

“Fanaticism” and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India

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What can you say to a man who tells you that he prefers obeying God rather than men, and that as a result he’s certain he’ll go to heaven if he cuts your throat?

———Voltaire¹

INTRODUCTION

At 9:50 a.m. on 22 October 2014, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau shot and killed Corporal Nathan Cirillo in front of the Canadian National War Memorial in Ottawa. Minutes later, Zehaf-Bibeau stormed into the nearby Canadian Parliament and became embroiled in a gun battle with security forces before he was killed. Following the attack, the Canadian Prime Minister issued a solemn statement that emphasized how Zehaf-Bibeau’s actions constituted a “terrorist” attack against the nation, and linked it to an “ISIL-inspired” attack earlier that week.² Since these events, Zehaf-Bibeau has become the infamous “face of homegrown terrorism” in Canada and his actions have sparked renewed concern over the perceived threat posed by “fanatical,” Islamist “jihadis.”³ Not everyone, however, was so quick to brand Zehaf-Bibeau a “terrorist.” Numerous journalists pointed to the possibility that he was suffering from mental illness and drug addiction,

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¹ Voltaire, *A Pocket Philosophical Dictionary*, Nicholas Cronk, ed., John Fletcher, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1764]), 138.

² “Ottawa Shooting: Harper, Mulcair, Trudeau Speak about Attack,” *CBC News*, 22 Oct. 2014: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ottawa-shooting-harper-mulcair-trudeau-speak-about-attack-1.2809530> (accessed 22 Oct. 2014).

³ “How Michael Zehaf-Bibeau Went from Petty Criminal to the Face of Homegrown Terrorism,” *National Post*, 7 Nov. 2014: <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/11/07/how-michael-zehaf-bibeau-went-from-petty-criminal-to-the-face-of-homegrown-terrorism/> (accessed 20 Nov. 2014).

raising the question of whether his actions should be interpreted as the products of pathology and disease, rather than religion or ideology.⁴ Still others have refused to characterize this as terrorism altogether, maintaining instead that it should be considered a “criminal” act.⁵

As political leaders, political scientists, sociologists, law enforcement authorities, and even medical professionals continue to debate the precise significance of Zehaf-Bibeau’s actions, it seems timely to reflect upon the ways in which similar sorts of “fanatical,” religiously motivated “crime” have traditionally been framed and understood. Indeed, these current discussions bear striking similarity to debates that were taking place over a century and a half ago during the heyday of British colonial rule in India, at a time when colonial officials were attempting to deal with an “epidemic” of “fanatical” assassinations along the North-West Frontier.⁶

At 10 a.m. on 9 January 1901, Captain Johnson departed the civil hospital in Loralai, Baluchistan, along with his assistant Makhan Singh, to pay a house call to the Assistant Political Agent. They proceeded through the town’s bazaar and immediately passed by a small hill. Upon hearing a sudden noise from above, both men looked up to see a man charging toward them from the top of the hill, shouting and waving a drawn sword. Johnson turned to avoid the attacker, raising his right arm in an attempt to ward off the impending sword blow. With a single swing, the attacker managed to sever Johnson’s arm completely from his body. Stunned, Johnson fell to the ground and the attacker began to slash repeatedly at his head, killing him instantly. As the assailant continued to hack away at Johnson’s mutilated body, Singh attempted to draw him away by shouting and throwing rocks. At this point, the assassin turned his attention toward Singh, and pursued him back into the bazaar, whereupon he was promptly seized by a policeman, and then “quietly” allowed himself to be arrested.⁷

The prisoner, a Pashtun man named Doulat, was found to be “in a high state of nervous excitement” when he was brought before British authorities, and he was immediately identified as a “fanatic.”⁸ During questioning,

⁴ Doug Saunders, “When Troubled Young Men Turn to Terror, Is It Ideology or Pathology?” *Globe and Mail*, 24 Oct. 2014: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/lone-wolf-ideology-or-pathology/article21293910/> (accessed 24 Oct. 2014); Jeet Heer, “The Line between Terrorism and Mental Illness,” *New Yorker*, 25 Oct. 2014: <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/line-terrorism-mental-illness> (accessed 25 Oct. 2014).

⁵ Mark Gollom, “Ottawa Attack: Was Michael Zehaf-Bibeau’s Attack a Terrorist Act,” *CBC News*, 30 Oct. 2014: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa-attack-was-michael-zehaf-bibeau-s-attack-a-terrorist-act-1.2818329> (accessed 31 Oct. 2014).

⁶ See Letter 490F from the Government of India (GOI) to the Punjab Government, 20 Feb. 1896, National Archives of India (NAI), Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32.

⁷ Letter 37-C from the Political Agent in Zhob to the Agent to the Governor-General (GG) in Baluchistan, 9 Jan. 1901, NAI, Foreign/External A/Sept. 1901/nos. 9–21.

⁸ Telegram from the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, to the GOI, 11 Jan. 1901, NAI, Foreign/External A/Sept. 1901/nos. 9–21.

Doulat claimed he had recently returned from Kandahar, where God had “put it into his heart” to kill “either a Sikh or a white man.” He stressed that no one else knew of his intention to commit this act, that he had no particular complaint against any British official, and that he did not even know whom he was attacking. Because Doulat was in such “an excited state of mind,” he was deemed unfit for an immediate trial, and placed in solitary confinement despite his insistent “prayers” that he be executed immediately.⁹

Doulat’s case was an example of a very special type of crime that existed at the fringes of British India. Known as “murderous outrages,” “fanatical outrages,” or “*ghazism*,” these were crimes that typically involved a sudden, seemingly unprovoked, and murderous assault against British officers or their Indian subordinates. Perpetrators of these crimes were disposed of in swift, summary trials under one of the most brutal-minded and draconian laws ever passed in British India: the Murderous Outrages Act of 1867 (henceforth MOA).¹⁰ The MOA granted colonial authorities along the North-West Frontier a sweeping range of executive powers that allowed them to bypass India’s regular judicial codes and procedures in order to prosecute “fanatics.” In Doulat’s case, his identification and subsequent conviction as a “fanatic” was based on both his professed desire to kill an “infidel” and his evidently deranged mental state. This twin emphasis on religious motivation and mental illness reappears again and again throughout the colonial records documenting these crimes and, as we have seen, is one which still persists today.

During the past decade, discussions of religious extremism and “fanatical” violence have come to dominate both public and academic discourse. As a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and the new geo-strategic and security imperatives brought about by the subsequent “War on Terror,” policymakers and intellectuals have demonstrated a particular interest in tracing the historical roots of these contemporary issues.¹¹ The problem with much of this work, as Kim A. Wagner has recently argued, is that it often tends to uncritically reproduce the same Orientalist tropes and

⁹ Letter 37-C from the Political Agent in Zhob to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 9 Jan. 1901, and Letter 3665 from C. E. Yate to the GOI, 3 Apr. 1901, both in NAI, Foreign/External A/Sept. 1901/nos. 9–21. Doulat later died in prison of pneumonia before he was brought to trial: *Statement of Fanatical Outrages in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan* (Simla: Intelligence Branch, Quarter Master General’s Dept., 1905), India Office Records (IOR), London, L/PS/20/203, p. 7.

¹⁰ For more on the history of this law, see Mark Condos, “License to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the Rule of Law in Colonial India, 1867–1925,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, 2 (2016): 479–517: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000456> (accessed 1 June).

¹¹ For a relatively recent and prominent example of this, see Charles Allen, *God’s Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (London: Abacus, 2007).

stereotypes that have historically constituted the ways these very same issues have been understood and represented.¹² Thus, rather than helping us to better understand the present through the past, this work ends up perpetuating and projecting past fallacies into the present.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a corrective to this often problematic and flawed understanding of the history of “fanaticism” and the problems associated with it. It approaches these topics through an examination of how British colonial authorities conceived of and responded to the problem of “murderous,” “fanatical,” and “*ghazi*” “outrages” along the North-West Frontier of India. By unpacking the various religious, cultural, and psychiatric explanations underpinning British understandings of this phenomenon, I explore and deconstruct how these different discourses interacted in order to create the powerful legal and discursive category of the “fanatic.” As we shall see, this was an existentially threatening class of criminal that existed wholly outside the bounds of politics, society, and sanity, and therefore needed to be completely destroyed.¹³ Here the subjectification of the “fanatic” ultimately served as a way to activate the colonial state’s “sovereign” need to punish and kill.¹⁴ But still more striking in these cases is the way in which the legal definition of “fanaticism” remained highly vague and subjective. Far from providing a clear explanation of what constituted “fanaticism,” the MOA granted officers wide discretion on this point. As such, the term “fanatic” became a sort of blank discursive label that could be manipulated by the creative and often flexible interpretations of individual colonial officials, making what was already a powerful form of executive prerogative even more deadly.

¹² Kim A. Wagner, “‘Thugs and Assassins’: ‘New Terrorism’ and the Resurrection of Colonial Knowledge,” in Carola Dietze and Claudia Verhoeven, eds., *Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), published online: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199858569.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199858569-e-006> (accessed 13 Nov. 2014).

