of expression. The choice of English allowed the authors to communicate more radical thoughts, as the limited audience excluded the greatest part of conservative Ulama who rejected Western education.

Writing in Urdu could not provide this liberty, as had become obvious based on the example of Ahmad Khan, who had to face hostility that escalated into *fatwas* declaring him to be a *kāfir*.[113] The choice of language as well as the radicalness of thought were certainly also related to the differing locations and time periods. Hali and Chiragh Ali stem from north western parts of South Asia; Hali spent most of his life in Punjab, while Chiragh Ali – born in Meerut in what is today Uttar Pradesh – spent most of his life in both this region and the state of Hyderabad. By contrast, Ameer Ali hailed from Bengal, Khuda Bakhsh from Patna, and Yusuf Ali from Bombay. Furthermore, the authors of the second group – generally speaking – outlived the first group and, thus, experienced periods generally more critical of the British, particularly that of the Khilafat-movement.[114] Thus, the authors of the second group grew up in regions which had faced colonialism over a longer period than those regions of the first group of authors.[115] Apart from this distinction, the

113 Troll: Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 21.

114 The Khilafat movement, which lasted from 1919 until 1922, was a protest against the British plan to abolish the Ottoman Caliphate, initiated by Indian Muslims yet eventually acquiring a pan-Islamic character. On the other hand, the movement was not restricted merely to Muslims in India but appealed also to the Indian National Congress.

115 Yet, one must not overlook that Khan is often called the pioneer of Muslim thought leading to the partition of India and the consolidation of a separate Muslim identity: "Some of Sir Sayyid's critics have held him responsible for exacerbating differences between Hindus and Muslims and thereby laying the foundation for the partition of United India. Anand K. Verma in his book *Reassessing Pakistan – The Role of the Two-Nation Theory* writes: 'While on the one hand he influenced Muslims to come closer to the British to seek their patronage and goodwill, on the other hand he advised them to maintain a distance from the Hindus in order to create a distinct place for themselves'" (Tariq Hasan: *The Aligarh Movement and the Making of the Indian Muslim Mind: 1857-2002* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2006), 79). Lelyveld perceives a steady shift in meaning of Khan's usage of *qaum* towards an equivalent of the Muslim *ummat* or the *Ahl-i Islām* (the people of Islam) (cf. Lelyved: *Aligarh's First Generation*, 143) – yet, it rather seems that Khan uses *qaum* only with regard to Indian Muslims and not in a pan-Islamic sense, as the term *ummat* implies (cf. Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. XII, 160f.; with regard to Hali's usage of *qaum* cf. also Masood Ashraf Raja: *Constructing Pakistan: Foundationals Texts and the Rise of Muslim National Identity, 1857-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2010), 59).

This is true inasmuch as Khan applied a communalist terminology, distinguishing between Hindus and Muslims as separate *qaum*s (nations). Yet, this overlooks his vehement emphasis on the unity between both *qaum*s. Both, Khan argues, have lived centuries in the same country and, hence, have to view themselves as a single *qaum*. As model, he refers to Europe where adherents of different religions are united in one nation (Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. XII, 160f.).

Thus, it would be farfetched to describe Khan's views as nationalist with regard to Muslims, while a communalist perspective cannot be denied: "Such criticism is frequently too harsh and based on unfounded allegations and half-truths. Despite his utter frustration on his failure to cement Hindu-Muslim ties, Sir Sayyid was always a staunch votary of Hindu-

whole of the second group enjoyed higher education in Britain. This better acquaintance with European education, as well as their regions' longer experience with colonialism, might also have added to their more radical thinking and critical views of Europe.

The European claim of universality has proven to be a starting point for differing Muslim reactions. Both groups take as their general approach the attempt to reconstruct an original Islam. It could be argued, however, that the quest for an original Islam rather proved to be a projection surface upon which to illuminate present Muslim circumstances and their demands. The dominant discourse of Europe served in both cases as the crucial point of reference point against which to define the "original" Islam. Neither of the two approaches presented here could completely abandon its dependence on this dominant discourse. The origin of Islam, through its temporal distance, could nonetheless be instrumentalised as a legitimising reference point for reformist thoughts.[116]

The conception of the origin has proven to be contingent. It fundamentally depends on the respective point of reference within the tripartite structure of history. Only this relative structure conveys meaning, as events within the open-ended structure of chronology do not inherit any meaning *per se*. Any meaning is given merely through integrating a selection of events within the limited structure of a historical story or narrative, the beginning of which is then perceived as pointing inherently to the story's conclusion.

Hali's *Musaddas* is in itself a perfect example of this dependency on referential definition. He describes two stories depicting the golden age of Islam in differing contexts. The first story identifies the early period of Islam as the *telos*, comparing it with the preceding time of the pre-Islamic Arabia: thus early Islam can be presented as inherently progressive. This very period is perceived in the second story as the beginning of the story which is then compared to the alien *telos* of Europe. The regulations of the early period, presented in the first story as progressive, remain unchanged in this second story and come to be perceived as immutable and divine. According to Hali, the intentions and inherent principles of the early Muslims are no longer comprehended by the Muslims of South Asia. Thus, Hali criticises them as backward in view of the *telos* of Europe. This entire argument is fundamentally based on the referential character of historiography, which allows one to depict even the same period with contradictory meanings.

