FROM 'IMAM UL-HIND' TO AZIZUL HIND: THE 'ONE-MAN MEDIA HOUSE' IN MODERN INDIA

From 'Imam ul-Hind' to *Azizul Hind*: the 'one man media house' in modern India

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the efforts of two Indian Muslim journalists, Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) and Aziz Burney (1952-), to use and exceed the constraints of direct and indirect censorship, in order to address a community (a *qaum*) conceived in their own image. It deals with these attempts through their responses to a series of national and international level crises; and to political groups that attempted to unite Hindus and Muslims. These include the nascent Khilafat movement, which was key to their coming together in the Independence struggle and Congress party, and dealing with the Congress's ambiguous relationship with Muslims in the post-Independence period.

KEYWORDS

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The Indian Urdu-language press has come to be seen as both marginal and the voice for an electorally significant minority, and not just within India. Wikileaks cable 06 NEW DELHI 5470, entitled "Indian Muslim Resentment Smoldering over Lebanon", describes how "the Urdu press has devoted much more space to these issues than English and Hindi language newspapers" and concludes with a discussion of "The Muslim Factor" in Congress electoral calculations, in terms familiar from colonial-era police reports on the 'Muhammadan' press.[1]

In both periods close attention to the 'Muslim' press stemmed from anxiety about what was perceived to be the divided loyalties of Indian Muslims, and these debates were not confined to the state. Muslims themselves engaged in charged discussions about the boundaries and nomenclature of various putative communities. During the Independence struggle this was famously expressed in an exchange of words, conducted in the Urdu press, between Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) and the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), regarding the meaning of the terms: *qaum*, *millat* and *ummat*. *Qaum*, most often translated as nation, can variously mean "A people, nation; a tribe, race, family; sect, caste".[2] *Millat* can also mean nation, or, more generally, a society or a company, but is more strongly redolent of religious community and faith.[3] *Ummat* (or, more commonly, *ummah*) has come to be associated with the international community of Muslims, but can also encompass "religious sect, people of the same religion; followers; race, nation; caste; creed, religion".[4] The unfixity of these terms has led them to be used interchangeably, allowing dispute over their meaning to become a means to delimit sociopolitical community.[5]

This paper deals with how the dispositif of the *qaum* played out in the hands of two politically ambitious Urdu journalist-editors: Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), during his editorship of the first iteration of *al-Hilal* (1912-14), and Aziz Burney (1952-), founder of the most widely

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[1] https://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/08/06NEWDELHI5470.html (accessed 01/09/2015).
[2] John T Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2006), p. 796.
[3] *Ibid.*, p.1064.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[5] A detailed account of Madani's assertion that in the current age *qaumeen* are based in homelands rather than *mazhab*, and Iqbal's hostile response, appears in Barbara D. Metcalf, "Introduction" to Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam*. (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2005).

distributed Indian Urdu newspaper, *Roznama Sahara Urdu*, who in 2013 started to publish his own paper, *Azizul Hind*. In Azad and Burney's writings *qaum* implicitly means Muslims in India. However, writing in a multilingual context with high levels of illiteracy but strong "literacy awareness",[6] they address a much wider audience than Urdu-knowing Muslims, with repercussions in turn for how this group is configured.

Their careers therefore also attest to shifts in the status of Urdu across the pre and post-colonial periods. During both it was associated with Muslims, and their status as editors of newspapers written in a language associated with India's largest minority would have leant them cachet amongst people unable to read Urdu, but 'aware' of it. But in the earlier period Urdu would have had a significant non-Muslim readership and competed with Arabic and Persian as a language of Islamic scripture and learning, and in the latter with Hindi as official language of the Union. Azad and Burney both make use of different Perso-Arabic and Sanskritic registers of the Urdu language in order to assert their ambitions to be Muslim and national level leaders. *Al-Hilal's* difficult language signals Azad's double consciousness of the colonial censor, whose attention he wished to avoid, and the *ulama*, whom he sought to impress with his piety and erudition. Post-independence, Burney uses *devanagari* script and Sanskrit vocabulary when writing on issues of national significance.

I have selected these particular case studies because Burney claims a genealogical relationship with both reformist and revolutionary traditions of Indian Muslim leadership, and with Azad in particular. In his intellectual biography of Azad, Douglas describes how during the Khilafat struggle, from 1910 until his imprisonment in 1921, he had thought of himself as "some kind of *mujaddid* or *imam*, whom God would vindicate in the way He vindicated the prophets".[7] The title of 'Imam ul-Hind' was semi-officially bestowed upon him by the mysterious figure of the Sheikh ul-Islam, but its legitimacy was disputable, with it remaining unclear what binding force it would have at any level. Azad was more securely located in the then emergent type of "the professional

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[6] C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870.* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 39.
[7] Ian Henderson Douglas, 1988. *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 97.

politician in India, part journalist, part orator, part holy man",[8] and Burney locates himself in this by now well-established tradition.

In their journalism both men attempt to retain something of the religious authority of the person-to-person mode of transmission. But far from being unalloyed mixtures of god's word and human consciousness, with no political content or design, their pronouncements verge upon intercession and even more, during moments when they attempt to 'conjure' the audience whom they address. I argue that sensitivity to the context within and audience for whom these performances were enacted, to what Butler describes as the "open temporality" of the speech act,[9] better reflects their contingent and therefore changeable nature.

I will accordingly pay attention to both their writing and the surrounding circumstances for its production: to the media through which their words were transmitted, their uneven translation within and across languages, and to the role of technology. Technological advances in themselves do not seem to have guaranteed greater freedom of speech for either Azad or Burney. Use of the latest printing technology made it easier for them to disseminate their message, but also left them vulnerable to external pressures which shaped its content and directed its movement.