¹³ As William T. Cavanaugh points out, this dichotomy between an “irrational,” “fanatical” other and a “rational,” “secular” political subject effectively functions as the “friend-enemy” distinction in politics described by Carl Schmitt, and is used to justify the violent and coercive treatment of the “fanatical” other at the hands of the “secular” state: William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–5. For the idea of the “friend-enemy” distinction in politics, see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁴ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ann Laura Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* 18, 1 (2006): 125–46; Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, 1 (2003): 11–40; and Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

FANATICISM AND THE COLONIAL WORLD

Today, the term “fanaticism” immediately conjures up images of religious radicalism, bigotry, backwardness, and often brutal violence. The “fanatic” has become the quintessential “other”—an existentially threatening and dangerous individual who stands entirely outside of all acceptable standards set by society. As Alberto Toscano has recently pointed out, this contemporary picture of “fanaticism” draws elements from eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought that believed religious intolerance and political stridency were the principal causes of political violence, social destabilization, and intellectual backwardness.¹⁵ Voltaire, in particular, was a vociferous critic of “fanaticism,” believing it to be a form of infectious and murderous mental illness that was completely antithetical to peace and stability in society.¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that Voltaire’s critique was directed primarily toward the problems he saw within European society, rather than an external “other.” Indeed, the problems of “fanaticism” did not begin to be associated almost exclusively with the extra-European world until Hegel, who singled out Islam for particular censure. As he saw it, Islam’s universalizing aspirations precluded the creation of alternative political subjectivities, allegiances, and identities beyond the religious, effectively demanding that its adherents become “fanatics.”¹⁷

In the colonial world, Hegel’s ideas were combined with theories about religious, cultural, and racial backwardness to explain the disorder and violence that Europeans encountered when attempting to impose their rule. Muslims were widely considered by Europe’s imperial powers to be uniquely sensitive subjects who were difficult to govern and prone to violence and rebellion due to their inherently “fanatical” tendencies.¹⁸ During their brutal, nineteenth-century conquest pacification of the Caucasus, for example, Russian officials blamed the bloody and protracted nature of the fighting on the inherent “savagery,” “irrationality,” and “fanaticism” of the local Muslim population.¹⁹ In the case of French North Africa, colonial administrators used similar language to demonize the Senussis, giving rise to what Jean-Louis Triaud has termed the “black legend” surrounding the “peril” of *confrèrisme* (religious

¹⁵ Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010), xviii.

¹⁶ Voltaire, *Pocket Philosophical Dictionary*, 137–38.

¹⁷ Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 152–54.

¹⁸ David Motadel, “Introduction,” in D. Motadel, ed., *Islam and the European Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁹ Alexander Morrison, “‘Applied Orientalism’ in British India and Tsarist Turkestan,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 3 (July 2009): 619–47; Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Alexander Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Resistance Movements in Western and Russian Scholarship,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42, 2 (2002): 139–73; Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

brotherhoods or associations).²⁰ American imperialists in the early twentieth century also frequently resorted to claims about the “primitive,” “savage,” and above all “fanatical” nature of the Muslim population of Mindanao in the Philippines in order to justify their brutal military occupation of that region.²¹

In British India, concerns about Muslim “fanaticism” can be traced back to the debates over the establishment of Christian missions in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Many Company officials were fearful that missionaries would inflame the “excitable” religious sensibilities of their Indian subjects, particularly Muslims. As Thomas Sydenham put it, “I do not know any description of men who are more jealous of any violation or insult offered to their habits and prejudices than the Mussulmen, from that character of bigotry and fanaticism for which they have been distinguished, I believe in every period.”²² Interestingly enough, many of the arguments mounted in opposition to the missionaries also contained sharp critiques of their own particular brand of Christian “fanatical” zeal, and were thus much more in line with Voltaire’s original criticisms. Despite this initial resistance towards missionary activity, however, British imperial ideologies became increasingly tinged with Christian evangelical ideas over the next several decades.²³ This perceived tension between both Muslim and Christian “fanaticism” reached its culmination during the Rebellion of 1857, which William Dalrymple has described as a “clash of rival fundamentalisms.”²⁴

The Rebellion shook British power to its core and provided a sobering lesson for the British about the inherent dangers of “fanaticism,” whether it was the bigoted bloodthirstiness of Muslim rebels or the strident Clapham reformism of officers like Herbert Edwardes. But Muslim “fanaticism” was singled out for special blame, and a virulent wave of anti-Muslim hysteria swept across British India in the wake of 1857. Many British officials believed the revolt had been the product of a widespread and carefully orchestrated Muslim “conspiracy,” and became obsessed with the notion that Indian

²⁰ Jean-Louis Triaud, *La Légende Noire de la Sanüssiya: Une Confrérie Musulmane sous le regard Français (1840–1930)*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1995).

²¹ See Michael C. Hawkins, “Managing a Massacre: Savagery, Civility, and Gender in Moro Province in the Wake of Bud Dajo,” *Philippine Studies* 59, 1 (2011): 83–105; and Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²² Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee of the Whole House, and the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, House of Commons Papers: Reports of Committees; 1812–13 (122) VII.1, p. 311. See also Copy of a Letter from the Governor-General to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, 2 Nov. 1807, House of Commons Papers: Accounts and Papers; 1812–13 (142) VIII.275, pp. 41–45.

²³ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27, 33.

²⁴ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 121.

Muslims were somehow part of an endemic culture of seditious and “fanatical” criminality that sought to overthrow British rule.²⁵ In many ways, this mirrored the deep-seated fears and suspicions held by both Russian and French colonial administrators toward various forms of Muslim religious sociability, particularly the influence of “secret” Sufi orders, which they believed were breeding grounds for anti-colonial conspiracies and violence.²⁶

The proliferation of anti-Muslim sentiment in India following the events of 1857 helped fuel the colonial state’s increasing reliance on the use of anthropological and ethnographic data to determine the relative “loyalty” or “treachery” of entire communities.²⁷ In the case of some Muslim groups, including the “martial” Punjabi Muslims who would help form the backbone of the post-1857 Indian Army, these types of ethnographic labels helped secure them a privileged position as loyal servants of the Raj.²⁸ Many others, however, were branded as being habitually “criminal” or “fanatical.” By portraying these communities as endemically threatening and destabilizing to colonial rule, British officials justified their often brutal and coercive treatment at the hands of the state. Although there were some British officials, including George Otto Trevelyan and Alfred Lyall, who challenged some of these negative Muslim stereotypes following the Rebellion,²⁹ events over the following two decades—including the notorious “Wahhabi” scare of the 1860s and 1870s, the publication of W. W. Hunter’s infamous *The Indian Musalmans* in 1871, and the assassination of Viceroy Mayo by a Pashtun Muslim prisoner in Port Blair in 1872—served to highlight the ever-present danger and existential threat that so-called Muslim religious “fanatics” posed to the Raj.³⁰ Indeed,

²⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 139–42.; idem, *The Aftermath of the Revolt: India, 1857–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 298; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 320; Peter Robb, “The Impact of British Rule on Religious Community: Reflections on the Trial of Maulvi Ahmadullah of Patna in 1865,” in Peter Robb, ed., *Society and Ideology: Essays in South Asian History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 142–76; and Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), ch. 3.

²⁶ For the Russians this was known as *miuridizm*, and for the French it was the “peril” of *conférisse*: see, respectively, Morrison, “Applied Orientalism,” 633; Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 89; Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm,” 144; and Triaud, *La Légende Noire*, 9–14.

²⁷ Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857–8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007), 177; Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005); David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).

²⁹ See George Otto Trevelyan, *Cawnpore*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), 89–93; and Morrison, “Applied Orientalism.”

³⁰ Benjamin D. Hopkins and Magnus Marsden, *Fragments of the Frontier* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 82. For an excellent recent treatment of the post-1857 British obsession with Indian conspiracies, including Muslim ones, see Kim Wagner, “‘Treating upon Fires’: The ‘Mutiny’-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India,” *Past & Present* 218 (Feb. 2013), 159–97.

as Hunter warned in his book, there would soon come a time when all of India's Muslims would be "transformed into a mass of disloyal ignorant fanatics."³¹

CRIMINALIZING FANATICISM

Nearly a half-century before the alleged mass conspiracy of Muslim sedition and criminality described by Hunter became part of the colonial imagination, British authorities were already routinely using charges of "fanaticism" to stigmatize the activities of a variety of different Muslim castes and communities throughout India.³² The *julaha* (weaver) communities of North India, for example, were frequently described by British authorities as a "bigoted" and "fanatical" Muslim caste. In so doing, these officials obscured the socio-economic grievances that drove *julaha* participation in a series of disturbances between 1813 and 1849 by recasting these events within a "law and order" narrative in which the colonial state was forced to intervene in order to correct rampant "caste-bound lawlessness."³³ This same "criminalizing rationale" was also used to great effect in constructing similar, ethnographically driven typologies that branded other Indian communities as hereditarily "predatory" or "criminal," including the Bhils, Pindaris, Thugs, and Sansiahs.³⁴ The colony of so-called "Hindustani fanatics" that was established in 1831 by the followers of Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bereilly near Sitana along the North-West Frontier provides yet another example of enduring British anxieties and concerns over the existence of "fanatical" criminal organizations.³⁵

One of the most notorious "fanatic" Indian communities identified by the British before 1857 was the Mappilas (known in colonial terminology as "Moplahs") of the Malabar Coast. Between 1836 and 1921, they were at the center of a series of violent agrarian revolts that were fueled by a complex combination of economic, political, and communal grievances, and which were

³¹ W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (London: Trübner and Co., 1871), 151.

³² The main difference was that after 1857 British colonial authorities began to conceive of Muslim "fanatics" as belonging to a universal, pan-Indian insurrectionary fraternity: Alex Padamsee, *Representations of Indian Muslims in British Colonial Discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 46, 49, 62.

