

Rashid Rida: A “Passage to India”... and Kuwait

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RÉSUMÉ / ABSTRACT

In May 1912, under the combined influence of the reformist currents of Egypt and the Indian Ocean, the first school described as “modern” in the country, was created in Kuwait. At the same time, the tenth congress of the Association of Indian Ulemas was held in Lucknow, bringing together reformist intellectuals influenced by the legacy of the famous Sayyid Ahmad Khan who died in 1898. The presence of the Syrian thinker Rashid Rida at these two events is a little-known historical fact, despite its importance, right when the ideas of reformism were experiencing an unprecedented increase in circulation in the major port cities of the Persian Gulf. Rida's account of the trip shows how the theme of education was given an unprecedented political and internationalist meaning by the Muslim elites of the Indian Ocean ; a region strongly connected by its port synapses where both mercantile and intellectual networks wove and intertwined together.

[1] About the first years of al-Manâr, see RYAD Umar, “A Printed Muslim 'Lighthouse' in Cairo al-Manâr' [...]

1The year 1912 was a flourishing year for Rashid Rida's journalistic and theological activity. A number of his educational projects, notably the foundation of his own institute of "guidance and orientation" in Cairo (Dâr al-da'wa wal Irshâd) which intended to train a new generation of modernist preachers, were put to shape. Rida was also working, after the growing success of his journal al-Manâr, on creating a solidified network of reformist and like-minded intellectuals around him. Al-Manâr, his first enterprise, was a monthly newspaper whose publication began in 1898 just when Rida moved from his small Lebanese hometown near Tripoli to the buzzing Cairo[1]. It quickly established itself as the leading journal of Islamic reformist thought on the modern world. Evolving in a period of reform in education in Cairo where he settled at the beginning of the century, Rida engaged himself in the debates around those subjects, through his writings and his actions very much in favor of a modernized education. This educational project would combine the teachings of the religious tradition and modern sciences. This new scheme was to compete with Christian missionary schools on one hand and traditional Islamic institutions like the ancient kuttâb, on the other, that Rida considers unproductive and unfit to train young Muslims.

[2] BENNISON Amira K., "Muslim Internationalism between Empire and Nation-State" in: Green, A., Viaene [...]

[3] MANDAVILLE Peter, “The Heterarchic Umma: Reading Islamic Civilization from Within”. in Hall, M., Ja [...]

2This unprecedented perspective on education as a lever of power and independence against what was perceived as a western cultural invasion stemming from colonialism, is anchored in a quite particular historical context. Rida does perceives ta'lîm as a mean to awaken the Muslim nation, the ummah, from its slumber and its indolence and to strengthen its moral bonds against the multidimensional colonial and imperialist

advances. This narrative, which undoubtedly cultivates a certain internationalist Islamic sensibility, constituted an attempted response to the political and moral wavering of this pre-war era. This era was also the one of anxious hesitation as to which path to take in the face of the Ottoman growing political decay[2] and the British interference in the Gulf. As historian Peter Mandeville explains in "The Heterarchic Umma"[3], Rida's educational and reformist project can be read as an "Islamic response" to imperialism which intends to respond to the fragmentation of the Muslim world. The educational project carried out by reformist thinkers can also be categorized as an attempt to "rearticulate the frontiers of Islamic civilization", as Mandaville puts it, according to the same educational corpus and goals which, in the mind of Rida, sought to combine piety and progress.

3Rida constructed a discourse accrediting the role and effectiveness of the "muşliḥîn" (reformists) of all countries, which allowed him in the 1910s to assert himself as a man of action capable of making pragmatic choices beyond the reputation of discourse and polemicist that marked his early years.

4Rida's reformist project in those years, is characterized by its multidimensionality, being as much concerned with economic and financial affairs as it is with the literacy of the masses, and does not only constitute, as the more islamological analyses of the subject tend to suggest, a theological discourse *stricto sensu*.

[4] GELVIN James L, and NILE Green. *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, University of Califor [...]

[5] HALEVI Leor, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam's Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida*, Ne [...]

5Rida's discourse is also characterized in this period by a perennial enthusiasm for new objects allowing a greater connectivity between Muslim peoples such as the newspaper, the telegram or the steamboat.[4] His narrative stressed the importance of material prosperity and viewed it as essential to civilisational progress.[5] This interesting perspective helps one understand Rida's sympathy for both Indian and Kuwaiti traders and the ideological affiliations he could share with the infamous *tujjâr*, the wealthy notables of the Gulf.

[6] ABU-HAKIMA Ahmad Mustafa, *The Modern History of Kuwait: 1750-1965*, London: Luzac and Company Limite [...]