In both periods the most significant of these pressures emanated from the state. From publication of the first Urdu daily in north India to the ongoing 'newspaper revolution', encouraged by increased literacy and economic liberalisation, government advertising revenue has been the main support for the Urdu press in India.[10] More generally, state discourses of loyalty and disloyalty have set the boundaries of permissible speech by which its contents have been judged. This paper will discuss how Azad and Burney sought to escape these strictures through adoption of an alternative business model and revolutionary politics.

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[8] Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

[9] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 15.

[10] See Ulrike Stark. "Politics, Public Issues and the Promotion of Urdu Literature: *Avadh Akhbar*, the First Urdu Daily in Northern India" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 18.1, 2003: 66-94 and Robin Jeffrey. *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-language Press* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) and "Urdu newspapers in India: Waiting for Citizen Cane?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(13), 1997, pp. 631-636.

I was able speak to Aziz Burney on several occasions between 2011-2014, conduct interviews with both him and his staff, and observe production processes in *Roznama Sahara Urdu* and *Azizul Hind*. When considering Azad I am reliant on his own writings, archival sources and secondary literature on this early period in his career, which marks the beginning of what Aijaz Ahmad has described as his "pious phase",[11] and just precedes his active involvement in the Independence struggle. But I will also deal with his general legacy, encompassing later better known periods of his life, when discussing political possibilities and speech conditions for Urdu journalists who write in his wake. In the first section, with reference to *al-Hilal* and the early stirrings of the Khilafat agitation in India, I will consider how a local politics existed alongside a revolutionary 'cosmopolitan' politics and was influenced by a Hindu nationalist 'cosmo-politics', based in a changing understanding of the significance of the spoken and the written word, and accordingly of the *qaum*. The next section will describe the more limited possibilities available to Burney, working in a post-Independence context and facing more severe techno-material constraints.

Abul Kalam Azad: 'Imam ul-Hind'

On the 2 November 1914, the Indian English language newspaper, *The Pioneer*, published an editorial titled "Pro-Germanism at Calcutta", which describes the stance of *al-Hilal*, a widely circulated, Urdu journal edited by Abul Kalam Azad. It claims that the paper has so far managed to avoid censorship because "the style of the most mischievous articles is very allusive and full of veiled sneers and sarcasms and innuendoes, most of which either disappear or lose their effect when translated into English, and it is not likely that many European officials read the paper in the original". A government which at such a time allows a British subject to publish such "malicious insinuations" must "lay claim to the possession of a most un-Germanic spirit of toleration", the writer concludes.

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[11] Aijaz Ahmad, "Azad's Careers: Roads Taken and not Taken" in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 122-175), p. 125.

This paper is not named, but the 2 November 1914 edition of *The Pioneer* contained an editorial titled "Pro-Germanism at Calcutta", which describes the stance of *al-Hilal*, a widely circulated, Urdu journal edited by Abul Kalam Azad. It claims that the paper has so far managed to avoid censorship because "the style of the most mischievous articles is very allusive and full of veiled sneers and sarcasms and innuendoes, most of which either disappear or lose their effect when translated into English". A government which at such a time allows a British subject to publish such "malicious insinuations" must "lay claim to the possession of a most un-Germanic spirit of toleration", the writer concludes.

But a spirit of toleration seems not to have informed the colonial state's attitude towards the Indian press since the viceroyalty of Curzon (1889-1905). The easily evaded requirement, introduced in 1867, that books and newspapers bear the names of authors, printers, and publishers, had recently been made more stringent with the introduction of the 1910 Press Act. Introduced in response to political disturbances provoked by the 1905 partition of Bengal, this rendered all registered publications liable to payment of a security deposit, which would be forfeited if a document was found to contain seditious content.[12]

In practice the 1910 Act was hard to implement because demarcating where "seditious" began and the merely "religious" or "mythic" ended involved difficult encounters with "vernacular cultural production";[13] in the case of *al-Hilal*, the allusive language full of "veiled sneers and sarcasms and innuendoes" referred to in the *Pioneer* editorial. There were also techno-material limits to its implementation, with artists and publishers evading regulations by disseminating their messages through more mobile and less easily tracked media such as lithography and word of mouth. As a result the Act mainly affected letterpress printing technology, such as that used by Azad to produce his journal. Hence both the delay in taking action against *al-Hilal*, which combined political polemic and religious fervor in its coverage of the Balkan and first world wars, and the

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[12] Muzzafer Hussain Khan, *The Indian Press Act, Act I of 1910* (Calcutta: R. Cambray & Co., 1919).
[13] Christopher Pinney, "Iatrogenic Religion and Politics" in Raminder Kaur and William Mazzarella (eds.) *Censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 29-62), pp. 40-41.

effectiveness of levying an additional deposit in forcing it to shut down. In 1913, alarmed by the pro-German tone of its editorials, the Government of India had demanded a security deposit of Rs 2,000 and in response to the double edition described in *The Pioneer*, forfeited this and claimed a further sum of Rs 10,000, causing *al-Hilal* to cease production. The last edition of its first iteration was published on 18 November 1914.[14]

The Daily Report of the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, for 11 September 1914, describes how apparent Muslim support for the Germans can only be understood by reference to events preceding the war; in particular, communal representation in the new Councils and drives to remedy the perceived educational "backwardness" of Muslims.[15] This "awakening" is said to have produced a new generation of political leaders and primed them for a more radical politics. Provoked by "the troubles which have befallen the Muslim world", Indian Muslims are said to be imitating "Hindu methods" in pressing "what they consider to be claims of the community by active agitation". They have acquired "a ready means of inflaming the masses" through the "new Muhammadan press", and of these papers the tone of *al-Hilal* is "particularly bad". There is said to now be "a definitely acknowledged young party which seeks to thrust the older more cautious men into the background".

