

**MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH IN THE PAN-
ISLAMIC THOUGHT OF JAMALUDDIN AL-
AFGHANI**

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of Makkah Al-Mukarramah in the pan-Islamic and reformist thought of Jamaluddin al-Afghani. Afghani framed his ideas within the framework of his calls for universal Islamic unity, brotherhood and cooperation, which - as a result - are examined at the beginning of the article. The article then assesses Afghani's advocacy that the status of Makkah Al-Mukarramah as the Muslim spiritual *qiblah* or direction be enriched and expanded into the realms of social relations and intellectual awakening as well, thus also becoming a Muslim emotional, social and intellectual *qiblah*. As a *modus operandi*, Afghani put forward the idea of establishing an international network of Muslim scholars, activists and even ordinary people, with Makkah Al-Mukarramah functioning as a nerve centre and its annual hajj season an opportunity for regular conferences. Afghani also suggested that mosques and schools throughout Islamdom be turned into centres of teaching, propagating and facilitating Islamic unity, and that Makkah Al-Mukarramah function as the unifying factor and guidance. Afghani juggled his qualified support for the Ottoman Caliphate with his reformist ideas, some of which went down well neither with the upper political echelons nor some religious leaders in Istanbul. Hence, in order to properly contextualize the pan-Islamic thought of Afghani the article likewise explores the impact of the triad axis of the Ottomans, the caliphate notion and the city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah. The article's

research methodology centres on descriptive as well as analytical qualitative modes, infused with a degree of interdisciplinary leaning.

Keywords: Islamic Unity; Pan-Islamism; Afghani; Makkah Al-Mukarramah; Ottomans

1. Introduction

The holy city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah always occupied a special place in the lives and minds of Muslims. Even though the political and economic centres of gravity existed somewhere else, the spiritual, social and, to some extent, educational status of Makkah Al-Mukarramah remained unchanged. It was ensured and facilitated by the authority of the revelation. Some of the most fundamental tenets and sacraments of Islam are forever tied to it.

Indeed, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was and remained *umm al-qura*, the mother of all cities and villages, i.e., all sorts of urban and rural human settlements. The nobility and luminosity of Makkah Al-Mukarramah stand for the source, as well as the climax, of all other nobilities and luminosities. Not only is Makkah Al-Mukarramah the centre of life on earth, but also the centre of the universe and all existence. Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* said that Allah Almighty decreed Makkah Al-Mukarramah to be what it is - that is, a holy city, sanctuary, and a place of safety – the moment He created the heavens and the earth.¹

It was on account of this that no sooner had the weakening of the Ottoman Empire started to prove irreversible and its degeneration irreparable, than the leading voices of Islamic spirituality and scholarship began to call for the enhancement of the role and the broadening of the responsibilities of Makkah Al-Mukarramah as a possible remedy. Some of those voices even focused on making Makkah Al-Mukarramah gradually assume the role of political leadership, in addition to strengthening its inherent spiritual, social and educational functions. Once established as a political axis as well, all other disintegrated and greatly enfeebled centres, as well as peripheries, in the Muslim world were expected to slowly gravitate towards it. It was only Makkah Al-Mukarramah that had what it takes to become a rallying point for all Muslims.

One of the leading Muslim voices in the second half of the 19th century was Jamaluddin al-Afghani (d. 1897) – an avant-garde Muslim scholar, ideologist, reformer and political activist² who in many ways

was an originator of the Muslim reformist thought in modern times. His impact was massive, directly or indirectly inspiring more than a few arms of Muslim scholarship in the 20th century. Just as it is the case with all trailblazers, Afghani too was sometimes misunderstood and at other times unacknowledged. Similarly, some of his seminal thoughts were fulfilled, while others were either partially so or thwarted altogether.

This article explores the importance of Makkah Al-Mukarramah in Afghani's pan-Islamic philosophy. Afghani promoted the idea of Makkah Al-Mukarramah functioning as a nerve centre of a transnational network of Muslim scholars and activists. Hajj seasons signified superb occasions for holding regular and systematic summits, and they needed to be optimized as such. In addition, Afghani proposed that mosques and schools everywhere in the Muslim world be considered as holistic centres of education, with the notion of Islamic unity toping the priorities of their curricula, and that Makkah Al-Mukarramah be transformed into the bona fide unifying factor and direction for all Muslims. That is to say, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was to be turned into a universal *qiblah*.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted is a mixture of descriptive and analytical qualitative research modes. It features detailed descriptions, critical and comparative thinking, and systematic evaluations of the available data pertaining to the subject matter. Moreover, the research method used could likewise be described as interdisciplinary. As such, it has helped to create a unique perspective for dealing with the selected topic by thinking and researching across traditional boundaries that defined established academic disciplines.

3. Literature Review

There is no much that has been written specifically about the significance and role of Makkah Al-Mukarramah in Afghani's pan-Islamic thought. Most of the existing studies focus on Afghani's pan-Islamism, general political thought and activism, and, to some extent, on his religious and philosophical views. References to Makkah Al-Mukarramah are rendered succinct and superficial as an aspect of the latter.

Of those studies the following ones stand out: "An Islamic Response to Imperialism" by Nikki R. Keddie, which is a compilation of Afghani's religious and political writings, plus a comprehensive account of

Afghani's life and thought.³ Next is Afghani's political biography, also by Nikki R. Keddie ("Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, a Political Biography"), which is second to none in terms of the wealth of information and their analysis. The book is general in character and traces the trajectory of Afghani's political career from his humble and unknown beginnings, either in Afghanistan or Iran, to his final years in Istanbul.⁴

Worth mentioning is also a book titled "Pan-Islam, History and Politics" by Jacob Landau, whose emphasis is the progressive concept of pan-Islamism which, historically, has caused more passion, debate, and so, more controversies, than any other concept. As an epitome of the idea, Afghani is thrust into the eye of the storm on account of his pivotal contributions to the formation and early developments of the pan-Islamism ideology.⁵

These three books represent the bibliographical foundation of this article, in addition to Afghani's six original articles that appeared in his and Muhammad 'Abduh's newspaper *al-'urwah al-wuthqa*. Those six articles addressed the philosophical and practical dimensions of Islamic unity (pan-Islamism) within the context of the socio-political and religious realities of the day. The importance and function of Makkah Al-Mukarramah were subtly integrated into the perspectives.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Meaning of Islamic Unity

The central theme of Afghani's thought was Islamic unity – the idea and undertaking ideologized in the West as pan-Islamism. Unity was the centroid of the matrix of all hopes and endeavours of Afghani. Somehow or other, everything he wrote and said was related to the unity centrepiece whence the nexuses of meanings and relationships originated and to which they in the end returned for authentication and patronage. To Afghani, the Islamic axial notion of the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*) served as the fountainhead of all genres of religious as well as socio-political concord and unity among Muslims, such as the unity of purpose, direction, mission, objective, consciousness and sentiment.

Accordingly, there could be no Islamic social and political unity if there was no spiritual and emotional unity among Muslims, in that Islamic socio-political systems and institutions can function properly only by dint of the universal Islamic spirit and identity. In the same vein, the spirit and identity of the Islamic religious unity can be fully actualized only via the existence and full operation of unified Islamic socio-political

systems and functional blueprints. The two poles are interlocked in a framework of delicate liaisons where the forces of reciprocity and equilibrium dominate.

Once such an all-inclusive physical and metaphysical unity is achieved, only then can components of a thorough Islamic civilization be generated. Only then, moreover, can the unity of civilization be dreamt of. Such a civilization would signify the apex of Islamic unity ambitions and strivings, at once typifying and mirroring the other constitutive types of unity. However, the unity of Islamic civilization would be as much the beginning as the end, and as much the means as the result. In no way should it be an end in itself, nor should it be sought for its own sake. Islamic civilizational unity would be the end that will result from interaction and confluence processes insofar as the dynamics of the internal systems of Islamic unity are concerned; and it would be the beginning insofar as truly recognizing and appreciating the ontological unity of mankind and the whole universe (totality of existence) are concerned.