6Interestingly enough, this pre-war period was also a pivotal moment in Kuwait. The great merchant families sought to structure themselves into a political class with common interests, as highlighted by the historian Abu Hakima in his "Modern History of Kuwait"[6]. The latter explains that at the dawn of the First World War, the Gulf region experienced a boom in its economic production thanks to the export of pearls. Kuwait then had about 35,000 inhabitants and in 1906, 461 Kuwaiti ships employed more than 9,000 men in the pearl trade, which at the time already represented a third of Kuwait's population. At its peak, the pearl trade employed up to fifteen thousand Kuwaitis. This accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small part of society, the great merchant families in close contact with the Indian facade of Asia, placed this group at the very top of the political superstructure of the tribal emirate.

7Ta'lim was thus a central theme in pre-war articles of the *Manâr*. Rida's growing contacts with other ulemas, such as the Indians of Aligarh, enabled him to visit India at the beginning of the year, where he encountered the dizzying diversity of reformist currents which were active in the country. Important debates on education were indeed taking place in India since the beginning of the century under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, founder of the Islamic University of Aligarh, an institution often mentioned by Rida in the *Manâr*.

[7] Mubarak al-Sabah is an ambivalent figure in the political history of Kuwait. Intuitively seen as th [...]

8During his trip in 1912, Rida was invited to deliver a speech to the Ulema Association in Lucknow and also visited the "House of Knowledge" (*Dâr al-`Ulûm*) located in the North Indian village of Deoband before returning to Bombay. This visit to some of the greatest intellectual centers of India was the first stop on Rida's 'reformist tour', which he continued towards Kuwait. From the port of Mumbai, Rida headed to the Gulf for talks with the ruler Mubarak al-Sabah[7] and the powerful merchant-patrons who surrounded him, about the opening of the Mubarakiya school.

9All these projects asserted Rashid Rida's position as a leader of Islamic reformism for the years to come, while increasing his popularity and adding legitimacy to his social and spiritual credentials. This double invitation was indeed an important event in Rida's professional career.

10His travelogue also reveals the extent to which intellectual and trading networks were intertwined in this part of the world. These transnational networks intersected with the merchant networks that infused in Kuwaiti proto-national culture the idea of renaissance, progress and cosmopolitanism common to both groups weaving links from Cairo to Bombay. These networks also experienced an unprecedented trans-imperial spread through press, trade, pilgrimage routes, and all the new means of transportation which appeared during this modern era. These new reformist connectivities created a space where scholarly and mercantile communities from both sides of the ocean linked up; Kuwaiti and Indian renaissance figures clung to mercantile networks in the region to further out and publicize their cause, and the merchants who traveled between the port coasts became the main patrons of the movement which certainly added value to their political clout.

11Therefore, studying Rashid Rida's visit to Kuwait and India in May 1912 allows us to both delve into a less-known history of this Syrian scholar of the *Nahda*, and to measure the role of economic and scholarly diasporas between these two oceanic coasts in the construction of a pan-Islamic political discourse. This event also allows us to reconsider the very strong historical links between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, made up of economic, intellectual and religious circulations outlining the existence of another *Nahda*, and a particular one in its own right.

12Through Rida's journey, it is possible to observe in detail the changing faces of a religious knowledge that seeks to invest new social and public spaces. In this modern era, Islamic tradition serves as a resource to answer new social questions, on the relations to foreign powers, on mass education and on economic progress.

13Rida's reputation definitely precedes him as he embarks in 1912 on a British steamer for the Indian coast. The debates and topics raised by Rida at the annual celebration of

the Indian Ulema Association in Aligarh and Lucknow consisted in fairly straight-forward elements of reformist discourse, notably those of the political decadence of Muslim countries, the necessity and urgency of Iṣlâh, the importance of education and the role of the Ulemas in the civilisational awakening of Muslim peoples.

14But Rida's articles on the subject also allows us to look at the more material logics of connections, networking, credit and spiritual capital at work during this visit. It is interesting to note that it is from the Indian trading posts where they are based that Kuwaiti merchants hear of Rida's presence and invite him to visit them on their native shores on their own trade ships. His visit to Lucknow, enthusiastically announced by the reformist newspapers, circulated indeed in all such circles and prompted these merchants to invite him to Kuwait, as we will see.

15India, the first stop on what can be called Rida's reformist "tour" was in a country where educational projects had been flourishing since the turn of the century. Those were carried out in the wake of the legacy of the famous Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Rida had been following their promising progress with an unconcealed enthusiasm.

[8] رشيد رضا ، "نهضة مسلمي الهند" ، المنار ، المجلد. 1 ، أغسطس 1898 ، الجزء 20 ، صفحة 369.

[9] *ibid.*

16It is indeed possible to say that from the very beginning of the Manâr's publication, Rida had a special interest in India. Between 1898 and 1935, there are no less than 49 articles about India or with the word 'India' in their title. And Rida's appreciation for the Indian reformist activities of Anglo-Mohammedan College in particular is visible. In this 1898 article entitled 'The Nahda of the Indian Muslims'[8], Rida pays tribute to Sayyid Ahmad who passed away the same year, and looks back at the transnational career of this figure of Indian reformism, whom he describes as 'the first to stand up for the spread of education and the generalization of education among the Muslims of India'. The latter is admired and described by Rida as the embodiment of the ideal 'âlim ; the one who went to the best Western institutions (Oxford and Cambridge) to imbibe himself with European knowledge before resettling in his country to serve his people and their moral and religious upliftment, while bringing with him all the benefits of European teachings to his Islamic base: "When he visited England and saw what seriousness and hard work there was, he was touched by the fire of jealousy and from then on he resolved to establish a university school in his native country, similar to the two greatest institutions in England (Oxford and Cambridge), so he returned to his native country with the courage and resolution to accomplish such a project there"[9].