In the report's reference to the older, more moderate generation can be discerned an allusion to the reformist tradition of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817 – 1898), who had been hostile to pro-Khilafat sentiment in the late nineteenth century, responding with a series of articles written at the conclusion of the Greco-Turkish War in 1897. These were collected together and published by Siraj-ud-din Ahmed, an Indian Muslim Barrister, in 1916 and 1920, with the intention of refuting the messages of those who were seeking to "misguide the ignorant Mussalman masses of the country".[16] (His preface makes particular mention of a booklet by "Maulvi Abulkalam Azad of

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[14] Azad published another magazine a year later under the name of *al-Balagh*. This ceased publication within a year after Azad was expelled from Bengal and moved to the State of Bihar. Later, in 1927, *al-Hilal* resumed publication in Delhi, but this iteration only lasted for six months.

[15] National Archives of India, Home, Political A, November 1914, Nos. 33-38.

[16] Siraj-ud-din Ahmed. 1920. *The Truth about the Khilafat* (Lahore: Khosla Bros., Electric Printing Works, 1920), p. ii).

Calcutta".)[17] During this earlier period, Ahmad Khan dealt with the problem of defining the boundaries of the *qaum* by upholding the colonial distinction between religion and politics, thereby limiting the authority of the Ottoman caliphate and emphasising the subject position of Indian Muslims. In this way he staked his claim to be an intercessor for the Indian Muslim community he was in the process of ventriloquizing for the colonial state. Building upon this legacy, Azad would go on to both use and overstep these boundaries in his pursuit of a broader constituency as a Muslim leader *and* a nationalist statesmen.

More generally, by mobilizing a national pan-Islamic constituency the Khilafat movement sought to reconstitute the nationalist movement by involving Indian Muslims in it on more equal terms. In the early twentieth century the increasingly embattled caliphate became not just a symbol of unity but of 'Islam in danger', with special significance for Muslims in India who identified with the declining Mughal ruling elite, and the leadership of the Khilafat movement came from this group. Support for the Khilafat therefore marked a significant shift away from the reformism of an earlier school towards a more militant type of political engagement, with ramifications for how the *qaum* would be imagined.

But the Khilafat leadership was not a homogenous group, and Azad, in particular, is something of an outlier within it, not being affiliated to any of the schools with which most of its leaders were associated, the Aligarh Movement, the Dar al-Ulum Deoband and Farangi Mahal madrassas, and therefore not fitting within the pattern of those who entered politics because of "institutional rivalries and the quest for followers in that framework".[18] The ambivalent nature of Azad's relationship with the *ulama*, and his own leadership ambitions can be discerned in both the style and content of his editorials in *al-Hilal*, full of criticism of the conservatism of these schools, but written in prose laden with Persian and Arabic words, and sometimes even, in his *fatiha* (opening) editorials, entirely in Arabic.

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, p. 45.

Precisely because of his extra-mural status as a journalist/statesman rather than a full-fledged member of the *ulama*, Azad was open to diverse influences: reformist, revolutionary, English, non-Western and non-Indian, and therefore well-placed to invoke both pan-Islamic and cross-denominational notions of the *qaum*, which often seemed to elide into the no less ambiguous category of 'the people'. This was to allow him to assume a pivotal role in the dawn of the non-cooperation movement, when the Independence struggle would become a mass and national movement. Through his deployment of print and prophetic speech, he participated in a shift from a reformist to a revolutionary Indian Muslim politics, and sought to position himself at the apex of this movement.

Print, as has often been noted, came relatively 'late' to the 'Muslim world' and India,[19] and has even, contentiously, been described as a less significant innovation than the manuscript in South Asia.[20] Its belated introduction in North Indian local languages has been attributed to the East India Company's policy of non-interference in religious matters, which led it to forbid missionary activities within its territories until 1813.[21] Before the 1800s most Urdu books published in India were printed in *nastaliq*, the cursive script in which Urdu is most commonly written, but even after moveable type printing in the more adaptable *naskh* character was introduced by the missionary press, lithographic printing and *nastaliq* continued to predominate.

Cheap, portable and easy to use, lithography played a significant role in "democratizing print in South Asia".[22] Lithography became "the printing medium par excellence of the Muslim

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[19] Thomas Francis Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1925); William. A. Graham. *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robinson, Francis Robinson, "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia" in Nigel Crook (ed.) *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 62-97) and "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print", *Modern Asian Studies*, 27(1), 1993, pp. 229-251.
[20] Sheldon Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India" in Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash and Ian Willison (eds.) *Literary Cultures and the Material Book*, (London: British Library, 2007, pp. 77-94).
[21] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007), p. 37.
[22] Graham Shaw,"Calcutta: Birthplace of the Indian Lithographed Book", *Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, 27, 1998, pp. 89-111, p. 89.

communities in South Asia for its ability to make possible the 'mass-produced manuscript', which met the criteria of cultural authority which the type-set text could not".[23] That is, a person-to-person mode of transmission, which would preserve the authentic meaning of a text in the absence of the original author.

But there were also technical reasons for this preference. *Nastaliq* is hard to accurately typeset, meaning that most Urdu newspapers continued to be lithographed until Urdu InPage software was developed in 1994. The first Urdu computer font was invented by Ahmed Mirza Jamil in 1981, who had been inspired by a Chinese character keyboard he had seen at an exhibition in Singapore.[24] A complicated user interface and incompatibility with standard word processing packages meant that it was not much used, in India at least. Even the Congress party paper *Qaumi Awaz*, the most widely distributed and best-resourced Indian Urdu paper of its time, continued to be lithographed into the 1990s. Azad was therefore making a statement in choosing to publish his newspaper on a type press in *naskh* font in 1912. In doing so he was both signaling a modern outlook and grounding in Islamic scripture, *naskh* being the script in which the Quran has most commonly been written.[25]