Thus, it is through the grasping of the unity of creation that the Unity (Oneness or *tawhīd*) of Allah Almighty as the Creator is grasped. That is to say, there could be no *ittihād* or *wahdah* (unity) of Muslims – serving as an impetus to affirming the existential unity of mankind and the universe – without the enactment and observance of the *tawhīd* (Oneness or Unity) of the Creator. The *tawhīd* of *al-khāliq* (Creator) is the only avenue towards the *ittihād* or *wahdah* of *al-khāliq* (creation). It is the only cause that can bring about the latter.

On account of all this did Muhammad ‘Abduh - by far the most prominent student and associate of Afghani - compose his “*Risālah al-Tawhīd*” (Treatise on the Oneness of God), which was based on his lectures delivered in Beirut. The treatise was published in 1897 - the year Afghani died - and was Muhammad ‘Abduh’s most important publication. As if Muhammad ‘Abduh thereby finalized and perfected the thought of Afghani as his teacher, and concomitantly brought the embryonic Muslim reformist scholarship to a whole new level – in spite of several methodological differences between the two reformers. The triad of unity, *tawhīd* and civilization-building was thus inscribed eternally on the pages of the evolution of the Muslim modern reformist thought. It became a credo. According to Muhammad ‘Imarah, the editor and reviewer of “*Risālah al-Tawhīd*”, the theological views and scriptural interpretations of Afghani, in his capacity as an originator and teacher, inspired the outlook of “*Risālah al-Tawhīd*” produced by Afghani’s most outstanding student, giving it a sense of direction too.⁶

Al-urwah al-wuthqa (“the Most Trustworthy Handhold”) abounded with Afghani’s articles that treated different aspects of Islamic unity, at the conceptual and practical planes. In passing, *al-urwah al-wuthqa* was one of a kind Muslim newspaper in relation to the evolution of the Islamic modernist and revolutionary thought. It was founded and printed in Paris and was distributed gratis all over the Muslim world. It was in operation only seven months, from March 1884 to October 1884.

The following articles of Afghani stand out: “Islamic Unity” (*al-wahdah al-islāmiyyah*),⁷ “Unity and Power” (*al-wahdah wa al-siyādah*),⁸ “Nationality and the Religion of Islam” (*al-jinsiyyah wa al-diyānah al-islāmiyyah*),⁹ “And Do not Be Like the Ones Who Became Divided and Differed after the Clear Proofs had Come to Them” (*wa la takūnū ka alladhīn tafarraquū wa ikhtalafu min ba’d ma ja’ahum al-bayyināt*),¹⁰ “the Past and Present of the Muslim Ummah and the Cure for its Maladies” (*mādi al-ummah wa hādīruha wa ‘ilāj ‘ilaliha*),¹¹ “Muslim Backwardness and Lethargy and the Reasons for Them” (*inhiṭāṭ al-muslimīn wa sukūnuhum wa sabab dhālik*),¹² “Fanaticism” (*ta’aṣṣub*),¹³ “the Ummah and the Reign of the Despot Ruler” (*al-ummah wa sulṭah al-hākim al-mustabidd*),¹⁴ “Invitation of the Iranians to a Union with the Afghans” (*da’wah al-furs ilā al-ittiḥād ma’ al-afghān*),¹⁵ “Hope and Seeking Glory” (*al-amal wa ṭalab al-majd*),¹⁶ “Deception” (*al-wahm*)¹⁷ and “Cowardice” (*al-jubn*).¹⁸

Afghani’s motto for Islamic unity were the following words of the Holy Qur’ān: “Obey Allah Almighty and His Messenger, and do not quarrel with each other, lest you should lose courage, and your prowess should evaporate; and be patient. Surely, Allah Almighty is with the patient”¹⁹. And also: “Do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes after the clear signs had come to them”²⁰. Afghani’s reformist mantra was the Quranic declaration that all believers were brothers and constituted but a single universal brotherhood All believers are but brothers²¹. Afghani also believed that unity and brotherhood could only be effective and could be translated from a mere potential to an actual potency if Muslims held firmly to the rope²² of Allah Almighty which He had stretched out to them, i.e., the Holy Qur’ān as the divine constitution, Prophet *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* as the teacher and guide, and Islam as the standard of living.

Afghani lamented the fact that Muslims were divided, weak and regressive. Disagreements, quarrels and hostilities were common. All that played right into the hands of their enemies who like vultures snoop, waiting to pounce. So dismal was the situation that the same enemies

were often resorted to for assistance and possible solutions, thus deepening and prolonging the strings of domestic animosity and foreign expansionism. Breaking this vicious circle, therefore, seemed to be the most pressing priority.

Afghani did not mince his words in his treatment of both internal and external culprits. For him, Western colonizers were usurpers and lawbreakers. They were evil and meant no good for the colonized Muslim nations, irrespective of their pretexts and how they presented them as part of a global propaganda. Committing wrongs in the name of diffusing civilization and fostering progress was not only inappropriate, but as well hypocritical. Indeed, from the perspective of a victim, the few advantages connected with foreign interferences were easily outweighed by a great many drawbacks on all fronts that resulted therefrom.

For instance, Afghani likened the historical and incessant endeavours of Britain, France, Holland and Portugal to colonize the vast territories of India to a contest or a competition (*mubarah*).²³ In it, the only language spoken and understood was that of deceit, double-dealing and corrupt politics. As a result of their mastery of the necessary tricks, Britain won the contest. The “game” did not stop there; it extended to the most of the Muslim countries, yet to the most of the world. The entire globe became a battleground.

If in the spheres of biological evolution and social Darwinism the rules that unfolded were consistent with the dictum of survival of the fittest and most powerful, then in the spheres of the “evolutions” of colonialism and the global territorial domination the rules that applied were those that emanated from the dogma of survival of the most powerful, most dishonest and most cunning. Certainly, such were the times when the canons of some major Western political ideologies - such as those entailed in the refrains of “might is right”, “political expediency” and “man is wolf to man” (*homo homini lupus*) - were in full swing. Of course Afghani did not say all this as explicitly, but one can sense the crux of the matter issuing from several of his discourses. To Afghani, the global happenings were as much relatable to bad politics as to the iniquitous materialism of the West, both of which were his nemeses and which he targeted all his life.

Unavoidable dealings with colonizers, consequently, had to be conditional. It had to be sensible and meant for a greater native good. It was paramount to instil a belief to the effect that there was a silver lining to the predicaments and that, by hook or by crook, it needed to be found.

Under no circumstances was an evil to be repaid or confronted with another evil. Two evils were never to make a right. The causal nexus needed to be remedied, rather than aggravated.

Afghani gave an example of the Russians. They were “poor, retarded, and had no natural resources, but their spirit of co-operation enabled them to buy the weapons which they could not produce and hire the officers whom they could not train themselves - and all Europe feared them. Muslims could do the same and defend from all attacks the union which joined them.”²⁴

On the other hand, Afghani chided Muslims for abandoning some of the most critical dimensions of Islamic creed (*‘aqīdah*) and Islamic law (*sharī‘ah*). He publicized that agreeing and collaborating on the institution of a unified Islamic rule (government) signified a central pillar of Islam, and believing in it represented a foremost aspect of the Islamic belief system. “Muslims did not need an instructor to teach them that, nor a document to affirm, nor epistles to broadcast, it”, was Afghani’s emphatic inference.²⁵

Islamic unity was not a choice but an imperative by the letter of the revelation (the Holy Qur’ān) and the traditions of Prophet *Ḥadrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*. Essentially, unity was Islam’s *raison d’etre*. Disregarding it meant destabilizing the whole edifice of Islam, wherewith neither cultural refinement nor civilizational vitality was feasible. Islamic unity was the responsibility of all. However, Muslim political, intellectual and religious elites were to be most accountable. The fate of the commoners, by and large, depended on what was transpiring in the upper echelons of society. That is why the recurring themes in Afghani’s thought revolved around the corrupt tyrannical rulers of the Muslims world, along with misguided, sluggish and barren Muslim intellectuals – religious or otherwise – whose thinking was imprudent, mediocre and unreasonable. All of them were detrimental to Islam and to any Muslim cultural and civilizational awakening. The harm of some of them was on a par with that of colonizers.