[10] HALEVI Leor, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam's Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida*, Ne [...]

[11] رشيد رضا ، "نهضة مسلمي الهند" ، المنار ، المجلد. 1 ، أغسطس 1898 ، الجزء 20 ، صفحة 369.

17The latter also fits well with the figure of the self-made entrepreneur that Rida himself claims to embody, as Leor Halevi's work on the sahib al-Manâr's more economic thinking has highlighted[10]. Described by Rida as having been rejected and mocked by his peers, his determination did not waver, and he 'began to work at his own expense; some of his honest companions were forced to help and support him, so his opinion gradually spread, as it does in any useful project'[11].

18It is through the same cosmopolitan and hard-working ethos that Rida would later describe the Indian and Kuwaiti reformists who went to meet him. Celebrated at his death by Indian Muslims, Sayyid Ahmad was to be remembered by posterity as the number of clerics graduating from the Aligarh school increased year by year. Rida saw this type of institution as a model for the Egyptians and Ottomans, whom he hoped would one day undertake similar projects.

رشيد رضا ، "مؤتمر التربية والتعليم في الهند" ، المنار ، المجلد.4 ، فبراير 1902، الجزء 22، صفحة 871.
[12]

[13] *ibid.*

19The publication of articles in the *Manâr* praising the Indian reformers kept going long after the death of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. In February 1902, following a congress held in India on education and teaching, Rida published a summary of an intervention by one of the 'âlim from the University of Aligarh[12]. One can see how the discourse, which is very much built around the notion of 'ilm al-nâfi'(useful knowledge), may have influenced Rida in his own writings on his ideal of modern Islamic education. Rida's article summarizing of this speech highlights this dimension, which was to be found a few years later in his own reformist discourse: "Then this scholar said what I summarize here: It must now become clear to you that the best schools to teach Muslim children are those which combine religious education with modern sciences ; their morals are refined there by combining with the learning of good virtue, that of the sciences which are useful to them for their future and their life"[13].

20Education was a common theme in the liberal discourses of the time. The reformists pointed to the backwardness of classical Islamic institutions and argued in favor of the introduction of secular sciences into the curriculum of Muslims schools. They were certain that the legitimate alliance between the modern sciences and the religious sciences would contribute to the progress of the community. These epistemological foundations are reflected in the discourse that Rida would later develop in his critiques of the outdated *taqlîd* of classical institutions such as al-Azhar.

[14] رشيد رضا ، "الأخبار والآراء" ، المنار ، المجلد.15 ، مارس 1912، الجزء 3، صفحة 225.

21Rida's early infatuation with Indian reformist writings and activities, at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Arab intellectual field was still mainly played out between Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul, is quite original for the time. Not without a certain idealism, he was influenced by the societies of the Indian Ocean, which he imagined to be harmoniously composed of rich merchants, wise and literate ruling families open to cosmopolitanism, numerous philanthropists, noble clerics of great intellectual vitality and a fairly tolerant British administration. Rida goes so far as to consider this region, along with Egypt, as the future heart of the Islamic renaissance . He sees it as the vanguard of the global Islamic reform movement. He expresses this vision in an article published in March 1912[14] ; "The Muslims of India and the Muslims of Egypt are those who enjoy a kind of freedom with which they can serve their religion and themselves, unlike all other Muslims".

22Addressing the Indian ulama, Rida said: "Dear brothers, Islam and the rest of the Muslims in your country expect a certain task from you, that of reviving its sciences, literature and deeds. For I have learnt through hard trials that there is no Muslim country in which freedom of education, effort of thought and vast wealth are combined as in

India and Egypt, and we must thank God for this and use this blessing to our advantage"[15]. Rida holds a very optimistic view of India and expects it to be the home of a collective "ijtihâd" for a global "is/lâh".

23In the following excerpt, Rida describes the situation of other Muslim peoples, beginning with the state of Tatars, who are "awake, alert" but whose government is "cutting them down, prosecuting teachers and punishing them for the crime of education", that of the Muslims of North Africa who "are not able to do the same work as them, because France watches them more severely", and those of Java whose "situation is worse than every other Muslim condition because Holland has surrounded them with a wall of ignorance that nobody can climb"[16]. This fairly realistic description of the political weaknesses of the Muslims, hampered by the material and administrative conditions of their time, leads to the fair enhancement of the role of the Muslims of India by the Syrian thinker.