The early editions of *al-Hilal* repeatedly draw attention to the magazine's use of type. The first edition (13 July 1912) discusses at length the difficulties that have beset its production, and apologises for its poor quality. Due to production difficulties the entire magazine could not be printed in specially imported Turkish type, as had been promised in announcements for *al-Hilal*. But the editor promises that these faults will be fixed in the coming weeks. The second edition (20 July 1912) details the different formats of newspapers (daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly) and provides a brief history of printing in eastern nations, in which the editor regrets that because of a lingering attachment to stone lithography there is no *nastaliq* equivalent to the beautiful *naskh* type produced in Turkey and Egypt, in which Arabic and Persian newspapers are printed. These

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Syed M. Abul Khair Kashfi (ed.), *Noori Nastaliq Revolution in Urdu Compositing*, (Karachi: Elite Publishers, 2008), p. 12.
[25] Y.H. Safadi, *Islamic calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 62.

discussions contextualize his choice to publish a weekly magazine rather than a daily newspaper, and to print it using printing technology imported from Turkey. He draws attention to the superior type in which *al-Hilal* is produced, and claims it is much better than that produced from Allahabad and Calcutta.

In an addendum to this edition, the magazine's production values are said to justify its relatively expensive price, which he claims would be unexceptional for a similar quality English paper. If *al-Hilal* were in English an annual subscription would cost one guinea and be cheap at the price. Urdu readers have got into the habit of paying no more than three or four rupees for an annual subscription to a magazine, but most of these papers are printed using litho press and inexpensive paper, and are often un-illustrated. Although *al-Hilal's* annual subscription is eight rupees, this is not excessive given the expense and effort put into its production. With a cover price of fifteen rupees there would be some hope of recovering expenses, but because the real purpose of the magazine is to raise a countrywide movement, and without producing numerous editions this would be impossible, the additional expense has been overlooked.

Through the direct address of these editorials Azad makes his presence felt and appeals to an audience, whom he addresses as *nazrin* (viewer) and *pablik* (public). Discussion of letters he has received and editorials written in response to them further underline his presence; notably, in the editorial that appears in *al-Hilal* of 8 September 1912, written in response to a senior friend's enquiries about the political purpose of the newspaper: "*Al-hilal ki politikal ta'lim ki nisbat ek khat aur us ka jawab*" (With regard to al-Hilal's political education: a letter and its reply). The text of the letter is reproduced, accompanied by a lengthy reply by Azad in which he both asserts and downplays his knowledge of Arabic, religious learning and possession of a good library, and emphasizes that the authority of his paper's political policy is solely based in the teachings of the Quran. According to its teachings there is no need to pay obeisance to the colonial state or submit to the Hindus. Azad's authority may be located in an Arabic-language ecumene, but his journal was written in Urdu and published in India. Although a great deal of space in *al-Hilal* was devoted to

coverage of events in the Ottoman empire, these reports were written with the concerns of Indian Muslims in mind.

These connections are perhaps most clearly evident in his coverage of local authority encroachment upon a mosque in the north Indian city of Kanpur. The story ran in *al-Hilal* for many months from 11 June 1913 onwards. When police fired upon demonstrators, killing several on 3 August 1913, Azad responded in the 13 August 1913 edition of *al-Hilal* with an article titled "A Painful Glimpse of Edirne in Kanpur", in reference to the Turkish town (Adrianople) which had been occupied during the Balkan war in that same year. In its report on this event, *al-Hilal* weaves a local story which had gained national significance into the international:

> The earth is thirsty. It needs blood. But whose? That of Muslims. West Asia is adorned [*rangin*] with whose blood? Muslims. On the soil [*khak*] of Iran, whose bodies are writhing? Muslims. In the Balkan region whose blood is flowing? Muslims. The soil of Hindustan is also thirsty. She needs blood. Whose? Muslims. At last, in the environs of Kanpur blood flows and the earth of Hindustan is intoxicated.

Such passages seem to substantiate criticism of Azad of the *al-Hilal* period's "thick streak of Muslim separatism".[26] Communal tensions do seem to have been an important context for his strong response to the demolition, but the rhetorical devices in this passage bear comparison with the "cosmo-politics" of Hindu-nationalist discourses of the Independence movement, as described in Pinney's article on the unintended effects of the 1910 Press Act.[27] Specifically, there are parallels with revolutionaries' use of allegorical devices, according to which historical and present-day events become "parallel systems with a converging significance".[28] Similarities with what the Calcutta Police Commissioner had described as "Hindu" methods of protest can be seen in both the demonstrations and the coverage of them in "the new Mohammadan press", the allusive use of

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[26] Ali Ashraf, "Appraisal of Azad's Religio-Political Trajectory" in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 100-121), p. 108.
[27] Pinney, "Iatrogenic Religion and Politics", 2009.
[28] Ibid., p. 32.

words and images as colonial censorship increasingly began to take its toll. Pushed into the same socio-religious space, and into using the same tropes, those critical of British rule were driven to be more militant *and* more indirect.

There is also the significance of *al-Hilal*'s non-Muslim readership during a period when Urdu had yet to be exclusively associated with Muslims. Because of Azad's subsequent involvement in the Indian Independence movement *al-Hilal* has come to acquire the status of a nationalist periodical. In *India Wins Freedom* Azad describes how *al-Hilal* was intended to build up national public opinion, and speaks of a multidenominational readership.[29] This may not accord with the difficult language in which the paper was written, unlikely to have had mass appeal in this period of mass illiteracy. Nor does it reflect the Muslim readership addressed in editorials on the status of Muslims in India and around the world. In the earlier mentioned editorial of 8 September 1912, in which he outlines the political purpose of his journal, he urges Muslims to abjure the path of both moderate and extremist Hindus. They are not to forget that a true Muslim holds the Quran in his hand, and a hand that holds a Quran cannot hold a bomb.

