Article

Empire, Colonialism, and Religious Mobility in Transnational History

AKM Ahsan Ullah [ID]

Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Jalan Tungku Link, Gadong,
Bandar Seri Begawan BE 1410, Brunei; ahsan.ullah@ubd.edu.bn

Abstract: The expansion of empires and colonial rule significantly shaped the movement of religious communities, practices, and institutions across borders. This article examines the intersections of empire, colonialism, and religious mobility with a view to exploring how colonial administrations facilitated, restricted, or co-opted religious movements for governance and control. Religious actors—such as missionaries, clerics, traders, and diasporic communities—played roles in transnational exchanges, carrying faith traditions across imperial networks while simultaneously influencing local spiritual landscapes. The study situates religious mobility within the broader framework of colonial power structures and analyzes how missionary enterprises, religious conversions, and state-sponsored religious policies were used to consolidate imperial control. It also considers how indigenous religious movements navigated, resisted, or transformed under colonial rule. The case studies include Christian missionary networks in British and French colonies, the movement of Islamic scholars across the Ottoman and Mughal empires, and the role of Buddhism in colonial southeast Asia. These examples highlight the role of religion not just as a tool of empire but as a vehicle for indigenous agency, resistance, and syncretic transformation. This article explores the transnational mobility of religious artifacts, sacred texts, and pilgrimage networks, demonstrating how colonial expansion altered religious landscapes beyond political boundaries. The study critically engages with postcolonial perspectives to interrogate how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary religious diasporas and global faith-based movements.

Keywords: religious mobility; empire; colonialism; transnational history; missionary networks

1. Introduction

The expansion of empires and colonial rule greatly shaped religious mobility, influencing how faith traditions, institutions, and practitioners moved across borders. Religion, far from being a peripheral element of imperial expansion, was both a tool of governance and a site of resistance. Colonial administrations actively facilitated, restricted, and co-opted religious movements to consolidate power, reinforce social hierarchies, and manage indigenous populations (Chatterjee 1993; Adogame 2013). At the same time, religious actors—including missionaries, clerics, traders, and diasporic communities—operated within and beyond imperial structures, adapting to colonial constraints and reconfiguring spiritual landscapes through conversion, syncretism, and transnational networks (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). This study situates religious movement as an integral aspect of transnational history, emphasizing how empires were shaped not only by economic and political interests but also by spiritual encounters. Religious mobility refers to the

movement of religious actors, institutions, texts, artifacts, and practices across geographic and political boundaries. This movement can be voluntary or forced and occurs through missionary expansion, pilgrimage, trade networks, migration, and imperial policies. In transnational history, religious mobility is understood as part of interconnected imperial and colonial networks that facilitated or constrained the circulation of religious ideas and people (Bayly 2004; Osterhammel 2014). Within postcolonial studies, religious mobility is also analyzed in terms of power asymmetries, where colonial rule transformed indigenous spiritual landscapes through coercion, assimilation, and cultural contestation (Said 1978; Chatterjee 1993). Religious mobility, therefore, is not a neutral process but an arena of political, cultural, and ideological negotiation, shaping both imperial governance and indigenous resistance in profound ways.

This article asks three central questions: How did colonial administrations facilitate, restrict, or co-opt religious movements? In what ways did religious actors function within imperial structures while simultaneously resisting or negotiating power? How did transnational religious mobility influence both the consolidation and fragmentation of empire? The state-sponsored promotion of Christianity in British and French colonies, the circulation of Islamic scholars across the Ottoman and Mughal empires, and the role of Buddhist monastic networks in colonial southeast Asia provide compelling case studies to analyze these dynamics. While empires sought to manage religious activity through laws, taxation, and patronage, religious movements often defied imperial boundaries, creating transregional connections that complicated colonial control (Bayly 2004; Van der Veer 2001).

The study examines religious mobility across three major traditions—Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism—to illustrate the imperial mechanisms of religious governance, missionary expansion, and indigenous responses (Bentley et al. 2015). The Christian missionary networks of the British and French empires played a crucial role in shaping colonial education, legal systems, and indigenous conversions, often acting as intermediaries between European authorities and local populations (Hu and Leamaster 2015). At the same time, the mobility of Islamic scholars, traders, and Sufi orders across the Ottoman, Mughal, and colonial African territories shows the persistence of religious networks that operated independently or in contestation to imperial rule (Robinson 2000). Meanwhile, Buddhist monastic exchanges in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand under colonialism reflect how southeast Asian Buddhist institutions negotiated patronage, reform, and resistance in response to Western interventions (Blackburn 2010; Ghosh 2019). Also, by foregrounding indigenous agency, the study moves beyond a Eurocentric perspective, showing how religious communities adapted, resisted, and reshaped their identities under colonial rule (Asad 1993).