24These few references drawn by Rida to the reformist projects taking place in the urban and religious centers of India shows how much the country constituted a wealthy source of inspiration for the intellectuals of the Nahda. We can safely argue that, in this sub-political but no less important domain of religious education, Muslim India exerted a kind of soft power towards Arab intellectuals and clerics. These educational projects were indeed a model and a reference for Rida who worked during his first decade in Cairo to build his own pedagogical institute, the Dâr al-da'wa wal Irshâd mentioned above, which intended to train the next generation of Muslim thinkers.

[17] رشيد رضا ، "ندوة العلماء الهندية " ، المنار ، المجلد.12 ، فبراير 1909 ، الجزء 1 ، صفحة 73.

25The recent establishment of the Indian Ulema Association in 1909 encourages Rida to publish an article to introduce the organisation and explain its objectives in the following terms ; "To found a house of science: This is the aim of the Indian Ulema Association which pursues its efforts in the service of the true religion and in its rightful quest for the good of the human race. The magazine Al-Bayan, which is published in the city of Lucknow (India) informs us that an annual celebration of the Ulema Association was held on November 28, 29 and 30 last in a city which is blessed with Muslims from all parts of the world, including great notables, scholars and dignitaries. During this ceremony, sermons calling for the dissemination of knowledge and the restoration of the glory of teaching in classical Arabic in the countries of India, for the erasure of the gross heresies that people perform in the name of religion, for the suppression of religious quarrels, for the reform of inter-community relations, for the consolidation of brotherhood and harmony among Muslims of different sects and opinions were delivered..."[17] These words express all of Rida's admiration for the Indian model, for the scientific openness and reformist spirit that such a gathering attracts.

26And it is on this same appreciative note that Rida visited the members of the Nadwat al-Ulama during their annual congress in 1912.

[...] رشيد رضا ، "الخطبة الرئيسية في ندوة العلماء لكهنؤ الهند" ، المنار ، المجلد.15 ، مايو 1912 ، الجزء 5 ، [...] [18]

[19] ibid.

27It is precisely in this August 1912 article[18] that Rida delves into his seminal visit. He publishes the speech he delivered to the members of Nadwat al-Ulama. He begins by

introducing himself as a qualified person who "has been working on this issue for fifteen years through research, study, debate, writing, preaching and teaching", explaining that he speaks here not as a "seasoned expert and scrutiniser" but as a "sincere lover of this cause"[19].

28Rida is very honored by this invitation from an association which is "a reformist association which is one of the most beneficial of all Muslims of this time to revive the religious sciences and their means"[20].

29He also reflects on the material difficulties he faced just prior to his visit to India, describing his enthusiasm for participating despite being preoccupied with the necessities of financially maintaining the Dâr al-da'wa, Rida says: "I was preoccupied with the establishment of the Dâr al-da'wa and the orientation and with looking at all the needs of the physical and moral foundations of the building, the furniture, the supplies, the teaching aids, the books, the selection of teachers and staff, and so on. But this was a much bigger cause, so I stopped everything to go to India and participate in this educational mission"[21].

30He goes on to express his admiration for the social strength of the Indian merchants and ulama and the economic support of the upper-class in funding educational projects that benefit the upliftment of their people: "The members of the Muslim upper class and their wise men in India support [financially] the seminary and provide it with money ; and the government of India itself is pleased with it and gives it an annual subsidy from its treasury"[22].

31The purpose of this visit is definitely for Rida to reflect "on what we need to do and what we should do in terms of serving Islam and promoting the status of Muslims through education"[23], but it also serves more "material" objectives for Rida, like sourcing powerful patrons and committed subscribers to fund the Manar newspaper ; "My trip to India this year will be the opening of one of the most important chapters in our financial history, as our group and our school have become very famous among our Muslim brothers in India who are the most steadfast Muslims in their religion, especially those from Nadwat al-Ulama"[24].

32The Indian merchant class, as Rida points out, is much invested in such projects. As he praises the wealthy Kuwaiti 'muthaqqaffin' (educated) merchants who invest their capital in the future of their country and in the cause of educating the younger generation, Rida admires those Indians traders "who have not hesitated to support scientific and charitable projects financially, out of a desire to establish financial and scholarly connections with those working in the field of education in the most prestigious countries of Islam ; Egypt and India"[25]. Through this excerpt, one understands how much al-Manâr functioned just like a small company where respectability, clout, self-presentation strategies and business partners mattered and were well-thought out by Rida[26].

33In the course of 1913 in a series of articles entitled 'Rihlatuna al Hindiya'[27] (Our Indian trip), Rida once again opened up about his journey, mentioning the names of the intellectual and commercial figures who welcomed him. Once again, public acknowledgements dominate the narrative and it seems that Rida tries to mention as many names as possible. His visit seems to have been paced by the many invitations he received, the people he met and the ulama whose homes he visited ; "I begin by

thanking the Aligarh school, its directors and students, mentioning the venerable sheikh, the great notable, the Reverend King, Bahadur Mawlawi Mushtaq Hussain, the secretary of the school and one of the leaders of the Muslims of India, and the pillars of the scientific renaissance in India. [I also thank the people of the school and the notables of the country for their great hospitality towards me during my stay among them, the venerable representatives and the dignity of the Bahadur have exaggerated the elegance of this welcome. And he welcomed me in the house of his great friend Bahadur Nawab Muhammad Khan, which is spacious and has a lush garden, and he used to invite me to dine in his company and those of great scholars and writers. The deputies, the reverence of the Bahadur and the mayor of the school and its teachers, their satisfaction with my advice, did me credit"[28].