But appearing soon after implementation of the 1910 Press Act such public disavowals of violence arguably reflect his awareness of a particular audience – that of the colonial censor. In subsequent autobiographical writing Azad was to claim that during the period of "Indian political awakening", which had followed the partition of Bengal in 1905, he had joined a Hindu revolutionary group in Calcutta and convinced them to overcome their anti-Muslim prejudice:

> I began to argue with them that they were wrong in thinking that Muslims as a community were their enemies. I told them that they should not generalise from their experiences of a few Muslim officers in Bengal. In Egypt, Iran and Turkey the Muslims were engaged in revolutionary activities for the

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[29] Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1989), p. 8.

achievement of democracy and freedom. The Muslims of India would also join in the political struggle if we worked among them and tried to win them as our friends.[30]

Regardless of the accuracy of these retrospective accounts, it is notable that even in the first iteration of *al-Hilal* Hindu revolutionary activities form the context for Azad's discussion of the necessity to adopt jihad, when he criticises Muslim leaders who counseled quietism and loyalty, leaving Hindus to take the lead in the struggle for independence (*al-Hilal* 18 December 1912). By fusing pan-Islamism and anti-British sentiment, and thereby extending the boundaries of the *qaum* through deployment of cosmo-politics and cosmopolitan politics, Azad effects an innovation. He attempts to ventriloquise both a pan-Islamic *and* pan-national community of readers by moving around various sociotechnical constraints, between a spiritual register and demotic concerns, a local and international politics, and even attempting to intertwine the two as an 'Imam ul-Hind'.

Aziz Burney: *Azizul Hind*

One hundred years after the first release of *al-Hilal*, a newspaper with the curious title of *Azizul Hind* came into publication in 2013, an Urdu paper for the most part, but with certain sections translated into Hindi. The title of the paper draws upon the meanings of its editor, Aziz Burney's first name. "Aziz" is evocative of various kinds of love and esteem, and also indicates "a great man; a worthy or pious personage, a saint",[31] and "ul-Hind" recalls Azad's honourary title. When asked whether the last was a deliberate allusion, Burney smiled and allowed that it may have had some bearing upon the choice of name for his newspaper, but said its main purpose was to express his own love for India.[32]

Through the title of his newspaper Burney sets himself up in a line of Indian Muslim leadership, and in relation to Azad in particular. This was not the first time in which he had done so.

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[30] Ibid., p. 5.
[31] Definition of "Aziz" from John T Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī and English*, p. 761.
[32] Interview with Aziz Burney, Noida, 4 September 2014.

His 2005 collection of editorials on the Gujarat riots, *India Lose Freedom* (sic), directly alludes to Azad's book on the Independence struggle with its title.[33] A complete set of *al-Hilal* was also prominently displayed in his office. More than his literary style or political ideas, the example of Azad can be seen to have shaped Burney's ambitions. As with Azad, these would seem to be quite grandiose, combining intimacy and political prophecy:

> I talk with my readers. I don't think of them as readers. I think of myself as a member of their family, and just as on a daily basis one interacts with one's family members, in this way I am a family member who every morning over tea am with them…sometimes I will even be angry with them. Today itself I wrote that I am not participating in some *mushaira* [poetry performance] in which it is your responsibility to clap hands and 'appreciate' and that is it! I don't need praise. I need revolution. If you are prepared to bring revolution then my writing is okay, it's good that I bring out my newspaper and you read it. It is meaningless if my writing is merely good and you enjoy reading it.[34]

In such statements one sees the legacy of Azad's performance, in the early phase of his career, of the role of politician-journalist, revolutionary and holy man. This mode of address characterises the journalism of both men, which often seems more akin to confessional speech than orthodox journalistic writing.

Prior to setting up his own newspaper in 2013, Aziz Burney had been head of operations at Sahara Group Urdu Media. After joining its Hindi newspaper in 1991, he went on to launch monthly, weekly and daily Urdu periodicals in 1991, 1994 and 1999 respectively. *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* grew to become the most widely circulated daily Urdu newspaper in India, and is now published in ten editions, including one as far south as Bangalore. Burney is also a prolific writer in several languages and formats. He has published novels and books of non-fiction in Urdu, Hindi and English,

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[33] Aziz Burney, *Gujarat 2002, the turning point of Indian history: India lose freedom* (sic) (New Delhi: Indian Publishers' Distributors, 2005).
[34] Interview with Aziz Burney, Noida, 4 September 2014.

and keeps a multilingual blog.[35] When I first spoke to him in the spring of 2011 he mentioned that the screenplay of his book about Saddam Hussain was due to go into production and described plans for a science fiction novel.

But Burney is most famous for his full-page Hindi and Urdu editorials on the second page of *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*: the right hand columns in Urdu, the left in Hindi, the contents and language of the two varying slightly (i.e. the *nastaliq* original is not transliterated straight into *devanagari*). These editorials would be dictated to a sub-editor sitting in an adjoining office, and, when he was travelling, delivered via telephone. The free-form structure and personal voice of these texts means that they convey a strong sense of the spoken word. These speeches/texts have attracted attention beyond the domain of Urdu newspapers as a result of being collected and published in book form. Even when printed in the newspaper they carried a certain weight because of their prominent position within the paper, and grand title of "*Azad Bharat ka Itihas*" (The History of Free India).[36]

Like Azad, Burney's writings not only span borders between genres, formats, languages, the written and the spoken word, but also between the sayable and the unsayable. Most controversially in a series of articles he wrote implicating the Hindu nationalist paramilitary organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, which resulted in a public apology on the front pages of both Hindi and Urdu Sahara. On 26 November 2008 gunmen attacked various landmarks in Mumbai, including Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and the Taj Mahal Hotel, killing 174 people over the course of three days. The attacks were at least partly planned from Pakistan, and badly affected relations between the two countries.