³³ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁴ See, generally, Anand Yang, ed., *Crime and Criminality in British India* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985); Sandria B. Freitag, "Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India," *Modern Asian Studies* 25, 2 (1991): 227–61; Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Andrew Major, "State and Criminal Tribes in Colonial Punjab: Surveillance, Control and Reclamation of the 'Dangerous Classes,'" *Modern Asian Studies* 33, 3 (1999): 657–88; and Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³⁵ Hopkins and Marsden, *Fragments of the Frontier*, ch. 3; and Benjamin D. Hopkins, "Islam and Resistance in the British Empire," in David Motadel, ed., *Islam and the European Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 157–58.

mobilized and articulated through a language of ritual and religiosity.³⁶ The British colonial authorities at the time, however, dismissed any notion that these movements were symptoms of economic hardship or represented a form of political action, and instead blamed them on the inherently “fanatical” tendencies of the Mappilas.

In a Minute from February 1852, Henry Pottinger, the Governor of Madras, confidently declared, “Their murderous outrages appear to be solely caused by revenge and fanaticism.”³⁷ T. L. Strange, a local judge who was subsequently appointed as the head of a special commission to investigate these disturbances, reached a similar conclusion. In his exhaustively compiled and meticulously researched report, Strange found, “In no instance can any outbreak or threat of outbreak that has arisen be attributed to the oppression of tenants by landlords.”³⁸ Instead, he fixated on the ritualistic and religious aspects of these revolts, cementing the notion that Mappila violence could be understood entirely as a product of religious “fanaticism.” “The pride and intolerance fostered by the Mahomedan faith,” Strange wrote, “coupled with the grasping, treacherous and vindictive character of the Moplahs ... have fomented the evil.”³⁹ His interpretation of these events also led him to one other crucial conclusion: that these uprisings were not merely the result of actions undertaken by a few individual participants, but were encouraged, abetted, and celebrated by the entire Mappila community. In so doing, Strange succeeded in creating an enduring image of the Mappilas as inherently and irredeemably “fanatical” and violent.⁴⁰

In October of 1854, the Indian Legislative Council passed a landmark law intended to deal decisively with these persistent “fanatical” outbreaks. The Act for the Suppression of Outrages in the District of Malabar (Act XXIII of 1854), more popularly known as the “Moplah Act,” created a specific legal-political category for “Moplahs” and granted the colonial state extensive powers to detain, prosecute, and inflict communal punishments against individuals connected or even suspected of being connected with these attacks. It also included the brutal-minded proviso that allowed the bodies of convicted Mappilas who

³⁶ K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836–1921* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Arnold, “Islam, the Mappilas and Peasant Revolt in Malabar,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 9, 4 (1982), 255–65.

³⁷ Minute by the Honorable President, 6 Feb. 1852, in *Correspondence on Moplah Outrages in Malabar, for the Years 1849–53* (Madras: United Scottish Press, 1863), IOR, V/27/262/20, p. 263.

³⁸ Report from T. L. Strange to T. Pycroft, 25 Sept. 1852, *Correspondence on Moplah Outrages in Malabar, for the Years 1849–53* (Madras: United Scottish Press, 1863), IOR, V/27/262/20, p. 440.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 443–44.

⁴⁰ As one editorial in *The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce* from 1855 put it, the Mappilas were “turbulent, refractory, blood-thirsty, and revengeful fanatics,” who possessed a “deep-rooted prejudice and hatred against those opposed to their creed.” Their “vengeance is wreaked in blood,” it continued, “and should the forfeiture of life be entailed on any one of them, in their sanguinary conflicts, Paradise is held out as the reward, the sure and certain recompense for this ‘martyrdom!’” (3 Oct. 1855: 546).

had either been executed or killed in action to be burned.⁴¹ The destruction of the body through burning, it was believed, would “terrify” Mappila fanatics, who otherwise embraced death and martyrdom, by denying them entry into Heaven as a reward for their actions.⁴²

Colonial officials and the public alike applauded the Act for its highly coercive and despotic provisions, arguing this was the only way to effectively deal with such a viciously “fanatical” community.⁴³ In addition to its striking similarities to other draconian colonial legislation that targeted habitually “criminal” communities, including the Thuggee Act of 1836 or the later Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, the Moplah Act set an important precedent for understanding “fanatical behavior.” By reducing Mappila grievances to the inevitable expressions of an endemically “fanatical” and “bigoted” community, colonial authorities fundamentally depoliticized their actions and effectively rendered them as nothing more than signifiers of barbarism, backwardness, and lawlessness.

FRONTIER FANATICISM

Claims about the “exceptionality” of the North-West Frontier and the propensity of its Pashtun population for violence and turbulence played a formative role in shaping the way British officials attempted to administer this region throughout the colonial period. According to this logic, the frontier was unsuited to the “norms” of regular laws and administrative institutions, and required a firm hand to control its inherent disorder.⁴⁴ Religiously motivated violence, in particular, was seen as one of the greatest threats to order. Shortly after assuming control of the frontier in 1849, the new Punjab Government bluntly described the Pashtuns as “priest-ridden fanatics, and bigoted followers of the Prophet.”⁴⁵ As Henry Walter Bellew put it, “They are ... extremely bigoted, are entirely controlled by their priests, and are at all times ready for a *jahâd*, be the infidels black or white.”⁴⁶ The concept of *jihad* (a material or spiritual struggle in the cause of Islam) was one that frontier inhabitants had repeatedly

⁴¹ Section 3 of the Act contained the proviso regarding burning: “Act No. XXIII of 1854, An Act for the Suppression of Outrages in the District of Malabar,” in William Plumbridge Williams, ed., *The Acts of the Legislative Council of India Relating to the Madras Presidency from 1848 to 1855* (Madras: Church of Scotland Mission Press, 1856), IOR, V/4589, p. 294.

⁴² “The Malabar Coercion Bill,” *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 21 Nov. 1854: 4757.

⁴³ According to the *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce* (ibid.), “Its provisions were strict almost beyond the precedents of Ireland, and the crime also was beyond all European precedent. The Magistrate was rendered despotic, and nothing but responsible despotism can keep a race at once fanatic, Mussulman, and oriental to the observance of their social duties toward idolators.”

⁴⁴ See Condos, “License to Kill.”

⁴⁵ *General Report upon the Administration of the Punjab Proper, for the Years 1849–50 & 1850–51* (Lahore: Chronicle Press, 1854), 89, 27

⁴⁶ Henry Walter Bellew, *Our Punjab Frontier: Being a Concise Account of the Various Tribes by which the North-West Frontier of British India Is Inhabited* (Calcutta: Wyman Bros. Publishers, 1868), 12.

deployed to organize resistance against foreign incursions dating as far back as the Mughals.⁴⁷ Throughout the British period, the frontier was periodically rocked by revolts and uprisings cloaked in the religious rhetoric of *jihad*. These included the prolonged guerrilla campaign led by Mullah Powindah in the 1890s, the 1897 Uprising, and the great 1936 revolt that took some sixty thousand British troops two years to suppress.⁴⁸

Aside from these more organized, large-scale displays of religiously motivated violence, frontier officials were also quite concerned with the propensity of the frontier's inhabitants to engage in individual acts of violence. For example, in late January of 1856, Deputy Commissioner of Dera Ismail Khan John Nicholson reported that he had been obliged to shoot and kill a “fanatic” named Painsa Khan who had attacked him at the entrance of his compound. In his report, Nicholson stated that Khan had “become religiously insane some months ago,” and concluded that such an incident was unsurprising “in a country in which so much religious enthusiasm still exists.”⁴⁹ Between 1849 and 1867, at least sixteen Europeans and their subordinates were killed or wounded in similar sorts of attacks, prompting the creation of the MOA in 1867.⁵⁰ The MOA was closely modeled on the Moplah Act of 1854 and provided similarly wide-ranging executive powers, including the right to summarily execute convicted “fanatics” and burn their bodies. However, though the MOA gave official legal status to the crime of “fanaticism,” it provided only a vague and subjective definition of what this type of criminality entailed.

While drafting the new law, legislators had been torn over how to precisely define and characterize these attacks. In the bill's original version, individuals who committed these sorts of assaults were referred to as “*ghāzīs*,” a term that the Punjab Government had overwhelmingly endorsed in their own correspondence petitioning for the creation of the new law.⁵¹ Objections to the use of the term were raised as soon as the draft bill was put up for discussion before the Legislative Council. Derived from the Arabic word *ghazw* or *maghāzī* (raid), *ghazi* was an honorific term that referred to a “holy warrior”

⁴⁷ B. D. Hopkins, “Jihad on the Frontier: A History of Religious Revolt on the North-West Frontier, 1800–1947,” *History Compass* 7, 6 (2009): 1459–69. For more on the history of *jihad* in South Asia, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴⁸ Hopkins, “Jihad on the Frontier,” 1459–62. For an examination of the 1897 Uprising, see David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 175–219; and Keith Surridge, “The Ambiguous Amir: Britain, Afghanistan and the 1897 North-West Frontier Uprising,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 3 (Sept. 2008), 417–34.

⁴⁹ Letter from John Nicholson to the Punjab Government, 21 Jan. 1856, NAI, Foreign/Frontier/June 1856/nos. 171–85.

⁵⁰ Condos, “License to Kill.”