34This excerpt lets one appreciate the diverse origins of this circle of ulama and their intertwined functions and professions that shaped Indian reformist structures. Rida does not hesitate to put them forward publicly under the pretext of not having time to thank them personally. In the following excerpt he mentions Sheikh Qasim Ibrahim, the great Kuwaiti merchant based in Bombay, from whom the invitation to head for Kuwait will come ; "I was able to write to some of them what I will be able to write to others or most of them, and I distinguish those whose names I now remember ; The Great, Noble Son of Karim Ibn al-Karim, Sheikh Qasim bin Muhammad Al-Ibrahim, 'abd-Allah Fawzan, and the rest of the Arab community of Bombay who welcomed me"[29].

35The same tropes are used in Rida's narration of his trip to Kuwait, in the sense that Rida always places his connections and the important people he meets at the center of his narrative. These successive logorrheas of public thanks seems to confirm our hypothesis about the importance of the social credit that this otherwise very short trip allows for Rida to gather.

[30] ANSCOMBE Frederick, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*, New York: Col [...]

36Beyond the network aspect, Rida's Indian account gives us an idea of the degree of influence that the educational models of Aligarh and Lucknow had at the time. It reveals the connections between merchant and reformist networks, with wealthy traders often becoming patrons of modernist projects and schools. Such cultural exchanges "cut accross the imperial space", as historian Frederick Anscombe puts it, challenging and questioning the presumed hegemonic domination of the imperial center and the metropolis-periphery binary divide[30]. The political behavior of Rida and of Indian and Kuwaiti merchants towards the two imperial forces (Ottoman and British) allows us, according to Anscombe, to reconsider the empire "as a dynamic process of multidirectional flows in which not only the metropolis but also other colonies can impact each colony, and vice versa". This peculiar geopolitical context is important to understand Rida's global activism and his great geographical mobility. It was through those intricate networks and connections that he found himself on a ship to Kuwait right after his visit to the Nadwat al-Ulama.

[31] MCPHERSON Kenneth. "Port Cities as Nodal Points of Change: The Indian Ocean, 1890s-1920s". in C. A. [...]

[32] About the life and the importance in pre-oil Kuwait of Sheikh Qassim al-Ibrahim, see al-Hijji Yacou [...]

[33] SEGAL Eran. "Rulers and Merchants in Pre-Oil Kuwait: The Significance of Palm Dates." British Journ [...]

37Rida's journey continues as he prepares to embark from Bombay to the shores of the Persian Gulf, in the first week of May 1912. In this commercial synapse, Rida was able to meet and greet part of the Kuwaiti economic diaspora based in the port. Rida was already acquainted with some of the prominent figures of the Kuwaiti merchant class to whom he reached out to help him finance his institute and his journal at the beginning of the century. The work of historian Kennet McPherson on the subject helps one make sense of the strategic importance of port cities as hotshouses for communication, network, trade in goods and ideology[31]. Rida's trip to Kuwait was thus not entirely planned but the invitation could be rather foreseen as his presence in Mumbai led to him meeting people he already was in written contact with. He met the famous Sheikh Qassim Muhammad al-Ibrahim, a wealthy merchant, settled in Bombay, a philanthropist and trader, well-known to the Syrian reformist. Having taken over the family business in 1908, Sheikh Qassim Muhammad al-Ibrahim also created the first purely Arab shipping company to operate with modern ships[32]. The al-Ibrahim was one of the Kuwaiti families who settled in Bombay in the early 19th century during the reign of Sheikh Jabir bin Abdullah ibn Sabah, the third ruler of Kuwait. However, during the first half of the 20th century, Sheikh Qassim takes the business of his father to a next level and becomes an important national figure in Kuwait, particularly celebrated for his philanthropic and commercial activities that contributed to the economic rise of the country. He is a very important figure in Rida's eyes because his philanthropic commitment crossed the boundaries of the Gulf, to become an acknowledged patron of educational and cultural projects in the rest of the Muslim world. Historically, Sheikh Qassim al Ibrahim is a key example of these merchants who came to participate in knowledge-networks in the Persian Gulf. As Eran Segal study shows, the economic dynamism of Kuwaiti merchants invested in the trade of pearl, date and fishing in the pre-oil era placed them as agents of significant historical change in the political and economic infrastructure of their nascent nation[33].

[34] رشيد رضا، "الحرب الصليبية في البلقان"، المنار، المجلد 15، نوفمبر 1912، الجزء 11، صفحة 817

[35] ibid.