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[35] http://www.azizburney.com/ (accessed 23/07/2017). This is no longer updated as regularly as it was, but Burney continues to maintain an active online presence via his social media accounts.
[36] In using the Sanskrit terms *Bharat* and *itihas* in this Urdu text he situates his writing within mythopoeic traditions of Indian history writing, which have a strong Hindu inflection. *Itihas* is synonymous with the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; Bharat is a character in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* is the tale of his dynasty.

Aziz Burney wrote a series of editorials on these attacks, which were collected and put together in book form, and published conjointly in Hindi and Urdu in December 2010.[37] The book launch precipitated a legal case and an apology published in both the Hindi and Urdu editions of Sahara. In the left-hand corner of the first page of the 28 January 2010 edition of the Urdu paper, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, can be seen a short text in Hindi titled: "*Aziz Burney ki taraf se saphai aur maphi: RSS ki Sajish 26/11 pustak ke sandarbh main*" (A clarification and apology from Aziz Burney with regards to his book *RSS Conspiracy, 26/11*). The fact that the apology was written in Hindi accentuates the impression of accommodation. "The story behind Aziz Burney's unconditional apology to the RSS in Hindi" is the headline of a story on the website *New Age Islam*.[38] The apology is not just written in *devangari* script but, in parts, in a heavily Sanskritised Hindi. This is especially evident in its closing lines: "*hridya se ksama chahta hun*" ("I seek forgiveness from my heart"). It was removed from the e-edition of *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, although it did appear in the Hindi online edition. When I asked staff in the Noida office about this they said the decision had come from above, but it was arguably equally a response to feared and actual responses from below, and both its inclusion and removal were facilitated by technology, the speed with which it is now possible to produce multilingual layouts and edit e-editions.

The 13 February 2011 edition of the RSS English language publication *The Organiser* claims that Burney wrote his apology because of a lawsuit filed on 7 August 2009 by a social worker with RSS connections.[39] But given the delay in publishing the apology and the fact that the book compilation of his articles was published in the meantime, it seems unlikely that this was the only reason. Other reports speculated that Burney was made to publish it on the front page of both Hindi and Urdu Sahara, in an apparent attempt to appease his Hindu patron, Sahara Group chairman

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[37] Aziz Burney, *RSS ki sazish 26/11?* (Noida: Burney Publishing House, 2010).
[38] "The story behind Aziz Burney's unconditional apology to the RSS", *New Age Islam*, 12 February 2011: http://www.newageislam.com/islam-and-the-media/the-story-behind-aziz-burney%E2%80%99s-unconditional-apology-to-the-rss/d/4113 (accessed 31/08/2015).
[39] Pramod Kumar, "Burney apologises for his vicious canard against RSS Will Digvijay follow suit or face trial?", *The Organiser*, 13 February 2011: http://organiser.org/archives/historic/dynamic/modules4df7.html?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=384&page=8 (accessed 23/09/2015)

Subrato Roy, who was keen to maintain working relations with all political parties, and to avoid antagonising a powerful organisation such as the RSS. The volatile patron-client relations at play here contrast with Azad's relatively secure financial position, made possible by the strength of *pir-murid* ties binding descendants of the disciples of his father, Sufi *pir* Shaikh Muhammad Khairuddin Dehlavi.[40]

Burney's position in Sahara continued to be precarious, and this forms the context of a series of editorials he wrote in response to the controversial 2010 Allahabad High Court judgement on the Ayodhya land title case. Disputes over who owns this plot of land, reputedly the site of a temple marking the birth of the Hindu deity Ram, came to a violent culmination in the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid, built upon the spot in 1528. In its 2010 judgement the High court declared that Ayodhya is the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram and that this was proven by a report of the Archaeological Survey of India. The land was divided three ways between two Hindu organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Nirmohi Akhara, and the Sunni Waqf board. As an infant, Ram's claims could be represented by the Hindu Mahasabha, and as a god any claims made on his behalf were not time-barred, unlike those of the Sunni Waqf board, which were dismissed on this basis even though they were allocated a third of the land. The judgement was met with both shock and relief as anticipated communal clashes did not occur. But there were soon criticisms of it as a faith-based judgement, and calls to take it to the Supreme Court and have it overturned. On 9 May 2011 the Supreme Court stayed the judgement on appeal, describing it as "something strange" given that no one had requested division of the land.[41]

Aziz Burney had been in the habit of writing emotive editorials on the anniversary of the destruction of the mosque, and it might have been expected that he would respond in kind to the 2010 judgment, but this was not the case. After keeping his counsel for a few days he responded

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[40] *Al-Hilal's* chief patron was Haji Nur Muhammad Zakariya, son of Haji Zakariya, a wealthy merchant and disciple of Azad's father (Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*), pp.39-40.
[41] "Supreme Court stays Allahabad High Court verdict on Ayodhya", *The Hindu*, 9 May 2011: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-stays-allahabad-high-court-verdict-on-ayodhya/article2003448.ece (accessed 01/09/2015)

with an editorial on the 2 October 2010, titled "*Kya zaruri hai, suprim kort jana…zara ghor karen*" ("What need is there to go to the Supreme Court…please reflect on this"). In this editorial Burney acknowledges 30 September 2010 was a difficult day for the Indian people and the Indian state, and expresses gratitude that there have been no untoward incidents. He respectfully asks the Muslim leaders and members of the *ulama* who are wanting to appeal the judgement, whether, given that it is the state's responsibility to maintain peace and unity, it is possible for a mosque to be built on this site. He offers an alternative scenario in which Muslims would ask their Hindu brethren to build a splendid Ram temple, whilst they themselves would build a mosque on the land allotted to them by the court. These two buildings would then become internationally renowned symbols of Indian traditions of communal harmony for coming generations.