⁵¹ Legislative Council Proceedings, 15 Mar. 1867, IOR, V/9/10, pp. 196–97.

who fought in the cause of Islam.⁵² British descriptions of *ghazis*, however, were almost universally derogatory.⁵³ In the religiously charged climate of the 1857 Uprising, *ghazis* fighting within the ranks of the rebel armies had become notorious amongst the British for their religious zeal and ferocity. *Ghazis* were noted for adopting overtly religious symbols such as the green banner of Islam, and for the highly ritualized preparations they underwent before entering into battle, in which they would swear oaths on the Koran and don either green tunics and turbans or the white clothes worn by pilgrims before undertaking the Hajj.⁵⁴ What most impressed British observers was the sheer “frenzy” they exhibited in battle. In addition to their bloodcurdling battle cries about the need to kill “infidels,” *ghazis* became famous for launching brutal and often reckless assaults against the British lines. This led many observers to conclude that they were not merely unafraid of death, but actively courted martyrdom.⁵⁵

Yet, despite its strong associations with religiously motivated violence and fanaticism, British legislators were reluctant to use the term *ghazi* to describe “fanatical” crime along the North-West Frontier. The bill’s chief architect, Henry Maine, pointed out that if the British were to formally associate a venerated and revered Muslim term with criminality, they would both cause offence to “respectable” Muslims and encourage the further glorification of such acts.⁵⁶ In lieu of *ghazi*, a committee in charge of revising the bill suggested swapping it with the phrase “political or religious fanatic,” but this, too, proved contentious. Viceroy John Lawrence strongly opposed the measure, arguing that it would make it much more difficult for the government to try these individuals if it first had to prove that their actions had been inspired by either of these motives. Rather than limiting the definition of what constituted a “fanatic,” Lawrence urged the Council to instead expand it.⁵⁷

The Council was divided by Lawrence’s suggestion to omit any explicit references to political or religious motives when it came to defining these sorts of crimes,⁵⁸ but he ultimately carried the day. Nowhere did the new

⁵² Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*, 23; Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 34, 96; Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

⁵³ Nicholson once described a group of “Ghazi fanatics” who attacked his garrison during the First Anglo-Afghan War as a pack of animals, “howling for the blood of the Farangi Kaffirs”: Lionel J. Trotter, *The Life of John Nicholson: Soldier and Administrator* (London: John Murray, 1897), 28.

⁵⁴ Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, “Holy Warriors: Religion as Military Modus Operandi,” in Gavin Rand and Crispin Bates, eds., *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857, Volume 4: Military Aspects of the Indian Uprising* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), 47–49.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

⁵⁶ Legislative Council Proceedings, 15 Mar. 1867, IOR, V/9/10, pp. 197–98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 Feb. 1867, IOR, V/9/10, p. 90.

⁵⁸ Maine, in particular, preferred retaining the word “religious,” believing there necessarily had to be “some ingredient of religion in the frenzy of an assassin who was brought under this measure.” *Ibid.*

law make any mention of what precisely constituted a “fanatic” or a “fanatical act.” Instead, “fanaticism,” as defined by the MOA, became a category that was ambiguous and highly subjective, yet legally authoritative; it was something that anyone could identify, but no one had to define. For those who supported the measure, the logic behind it was simple enough. As Commander-in-Chief Charles Mansfield so aptly put it, an overly precise definition would have required “very refined discussions” between the adjudicating officers.⁵⁹ By keeping the definition of fanaticism obscure, colonial officers trying these cases were given a free hand to deal with these types of crimes as swiftly and severely as possible.⁶⁰ And swift and severe they were. Offenders tried under the MOA were almost invariably executed, usually within a day or two of their arrest and trial (sometimes even on the same day),⁶¹ and their bodies were often burned afterward.⁶²

The new law’s vague definition of fanaticism also ensured that frontier officers could apply its provisions flexibly, and often creatively. Between 1867 and 1877 the MOA was used to prosecute just five cases,⁶³ but over the next two decades this number increased drastically. In 1881 the law was extended to Baluchistan, and between then and 1905, ninety-three cases of fanatical outrage were recorded in that region alone. Of these, at least forty resulted in execution; another sixteen saw the “fanatics” killed outright before they could be captured; and in only eleven cases was the sentence of death commuted to either rigorous imprisonment or transportation.⁶⁴ Between 1895 and 1905, there were twenty-three recorded cases of “fanatical outrage” along the Punjab frontier (after 1901 the North-West Frontier). Twelve of these cases resulted in execution, eight saw the attackers killed outright, and in one, exceptional case the accused was acquitted.⁶⁵ In all likelihood, the true numbers were even higher. In 1896, an inquiry launched by the Government of India found an

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ No juries were allowed for these cases, and court officers were allowed to dismiss evidence or witnesses if they were believed to have been “offered for the purpose of vexation or delay”: “Murderous Outrages in the Punjab, Act No. XXIII of 1867,” in William Theobald, *The Legislative Acts of the Governor General of India in Council, from 1834 to the End of 1867; with an Analytical Abstract Prefixed to each Act*, 5 vols., vol. 5: 1866–67 (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1868), IOR, V/8/119, p. 461.

⁶¹ *Statement of Fanatical Outrages*.

⁶² As with the 1854 Moplah Act, burning was designed to exploit what the British believed was a deep-seated “superstition” amongst Muslims that this would destroy the soul and thus prevent the “fanatic” from ascending to Heaven: K. W. note by John Lawrence, 11 Oct. 1866, NAI, Foreign/Judicial A/nos. 12–14. It remained, however, a highly controversial punishment and was temporarily banned by Governor-General Fitzpatrick in 1896, before being revived again by Lord Curzon in 1905: see Condos, “License to Kill.” “Fanatics” were also sometimes buried in quick lime, which was considered by some to be just as severe as burning: Letter from H. A. Deane to the GOI, 16 Mar. 1905, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/July 1905/nos. 178–82.

⁶³ IOR, P/862, Table B.

⁶⁴ *Statement of Fanatical Outrages*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

alarming number of cases in which the law had been applied in either questionable or entirely illegal circumstances.⁶⁶ In other instances, officers had either improperly or only “casually” reported MOA cases.⁶⁷ It is therefore difficult to obtain an exact picture of the frequency with which this law was used, which raises questions about how many other cases either fell between the bureaucratic cracks or were simply never reported. This became such a persistent problem that the government felt compelled to remind its officers that the provisions of the law were only meant to be applied to “true” cases of fanatical outrages. “The Government of India admit that it is difficult to define what is a fanatical outrage, and what is not,” they conceded, “but provided that it is clearly understood that the special treatment provided for fanatical outrages is applicable to such outrages only.”⁶⁸

The Moplah Act of 1854 and the MOA of 1867 are two prominent and striking examples of the often brute and “sovereign” nature of colonial power. As such, they differ significantly even from other forms of exceptional colonial legislation, such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 or the Punjab Frontier Regulation of 1872 (later revised into the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1887).⁶⁹ Unlike in the latter two examples, where the state at least attempted to survey, regulate, and control groups it identified as inherently threatening or criminal, the Moplah Act and the MOA had no such ambitions. Instead, these laws excluded “fanatical” communities and individuals from the protection and rights that would normally be afforded to them under regular law, and effectively relegated them to what Giorgio Agamben calls the sphere of “bare life”: a space where all legal rights and norms cease to exist, and where the sovereign’s power to decide is converted into a fundamentally biopolitical decision over who may live and who may die.⁷⁰ These laws did not seek to reform, but simply to kill.

Despite their obvious similarities, we must recognize an important distinction between the ways in which Mappila violence and the violence of frontier “fanatics” were defined and understood. Unlike the legal category of the “Moplah,” which was based on religion, ethnicity, and caste, “fanatic” in the MOA remained much more elusive and ill-defined. Although the law was obviously targeted at the frontier’s Muslim population, officials deliberately refused to define “fanaticism” in terms exclusive to either religion or

⁶⁶ See, for example, telegram from the Punjab Government, to D. F. McLeod, 9 Jan. 1869; telegram from D. F. McLeod, to the Punjab Government, 11 Jan. 1869, both in IOR, L/PS/6/566, coll. 198.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* For further correspondence regarding the improper reporting of MOA cases, see NAI, Foreign/Frontier B/June 1896/no. 38.

⁶⁸ Letter 490F from the GOI to the Punjab Government, 20 Feb. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32.

⁶⁹ See Robert Nichols, ed., *The Frontier Crimes Regulation: A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6, 31–32, 181.

ethnicity.⁷¹ As a result, the category of the “fanatic” became powerful precisely because of its flexibility and ambiguity. As we shall see in the next section, these ambiguities led to an interesting set of discussions among frontier officials over the precise causes of and “cures” for these types of crimes. Some saw these attacks as the acts of desperate, lonely, mentally ill, “lone wolves,” whereas others saw them as the products of an endemically backward society.

PATHOLOGIZING THE POLITICAL

In 1849, the district collector and magistrate of Malabar, H. V. Connolly,⁷² claimed that Mappila fanatics were akin to “mad dogs.”⁷³ Seven years later, the joint magistrate of Malabar, C. Collett, similarly noted how the phenomenon of fanaticism resembled a sort of “disease” that had managed to “infect” the entire Mappila community.⁷⁴ As we have already briefly seen, depictions of fanaticism as a sort of pathology were an integral part of European conceptions of this phenomenon dating as far back as the Enlightenment.⁷⁵ In the colonial context, psychiatric and medicalized language was similarly used to discredit acts of resistance by colonized peoples. By reducing certain forms of undesirable behavior to pathologies, colonial authorities were able to render the statements and actions of their subjects “unworthy” of serious consideration.⁷⁶

For example, following the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, British authorities turned to the psychiatrist J. C. Carothers in order to provide the “official” account of the revolt.⁷⁷ In his report, entitled *Psychology of the Mau Mau*, Carothers pathologized the Mau Mau Rebellion by presenting the Kikuyu as an endemically anxious and mentally deficient community, thereby erasing any political element to the movement and replacing it with the psychopathological.⁷⁸ Another prominent example of how colonial authorities deployed psychiatry and colonial medicine to delegitimize the actions of colonial subjects can be seen in the treatment of the “*amoks*” of the Malay peninsula. Popularized in

⁷¹ See, for example, Copy of Letter 56 from F. R. Pollock to the Punjab Government, 14 Aug. 1866”; and “Copy of Memorandum by Colonel J. Becher, 11 Aug. 1866, both in IOR, P/438/15, no. 13, p. 11; and Condos “License to Kill.”