38Sheikh Qasim al-Ibrahim had already been quoted and described in a laudatory way by Rida in an article of November 1912 about the Balkan War. This war, which gave way for a surge of solidarity on the part of Muslim people, saw the rise and structuring of transnational philanthropic and humanitarian organizations. Sheikh Qassim al-Ibrahim, who is said to have provided generous funding for the defense of these Ottoman lands, is mentioned in these terms ; "Among my friend, the famous philanthropist and great merchant Sheikh Qassim Muhammad al-Ibrahim, the leading Arab trader in Bombay, and other Arab dignitaries, the sad news of the Balkan war and its grave impact on the souls of Muslims in general and Arabs in particular, awakened a desire to raise money to help and some came to me. Sheikh Qassim al-Ibrahim alone donated forty thousand rupees"[34]. The figure is also known to Rida because he participated greatly in the financing of the Dâr al-da'wa and the Manar by making generous subscriptions a few months earlier. He gave Rida 2000 pounds and a monthly subscription of 200 pounds, as mentioned in this article[35]: "This dear benefactor friend was the first regular benefactor of the establishment as well as the first supporter of this cause".

[36] BOWEN John, "Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space" Journal of Ethnic and Migrati [...]

39The latter, in addition to his commercial activity, is involved in both the reformist networks in India and those in Kuwait. Sheikh Qassim is said by Rida to have provided significant financial support to this type of project and associations by chairing, for example, in the Committee for the Assistance of Muslims in India, Bombay, alongside a committee composed mainly of merchants, as well as financing the premises of the Mubarakiya School. The active and material support of this great Kuwaiti merchant to Rida's journey is an interesting fact as it clearly illustrates the strength and longevity of these intertwined networks of merchants and scholars in a pan-Islamic spatiality that transcends the borders of imperial zones of influence.[36]

[37] رشيد رضا، "رحلتنا الهندية"، المنار، المجلد 16، مايو 1913، الجزء 5، صفحة 104.

40Rida was invited to travel to the Persian Gulf on one of the boats owned by his long-time friend's company, which he does not forget to mention is "steam-powered" ; "I traveled from Bombay on Friday morning for nine days of Jumada al-Awwal (April) on a ship to Muscat, and I was keen to travel on one of the ships of the Arab company that he [Sheikh Qassim] runs in Bombay, as he is one of our friends. We stayed in the palace of the great leader, my friend and host, and moved to the port of Karachi to another ship that took us to Muscat which we reached at dawn on Monday (12 Jumada al-Awwal - 29 April)"[37] .

41The journey is long and before reaching Kuwait, huddled in the inner Gulf, Rida thus made a short stopover in Muscat. He was pleased with the technological advances that allowed the Sultan's men in Muscat to be notified by telegram so that they could greet him in time: 'When it docked, a steamer of the honorable Sultan, Mr Faisal, King of Oman took some of his men to meet me, and he instructed a trusted person in Bombay to inform him by telegram of my departure and arrival. I was welcomed at Muscat by the Sultan's family, his greatest merchants in rank and fame. This community welcomed me effusively and after that, we boarded a boat and were transported to the jetty near the Sultan's palace. We entered the palace and stayed for an hour with the Sultan. After that, we went to his guest house which he had prepared for us"[38].

42In Muscat as in Kuwait, it is clear that Rida was received with great pomp by his attentive and long-time readers who wished to broadcast in their respective communities the reformist ideal promoted by this now unavoidable figure of the *islâh*. These were seasoned readers, members of the political and economic elites of their societies and had as their ideological reference the *Manâr*. The newspaper had been circulating in these regions for the past ten years and had created communities of subscribers among intellectuals and merchants, linked only by the medium of print. As Gelvin's study pointed out, the technologies of this "age" triggered transformations in the conceptual arenas of religion, politics and culture and allowed for an Islamic public sphere to emerge.

[39] AL-ATIQUI Suliman, "The Origins of Kuwaiti Nationalism: Rashid Rida's influence on kuwaiti nationali [...]

43It is clear that Rida's reformist project of securing economic as well as spiritual well-being for the ummah did not conceal his interest in allying himself with an economically strong and educated merchant class, presented as a model of worldly and

spiritual success. Rida saw the tujjâr group as essential to the civilisational remaking of the ummah and as an enlightened vanguard with a significant responsibility for the awakening and progress of their local community[39]. Rida's admiration in these articles for the material sufficiency (tharwa) of some Kuwaiti traders stemmed from the very positive view that Rida has developed over the years on international trade.

[40] The figure of Rida, the banner under which the supporters of educational reform are aligned, does not [...]

[41] AL-RASHOUD Talal, Modern education and Arab nationalism in Kuwait, 1911-1961. PhD thesis. SOAS Univ [...]