The national perspective and statesmanlike like tone he adopts in this text recall Sir Sayyid's attempts to present himself as a loyal representative of disaffected Indian Muslims in his work on the 1857 revolution, written in Urdu and published in London for an exclusive audience of British readers. They differ from Azad's editorials on the Kanpur mosque incident not just in their 'moderation', but also in their relatively narrow frame of reference. Here the international merely figures as an imagined audience for the resolution of a local conflict, north Indian but cast as national, rather than as a site of strong comparisons and connections.

Over the following days (4, 8-15 October 2010) there followed more editorials on this theme. In these writings he presents himself in the role of a mediator between the concerns of the Muslim community and the needs of the Indian state, but with one eye on the proprietor of his newspaper, Subrato Roy, and another on the political parties. In particular, the Congress party, which was in power at the centre at the time and preparing to contest the 2012 assembly elections in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Many Indian Muslims consider the Indian Congress party to have played a dishonourable role in the Ayodhya land title case. From the placement of Hindu idols inside the masjid in 1949, the unlocking of its gates in 1986, to its destruction in 1992 and the 2010 High Court Judgement, its most notorious episodes have occurred when the Congress party was in power at the

centre. Despite its proclaimed secular identity, this correlation has encouraged speculation about a soft Hindutva strain in Congress politics, which has been a factor in Muslim electoral disaffection from the party in the post-Independence period.[42] Hence periodic searches for spokesmen figures, such as Burney, who could mediate between Muslim voters and Congress. This was a role performed by Abul Kalam Azad himself in a later phase of his career, as Congress transformed from an insurgent movement into a ruling party.

Because Aziz Burney's editorials are written in both Hindi and Urdu they would have been easily accessible, and in a June 2011 interview he mentioned that he was aware that they were being read by Congress politicians.[43] During our first meeting in 2010 he had shown me a letter from Sonia Gandhi thanking him for his support in the 2009 national elections, but he subsequently insisted that he had backed Congress because of its secular ideology and had no particular attachment to the party.[44] Nevertheless, rumours were circulating that Congress was planning to re-launch its Urdu newspaper, *Qaumi Awaz*, from Lucknow in order to reach Muslim voters in time for the polls, and that Burney was slated to be its editor. Rumours were also circulating that he had ambitions for a seat in the upper assembly on a Congress party ticket.

His efforts, if that is what they were, seem to have been unsuccessful. *Qaumi Awaz* did not resume publication, no Rajya Sabha seat was in the offing, and in November 2011 Burney was transferred to the corporate relations department at Sahara and his editorials ceased to appear. This was an important post, he assured me, with many responsibilities, but not in his line.[45] He never actually worked there, although for about a year and a half he got a regular salary, "a car, driver, servants, everything". He had now left Sahara, but said he maintained a close relationship with Roy,

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[42] See the 2004 Rediff interview with politician Arif Mohammad Khan, who cites Congress "saffronisation" as a reason for his decision to quit the party and join the BJP: http://www.rediff.com/election/2004/feb/23inter.htm (accessed 26/02/2018). There is something of the tone of Khan's pledge to "surrender" himself to the BJP in the immoderate moderation of Burney's editorials on the Supreme Court judgement. Khan explicitly references Sir Sayyid, who in 1857 is said to have concluded that it was impossible to defeat the British, when urging Muslims to learn from and befriend Hindu nationalists after the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. Both editorials also recall Azad's famous post-Partition speech, delivered from the steps of the Jama Masjid, berating the *qaum* for not heeding his words on the dangers of the two-nation theory.

[43] Interview with Aziz Burney, Noida, 22 June 2011.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Interview with Aziz Burney, Noida, 4 September 2014.

despite his current difficulties. Roy had been imprisoned in February 2014 on a Supreme Court warrant for failing to refund the 240 billion rupees he owed to investors. This relationship between the two men would last forever, Burney proclaimed. At first there was a relationship between an employer and an employee, now there was a love which was not limited to the period that he remained on the Sahara payroll.

Soon after he left Sahara, with the publication of *Azizul Hind*, Burney realised his ambition of becoming a "one man media house".[46] When I spoke to him following the launch of his own paper he expressed excitement at the possibilities offered by new technology. Newspapers used to reach a limited circle, but now social networking and websites had considerably broadened their reach and brought him closer to his readers. Previously he used to tour the country from Kanyakumari to Darjeeling in order to address hundreds of thousands of people, and now this is no longer necessary. Nowadays even a journalist shut up in a room is capable of being discussed in every state in the land, of having the state concerned about what he will publish in the morning. He writes his editorial at 10pm and two hours later it reaches 130 countries, people run it through translation software and read it in various languages. What need for him to go anywhere?

By means of the latest communications technology Burney evokes ancient forms of inscription, a writing "without Paper, without Pen", which does much more than attempt to represent speech.[47] Through his online editorials he aims to recover both the authority of the spoken word and avail of the insurrectionary possibilities of writing. He even attempts to expiate what Pollock has described as "the guilt of Babel", to reach readers in distant lands speaking other tongues through the medium of this ur-language.[48] Again, comparison could be made with Azad's ambitions in *al-Hilal*, the prophetic pretentions of his Urdu and especially Arabic editorials, in which

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[46] An ambition expressed in an interview held on 14 July 2011 and repeated on 4 September 2014.
[47] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 76.
[48] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), p. 504.

being read seems to be less of a concern than transmitting a message and literally *creating* an audience.