A greatly troubling phenomenon was the Sunni-Shi‘ah divide, which the enemies of Islam, understandably, were capitalizing on. Afghani went to great lengths to try and bring the two sides closer to each other. His particular emphasis was a potential union of the Iranians with the Afghans, which was expected to function as a springboard for further

reconciliatory efforts. One of his articles titled “Invitation of the Iranians to a Union with the Afghans” delved into the matter exclusively.²⁶

Equally worrisome were growing nationalistic and separatist tendencies in Turkey and the rest of the Arab world, which were expediting the demise of the Ottoman Empire and with it the institution of caliphate as a major unifying factor in calls for Islamic unity. Afghani did not regard the Ottoman model as an exemplary one, however, a very few options were available. As bad and dysfunctional as the Ottoman administration was, weakening it further could only exacerbate the overall condition of Muslims, in Turkey and beyond, and could embolden their adversaries. For Afghani, provisionally supporting the Ottomans and working with them was tantamount to choosing the lesser of two evils. It seemed easier to work on remedying an ailing giant than to work on formulating a new-born and untested model. The circumstances were irrepressible, there were scant allies, and time was the “enemy”.

Those nationalistic and separatist tendencies were caused by viruses stemming from the rapid spread of Western liberal and materialistic thought, which on its path was bent on secularizing and desecrating every spiritual and moral value. If that thought was suitable for unique Western historical and current milieus, it was wrong to assume that the same would be useful and fruitful in completely different Muslim environments. Needless to say that Muslim religious, cultural, social and historical backgrounds were utterly different and were not in agreement with most Western values and worldviews.

Hence, Afghani extensively wrote and preached about the meaning of Islamic brotherhood, unity and cooperation, and how those had to be institutionalized and applied at all levels. He emphasized that Islamic spirituality was the foremost criterion in the vicissitudes of socio-political developments. It was the alpha and omega of Islamic exemplars and identities. Anything else was a faulty choice and was bound to backfire. Islamic spirituality was the prerequisite for Islamic unity.

Afghani reminded that no nationalism or patriotism paradigm should be above the one of “Islamic nationalism”, that no nation should be favoured over the “nation (realm and home) of Islam”, and that no allegiance and partisanship should supersede one’s allegiance and devotion to Islam. When Islam – as a religion, philosophy, way of life, and a historical as well as existential reality – is placed on the pedestal of the society and civilization-building kinetics, all other legitimate forms of patriotism, nationhood, allegiance and loyalty will start making sense.

Only then, furthermore, will the stage be set for an Islamic renaissance whose *elan vital* will be Islamic unity²⁷.

4.2. Makkah Al-Mukarramah the Focal Point of Islam

The Holy Qur'ān highlights that Makkah Al-Mukarramah is a sanctuary and a holy city of safety. It is *umm al-qura*, the mother of all cities and villages, which encompasses all kinds of urban and rural human settlements²⁸. Not only is Makkah Al-Mukarramah the centre of life on earth, but also the centre of the universe and all existence. Prophet *Ḥadrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam* said that on the day of victory over Makkah Al-Mukarramah that Allah Almighty decreed this city (Makkah Al-Mukarramah) as a holy city, sanctuary, and a place of safety the moment He created the heavens and the earth.²⁹

During Afghani's time, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was under the Ottoman control. It was part of an Ottoman first-order administrative division or province (*vilayet*). The *vilayet* comprised the entire Hijaz province with Makkah Al-Mukarramah being its centre, ahead of Madinah and Jeddah. The spiritual and to some extent intellectual status of Makkah Al-Mukarramah remained unchanged – which was expected, as the local and international political fluctuations could not impinge upon any of the heavenly decrees.

Afghani once said that if a calamity befell the Ottoman government, “neither will permanence remain to Makkah Al-Mukarramah, nor majesty to Medina, and not even the name of Islam or a rite of the faith will survive. And that afterward they (Muslims) will neither hear the voice of the mu'adhin nor see the Koran reader. They will be as low as the Jews of Bukhara, and like sheep without masters a prey to the rapacious wolf.”³⁰

As hyperbolic and exaggeratedly supportive of the Ottoman status quo this statement was, it demonstrated the standard Islamic conviction that Makkah Al-Mukarramah, and everything associated with it, eternally topped the list of Muslim official concerns and priorities. Ordinary Muslims lived their lives with their minds and hearts fixed on the prestige of Makkah Al-Mukarramah, wishing to visit the place as pilgrims as soon as they could for the experience of a lifetime, while the governments entrusted with the institution of caliphate were duty-bound to maintain and facilitate the situation. There could be no legitimate government-*cum*-caliphate without being in charge of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and without discharging customary responsibilities towards it. Governments

were established for the ideals personified by Makkah Al-Mukarramah, subsisting because of them. Hence, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the creator and guarantor of political legitimacies.

Since Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the heartbeat of the Muslim world, it was destined to play a critical role in fashioning Islamic unity. Afghani more than anybody else was aware of this. However, the idea was in its infancy. It was at a stage where Afghani was dejected and fearful because of the state of the Islamic nation and was searching for a means of its reform and salvation. Afghani was busy generating Islamic unity's conceptual framework and its operational blueprints, featuring conducive environments, partners, *modi operandi*, future directions and resources. He felt that what was needed first was a philosophy and charismatic leadership. Unity was a stimulus and the ultimate goal. Unity was expected to be an effect stemming from those foundations. Afghani took it upon himself to chart paths that would lead to the loci of socio-political unity firstly in Istanbul (Constantinople) then in other Muslim political centres such as Egypt, Iran and India, and another path that would lead to Makkah Al-Mukarramah as the locus of Muslim spiritual and intellectual unity.

Makkah Al-Mukarramah was sacred and untainted by the indelible tinges of political and ideological quarrels. Ever since the Prophet (*Ṣal Allāh-u- 'alaihe wa sallam*) had captured, "opened", "unlocked" and "launched" it (*fath Makkah Al-Mukarramah*), it became aberrant and even sinful to impose upon Makkah Al-Mukarramah any element of closure, suppression, discord and isolation. Though politically neither impartial nor non-aligned, historically Makkah Al-Mukarramah always managed to rise above the constraints of politics and politically driven tensions. It was the spiritual and emotional direction of all people. It was the fulcrum, and so the capital, of people's spiritual existence.

Because of this, Makkah Al-Mukarramah - which was ruled by its *Sharīfs*, semi-independent princes or emirs, albeit under Ottoman suzerainty - and the Ottoman leadership enjoyed a duplicitous relationship which was akin to a marriage of convenience. This was expected, nevertheless, bearing in mind that such was the age of endless crises and turbulences. According to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (d. 1922) - an English scholar who met Afghani and was his admirer - save that their union was a necessity, it would long ago have, by mutual consent, been dissolved. *Sharīfs* depended on sultans-caliphs in Constantinople because they needed protectors and material support, while sultans depended on *Sharīfs* because recognizing them by the Hijaz and its holy cities of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Madinah as protectors and "servants" was

a chief requirement for the caliphate. Makkah Al-Mukarramah, in fact, was a necessity to Islam even more than a caliph; and whoever was sovereign there was naturally the sovereign of the Muslim world³¹.