This article employs a transnational historical analysis, drawing on postcolonial critique and comparative case studies to assess religious mobility within and beyond empire. Transnational history allows for an examination of how imperial networks structured religious movement across multiple geographies, revealing interconnections between metropoles and colonies (Osterhammel 2014). Meanwhile, a postcolonial approach interrogates the power dynamics embedded in missionary activity, colonial legal systems, and religious conversions, demonstrating how religious encounters were shaped by both domination and resistance (Said 1978; Chakrabarty 2000).

In order to explain these dynamics, the study adopts a comparative case study approach, drawing from diverse historical contexts to examine Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist mobilities across different imperial formations. This approach also shows both the continuities and divergences in religious governance across British, French, Ottoman, and southeast Asian colonial structures (Conrad 2016).

This article argues that religious mobility under empire was not solely a function of colonial control but also a means of adaptation, resistance, and transnational connectivity. While empires sought to institutionalize religious practices through state-sponsored missions, legal codifications, and educational reforms, religious actors often subverted these structures, forging networks that transcended imperial borders. The circulation of missionaries, pilgrims, and sacred texts demonstrates that religious landscapes were not simply dictated by colonial authority but were instead reconfigured through dynamic processes of negotiation, contestation, and cultural synthesis (Cooper and Stoler 1997). This study, by tracing these entangled histories, contributes to a broader understanding of how empire, religion, and mobility intersected in shaping global history (Ullah 2012), offering perspectives into the legacies of colonial religious encounters in contemporary faith-based movements and diasporic identities (Van der Veer 2020).

The study focuses on Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, as these three traditions have historically played central roles in shaping religious mobility under empire. Christianity, particularly through missionary networks in British and French colonies, was instrumental in both the expansion of imperial authority and indigenous resistance. Islam's transnational scholarly, trade, and Sufi networks across the Ottoman, Mughal, and African colonial territories highlight the persistence of religious mobility that operated both within and in contestation to imperial structures. Buddhism, particularly in southeast Asia, presents an alternative framework, where monastic networks, colonial patronage, and reform movements negotiated both cooperation and defiance under Western imperial rule. These three traditions were chosen not only due to their significant role in transnational religious movements but also because they illustrate distinct modes of interaction—state-sponsored religious expansion, transregional scholarly circulation, and localized adaptations—that reveal the complexity of religious mobility under colonialism.

2. Theoretical Considerations

2.1. Religious Mobility in Transnational History and Postcolonial Studies

Religious mobility—the movement of religious actors, institutions, texts, artifacts, and practices across borders—has been a central feature of transnational history. It extends beyond individual conversions or missionary efforts to encompass the broader processes by which religions spread, transformed, and adapted within and across imperial structures. Within transnational history, religious mobility is not confined to a single geographic or political entity but is understood as part of interconnected imperial networks that facilitated or constrained the circulation of religious ideas and people (Bayly 2004; Osterhammel 2014). These movements were deeply embedded in colonial processes, as religious actors and institutions often traversed empires in ways that both supported and subverted imperial authority (Van der Veer 2001).

Postcolonial studies, on the other hand, emphasize the power asymmetries in religious mobility, highlighting how colonial rule transformed indigenous spiritual landscapes through coercion, assimilation, and cultural contestation (Said 1978; Chatterjee 1993). Postcolonial scholars argue that religion was not merely a neutral force moving through imperial networks (Ullah 2022) but was actively instrumentalized by colonial administrations to govern and regulate populations (Chakrabarty 2000). At the same time, religious movements often provided indigenous communities with agency, allowing them to resist colonial authority, reassert cultural identity, and create syncretic forms of spirituality that challenged imperial hierarchies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Adogame 2013). The following sections explore key theoretical concepts that frame the study of religious expansion, imperial governance, and the transformations of religious traditions under colonial rule.

2.2. Imperial Governance and Religion

Religion was a fundamental tool of imperial governance, often serving as a means to exert ideological, political, and social control over colonized populations (Porter 2004; Adogame 2013). Colonial administrations employed religious institutions to educate, discipline, and assimilate indigenous peoples, using Christian missions, Islamic legal structures, and Buddhist monastic networks to reinforce colonial authority (Van der Veer 2001). For instance, in British India, Protestant and Catholic missionary schools were supported by the state to produce a Western-educated elite that could serve as intermediaries in colonial administration (Viswanathan 1998). Similarly, the French empire in north Africa co-opted Islamic institutions to administer Sharia courts, incorporating religious leaders into governance structures to secure legitimacy while simultaneously restricting their autonomy (Robinson 2000).