But as well as being excited by the possibilities of electronic media, Burney seems to have been caught up short by buying into what Rancière has described as the "*onto-technological trick*".[49] Namely, the over optimistic prognosis of an actually existing 'communism' created by de-territorialised and de-materialised forms of capitalist production, based in communication networks rather than goods for private appropriation. As well as possibly overestimating the computer literacy and technological resources of its readers, Urdu E-papers seem to be based on an unsustainable business model. *Azizul Hind* makes much of its internet presence whilst not revealing sales and circulation figures. The banner on the front page of its 1 May 2015 edition boasts that it reaches 150 countries and 1809 cities, and gives an estimated readership of 3,705,616 on the dubious basis of 'hits' received by its website. According to Burney's son, Subrat Aziz Burney, who is executive editor of *Azizul Hind*, internet readership was more important for the newspaper than paper readership, although the paper edition was published in Delhi, the neighbouring National Capital Region, and the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.[50]

The paper edition was also unusually expensive for an Urdu daily (Rs 5 at a time when *Rashtriya Roznama Sahara* sold for Rs 3). According to Subrat Burney this was because of the value and interest of his father's editorials, which continued to be published under the title "*Azad Bharat ka Itihas*" and numbered in a sequence starting from their first appearance in *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*. He said *Azizul Hindi* was in receipt of both central and local state advertising, but the editions I saw only contained small-scale private adverts for *Unani* medicines and such like, and larger more prominent ones for the Samajwadi Party. (The newspaper had started publication the year prior to the 2014 Indian elections, and was taking a strong pro-Samajwadi party line.)[51] Direct

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[49] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 78.
[50] Interview with Subrat Aziz Burney, Noida, 4 September 2014.
[51] See a 2017 article by a former *Azizul Hind* journalist on political pressures he faced whilst working at the newspaper: https://cafedissensus.com/2017/03/19/my-first-brush-with-urdu-journalism/ (accessed 05/12/2017).

appeals for reader donations, with Burney's bank account details listed, seemed to reflect its poor financial condition.

Subrat Burney insisted that the paper was doing quite well in UP compared to the two other main Urdu dailies, *Sahara* and *Inquilab*, and that although it was not getting much advertising revenue "we are not in a high loss". *Azizul Hind* was in the initial stages of its production, and not yet a profit-making concern: "it's basically not a profit business in the beginning, but you get to know some people, you can meet politicians". The newspaper was produced by a staff of 50, most of whom were based in Aziz Burney's residence-cum-office, and printed using technology hired from the *Indian Express*. When I asked whether it was difficult to publish an Urdu newspaper from an English language press, Subrat Burney said that it was a "simple thing". Pages were sent from the main office via the internet and then printed off. Uploading pages onto the website was even simpler and cheaper.

Like Azad, Aziz Burney displayed an unconcern for sales and profit margins, but this attitude was harder for him to sustain because of the different exigencies he faced, despite the relative ease of Urdu newspaper production and absence of strict censorship laws. On 1 May 2015, a front-page editorial appeared justifying a doubling of *Azizul Hind's* cover price to Rs 10. Like Azad, Burney addresses the reader directly to justify this decision, and in similar terms. *Azizul Hind* is a movement and not just a newspaper, he explains. But it cost Rs 10 to produce the paper and he breaks down its production costs: Rs 3.6 for paper, Rs 2.32 for printing, Rs 3.18 (Rs 18.3 is given but I assume this is an error) for editorial costs and about Rs 1 for distribution. Only through advertising revenue and the cooperation of those who keep the pain of the *qaum* in their hearts is the paper able to make up this deficit. He emphasises his principled line with regards to accepting advertisements from substandard or communal elements, and expresses regret that in the two years *Azizul Hind* has been in publication no worthy personages belonging to the *qaum* have spoken of cooperating with the newspaper, even though it is the wealth of the community, which we know has need of its own media during this time when communalists have purchased Urdu media at a high price in an effort

to reach Urdu knowing people. This is a reference to *Inquilab*, which had been purchased by the Dainik Jagran press group, an organisation that has strong Hindu nationalist association; its former managing director, Narendra Mohan, was a BJP Rajya Sabha member.

Burney says he started the paper in order to represent the community and its interests at the national and international level. Now he is faced with the choice of either shutting *Azizul Hind*, increasing its price, or, alternatively, switching to a weekly format on the lines of the Urdu weekly *Nai Duniya*, or Hindi and English *Outlook* magazines. He asks readers to continue to buy the paper at an increased price so that the movement can remain alive. This decision was not taken lightly. He knows that there are cheaper papers available on the market. Yet when one looks at the larger purpose this cost becomes meaningless. If it was his aim to get other kinds of benefit from producing a newspaper, then perhaps it would be possible to sell the paper for Rs 1. But this would not be true to the requirements of the *qaum* and of journalism. He ends by asking readers to advise him on whether they would prefer the paper to be produced weekly or bi-weekly, and lists his phone number and email address. The paper appears to have subsequently ceased publication, and no further editions have been uploaded onto its website.

Coda: 'impossible speech'

Both Azad and Burney attempted to be 'one man media houses', involving themselves in all aspects of newspaper production and directly addressing a reader conceived in their own image, transgressing various boundaries as they did so, and facing constraints upon these ambitions. Both men also played with the range of languages available to them in their editorials, and were early adopters of new communications technology: type printing and telecommunications. But Burney seemed to be stuck within narrower parameters, despite the greater speed and ease of Urdu newspaper production. In its testing of the limits of what it is possible to say and near-parodic renderings of official positions, Burney's utterances more closely resemble what Judith Butler describes as "impossible speech", "asocial ramblings" that are produced by the very rules that

govern "the domain of speakability".[52] Not emanating from a coherent subject or addressed to a particular audience, such speech is easily discounted within this domain.

Both men may have addressed themselves to the *qaum* of Muslims in India and presented themselves as representatives of its interests, but the expansiveness of Azad during the *al-Hilal* period is missing from Burney's work. This is largely a result of more severe financial constraints than those experienced by Azad, who had chosen to publish a weekly journal rather than a daily newspaper and was financially independent. But it is also, arguably, an indication of the relatively limited possibilities available to Burney as he works within the confines of state nationalism and 'vote bank' politics, lacks the context of an agonistic relationship to a colonial state and a nation in the making which lent force and relevance to Azad's words.

Acknowledgements

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[52] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 113.