Referring specifically to Sultan Abdul Hamid II (d. 1918), whose contemporary he was, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt said that the importance of Arabia has of late years been fully recognized at Constantinople and elsewhere. It has been the sustained policy of Abdul Hamid II at all cost and by whatsoever means to maintain his influence there; and he knew that without it his spiritual pretensions could have no secure foundations. Arabia, the Sultan perceived, was the main point of the caliphal problem; and whether or not the future holder of the office resided in the Hijaz, it was certain that by its tenure alone the Muslim world will judge of his right to be their leader³².

Afghani should have shared this sentiment, concerning the relationship between Istanbul and the Hijaz. He had close contacts with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt who is said to have admired Afghani's reformist thought, have supposedly become a convert to Islam under the latter's influence, and have shared Afghani's often misunderstood hopes of establishing an Arab caliphate - based in Makkah Al-Mukarramah as one of possible options - to replace the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul.³³

At any rate – as a short deviation - respect and influence between Afghani and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt were mutual. However, who exactly influenced whom, on what subjects, and to what extent, remains unclear. Afghani's views of caliphate and of the Ottoman government are sometimes muddled on account of his relationship with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt supported the transfer of Muslim leadership from the Turks back to the Arabs, and suggested that the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire was both inevitable and to be desired. His book "The Future of Islam" was written for the purpose, condensing his theory to the effect that it was to Arabia that Muslims must in the future look for a centre of their religious system, and to Makkah Al-Mukarramah for a restoration of their caliphate.³⁴ Afghani's relationship with the man was conspicuous. He was involved in his schemes "to try to negotiate with the British government a settlement of the Egyptian question and of the Sudanese al-Mahdi's rising."³⁵

In addition, Afghani appreciated the fact that Makkah Al-Mukarramah, at least on the philosophical plane, was impervious to the scourges of nationalism, sectarianism and fanaticism. It was untouchable, so to say. It was meant for Islamic unity and collaboration. Just as it was perfectly configured ideologically, it likewise was occupying the perfect geographical and "civilizational" location.

Makkah Al-Mukarramah was in the centre of the Muslim world. As a midpoint, it was slanted neither to the East nor the West, and neither to the North nor the South. Makkah Al-Mukarramah was an Ottoman administrative division, but stood far away from the major Ottoman political centres.

In other words, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was absolutely Islamic and universally Muslim, which means that it exemplified everything that Islam stood for and whatever the Muslim ummah as a body of equal individuals and a federation of homogenous communities consequentiality-wise represented and could strive for. Strictly speaking, Makkah Al-Mukarramah belonged to nobody and nobody could claim control over it. Instead, people belonged to Makkah Al-Mukarramah and were “controlled” by it. Drawing attention to forbidden differences and kindling divisions within its holy precincts was outrageous. It was also sacrilegious to an extreme degree. As a matter of fact, doing such a thing anywhere was illegal, but in Makkah Al-Mukarramah was exceptionally so.

Afghani walked his talk. He practiced what he preached, setting an example for others to follow. It is unclear whether originally he was a follower of Sunnism or Shi‘ism. Calling himself Afghani, having no permanent home and being always on the road, might have been deliberate smokescreens. However, to Afghani personally, all that was irrelevant. He was a Muslim, subscribing to a set of higher transcendent criteria. He deliberately avoided accentuating any associations or designations as might have disrupted his struggle. He did not want the small things to stand in the way of the bigger – and real – ones. It was only Afghani’s personal enemies and the enemies of his calling that wallowed in the former.

As per a report, most probably in 1861 Afghani took a trip from India to Makkah Al-Mukarramah, stopping at several points along the way. He then went via Iraq and possibly Istanbul to Iran.³⁶ This early trip of Afghani, as little as symbolically, suggested the inherent value and status of Makkah Al-Mukarramah, on the one hand, and the import of Islamic unity for enlivening and preserving the Muslim world, on the other. The Makkah Al-Mukarramah trip was a sign of things to come. It might have yet been a turning point in Afghani’s spiritual and intellectual growth. Afghani was in Makkah Al-Mukarramah again in 1871.³⁷

The unity and freedom template of Makkah Al-Mukarramah had to be exported to the rest of Muslim provinces. People needed to be inspired and mobilized thereby so as to resist every sort of injustice and oppression both at the hands of colonizers and domestic tyrants. All of them were the

same in the eyes of Afghani. In their respective ways, they waged war against the quintessence of the Islamic message, working tirelessly on obstructing the performance of its capacities. However, what was encouraging in relation to this was the fact that in droves all year round people were going to Makkah Al-Mukarramah for the pilgrimages of Hajj and ‘Umrah. People lived for Makkah Al-Mukarramah and for the heavenly pilgrimage experience.

Makkah Al-Mukarramah was a magnet with enormous latent potentials, creating an opportunity that should not be missed. Hence, people needed to be awakened and educated, and some of them, especially religious scholars who commanded influence, be turned into propagandists upon their return home from Makkah Al-Mukarramah. Establishing an international network of supporters and activists from all walks of life was required, with Makkah Al-Mukarramah functioning as its benchmark and a nerve centre. Afghani referred to these prospects in the context of his discussions about “Unity and Power” (*al-waḥdah wa al-siyādah*)³⁸ and “Muslim Backwardness and Lethargy and the Reasons for Them” (*inhitāt al-muslimīn wa sukūnuhum wa sabab dhālik*).³⁹

What is more, while elaborating on why the project of the newspaper *al-‘urwah al-wuthqa* had been initiated, in the newspaper’s first issue on 13 March 1884 Afghani explicitly stated that Makkah Al-Mukarramah presented a big hope for the success of the newspaper project in particular and of the Islamic unity venture in general. Undeniably, no newspaper could match the mass communication appeal of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its Hajj season, and no amount of social unity theorization, coupled with limited implementation efforts, could match the impact of the annual global conference and socio-political exchanges of Muslims in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. Afghani wrote: “Because Makkah is the foundation and source of the religion (of Islam) and the anchor of (religious) certainty (*yaqīn*), and is the scene of the annual pilgrimage term to which are drawn and join together the easterners and westerners, and at whose holy sites the eminent and insignificant, the rich and poor ones fraternize with each other (regard each other as brothers and sisters) – (because of all this) Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the most ideal city for their (callers to Islamic unity and reforms) ideas to be effectively introduced there and thence broadcasted to the rest of places”⁴⁰.

Afghani additionally believed that Makkah Al-Mukarramah had to be part of any workable axis. Its religious significance and political convenience were simply indispensable. Thus, while the immediate focus of the newspaper *al-‘urwah al-wuthqa* were the events and their protagonists in Egypt, Turkey, Syria, North Africa and Iran – all of which

were destined to converge sooner or later in the blessed environs of Makkah Al-Mukarramah – five copies of each issue were still sent to Makkah Al-Mukarramah and two to Madinah. Afghani once alluded to the critical importance of the India-Makkah Al-Mukarramah-Egypt axis in particular.⁴¹ He said, implying the magnitude of the same axis, that many Muslims conceived Egypt to be a holy land because it historically served as a gateway to the holy cities of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Madinah. They were so attached to it, knowing if the gateway (Egypt) was safe, the holy regions of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Madinah were safe too. This way, contingent upon the strength, or otherwise, of the axis, people's faith, confidence and peace of mind could be either enhanced or shaken.⁴²

4.3. The Ottomans, Caliphate and Makkah Al-Mukarramah

All things considered, the philosophy of Islamic unity, aka pan-Islamism, necessitated a thought on a centre that would function as the idea's centre of gravity. There, most of the idea's "weight", i.e. authority, validity and management, was expected to be concentrated. The immediate thought naturally tilted towards the cosmopolitan city of Istanbul (Constantinople) which was the undisputed socio-politico-economic hub of the Muslim world and beyond. However, the problem was that in recent times the sustainability of Istanbul as such was frequently questioned. In addition, the capital's definite religious and, to a degree, intellectual supremacy never came true. It lagged behind several other Islamic hubs.