44This alliance with the merchant class allowed these relatively new reformist 'ulama to assert and legitimize their role and to "socially reclassify" themselves by occupying these new professions of public and social utility. This "right of scrutiny", acquired by these "new intellectuals", somewhat challenged the traditional religious establishment which was still confined at the time, to the Qu'ran focused learning of the kuttâb[40]. Intending to go beyond that, the reformist project, which was not strictly a scholarly one, also intended to train the ethics of decent and hard-working citizens. This new direction was supported with a driving optimism by those who wanted to influence the new cultural and educational orientation of their young nation. Talal al-Rashoud's study shows how during this period, members of large merchant families sought to assert themselves as cultural elites (later known as the "muthaqqafin") wanting to make cosmopolitan education a prominent feature of their proto-national identity[41]. This is the case of personalities like Abdul Aziz al-Rushayd and Yusuf al-Qina'i, both Kuwaitis and from prominent scholarly and merchant families, with extensive knowledge of Indian scholars, and who welcomed Rida upon his arrival in the Gulf.

[42] ارشيد رضا، "رحلتنا الهندية"، المنار، المجلد 16، مايو 1913، الجزء 5، صفحة 104.

45Following the same tone as his Indian and Omani narratives, Rida is expected and welcomed with pomp when he arrived in Kuwait. He recounts his arrival in the country, which he reaches on a boat sent by the emir Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah himself. The story recalls the same affluence with a few exotic touches: "On the morning of the second day, we left along the mountains of Oman and entered the Persian Gulf, so we could see the land of Persia on the right and the land of the Arabs on the left. Kuwait stood before us at dawn on Thursday. It appeared as an open place on the sea where a large sailing ship was waiting for us, sent by Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait, and he knew that we would arrive there at that time and on that ship as he had been informed by the people of Muscat. The sheikh's men welcomed us with large platters of fruit and apricots which we ate with pleasure. And I really enjoyed the many spices that coloured the Indian rice and mutton ; the dinner was equally colourful. We were then received by Sheikh Mubarak's children and some notables in a small boat outside the port. Sheikh Mubarak allowed me to stay in his new palace, which is the main palace of the emirate"[42].

[43] AL-SHEHABI Saad, The Evolution of the role of Merchants in Kuwaiti Politics. Thesis submitted for [...]

46Beyond the commercial (Indian spices mentioned by Rida) and technical (Rida's arrival, probably transmitted by telegram to Kuwait) relations that linked the pearl colonies and the Indian coasts, this excerpt also highlights the degree of connection that

these shaykhs-doms had with their economic diasporas in the Indian Ocean and their importance during this period of state building and political transformation.[43]

[44] المجلد 16, الجزء 5, ص -, محمد رشيد رضا , القاهرة رحلتنا الهندية - مايو 1913.

47Rida continued by enthusiastically depicting the noble political configuration he perceived, that of a sultan living surrounded by merchants, scholars and notables from whom he took advice, and delegating to his religiously and politically enlightened guides to carry out the responsibilities befitting their qualities ; "I stayed in Kuwait for a week and every day and night I attended the Sultan's council for about three hours from the first day of the trip, during which he asked me many questions about religion and related matters and legal, social and historical issues, and often he would signal to his men so that they themselves would ask their questions, and all were satisfied with the answers. The sheikh held debates with me day and night on subjects as different as religious, philosophical, literary and social. The Sultan also visited me in the guest house and stayed with me for several hours, and I visited him several times in his "majlis" with different questions each time"[44].

48One can imagine how fascinated Rida may have been by this model, which appeared to embody a prototype of the famous Islamic "shura". But these scenes of lively debate, counsels and open assemblies, also signal that political consensus did not prevail at that time in Kuwait where a period of transition seemed to be beginning. It appears that, on a more general chronology, Rida's visit to Kuwait came at a time when the country was evolving and going through a decade of political and cultural change that could not be achieved without the presence of these transnational figures, traders, scholars, and notables, fundamentally mixing Asian and Arab experiences.

[45] Political Diaries of the Persian Gulf ORW. 1994, Vol. 4, a. 645, 1911-1912 Koweït May 1912, paragra [...]

[46] رشيد رضا, "رحلتنا الهندية", المنار , المجلد 16, مايو 1913, الجزء 5, صفحة 104.

49This aura of transition and change was not exactly confined to the intellectual field, but was manifest in the wider population. Here Rida highlights the preaching he was able to do in local mosques, which even the British Indian Office records[45] refer to because of the very large numbers of people attending: 'I was in Kuwait for a week, and every day, except for the mail, I gave an exhortatory speech in the largest mosques in the country, and the mosque was crowded. It was customary to attend my assembly day and night, for the notables of the country among the pious and knowledge-loving people, as advised by religion. They used to ask questions about the subtleties of science in principles, jurisprudence, etc., even though they had never heard teachers speak. This is one of the manifestations of the rare Arab intelligence.'[46]

[47] رشيد رضا, "الأخبار والآراء", المنار , المجلد 15, مارس 1912, الجزء 3, صفحة 225.

50Mentioning the Mubarakiya School project in another article, Rida describes it as "the greatest educational project of today, a symbol of hope and conviction". Rida goes on to define the school in these words, a "scientific, religious school", which will serve as "a solid basis for education in the country and the useful teaching that will sustain it and make its inhabitants cultured, providing them with both inner and practical wisdom, which will be revealed in their daily works of production"[47].