⁷² Connolly served in Malabar from 1848 until 1855, when he himself was assassinated by a Mappila.

⁷³ Quoted in “Editorial,” *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 13 (1849): 711.

⁷⁴ Letter from C. Collett to T. Clarke, 7 Jan. 1856, *Correspondence on Moplah Outrages*, vol. 2, IOR, V/27/262/21, p. 239.

⁷⁵ Voltaire, *Pocket Philosophical Dictionary*, 137; Toscano, *Fanaticism*, xix, 12, 17–22.

⁷⁶ Roland Littlewood, *Pathologies of the West: An Anthropology of Mental Illness in Europe and America* (London: Continuum, 2002), 27; James H. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism: The “Native-Only” Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 2. See also Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷⁷ Jock McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and “the African Mind”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64–76.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 70–73.

the British imagination through numerous literary accounts,⁷⁹ *amok* was a Malay word that entered into the English language to describe cases of indiscriminate and seemingly unmotivated violence directed by one individual against those around them (giving rise to the expression “to run amok/amuck”).⁸⁰ Although *amok* encompassed a much wider variety of meanings during the precolonial period, British and Dutch colonial officials stripped it of its political and social power by reducing it to a primitive variant of European psychiatric disorders.⁸¹

Colonial conceptions of madness were understood in fundamentally cultural terms, giving rise to the notion that colonized peoples suffered from collective, “culture-bound” psychological disorders.⁸² Africans, for example, were believed to be prone to mass forms of “religious hysteria” and “psychic epidemics.”⁸³ *Amok*, in particular, was the most notorious and best known of these culture-bound syndromes,⁸⁴ and was often used as a frame of reference for understanding apparently similar phenomena in different colonial settings. Carothers used the term “frenzied anxiety” to refer to a specifically African version of running *amok*,⁸⁵ and even the “fanatical” violence perpetrated by the inhabitants of the North-West Frontier was frequently compared to *amok*. In *A Year on the Punjab Frontier* (1851), Herbert Edwardes described the “fanatical” frenzy exhibited by the Bannuchis during their struggle against the Sikhs as being akin to running *amok*.⁸⁶ During the 1866–1867 Legislative Council debates over the drafting of the MOA, Maine made the connection between these two phenomena quite explicit, claiming that *amok* represented the “nearest counterpart” to fanatical outrages.⁸⁷ Referring to Frank Swettenham’s book *Malay Sketches* (1900), J. G. Lorimer also pointed to the striking similarities between fanatical outrages and *amok* and concluded that both were “peculiar, apparently, to Muhammadans.”⁸⁸

⁷⁹ See, for example, Fred McNair, *Perak and the Malays* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1878); Isabella L. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1883); and Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches* (New York: John Lane, 1900).

⁸⁰ Littlewood, *Pathologies of the West*, 6–7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6–7, 9, 26.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 26. See also Richard C. Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 122.

⁸³ Sloan Mahone, “The Psychology of Rebellion: Colonial Medical Responses to Dissent in British East Africa,” *Journal of African History* 47 (2006): 243, 256.

⁸⁴ Littlewood, *Pathologies of the West*, 26. For an example of this, see McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, 213.

⁸⁵ McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry*, 54–55.

⁸⁶ Herbert Edwardes, *A Year on the Punjab Frontier in 1848–49*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), vol. 1, 24.

⁸⁷ *Gazette of India, 1867: Jan.–Dec. 1867 Supplement and Gazette Extraordinary*, IOR V/11/8, p. 233.

⁸⁸ Note by J. G. Lorimer, 7 May 1900, NAI: Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72. However, unlike *amok*, which was seen as a completely indiscriminate killing frenzy, colonial officials did recognize how fanatical outrages were typically calculated and targeted attacks: G.F.W.

Thus, like the *amoks* of the Malay Peninsula, or the endemically psychopathic Africans described by Carothers, the Muslims of the North-West Frontier were also depicted as a population that was uniquely susceptible to collective, culture-bound pathologies. In a letter from April of 1896, Major-General James Browne, the Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan, described *ghazism* as a “dangerous” and “contagious” disease with the capacity to spread throughout the local population like wildfire.⁸⁹ To illustrate his point, Browne described his own terrifying experience of a spontaneous fanatical outbreak that took place in a crowded Kandahar bazaar in 1879:

On the first raising of the cry of “ghaza,” Sir Oliver St. John was fired at in one place. In another place, a small Pathan boy of about 11, who was standing quietly beside me the moment before, snatched a chopper and a white Arum lily (the Mahomedan emblem of martyrdom) from a butcher’s shop. He wounded and stabbed some Sikh soldiers, but was fortunately knocked down before doing further mischief. He was secured and carried off, hurling implications on all kafirs, and taunting all the Mahomedans he saw with cowardice and atheism; his curses being re-echoed and applauded from every closed lattice and blind alley within hearing in the adjoining bazaars.⁹⁰

In Browne’s view, there was something inherent to the Muslim socio-cultural world that made them prone to spontaneous, religiously motivated fanatical outbreaks. “[T]he vast majority of the lower class of Afghans,” he concluded, “whilst having no wish to become ghazis, are perfectly and painfully conscious of their own dangerous susceptibility to, and powerlessness to resist, the national and religious rabies of ghazi outrage which they themselves describe as ‘having seen blood.’”⁹¹

Other officials noted how these fanatical outbursts seemed to possess a uniquely gendered aspect, and believed that they were undertaken by men who felt the need to validate their masculinity.⁹² For example, both Browne

Ewens, *Insanity in India: Its Symptoms and Diagnosis with Reference to the Relation of Crime and Insanity* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1908), 334.

⁸⁹ Letter 2842 (confidential) from James Browne to the GOI, 8 Apr. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32. Though Browne was referring to both Pashtun and Baluchis in this passage, there were those who believed that Baluchis were generally far less fanatical than their Pashtun counterparts: “Note on the Frontier Tribes of Sind—Belochees,” in J. Forbes and John William Kaye, eds., *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan* (London: W. H. Allen and Co. 1872), vol. 6, 308; and K. W. note by T. H., 30 Aug. 1881, NAI, Foreign/Political A/October 1881/nos. 353–55; K. W. note by H. S. Barnes, 29 Apr. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32. The great paradox, however, was that, from 1881 onward, the vast majority of cases of fanatical outrage actually occurred in Baluchistan, and not in Punjab: *Statement of Fanatical Outrages*.

⁹⁰ Letter 2842 from James Browne to the GOI, 8 Apr. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* The reference to “seeing blood” is also curiously similar to the notion that *amoks* were sometimes described as being literally “blinded” with rage: McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, 213–14.

⁹² While the overwhelming majority of the cases involved men, there was at least one documented case of a “woman Ghazi”: Demi-official letter from H. Wylie to the GOI, 13 July 1898, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1898/nos. 90–104.

and F. MacDonald observed how Pashtun men could be induced to commit these sorts of crimes in order to avoid being shamed by the “jeers” and “taunts” of women.⁹³ This notion of a scorned, emasculated, or “henpecked” man venting his wounded masculinity through acts of violence, as Jonathan Saha has recently noted, was also prevalent in both British characterizations of violent insanity in colonial Burma and in cases of *amok*.⁹⁴

Closely related to this was the idea that this type of violence represented a way for desperate and humiliated men to reclaim some portion of their lost social status by committing what was seen as a “manly” and “glorious” form of suicide. In November of 1900, Captain M. A. Tighe, the Political Agent in Southern Baluchistan, suggested that a fanatic who “ran amok” at Sibi in March of 1899 had done so because he was sexually impotent: “It was also said that he had found life not worth living, and that his wife had gone astray with another man. For these reasons he had determined to destroy himself and was, therefore, easily persuaded to die in what was considered a meritorious death by becoming ‘a martyr for the faith.’”⁹⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Yate, the Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan, similarly observed how conventional suicide was “practically unknown” among Pashtuns, and that “whenever a Pathan who from impotency, disappointment in love, loss of money or land, or any other cause, gets tired of life, his form of suicide is to go out and kill some body and get killed in return.”⁹⁶

Other explanations focused more on the mental and physiological aspects of this “disease.” According to J. G. Lorimer, “fanatical” attacks were produced by a combination of mental instability and the use of mind-altering narcotics. He therefore urged the government to implement stronger checks to both detect individuals who were mentally deranged, and also to restrict the sale of drugs “which produce insanity.”⁹⁷ W.R.H. Merk, the Commissioner of Derajat, similarly observed in 1900 how, “as a rule,” most fanatics were “drawn from the lowest classes, men usually of miserable physique, whose minds, already debased and enfeebled by indulgence in sexual passions (generally unnatural lust) or in intoxicants, have been thrown off their balance by

⁹³ Letter 2842 from James Browne to the GOI, 8 Apr. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32; letter from F. MacDonald to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 3 Apr. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 49.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Saha, “Madness and the Making of a Colonial Order in Burma,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, 2 (Mar. 2013): 406–35, 424, 435.

⁹⁵ Letter 1492 from M. A. Tighe to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 5–6 Nov. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, pp. 43–44.

⁹⁶ Letter 2435 from C. E. Yate to the GOI, 5 Mar. 1901, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72. Yate also reiterated this same point several years later: Extract from Colonel C. E. Yate’s Review; of the Administration of Baluchistan during the Years 1901–1904, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/January 1905/nos. 7–9, no. 7. See also Letter 16-C from E. G. Colvin to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 4 Jan. 1901, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, pp. 40–41.