At best, Istanbul could only share the distinction. In its heyday, as remarked by Snouck Hurgronje, while it was the material centre of the Muslim world, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the spiritual centre. People looked up to both centres – religious and worldly directions - with a double focus. In respect of looking towards the two centres, all Muslims formed a whole.⁴³ But the problem was that under adverse circumstances the double focus easily turns into a form of diplopia, or double vision, and makes some fine-tuning necessary.

Undoubtedly, Afghani's time was one of such episodes. The Ottoman government was facing unprecedentedly tough times. Inasmuch as its sheer survival was often at stake, there was little long-term that could be planned. Regardless of whether or not it was set to ride out the storm, the status – and future – of Istanbul was seriously affected. As a result, the idea of a contingency plan was mooted and voices for replacing the unfit Ottoman caliphate grew ever louder.

The prevalent alternative was the restoration of the institution of caliphate to its rightful Arab consciousness and origins, because one of the conditions for the caliph was Qurayshite descent. If a new caliph was of Arab Qurayshite ancestry that was “a sort of spiritual directory which would be recognized by all Muslims as the authoritative exponent of the faith.”⁴⁴ The views oscillated between Cairo and Makkah Al-Mukarramah (the Hijaz) as the potential new caliphate centres. Some of those who advocated the idea, with variations in specifics, were Abdurrahman al-Kawakibi (d. 1902), Rashid Rida (d. 1935), and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (d. 1922). As part of their colonial stratagems, the British were in favour of the same idea as well.

Parenthetically, such were the conditions of the Muslim world, generally characterized by recurring calamities and existential uncertainty – including the conditions of the preceding century – that Wilfrid Scawen Blunt went so far as to hypothesise that even Napoleon Bonaparte might have planned to become a caliph, if his schemes had gone according to the plan and if he had been enabled to establish a desired footing in the Muslim world. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt believed that in the 19th century caliphate seemed open to whoever should have been able to re-invent and prove himself worthy to wear it. Two men dreamt of its acquisition: Napoleon Bonaparte (d. 1821) and Muhammad Ali of Egypt (d. 1849).⁴⁵

As far as Afghani was concerned, in practical terms he was a supporter of the Ottoman caliphate, notwithstanding a great many uncomplimentary inner perceptions and feelings of his. In lieu of a revolution and within the existing legal framework, he was propagating his religious and socio-political reforms. He even contemplated the possibility of “a confederation of semi-autonomous Muslim states, with the Ottoman sultan as their suzerain.”⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Afghani’s overall position might have changed a bit towards the end of his life, which however was allowed neither to fully evolve nor manifest itself. That was the case due to Afghani’s somewhat early death in 1897 (he died when he was 58) and due to the complicated and rather unclear circumstances in which he died (he spent the last five years of his relatively short life in Istanbul where he was kept as a virtual prisoner).

Since both Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Afghani around the same time campaigned for their respective versions of Islamic unity (pan-Islamism), authors vastly differ as to who was the real originator of the concept and how their brief and erratic collaboration was constructed. There is no definitive answer. However, what seems plausible is that the seeds of pan-Islamism (ideological and political Islamic unity) had been planted much

earlier with the Young Ottomans society playing a prominent role. The idea was undergoing an impulsive evolution when it was accelerated by the unfolding of dramatic events and was then taken up to another level simultaneously by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Afghani on their respective career paths. The two towering figures might have been encouraged by one another's vision and courage, but not necessarily at the plain philosophical and spiritual levels, for those levels exclusively belonged to the provinces of the revealed Islamic spirituality and philosophy. Unity was an Islamic and absolute, not a mere national or regional, affair.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Afghani needed each other in respect of the movement's implementation plans and procedures. They needed to complement each other and to capitalize on each other's assets. At this stage, too, it is unclear which side exactly initiated the first overtures to the other side. Both possibilities have been put forward. However, here likewise the two personalities and their ideas might have been inclining towards each other spontaneously for quite some time until they eventually, as an inevitable outcome of an inevitable process, combined. Nikki Keddie said, demonstrating the ambiguity of the relationship between the Sultan and Afghani: "It is almost surely at this time (1885) that Afghani wrote to the Ottoman rulers a long petition offering his services as a kind of wandering pan-Islamic messianic emissary. The Sultan asked Afghani to stay where he was for the present, and no contact between them is recorded between 1885 and 1892, when the Sultan invited Afghani to Istanbul. The standard biographies speak of the Sultan as the initiator of the first overtures to Afghani, but the new documents make it clear that Afghani was trying very hard to ingratiate himself with the Sultan and, hopefully, to obtain a position from him."⁴⁷

As a hint at the majority and their standard biographies Nikki Keddie talked about, was Alyson Chouinard's reckoning that Afghani was one of the Islamic scholars that the Sultan had brought to Istanbul in an effort to bolster his pan-Islamic propaganda. Since there is no further elaboration, it can be safely assumed that according to the author it was the Sultan who had commenced the overtures to Afghani and was in full charge of the procedure. In passing, the same author thenceforth summarised the orthodox Western construing of the pan-Islamic (Islamic unity) idea by projecting it as a mere political tool in anti-imperialistic dogmas, whereby not only was the idea divested of any genuine religious nuances, but also was religion (mis)used as one of its implements. Little wonder, then, that Alyson Chouinard discussed the matter under the sub-title "Pan-Islam as a Source for Political Power" which is part of an academic article titled "A Response to Tanzimat: Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Pan-Islamism".⁴⁸

Once in Istanbul (1892-1897), Afghani was at first well-treated by the Sultan, but was never given major responsibilities. However, the relationship between the two soon morphed into a bumpy ride. Surrounded by endless internal and external intrigues, plus the Sultan's increasing political paranoia and Afghani's occasionally unpredictable modes of operation in the face of mounting gargantuan challenges, the association was fated to be volatile from the outset. A series of events lost Afghani the confidence of the Sultan within a few years of his arrival. So much so that in his last years in Istanbul Afghani was reduced to political impotence.⁴⁹ Virtually imprisoned, his influence was diminishing by the day.

About Afghani's end Nikki Keddie wrote: "In 1897 Afghani died of cancer of the chin. At the time and thereafter rumours circulated in the Muslim world that he had been poisoned by the Sultan, but his illness and the fact that he underwent operations for it are well attested by witnesses. Some of the more fanciful reports speak of the Sultan's surgeon injecting him with venom, but these tales are almost surely of a piece with the many myths about Afghani. At the time of his death he was apparently attended by only one person, a Christian servant, and his death brought no great reaction in either the East or West. Only later, when his pan-Islamic, unapologetic, and anti-Western ideas began to be picked up by a growing body of Muslim writers, was he once again eagerly and widely read, and regarded as a modern Muslim hero."⁵⁰

Since Afghani supported the Ottoman government-*cum*-caliphate, he expectedly supported Istanbul as the capital and political centre as well. There is no clear-cut evidence whatsoever that testify to the contrary with regard either to the standing of the Ottoman leadership or the role of Istanbul. Whatever people said about Afghani and his support for the immediate revival of an Arabic caliphate based in Makkah Al-Mukarramah replacing the Ottomans, could have been part of a conspiracy against Afghani and his relationship with Sultan Abdul Hamid II, or could have simply been a misunderstanding that was later blown out of proportion. It has been reported, for instance, that "the Sultan's Arab religious confidants grew hostile to Afghani and denounced him to the Sultan as a heretic and a deceiver."⁵¹

One of those who might have misunderstood Afghani and might have fallen for circulating conspiracies was the Sultan himself. According to some authors, ever since 1885 the Sultan associated Afghani with the idea of the revival of an Arab caliphate to take over the caliphal and religious claims of the Sultan. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt is alleged to have been of the main instigators of the idea on behalf of certain internal and external

political currents (He claimed to have “gotten” it from some Arabs). The design was sometimes referred to as a combined British and Arab caliphate. As a result, the Sultan was not in favour of Afghani travelling to Arabia⁵². Besides, that must have been one of the chief reasons why Afghani was ultimately kept as an involuntary captive in Istanbul and why his efforts to leave the place were cunningly thwarted.