Muslim unity. He championed the need to preserve the Muslim identity but was never an antagonist of Hindus or Hinduism" (Tariq Hasan: *The Aligarh Movement and the Making of the Indian Muslim Mind*, 79).

116 Foucault: "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 142-143.

The valuation of the origin depends heavily on its referential *telos*. It could, furthermore, be shown that the origin is rather a construction which reflects and recognises the present in the past. Hali's presentation of the dual story of the *Musaddas* aims first and foremost to reject the European critique of Islam by depicting an original Islam that is entirely in conformity with the demands of a universalised European concept of religion, the starting point from which his own critique originates., Ameer Ali's approach, by contrast, aims to present the history of Islam self-referentially – explicitly abandoning the *telos* of Europe. The latter deliberately accepts European critique and reverses it positively. But this move links his construction of the origin of Islam to the European concept of religion as well. While Hali accepts Europe as *genus*-category, Ameer Ali seeks to establish Islam as the *genus*-category against which other religions should be measured. Yet, the latter's *genus* is likewise a projection of the *telos* of Europe as an anti-*telos*. The *telos* of Europe being reversed serves as negative image against which to construe the original Islam.

Broadly speaking, in the 19th century, historiography becomes a strong instrument for South Asian reformers to counter European critique. In the context of Islam, it allows these reformers to link two parallel discourses: on the one hand, a tendency to retrace the "original" Islam in its early period had become a common approach since Shah Waliullah and was spread further by the Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah in late 18th and early 19th centuries This puritanical tendency recognised the present Islam as adulterated by Hindu traditions and aimed to restore the pure Islam of the time of Muhammad. Biographies of Muhammad became a popular genre and his person was increasingly emphasised as a Muslim role model. The aim of the reformists was to restore the Islam of the time of Muhammad without alteration. This type of preservationism remained popular also in several reform movements of the second half of the 19th century.[117] On the other hand, European critics likewise focused on historiography in order to legitimise their critiques of Islam. The "original" Islam of the time of Muhammad was likewise their point of reference. This period was equated with the essence of the authentic Islam.[118]

Reformers of the wider sphere of the Aligarh movement, including the authors discussed in this chapter, have aimed to combine their recovery of an "original"

117 Robinson: *Islam and Muslim History*, 89-91.

118 It is probable that European focus on the "original" Islam of the time of Muhammad was, if not influenced, at least somewhat reinforced by the parallel Muslim attempt to recover this period as unadulterated Islam. However, this conclusion requires deep scrutiny which cannot be provided within the scope of this study. Cf. chapter 3.

Islam, which is common to both discourses, with critical historiography. This allowed them to historicise and contextualise this origin and, thus, to abstract the "original" Islam into an adaptive essence. Thus, the period of Muhammad is no longer meant to be restored, but rather supplies abstract principles. Several parts of Islam are declared as unessential and rather temporal, and can, thus, be reshaped or abandoned. European critique can be refuted as wrongly interpreting unessential parts of Islam as essential. While the discourse of the unchanged restoration of the period of Muhammad perceived Islam to be an inflexible and eternal system, the reformers discussed in this chapter share the effort to prove the flexibility and adaptability of Islam. They reinterpret the concept of origin as a surface upon which the demands of the present are projected.

This process of the essentialisation of Islam at the same time implies a uniformed representation of Islam. One can observe this development already in the shift in Khan' thought from his early writings to his post-1857 writings. While we noticed a merely inner-Islamic debate in Khan's early writings, discussing different tendencies and reformist approaches, this diversity of interpretation is renounced in Khan's later representations of Islam. In response to external critique from Christian missionaries or orientalists, Islam is represented as a singular unit. This unity, however, varies across interpretations. Thus, as we have seen in the present chapter, Hali, Ameer Ali, Chiragh Ali, Yusuf Ali and Khuda Bakhsh present their views with reference to early Islam, however, in varying interpretations of this referential golden age. All of them represent Islam as a unified entity; only Ameer Ali made an effort to maintain some diversity in his historical outline of Islam. Yet, the different tendencies are either united under one essence of Islam, or rejected as adulterations of this very "original" essence.

Thus, we can observe a considerable shift towards a unified representation of Islam as a response to external critique. Internal debates are silenced so that even Ameer Ali, who has a Shiite background, adopts a rather Sunnite stance towards the history of Islam with the single aim of unifying Islam in its confrontation with external critique. Thus, by elevating the debate from a merely internal level towards an inter-religious level, the diversity and plurality of Islam is sacrificed for a unified representation of the faith. The following chapter will now discuss Khan's continuation of this process of essentialising Islam as dynamic, which we have seen in the preceding as well as the present chapter. In the following chapter, I will analyse this development as well as its reflection in an expansion of Khan's terminology from that laid out in his commentary on the Bible.