⁹⁷ Note by J. G. Lorimer, 7 May 1900, NAI: Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

the wave of feeling that has passed through the masses or is affecting the population as a whole.”⁹⁸

Regardless of the varied explanations about the root causes of these attacks, the one thing that remained relatively consistent was the proposed cure: summary execution followed by the destruction of the fanatic’s body through burning. Despite being a highly controversial form of punishment,⁹⁹ burning remained the de facto way of dealing with the bodies of executed fanatics throughout most of the British period. Those who supported this practice often used medical analogies to justify their position. Writing in August of 1897, Captain C. Archer compared fanaticism to a “virus,” and claimed that burning was a sort of medical way of cauterizing the wound and preventing infection from spreading.¹⁰⁰ According to Browne, the only way to stamp out the “bacillus of the ghazi rabies” was to destroy that “which can only be fed by the hopes of a future life, can only be starved by the collapse of all future spiritual hopes for the soul, as the result of the annihilation of the body.”¹⁰¹

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, it was increasingly evident to a number of officials that their attempts to contain fanaticism were failing, and some began to question the conventional wisdom about how best to deal with these types of criminals. In May of 1900, W. J. Cunningham argued that the immediate execution of fanatics actually hindered British attempts to stamp out this breed of crime. “The first thing towards the repression of this form of crime,” Cunningham wrote, “is to understand it; but the present system of dealing with it neglects almost every opportunity for bettering our information. The criminal is treated as a dangerous beast and put out of the way as soon as possible after it is ascertained that he has committed murder.”¹⁰² Realizing this was the case, frontier officials increasingly began to concern themselves with the “mind-attitude” that led individuals to

⁹⁸ Letter 972 from W.R.H. Merk to the Punjab Government, 17 Dec. 1900, NAI: Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

⁹⁹ According to R. I. Bruce, one of the most outspoken critics of this practice, it was unworthy “of a great Christian civilizing Government to resort to such a doubtful means of preventing crime as the taking advantage of a religious belief that the burning of the body bars the entrance of the soul to Heaven or Paradise”: *The Forward Policy and Its Results; or Thirty-Five Years’ Work amongst the Tribes on Our North-Western Frontier of India* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1900), 245.

¹⁰⁰ Note on the burning of the bodies of Muhammadan Fanatics after execution by Captain C. Archer, Aug. 1897, NAI: Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

¹⁰¹ Letter 2842 from James Browne to the GOI, 8 Apr. 1896, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/May 1896/nos. 322–32.

¹⁰² Note by W. J. Cunningham, 8 May 1900, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72. Supporters of this argument included Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab Mackworth Young (1897–1902), and C. E. Yate. As Yate put it, “The immediate execution of the murderer, which has hitherto been in vogue, destroys all chance of ever getting at the real cause of the murder”: Letter 2435 from C. E. Yate to the GOI, 5 Mar. 1901, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72. See also Letter 1284 from the Punjab Government to the GOI, 10 Sept. 1900, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

commit these fanatical crimes.¹⁰³ A renewed emphasis was placed on designing new forms of punishment that were specifically adapted to the unique psychology of these “fanatics.”

A common refrain amongst frontier officers was that executions had little deterrent effect since “fanatics” actively courted martyrdom. As Archer put it in November of 1900, “Death is a singularly inappropriate punishment for criminals who profess to look, and in most cases do sincerely look, upon death as a desirable thing.”¹⁰⁴ Instead, he argued, the British should deny these individuals their martyrdom and adopt a more “degrading” form of punishment. To this end, he recommended that “fanatics” be subjected to a series of severe public floggings designed to humiliate and shame them in the eyes of their peers, thereby removing any notion that these were somehow glorious and uplifting actions.¹⁰⁵ Other officials suggested that “fanatics” be sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor in one of the jails located in the plains of India, where the hotter climate would provide “a very real terror” to someone used to the much cooler temperatures of the frontier.¹⁰⁶ The added benefit of both these punishments was that they allowed time for the criminal to “cool down” from their “fanatical frenzy” so that they could appreciate the full extent of the punishments being inflicted upon them.¹⁰⁷ Thus, aside from their overtly physical aspects, these new punishments emphasized the need to maximize their psychological impact. Whether meting out the shame of being whipped or the “terror” of being exiled from the company of one’s countrymen and imprisoned in a foreign land, or ensuring that “fanatics” could fully appreciate the effects of their punishment, British officials increasingly concerned themselves not just with the destruction and punishment of the body, but of the mind and soul itself.

This newfound emphasis on addressing the minds of “fanatics” was also exhibited in more “benevolent” approaches. W.R.H. Merk, for example, believed the threat of “fanaticism” would only be removed once the British were able to “reform” the “native mind.” Noting how “fanaticism,” particularly amongst Muslims, had previously been quite prevalent in the North-West Provinces, Awadh, and upper Bengal during the early nineteenth century, Merk argued that the British had managed to vanquish these forces through reform

¹⁰³ Letter from F. MacDonald to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 3 Apr. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 50.

¹⁰⁴ Letter 87 from C. Archer to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 13 Nov. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 46. This was advocated by several of Archer’s colleagues as well: Letter 16-C from E. G. Colvin to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 4 Jan. 1901, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 40; Letter 719 from C. E. Yate to the GOI, 22 Jan. 1901, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 38.

¹⁰⁶ Letter 6856 from J. Ramsay to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 31 Oct. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ See letter from F. MacDonald to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 3 Apr. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 51; and Letter 16-C from E. G. Colvin to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 4 Jan. 1901, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 40.

and education.¹⁰⁸ Because many British officials believed that “fanaticism” was fueled largely by primitive and fundamental misinterpretations of Islam that were spread by the preaching of radical mullahs,¹⁰⁹ it was hoped that increased contact with educated and enlightened Muslims—and, of course, non-Muslims—would help to discredit the practice.¹¹⁰ Other officials, including C. E. Yate, proposed that involving *jirgas* (councils) more directly in the regulation, investigation, and punishment of these crimes would help to enforce tribal responsibility and also improve the goodwill of these communities toward the British, whose reputation had suffered due to their highly unpopular way of dealing with these crimes.¹¹¹ Following the aforementioned murder of Captain Johnson, Yate noted with great approval how a *jirga* had sentenced several members of Doulat’s family and his friends to rigorous imprisonment for abetting or failing to stop his crime, and he believed that this would act as a strong deterrent against similar acts.¹¹²

Although British descriptions of frontier “fanatics” were permeated by medicalized and psychiatric language, these individuals were never accorded the status of “lunatics” in its strict medico-legal sense.¹¹³ Instead of incarcerating and treating fanatics along with other criminally insane persons, they were simply executed or disposed of. This provides a stark contrast to most other colonial settings, where authorities framed similar bouts of homicidal violence as legitimately insane acts.¹¹⁴ “Fanatics” were thus deprived of the rights attributed to both normal criminals as well as the criminally insane. It is also important to emphasize just how varied the British explanations for “fanaticism” were—they did not form a coherent discourse. Officials often disagreed with one another about the causes of and solutions to “fanaticism.” There is an interesting tension, for example, between the ways that officers sometimes emphasized the individual and solitary nature of these crimes, while at other times claiming

¹⁰⁸ Merk did, however, concede that “fanaticism” was not entirely restricted to Muslims, and noted how the Akali (Nihang) Sikhs of Punjab were particularly “fanatical”: Letter 972 from W. R.H. Merk to the Punjab Government, 17 Dec. 1900, NAI: Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

¹⁰⁹ Letter 12-C-42 from W.R.H. Merk to the Commander and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, 30 May 1899, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, pp. 5–6.

¹¹⁰ Note by J. G. Lorimer, 7 May 1900, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72. Lorimer even suggested that the British authorities might also do more to treat fanatics as bona fide “lunatics” in order to “destroy the mock-heroic element of the situation and make the would-be martyr an object of derision”: Ibid.

¹¹¹ Extract from pp. 9 and 10 of Colonel C. E. Yate’s Review of the Administration of Baluchistan during the years 1901–1904, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/January 1905/nos. 7–9.

¹¹² Letter 3665 from C. E. Yate to the GOI, 3 Apr. 1901, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1901/nos. 9–21.

¹¹³ Mahone has made a similar observation about the legal status of prophets and others identified as “fanatics” in British East Africa: “The Psychology of Rebellion,” 253.

¹¹⁴ Even in colonial Burma, where efforts to provide proper resources and facilities for diagnosing and treating the criminally insane were lackluster, the colonial state at least made some attempt to provide for these individuals (Saha, “Madness”).

that they were the products of a pathology that was endemic to the frontier's Muslim community. Far from being a stable category, then, "fanatic" remained a highly mutable and fluid term, no doubt owing in large part to the failure of the MOA itself to provide any sort of authoritative definition.

READING "FANATICISM"

So far, this paper has concerned itself with the various colonial representations of fanaticism along the North-West Frontier. This section moves beyond this colonial discourse and toward an alternative reading of the significance and meaning of these events. One of the largest problems with any attempt to do so is one of sources. "Fanatics" left very little behind in terms of written records, and those fragments that have survived are found predominantly in extracts of testimonies, trial proceedings, and reports produced and mediated by colonial officials.¹¹⁵ Any reading of these documents tends to reveal more about the mentalities of colonial officials than about the colonized, making it difficult to discern where the colonial subject ends and the "subaltern self" begins.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, there are productive ways of reading these records "against the grain" of colonial discourse, which allow us to obtain a much more nuanced and complex picture of these events.¹¹⁷ Indeed, as Ann Laura Stoler has suggested, it is not enough to simply deconstruct colonially generated narratives in order to read events like these as acts of resistance on the part of the colonized.¹¹⁸ Instead, we should be attempting to provide a much more layered story where both the biases and the limitations of colonial interpretations, as well as the complexity of colonial motivations are combined into a varied set of negotiations and relationships.