A delicate combination of an intrigue, a misunderstanding, the Sultan’s paranoia, and an implicit element of a potential partial truth, was reported by Nikki Keddie. She wrote that “when the new Khedive of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi, came to visit Istanbul in 1895, he secretly went to see Afghani, and the Sultan believed, possibly correctly, that they were discussing an Arab caliphate under the control of the Khedive”⁵³.

Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind that at the time of the visit Afghani had already spent three years in his virtual captivity. He was wronged and so, unhappy. Therefore, whatever happened and was said at the time issued from an anomalous situation where desperation, pressure and overwhelming emotions sometimes play a significant role. The outcomes issued from a victimized, unhappy and fuming Afghani. It cannot be completely ruled out that under the circumstances Afghani should perhaps have toyed with the idea of an Arab caliphate in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. He might have entertained the prospect to a certain extent as one of remotely possible scenarios, albeit without completely abandoning his main thoughts. To Afghani, in the final analysis, Islamic unity and revival were bigger than the Ottoman establishment and his loyalty to the former superseded his loyalty to the latter.

To other authors, such as Jacob Landau, it seems that, while the Sultan and Afghani did not find common ground on pan-Islamism, “they differed in their views on reform and constitutionalism. In addition, various people at the palace worked to circumscribe Afghani’s activities and to warn the Sultan of his personal ambitions”⁵⁴. There is no mention of Afghani’s direct or indirect involvement in a conspiracy to establish an Arab caliphate in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. The idea is brought up, though, but without implicating Afghani. Jacob Landau said, for example: “Abdul Hamid suspected Egypt’s Khedive, Abbas Hilmi, and then the Sharif of Makkah Al-Mukarramah, of intriguing for the establishment of an Arab Caliphate, to replace the Turkish one, and naturally strived to prevent this”⁵⁵.

Only once did Afghani directly mention the vision of replacing the unwell Turkish caliphate with an Arab one. He did so in his article titled “al-Mahdiyyah II” which was published in the French newspaper

L'Intransigent on 11 December 1883. Afghani said that Great Britain concocted the project of creating a small caliphate (*khilāfah saghīrah*) in Makkah Al-Mukarramah to be headed by the current Sharif of Makkah, in order to put the Makkah Al-Mukarramah ruler “in control of a powerful means to hold sway over all Muslims” (and thereby do away with the Ottoman threat). Through this design, Britain actually wished to assert her domination of the whole Muslim world through her control of the Sharif of Makkah Al-Mukarramah (and the caliphate)⁵⁶. The ruler of Makkah Al-Mukarramah was meant but to be a puppet.

There are several observations about this account of Afghani. The topic was touched on in the context of the military advances of the religious and political movement of Muhammad al-Mahdi in the Sudan against the Khedivate of Egypt (Ottoman-Egyptian government) which had ruled the Sudan since 1821. The advances were regarded miraculous, considering how vast the military mismatch between the warring parties had been, putting in jeopardy the interests of both the Ottomans and Britain in the region. During the period between 1882 to 1914 Britain imposed its *de facto* protectorate over Egypt, which was often termed the “veiled protectorate”.

Afghani believed that, ideally, the caliph should be from the Qurayshite lineage. He said plainly in the same article “al-Mahdiyyah II” that there are two types of caliphate: the legitimate and illegitimate one. The former was associated with the Qurayshite tribe and the latter with anybody else who was a warlord and conqueror (*ghāzī*) (the conqueror of lands and the title). If the illegitimate type of caliphate was in place, it was untrue and pretentious and so, was bound to vanish by virtue of the advances of a legitimate claim⁵⁷. This outlook has been additionally reinforced in an article titled “Caliphate” (*khilāfah*), which was published in *al-'urwah al-wuthqa*. The article, in all likelihood, was not written by Afghani, but it reflected the philosophy of the newspaper, the movement it represented, and, of course, the minds of its founders: Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh⁵⁸.

The Ottoman claims to the caliphate institution were incorrect and enforced (without discounting whatsoever their massive contributions to the Islamic culture and civilization). Afghani’s support was circumstantial. He anticipated that changes in all departments were forthcoming and that his works were geared towards expediting the process. However, things had to be gradual and discreet. Changing the leadership and replacing the caliphate was the furthestmost goal. All other

strategies and programs were precursors to it. They were to pave the way for that goal's complete and effective inauguration.

Afghani interpreted the events in the Sudan at the hands of al-Mahdi as the potential beginning of something big. The events were seeding hopes, awakening and valour well beyond the gravity centre in the Sudan. The events were about to cause an irreversible chain reaction that will keep expanding until the Ottoman caliphate is revoked and the British plans frustrated.

This way, Afghani was hopeful that the Ottoman caliphate in Istanbul and the proposed British-backed small caliphate (*khilāfah saghīrah*) in Makkah Al-Mukarramah will eventually be swept away by a total revolt resulting from Mahdist Sudan. The revolt, then, will lead to the restoration of the Islamic caliphate paradigm, both as a dream and actuality. Afghani dubbed the outcome *markaz khilāfah muhimmah li al-'arab* (a critical caliphate centre for Arabs).

It is noteworthy that this designation of Afghani was as much circumscribed as open-ended. Although the "Arabs" specification left out - for instance - the Ottomans, Iranians and Indians from the caliphate office, neither did it automatically entitle the Qurayshite ancestry for it. Similarly, the "caliphate centre" could be anywhere in the Arab world: in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Cairo, or somewhere else. Caliphate was not Makkah Al-Mukarramah's inherent political right.

As if Afghani thereby wished to maintain his pragmatism at the expense of a tempting idealism. He was consistent in his positions, but, given the circumstances, such a forte of his easily evaded many people. More than a few misunderstood him, what Afghani, at the end of the day, paid with his freedom. Whenever the coveted historic moment will arrive, Afghani was ready to offer support to any Arab-centric – albeit most preferably Quraysh-centric - alternative that would be most suitable, most effective, and most consistent with the ultimate objectives of the Islamic religion. Geographical locations were irrelevant. Substance was ordained to overtake externalities.

4.4. Makkah Al-Mukarramah a Catalyst for Pan-Islamism

However, if, as regards finding a locus for caliphate, the role of Makkah Al-Mukarramah was not indispensable, its role in actualizing pan-Islamism (Islamic unity) was peerless. Inasmuch as fundamentally altering the political caliphate-oriented landscape was a far-flung proposition, Afghani made it take a backseat to his concerns about

Islamic brotherly unity and the role of Makkah Al-Mukarramah in engendering it. As a root cause, Islamic unity was an obsession. Political changes were an effect and were awaited to come to pass spontaneously following the institution of the former.

Afghani believed that Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the biggest hope for realizing the dream of Islamic unity. Afghani set the tone of his conviction when he elaborated on the sad state and extent of Muslim disunity. In his article “Muslim Backwardness and Lethargy and the Reasons for Them” (*inhiṭāt al-muslimīn wa sukūnuhum wa asbāb dhālik*)⁵⁹ he lamented that there was no relationship whatsoever between Muslims worldwide even though they were connected by the threads of the same Islamic belief system and values. It was a paradox that many Muslims were enthusiastic believers but remained indifferent towards each other’s conditions as members of different nations. Most people in a country were fine with the prospect of living oblivious to the conditions of their brothers and sisters in other countries, even if they were able to help. It was unacceptable that people subscribed to the theoretical doctrines and tenets without translating them into committed actions. Such a tactic was a partial Islam. Yet, it was not Islam at all.