51Rida duly praises the "ruler of Kuwait" who contributed to the construction of the school with his largesse[48]. His participation has allowed the blossoming of "Arab intelligence enclosed in their essence" and Rida describes how this "venerable sheikh in his intelligence, his zeal, the immensity of his experiences and his uniqueness among the rulers of the Arab ummah make this effort come from him alone, and he puts his greatest servants to the task"[49].

52He then refers to the effectiveness of the funding delegation, which relied on solidarity and the moral importance of the continuous almsgiving (*sadaka jāriya*) that this virtuous educational project promised. He describes the orderly ability of Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah to effectively organise this gathering of money, according to a structure that allowed alms to be collected efficiently and sustainably: "He chose for this school to have a committee that would collect money for it, and cooperate in its establishment and management, so that it would be the education of the nation on social works that hoped for its perpetuation, and that would make many virtuous people seeking to pursue this mission"[50]. The majority of the "*arbâb*", wealthy families and the ruling political class seemed to have understood their social responsibility and committed themselves to this collective effort. One can imagine how much such a landscape was appreciated by Rida, who advocated for a wider involvement of the rising Muslim bourgeoisie in the projects of education and collective progress of the ummah. Heading the delegation was Mubarak al-Sabah's son, Nasser al-Sabah, who managed to collect "prodigious donations"[51] through this mean.

53Clearly a great admirer of the Kuwaiti people, Rida was full of praise for its chief administrator, Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah, and his meticulous financial organization, after whom the first modern school under construction would eventually be named.

[52] AL-RASHOUD Talal, *Modern education and Arab nationalism in Kuwait, 1911-1961*. PhD thesis. SOAS Univ [...]

54Rida's discourse on the Mubarakiya is part of this very clear social and civilisational register. Rida integrated this project to his more general ambition of building a symposium of men of knowledge responsible for instructing, guiding and orienting their people, according to the principles of the reformist corpus.[52] Rida thus called for the training of competent ulemas to be well-versed in the public, political and social affairs of their community. The importance, repeatedly pressed, of an economic development capable of sustaining such projects became undoubtable. For Rida, Islamic economic hegemony was yet to be built and was equivalent in importance to the project of Islamic political hegemony. It is therefore understandable why one of the strands of his Indian and Persian narrative concerned his relationship with the great *tujjâr*, his admiration for their joint effort with the scholars and their capital invested in the education and moral revival of their community. The link between traders and reformist intellectuals was all the more obvious here.

55The Indian influence, and more broadly that of the network of pan-Islamic acquaintances enjoyed by Kuwaiti merchants, was central in the discourse on the construction of the school. During this turning-point era, the Kuwaiti political discourse was imbued with this pan-Islamic sensibility, which will be echoed in the Kuwaiti proto-nationalist narratives that emerged afterwards and that sought to distinguish the county from the Wahhabi hinterland. These described a people essentially turned open and onwards the oceanic coasts and immensity.

[53] FUCCARO Nelida, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800*, Cambridge, Camb [...]

56This article has attempted, by following the narrative and the route of the ferryman Rida, to shed light on the mutual interactions between two coasts at the heart of this "maritime and coastal continent"[53], that of the broad Indian ocean. The commercial and scholarly networks that Rida interacted with were not only supported by the diversity of material and abstract supports put forward by historians of modernity (trade routes, newspapers and telegrams), but also by men with different functions and similar aspirations of change. These historical figures constituted economic, intellectual and reformist models that held a certain monopoly all the way up to the borders of the eastern capitals. Their activities as well as their ideas, broadcast by the reformist press, deeply influenced the internal structures and urban life of Arab and Indian communities at the dawn of their political affirmation.

57Indeed, Rida's journey allows one to see how essential the links between these two territories were to the development of education and Islamic reformism in Kuwait, which is now part of its social and political fabric. The Syrian journalist's articles also highlight that Levantine reformist authors had strong connections with Indians, and that the Islamic movement of "iṣlâh" was far from being purely Arab. It is also possible to notice that most Kuwaiti merchants received their first "reformist education" in the Indian ports where they were settled. It was through prolonged contacts with the Indian ulemas and the knowledgeable merchants among the Muslims of this country, that the Kuwaiti merchants appropriated the "iṣlâh" discourse to their cause. Interactions multiplied between these two classes of individuals who, because of their capital and their economic power, were also decision-making political agents. Rida's trip was thus built on the intellectual and commercial exchanges between the two regions.

58These exchanges seem to outline the existence of a Nahda different from the one that took place at the same period in the Arab world. Indeed, these exchanges took place between communities with different historical trajectories, but on a certain "footing of equality". Indeed, they evolved in the same religious and cultural area which gave shape to a different interaction than the more vertical circulations undermined by the dominant North-South colonial imaginary, which characterized the Middle-Eastern Nahda.