Representations of "fanatics" as religiously motivated bigots enabled colonial officials to dismiss their actions as the politically meaningless expressions of deranged and violent lunatics. In reality, however, these were

¹¹⁵ Because of the highly unusual nature of cases tried under the MOA, which were often disposed of with the utmost speed, it is sometimes difficult to find detailed accounts of them. Some of these reports consist of little more than roughly scrawled notes or vague allusions to them in officers' political diaries: see, for example, NAI, Foreign/Frontier B/June 1896, no. 38.

¹¹⁶ See Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7; Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); and "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45–88.

¹¹⁷ My thinking here is largely influenced by Kim Wagner's work on Thuggees and Ann Laura Stoler's work on violence in colonial Sumatra: Wagner, *Thuggee*; and "'In Unrestrained Conversation': Approvers and the Colonial Ethnography of Crime in Nineteenth-Century India," in Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, eds., *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 135–62.

¹¹⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," *Representations* 37, special issue: "Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories" (Winter 1992): 151–89, 172.

actually much more complex and often deeply political acts.¹¹⁹ In January of 1869, a Pashtun man named Shereen was convicted of stabbing and murdering a sepoy named Dyab Singh during an afternoon auction in Bannu. In his testimony, Shereen claimed that he knew that Singh was a “kaffir” because he was eating sugar cane in the middle of the day during Ramadan, and had stabbed him because he was “an enemy to his religion.” Based on this, the presiding officer concluded that this was “one of those border cases which savours entirely of fanaticism.”¹²⁰ The overtly religious overtones of Shereen’s statement, however, belie the fact that he did not just kill any infidel, but deliberately targeted a soldier wearing a British uniform. Indeed, in the overwhelming majority of MOA cases, the victims and intended victims were British officers, Indian sepoys, policemen, or prominent local Indians who were known to be in the employ or under the influence of the British.¹²¹ Sikh soldiers like Singh were particularly popular targets for assassins,¹²² no doubt owing to the significant animosity that Sikh rule had provoked when they controlled the frontier.¹²³ Thus, while many of these attacks were communicated through the language of religiosity, they were also highly politicized acts in that they targeted “*sahibs*” or other representatives of the British colonial administration.¹²⁴

Attacks also appear to have been provoked by major political developments along the frontier. In June of 1883, a Pashtun man was arrested and executed for the attempted murder of two British soldiers outside the Quetta cantonment. During his deposition the accused fanatic claimed he had first been inspired to kill a “Feringi Kafir” (foreign infidel) four years earlier, during the wave of anti-British sentiment that had swept across the frontier during the Second Anglo-Afghan War.¹²⁵ Following the murder of Colonel

¹¹⁹ As Alexander Spencer has suggested, it is extremely difficult and often unhelpful to try and separate political from religious motivations when it comes to understanding certain forms of extreme or “terrorist” action: “Questioning the Concept of ‘New Terrorism,’” *Peace, Conflict & Development* 8 (Jan. 2006): 15, 24.

¹²⁰ Crown *versus* Shereen, IOR, P/442/53.

¹²¹ Letter 2672 from Robert Sandeman to the GOI, 5 June 1890, NAI, Foreign/External B/June 1890/nos. 196–97; Copy of Translation of the Statement of Accused, Payo, 17 Sept. 1890, NAI, Foreign/External B/January 1891/nos. 84–89; and Letter from E. G. Colvin to the Agent to the GG in Baluchistan, 19 Mar. 1898, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1898/nos. 90–104; and Demi-Official Letter from H. Wylie to the GOI, 13 July 1898, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1898/nos. 90–104.

¹²² See Extract from Colonel C. E. Yate’s Review of the Administration of Baluchistan during the years 1901–1904, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/January 1905/nos. 7–9, no. 7; Letter 88–661 from D. C. MacNabb to the Punjab Government, 7 Apr. 1871, IOR/P/147.

¹²³ Jadoons,” in J. Forbes and John William Kaye, eds., *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan* (London: W. H. Allen and Co. 1872), vol. 5, no. 247.

¹²⁴ Copy of Translation of the Statement of Accused, Payo, 17 Sept. 1890, NAI, Foreign/External B/January 1891/nos. 84–89; and NAI, Foreign/External B/June 1890/nos. 196–97.

¹²⁵ Letter 1767 from Robert Sandeman to the GOI, 22 June 1883, NAI, Foreign/A. Pol. E./July 1883/nos. 81–83, no. 82; see also Bruce, *Forward Policy*, 85.

LeMarchant in 1899, the investigating officers similarly acknowledged how the attack came at a time of heightened political tension. Citing the recent murder of another British soldier by a fanatic just a few weeks earlier, Commissioner of Peshawar F. D. Cunningham went so far as to concede that these two murders were blowback from the suppression of the recent 1897 Uprising, with the Uprising itself believed to have been motivated by a recent explosion in the circulation of fanatical literature and preaching.¹²⁶

One of the most striking things when reading over the “confessions” of convicted “fanatics” is their similarity. While this can be partly explained by the British propensity to represent (and sometimes misrepresent) these crimes as “fanatical” acts in order to invoke the automatic killing power of the MOA, it is also clear that the prisoners themselves were able to seize upon and shape these colonial representations to suit their own agendas. Most of these confessions follow a general sort of script in which the fanatic freely admits their guilt, and boast about how they will ascend to Heaven as a reward for becoming “*ghazi*” martyrs. The figure of the *ghazi* as a revered warrior of the faith appears to have been a well-known archetype within frontier culture that was invoked by “fanatics” in order to lend honor and respectability to their actions. For example, in two of the earliest MOA cases, from 1869 and 1871, it was the accused who first suggested to their interrogators that they should be considered “Ghazees.”¹²⁷ *Ghazis* were often honored and praised for their valor in frontier society, and their exploits were a particularly popular theme in local oral histories, poetry, and music. In 1881, shortly after the termination of the Second Anglo-Afghan war, British authorities became alarmed by the growing popularity of a Pashto song that was being performed openly in public gatherings all over Peshawar, Kohat, and Derajat. The song told the tale of Afghan resistance against the British invaders during the recent war, and some of its more inflammatory verses celebrated the killing of the British ambassador Louis Cavagnari in Kabul during the uprising led by Ghazi Muhammad Jan Khan Wardak: “The sword of Ghazi Muhammad Jan is powerful/ May he continue to possess courage, as he is to save the honor of Khorasan/ The Ghazi Muhammad Khan has wielded his sword well/ He defeated the (British) troops and killed the murdar (mean) Cavagnari/ He drove to London the bastard English/ May the great God give him

¹²⁶ See Letter 173 from the Commissioner of the Peshawar Division to the Punjab Government, 9 Apr. 1899, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/June 1899/nos. 107–14; and Memorandum by George Hamilton to the GG, 28 Jan. 1898, NAI, Foreign/Secret F/April 1898/nos. 214–15; Letter 52-C from R. E. Younghusband to the Commissioner of the Peshawar Division, 20 June 1899, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 7.

¹²⁷ See Crown vs. Shereen, IOR, P/442/53; and Letter 88–661 from D. C. MacNabb to the Punjab Government, 7 Apr. 1871, IOR/P/147; NAI, Foreign/External B/October 1894/nos. 53–56.

victory.”¹²⁸ Much to the annoyance of the British, the graves or place of execution of these types of *ghazi* heroes were also sometimes converted into shrines.¹²⁹

It is important to emphasize that not all of the frontier’s inhabitants celebrated these so-called *ghazis*, and that large numbers of Muslims actually condemned them. Following the murder of Colonel LeMarchant at Peshawar in March of 1899, Fida Muhammad, a local mufti (Sunni Islamic legal scholar) and barrister, wrote to the British authorities on behalf of the Peshawar Islamia Club to denounce the “barbarous action” of LeMarchant’s killer. In his letter, Muhammad stressed that these acts did not reflect the true teachings of the Koran, and that the local Muslim community was doing everything in its power to discourage their glorification.¹³⁰ Similarly, in June of 1900, the Lahore branch of the Punjab Anjuman-i-Islamia issued a fatwa (formal legal ruling) against these “foul murders perpetrated in the name of religion.”¹³¹

These attacks also seem to have offered the individuals who perpetrated them an outlet for venting personal grievances and grudges. In May of 1898, a Pashtun man named Arsalla Khan was convicted of murdering Colonel Gaisford, the political agent of Thal Chotiali. In his report to the Government of India, Colonel H. Wylie insisted that the “case was one of pure “Ghaza,” in which the murderer gloried up to the last.”¹³² Yet there was significant evidence to the contrary. According to E. G. Colvin, the man who first arrived on the scene after the attack, Khan had a troubled history with the British authorities in the area. Several years earlier, Khan had served in the Zhob Levy Corps at Fort Sandeman before being dismissed for bad conduct. Afterward, he had found work as a *chowkidar* (watchman) in the Military Works Department, but was removed from that post after losing a key to the bungalow he guarded. “All this points to the probability of there having been other motives besides pure fanaticism,” wrote Colvin, “although I believe he had never had any dealings whatsoever with Colonel Gaisford personally, and indeed was ready to kill any sahib.”¹³³

Although it will never be possible to fully capture the complex affective “life-worlds”¹³⁴ inhabited by these so-called “fanatics,” it is clear that their

¹²⁸ Copy of a Confidential News-letter, 26 Feb. 1881, NAI, Foreign/Political A/April 1881/nos. 135–36, no. 136.

¹²⁹ Letter 6856 from J. Ramsay to the Agent to the GG and Chief Commissioner of Baluchistan, 31 Oct. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 43.