Afghani blamed diverse sectors of society for the predicament, but especially rulers and scholars, in accordance with the principle that if those two principal groups are guided, the whole community is guided, and *vice versa*. The situation was appalling because rulers misgoverned and scholars misdirected, with each side maltreating and victimizing the general public in its own unique way. For example, Afghani wondered why the Ottomans did not have an embassy in Marrakesh (ruled by the Alaouite dynasty as an Arab sharifian dynasty that claimed descent from Prophet *Ḥadrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*, and *vice versa*, and why the Ottomans did not have adequate relations (*silat saḥīḥah*) with the Afghans and the other Muslim communities in the East. Afghani also bemoaned the fact that some Turkish scholars were unaware of the conditions of their counterparts in the Hijaz, and that some scholars in India were neither acquainted with nor concerned about the affairs of their counterparts in Afghanistan. And worse yet was the truth that the same breakdown in relations existed among the scholars of a single nation or community. The situation was akin to a contagion⁶⁰.

After that Afghani emphasised that it was only in Makkah Al-Mukarramah during its annual Hajj (pilgrimage) season that people could meet and learn about each other’s material and immaterial circumstances. If other places kept people apart, Makkah Al-Mukarramah acted as a

counterforce. Even if people were uninterested, Makkah Al-Mukarramah's intrinsic heavenly splendour and allure were irresistible, inspiring, spurring and reminding all within its bosom. Positively, while in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, no sincere pilgrim is in full possession of his spiritual and emotional being. No person is completely himself.

It appears as though Afghani wanted to put forward that all hope was not lost. No matter what, there was always the holy city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its annual Hajj pilgrimage (and 'Umrah as a smaller pilgrimage throughout the year) that functioned as an inextinguishable light and a source of perennial optimism, resiliency and rejuvenation. No colonial military might, no Muslim ruler's incompetence and corruption, and no Muslim scholar's mediocrity and stupor, could ever diminish, let alone quash, the inbuilt advantages and boons of Makkah Al-Mukarramah.

However, the powers of Makkah Al-Mukarramah for building Islamic unity needed to be fully taken advantage of, for which elaborate strategies were required. Just as the contributions of protagonists in diverse sectors – with rulers and scholars leading the way – were responsible for the existing plights, reverse contributions from the same protagonists were now needed for restoration purposes. In the context of his discourse, Afghani used the idiom "*bi al-ṣudfah*" (accidentally), indicating that at that particular point of time whatever meagre good was taking place in terms of harnessing the Makkah Al-Mukarramah potentials for Islamic unity, the same was happening inadvertently and by mere chance (*bi al-ṣudfah* or accidentally). No systematic policies or action plans were in situ. That was unfortunate in the extreme, and, by extension, was un-Islamic. The affirmation of "*bi al-ṣudfah*" and "poor interactions" was an unflattering verdict by Afghani. At the same time, though, it was a rallying call to Muslims to reconsider their positions and shares in the ubiquitous malaise, as well as to embark on and at least support inclusive reforms.

Afghani then proposed a *modus operandi* as a first and most critical step in the direction of creating Islamic unity. He stated that Muslim scholars should live up to their honourable name and reputation, which essentially were God-given. It was incumbent upon them to fight disunity and divisions among Muslims and to work on fostering unity, brotherhood and cooperation. As scholars, they had to do this systematically, far-sightedly and sensibly. All that lied at the heart of the *dīn* (religion).

Furthermore, scholars (preachers, imams, sermonizers, educators and intellectuals) were asked to conduct constructive discussions, meetings

and conferences on unity in mosques and schools (all conducive religious and social institutions) until every mosque and every school was transformed into a home where the spirit of the existence of unity will reside. Those religious and educational institutions will thus create an intricate network that will transcend the artificially imposed limitations and borders. In the network, every single mosque and school will function as a link (*ḥalqah*) upon which the coherence and strength of a whole chain (*silsilah*) will depend. If any link (constitutive unit) starts underperforming or becomes broken, the rest of the links in the network will be affected and will be restless until the health of the affected link is restored.

Scholars from all over the world, in addition, should be connected and organised in groups and associations. Regional and global centres should be set up for the purposes of facilitating the theoretical and practical matters of unity. At the summit of those centres and “homes” of unity will be the unity headquarter in Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its holy mosque institution (*bayt Allah al-ḥaram* or *al-masjid al-ḥarām*). Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its holy mosque will signify the pinnacle of the hierarchy, or the pyramid, of other Islamic unity centres, “homes” and conventions.

Hence, Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Hajj were to host global Islamic unity gatherings annually, exactly as recognised and insisted-upon by the revelation. During the official and informal Hajj meetings, attended by scholars, government officials and commoners, the necessary evaluation, future planning, implementation and general education steps were conceived to be undertaken. Afghani understood the strategy along the lines of preserving the religion of Islam, safeguarding the interests of Muslims against myriads of domestic and international hazards, and the purification of Islam and Islamic tradition of undesirable innovations⁶¹. If other mosques were to function as community development centres, the holy mosque in Makkah Al-Mukarramah (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) was to be the Muslim ummah development and coordination centre.

In the article “Unity and Power” (*al-waḥdah wa al-siyādah*) Afghani added another dimension to his Makkah *modus operandi* intended for the attainment of Islamic unity⁶². Consistent with the vibe of the article and the subject of Islamic unity it was aimed to serve - which was encapsulated in the tradition of the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) and was placed at the beginning of the article: “A faithful believer to a faithful believer is like the bricks of a wall, reinforcing each other.”⁶³ Afghani wrote that effective communication and collaboration between scholars in disseminating the voices of some Muslims to others, unifying

thus their interests and streamlining outputs, was not just possible, but also fast and easy. Muslims enjoyed the gift of the holy mosque (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*) in Makkah Al-Mukarramah which Allah Almighty, together with the city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah, had rendered superior over the rest of the world. The sacredness of the mosque and its city is loved and respected like no other. Moreover, Allah Almighty prescribed the annual pilgrimage to the mosque. Doing so is an obligation for all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey. At that most hallowed location of the globe every year Allah Almighty gathers multitudes of Muslims representing different backgrounds, tribes, ethnicities and countries.

In Islam on the whole and during the Hajj pilgrimage specifically, everything is primed as regards Islamic unity. Its capital city (Makkah Al-Mukarramah) and its operational background (Hajj) have also been determined. No earth-shaking planning and strategizing efforts were required. Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Hajj had it all. Everything was latent in their respective ambits; items just needed unearthing and activating. Nobody had to go anywhere; rather, everybody was coming – was also wishing and planning to come - to Makkah Al-Mukarramah. All sights and hearts were fixed on it. The Makkah Al-Mukarramah was the capital, as it were, of sensations, elations and dreams too. Similarly, nothing was to be taken anywhere; rather, everything was to be brought to Makkah Al-Mukarramah (the Holy Qur’ān describes Makkah Al-Mukarramah as “We have established them in the peaceful Haram (sanctuary) to which the fruits of everything are drawn as a provision from Us ⁶⁴”).

Therefore, Afghani reckoned, the whole matter boiled down to a “word” (information and knowledge, *kalimah*) that could be conveyed to pilgrims by someone whom they held in high esteem. The “word” should be such that every corner of the (Muslim) world will be shaken by it (will vibrate towards it) and the “tenants” of the depths of hearts will be deeply stirred by it. Which was something that Muslims should not have a problem with, as the Islamic articles of faith or belief system (*al-‘aqā’id al-dīniyyah*) prepared them for it.

Afterwards, the processes should unfold and their impacts be generated gradually and spontaneously after the model of the spread of a spider web. The expansion and growth will be in terms of a snowball effect whereby the material and immaterial assets of the community (ummah) will be taken on-board. The contribution of each constitutional element will be awaited and greatly appreciated. If the constant foreign interferences, invasions and harassments were also added to the mix and

wisely made use of, no Muslim would have a reason to remain indifferent to the global Islamic unity initiatives.

Afghani believed that Muslims were just about ready for the project, and such an assessment was his motivation that kept him going. As if Muslims were ready to feel again like a single healthy body whose parts supported each other and added to each other's strength. The body's heart as the centre point was Makkah Al-Mukarramah, the arteries and veins (vessels) were pilgrims as mediums and channels, and blood that run through the vessels and sustained the body was the divine message of Islam that was exemplified by the character of the holy city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its Hajj.

In summary, Afghani's conception of Islamic unity was synonymous with Islam itself, and inviting people to it was in the vein of inviting them to return to Islam. Neither was possible without the other. As part of his purely political pan-Islamism (Islamic unity) drive – digressively - Sultan Abdul Hamid II, as well, did not hesitate to take advantage of the innate opportunities presented by Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Hajj. In doing so, he was definitely influenced by Afghani's thought, even though some moves, especially the initial ones and such as were motivated exclusively by politics, might have been of his own making. This was expected, in that working towards Islamic unity was a national agenda and the government's manifesto.

Thus, according to Jacob Landau, as early as in 1881 there was a Turkish manuscript on the subject of Islamic unity, comprising fifteen pages. It was written by Suleyman Hasbi (d. 1909), the author of several printed works, and was entitled "A Treatise about Union for the Happiness of the Islamic Millet (community, nation or ummah)". The manuscript was presented to Sultan Abdul Hamid II and was dedicated to him. It was then incorporated into the Sultan's library. "While generally starting from religious premises, it discussed *ittifāq* (co-operation) and *ittihād* (union or unity) as essential for the future of the entire Islamic nation - attacking divisiveness (*tafarruq*). It pointed at the pilgrimage (Hajj) as an important unifying factor for Muslims everywhere and reminded these of the obedience they owed the caliph who still combined spiritual with temporal authority"⁶⁵.

It is furthermore said that the leaders of pilgrimage and its other officials were ordered to propagate the governmental pan-Islamic ideas to pilgrims. In addition to pilgrimage, education (schools and other learning institutions) and mosques were also said to be the anchors of the pan-Islamic propagandas of the Sultan. The Hijaz railway, constructed

between 1901 and 1908, likewise featured a strong pan-Islamic flavour and was continuously used for its publicity⁶⁶.

Lastly, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt mentioned “one of the most distinguished and loyal Mohammedans in India”, who spoke about Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s pan-Islamic schemes, which he asserted had not as yet found much favour in India. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt then quoted the man and his recommendations for expediting the matter, which concentrated on the exploiting of the potentials of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and the Hajj rite, and which were proposed to supplement the Sultan’s pan-Islamic programs: “I may, however, add that by far the most formidable means which can be adopted for propagating such (pan-Islamic) ideas, or for rousing a desire for Islamic union, would be the distribution of pamphlets to the pilgrims at Makkah Al-Mukarramah . The annual Hajj at Makkah Al-Mukarramah draws the more religious from all parts of India, and the Ḥujjāj on their return are treated with exceptional respect and visited by their friends and neighbours, who naturally inquire about the latest news and doctrines propounded in the Holy Cities; so that for the dissemination of their views the most effective way would be for the propagandists to bring the Ḥujjāj under their influence. I call it *effective*, because the influence of what the Ḥujjāj say goes to the remotest villages of the Mofussil”⁶⁷.

The man is said to have also recommended for the same objectives of pan-Islamism that the transport of the Indian pilgrims to Jeddah be duly taken care of, and that an agent, a native of India, be appointed to look after the interests of the pilgrims while in the holy lands.⁶⁸

5. Conclusion

Makkah Al-Mukarramah is absolutely Islamic and universally Muslim, which means that it exemplifies everything that Islam stands for and whatever the Muslim ummah as a body of equal individuals and a federation of homogenous communities consequentiality-wise represents and can strive for. Strictly speaking, Makkah Al-Mukarramah belongs to nobody and nobody can claim control over it. Instead, people belong to Makkah Al-Mukarramah and are “controlled” by it. Drawing attention to forbidden differences and kindling divisions within its holy precinct is outrageous. It is also sacrilegious to an extreme degree. As a matter of fact, doing such a thing anywhere was illegal, but in Makkah Al-Mukarramah it is exceptionally so.

Historically, there could be no legitimate government-cum-caliphate without a contender being in charge of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and

without discharging customary responsibilities towards it. Governments were established for the ideals personified by Makkah Al-Mukarramah, subsisting because of them. Makkah Al-Mukarramah, it follows, was the creator and guarantor of political legitimacies, prompting Muslim rulers to scramble and secure control over, and to “serve”, the holy city of Makkah Al-Mukarramah – and that of Madinah. There was no political gain for a ruler that was comparable to ruling Makkah Al-Mukarramah (that is, the Hijaz region where Makkah Al-Mukarramah was a political midpoint, ahead of Madinah and Jeddah) and to the tradition of his name being endorsed on a weekly basis from the pulpit (*minbar*) of the city’s holy mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*).

As one would expect, Makkah Al-Mukarramah occupied a prominent place in the pan-Islamic thought of Afghani. This was natural given the city’s extraordinary status as a holy place and a sanctuary. By the letter of the revelation, it is *umm al-qura*, the mother of all cities and villages, i.e., all types of urban and rural human settlements. To Afghani, the potentials of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and its Hajj pilgrimage for actualizing Islamic unity, brotherhood and cooperation, were unparalleled. At least on the philosophical plane, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was impervious to the banes of nationalism, sectarianism and fanaticism. It was also inaccessible to the physical expansionism and colonization of the West, which rendered it somewhat safer from the permutations of international politics than the rest of the Muslim world. Afghani put forward the embryonic idea of establishing an international network of Muslim scholars, activists and mere supporters from all walks of life, with Makkah Al-Mukarramah functioning as a nerve centre and its annual Hajj season an opportunity for regular meetings. He furthermore suggested that mosques and schools across the Muslim world be transformed into centres of teaching, promulgating and facilitating Islamic unity, and that Makkah Al-Mukarramah in its capacity as the personification of Islamic ideals function as the unifying factor and direction (*qiblah*).

Afghani was one of the pioneers of the Muslim modern-day thought. His influence was enormous⁶⁹. His ideas served as precursors to more than a few branches of Muslim intellectualism in the 20th century. As a forerunner, some of his ideas were accomplished, while others were in their infancy. The latter was refined and taken to another level by his disciples and followers. Just like everything, Afghani’s pan-Islamism and the rest of his reformist thought were subjected to the principles of evolution and progress where sometimes the pure political gusto prevailed, and at other times the one relating to the religious and

educational concerns did. Either way, Makkah Al-Mukarramah was a direct and indirect focus of attention, in the material or immaterial sense.

In any case, it stands to reason that Afghani planted the seeds of the creation of the World Muslim Congress founded in 1949 and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) founded in 1969. Similarly, he planted the seeds of the Makkah congress in 1926, which was convened as soon as Abdulaziz b. Al-Sa'ud had completed his successful Hijazi military campaigns and so, laid the foundation of the modern Saudi Arabia. Both the convening of the congress and the creation of Saudi Arabia connoted the indirect corollaries of the abolition of the caliphate institution in Istanbul in 1924.

Finally, what could be gleaned from the views of Afghani is that for the realization of Islamic unity a subtle blend of more than a few factors was needed. Those factors pertained to sound Islamic spirituality, good governance and far-sighted educational policies as well as programmes. So critical was the situation of the Muslim community that Afghani believed that every other reformative initiative depended on the success of Islamic unity. The latter was the *raison d'être*. Even though Afghani promulgated the spirit of inclusiveness, he was in favour of a top-down approach whereby guidance and decision-making were supposed to take place at the highest and at the same time most visionary levels, and were then to be communicated to and be implemented within the ambits of the rest of the community's segments (levels). In short, Muslims were to be regenerated as a single body with a visionary leadership, strong resolve, clear direction and the necessary material and immaterial wherewithal.

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