¹³⁰ Letter from Mufti Fida Muhammad to the District Commissioner of Peshawar, 30 Mar. 1899, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/June 1899/nos. 107–14.

¹³¹ Letter from Muhammad Barkat Ali Khan Bahadur to the Punjab Government, 30 June 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 21.

¹³² Demi-official from H. Wylie to the GOI, 6 Apr. 1898, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1898/nos. 90–104.

¹³³ Letter from E. G. Colvin to P. T. Spence, 19 Mar. 1898, NAI, Foreign/External A/September 1898/nos. 90–104.

¹³⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

actions were much more sophisticated and multifaceted than the standard colonial narrative of backwardness, bigotry, and mental instability would have us believe. While religion was obviously a crucial way of mobilizing and communicating these events (and undoubtedly there were many individuals who genuinely believed they were serving some higher religious purpose), there were a number of reasons a person might commit an attack of this sort. In many cases, these were politically motivated acts of anti-colonial resistance. Not only did they deliberately target representatives of the British administration, but they also frequently occurred in the wake of intrusive and disruptive interventions on the part of the colonial state.¹³⁵ Other times, it appears that individuals were seizing upon a recognized and (in some quarters) respectable practice in order to vent grievances or exorcize their own personal demons.¹³⁶ By claiming to be a *ghazi* warrior, otherwise powerless or disaffected individuals were able to obtain a measure of fame (or notoriety) they may not have otherwise have possessed. British officials were certainly sensitive to this fact, and many insisted that trials and executions be done *in camera* in order to avoid lending *ghazis* a platform through which to promote themselves.¹³⁷ Narratives of *ghazi* violence, therefore, cannot simply be understood through a binary opposition of “backwardness” or “resistance,” but must accommodate the very complex, personal circumstances that drove individuals to commit these acts.

CONCLUSION

In *The Indian Musalmans*, Hunter concluded, “Insurrection and fanatical ebullitions are the natural incidents of an alien Rule; and so long as the English remain worthy of keeping India, they will know how to deal alike with domestic traitors and with frontier rebels.”¹³⁸ In the case of the North-West Frontier’s “fanatical” and psychopathically murderous *ghazi* assassins, the colonial state responded swiftly and mercilessly. The MOA enabled officials to exercise the brute and “sovereign” power of British colonial authority in order to kill “fanatics.” The concept of the “fanatic” thus served as a powerful legal category. It denoted a pseudo-psychotic criminal who existed totally beyond the pale of law and even sanity, and therefore needed to be killed in the name of preserving the stability of the colonial regime. But although the language of

¹³⁵ Note by F. D. Cunningham on the suggestion for checking murders of which the motive is religious fanaticism, 3 Apr. 1900, IOR, L/PJ/6/583, file 2012, p. 17.

¹³⁶ Some scholars have even argued that such acts of violent resistance and suicidal martyrdom were a means for marginalized individuals to fashion a sense of subjecthood on their own terms: Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 36–40; Ronit Lentin, “Introduction: Thinking Palestine,” in R. Lentin, ed., *Thinking Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 2008), 13. See also Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall, eds., *Agamben and Colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

¹³⁷ Letter 2435 from C. E. Yate, to the GOI, 5 Mar. 1901, NAI, Foreign/Frontier A/August 1901/nos. 63–72.

¹³⁸ Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 149. The “frontier rebels” Hunter refers to were the “Hindustani fanatics” at Sitana.

pathology, disease, and madness permeated British descriptions of these crimes, *ghazis* were never accorded the same legal status as the criminally insane, nor were they treated as such. Instead of being incarcerated in asylums, they were simply executed. As such, the treatment of these frontier “fanatics” tells us a very important and different story from many of the conventional narratives about the operation of colonial psychiatric and disciplinary regimes.¹³⁹ Rather than attempting to reform or even regulate the behavior of these frontier criminals, the colonial state simply annihilated them.

British representations of “fanaticism” were also part of a much wider European (and American) imperial tradition of stigmatizing and repudiating the actions of rebellious and recalcitrant colonial subjects by placing limits on what constituted legitimate or “real” political action. Thus, whether it was Russian anxieties about the threat *miuridizm*, French fears about the “peril” of *confrèrisme*, or American shock at the primitive “savagery” of the Moros of Mindanao, the problem of “fanaticism” tended to be articulated in strikingly similar terms. It was, in many ways, a well-recognized shorthand that was readily drawn upon to justify the often brutal and violent treatment of these colonial subjects by the state. However, far from being a stable and well-defined concept, “fanaticism” remained an ambiguous and elusive idea. Indeed, the very breadth and scope of its application to various groups across the imperial world suggests that it was its flexibility and elasticity, rather than its exactness, which lent it its power.

Returning to the point I made at the beginning of this paper, it is clear that these colonial responses to fanaticism resonate deeply with today’s so-called “War on Terror.” At a time when Western states increasingly face the problem of curbing home-grown radicalism and terrorism, it seems especially important to reflect on how proposed expansions to policing and surveillance powers bear striking resemblances to the sorts of unrestrained executive authority and privilege granted by laws like the Moplah Act and the MOA.¹⁴⁰ Many of the same tensions that characterized British attempts to define “fanaticism”

¹³⁹ For other examples of scholarship that has challenged the ready applicability of Foucauldian frameworks to the colonial world, see Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); John L. Comaroff, “Governmentality, Materiality, Legality, Modernity: On the Colonial State in Africa,” in Jan-Gorg Deutsch, Peter Probst, and Heike Schmidt, eds., *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107–34; and Peter Redfield, “Foucault in the Tropics: Displacing the Panopticon,” in Jonathan Xavier Inda, ed., *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 50–79.

¹⁴⁰ Laura Payton, “Bill C-51 Bars CSIS from Committing ‘Bodily Harm,’ Sexual Violation,” *CBC News*, 4 Feb. 2015: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/bill-c-51-bars-csis-from-committing-bodily-harm-sexual-violation-1.2938380> (accessed 30 Mar. 2015). The 2001 American Patriot Act is, of course, the other signal example of this: “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001,” U.S. Government and Printing Office: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-107hr3162enr/pdf/BILLS-107hr3162enr.pdf> (accessed 4 Dec. 2014).

are being reproduced in contemporary discourse. Just as British colonial officials vacillated between emphasizing the “lone wolf” nature of these crimes and blaming them on wider problems endemic to Muslim culture and society, modern observers seem similarly torn when it comes to discussing how to prevent the “radicalization” of young people.¹⁴¹

The concept of “fanaticism,” as we understand it today, remains firmly rooted in the discourses of the past. The Russian Federation, for example, draws heavily on old imperial notions about Islamic savagery in order to justify its pacification campaigns against various so-called “terrorist” groups.¹⁴² The same can be said of the American case. During a recent address given to the United Nations on 24 September 2014, President Barack Obama singled out “fanaticism” as one of the greatest ongoing threats to the security of the global community, and described terrorists and religious extremists such as al Qaeda and ISIL as a “cancer” ravaging the “Muslim world.” Obama’s speech made it clear that there could be no negotiation with these types of religiously motivated “fanatics,” and that the “only language understood by killers like this is the language of force.”¹⁴³ Though perhaps unbeknownst to him, Obama’s speech effectively replicated the same stereotypes about “Muslims fanaticism” that British colonial officials deployed along the North-West Frontier over a century ago. “Fanaticism” has proven to be a resilient, if not highly malleable, discursive concept. As this article suggests, it is precisely this flexibility that has ensured that it remains a powerful and often deadly legal and political category.

¹⁴¹ “6 Things We Learned about Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and Parliament Hill Shooting,” *CBC News*, 6 Mar. 2015: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/6-things-we-learned-about-michael-zehaf-bibeau-and-parliament-hill-shooting-1.2984759> (accessed 7 Mar. 2015); Marian Scott, “Radicalization: Why Do Western Youth Join Extremist Groups?” *Montreal Gazette*, 23 Oct. 2014: <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/radicalization-why-do-western-youth-join-extremist-groups> (accessed 18 Jan. 2015).

¹⁴² Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, ix.

¹⁴³ “Full text of President Obama’s 2014 Address to the United Nations General Assembly,” *Washington Post*, 24 Sept 2014: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-president-obamas-2014-address-to-the-united-nations-general-assembly/2014/09/24/88889e46-43f4-11e4-b437-1a7368204804_story.html (accessed 13 Nov. 2014).

Abstract: During the past decade, discussions of religious extremism and “fanatical” violence have come to dominate both public and academic discourse. Yet, rarely do these debates engage with the historical and discursive origins of the term “fanatic.” As a result, many of these discussions tend to reproduce uncritically the same Orientalist tropes and stereotypes that have historically shaped the way “fanaticism” and “fanatical” violence have been framed and understood. This paper seeks to provide a corrective to this often problematic and flawed understanding of the history of “fanaticism.” It approaches these topics through an examination of how British colonial authorities conceived of and responded to the problem of “murderous,” “fanatical,” and “*ghazi*” “outrages” along the North-West Frontier of India. By unpacking the various religious, cultural, and psychiatric explanations underpinning British understandings of these phenomena, I explore how these discourses interacted to create the powerful legal and discursive category of the “fanatic.” I show how this was perceived as an existentially threatening class of criminal that existed entirely outside the bounds of politics, society, and sanity, and therefore needed to be destroyed completely. The subjectification of the “fanatic,” in this case, ultimately served as a way of activating the colonial state’s “sovereign” need to punish and kill. Finally, I deconstruct these reductive colonial representations of fanaticism in order to demonstrate how, despite British views to the contrary, these were often complex and deeply political acts of anti-colonial resistance.