However, the use of religion in governance was not uniform; it varied based on the colonial context and the strategic interests of the empire. In some cases, religion was suppressed when it threatened imperial control (Ullah 2024). The British response to the 1857 Indian Rebellion, which had significant religious undertones, led to increased restrictions on religious expression, including tighter surveillance of Muslim clerics and Hindu religious gatherings (Bayly 2004). Conversely, colonial powers often encouraged sectarian divisions to weaken collective resistance, such as the British strategy of reinforcing Sunni–Shia divisions in Iraq or the French policy of privileging certain Christian sects over others in Lebanon and Syria (Makdisi 2000). Thus, while empires sought to use religion as a stabilizing force, religious institutions and actors often operated beyond the boundaries of state control, making them both instruments of imperial rule and potential sources of disruption.

2.3. Religious Mobility as Both Coercion and Agency

Religious mobility under empire functioned in contradictory ways—as both a mechanism of colonial coercion and a vehicle for indigenous agency. Missionary networks, for example, were closely linked to imperial expansion, providing justification for colonization under the pretense of spiritual enlightenment and moral uplift (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Porter 2004). The Christian missions in Africa, southeast Asia, and the Pacific were deeply intertwined with European colonialism, often operating as the ideological arm of empire by promoting Western cultural norms and religious doctrines while eroding indigenous belief systems (Adogame 2013).

At the same time, religious mobility also allowed for localized resistance, adaptation, and reinterpretation of imperial power. Islamic networks spanning the Ottoman, Mughal, and west African empires maintained religious autonomy, even under colonial rule. The movement of Sufi orders, scholars, and traders facilitated the spread of Islam independent of European imperial structures, often challenging colonial authority by fostering transnational solidarity (Robinson 2000). Similarly, Buddhist reform movements in southeast Asia adapted to colonial rule by engaging with Western ideas while maintaining indigenous religious authority (Blackburn 2010). Religious actors—missionaries, clerics, and lay followers—thus navigated colonial landscapes in complex ways. Some were complicit in imperial projects, while others used religious mobility as a means of cultural preservation and anti-colonial resistance. This duality underscores the ambiguous and contested role of religious expansion under empire.

2.4. Syncretism and Hybridity

Religious mobility under empire was not merely a process of imposition but also one of cultural adaptation and hybridization. Encounters between imperial and indigenous

traditions frequently produced syncretic religious forms, blending elements of both traditions in ways that challenged colonial hierarchies (Chakrabarty 2000; Van der Veer 2020). One of the most striking examples of religious syncretism occurred in the African Christian churches, where converts incorporated indigenous spiritual practices, healing traditions, and communal rituals into Christianity, creating new forms of worship that defied missionary expectations (Adogame 2013). Similarly, in British India, Hindu reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj engaged with Christian and Western philosophical traditions while articulating an indigenous vision of religious modernity (Viswanathan 1998).

Islamic and Buddhist communities also adapted to colonial rule by engaging in selective borrowing and reinterpretation. The Islamic modernist movements in the late 19th century, led by figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, sought to reconcile Islamic teachings with European scientific and political ideas while resisting Western domination (Salem 2004; Robinson 2000). Likewise, Buddhist revivalist movements in Sri Lanka and Burma appropriated colonial printing technologies and educational systems to promote indigenous Buddhist nationalism (Blackburn 2010).

These examples highlight how religious mobility was not a one-directional process of imperial domination but rather an arena of negotiation, resistance, and cultural synthesis. Religion under colonial rule functioned in multiple, often contradictory ways. As a tool of empire, it was used by colonial states to legitimize conquest, administer populations, and suppress dissent. At the same time, it served as a means of resistance, as religious actors and movements became central to anti-colonial mobilization, fostering both ideological and practical opposition to imperial rule. Religion facilitated cultural adaptation by enabling new hybrid identities that challenged rigid colonial hierarchies and fostered transnational religious solidarities. By integrating these perspectives, this study highlights how empire and religious mobility were deeply intertwined in shaping global history—not merely as processes of domination but as dynamic sites of negotiation, transformation, and enduring influence.

Religious mobility under empire was not only a process of forced conversions and institutional impositions but also a fertile ground for syncretism and hybridization. Encounters between imperial and indigenous traditions frequently led to new religious formations that blended elements from both traditions, often challenging colonial hierarchies. One of the most striking examples of religious syncretism occurred in Latin America, where Catholicism incorporated indigenous rituals, cosmologies, and symbols, such as the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, which fused Aztec religious imagery with Christian devotion. Similarly, African Christian churches integrated local spiritual practices, healing traditions, and communal rituals into Christianity, defying missionary expectations and producing new forms of religious expression (Adogame 2013).

In south and southeast Asia, Islamic and Buddhist communities also engaged in selective borrowing, reinterpretation, and synthesis to navigate colonial rule. The Islamic modernist movements of the late 19th century, led by figures such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, sought to reconcile Islamic teachings with European scientific and political ideas while resisting Western dominance (Salem 2004). Similarly, Buddhist revivalist movements in Sri Lanka and Burma adapted Western education models, printing technologies, and institutional frameworks to promote Buddhist nationalism while still maintaining indigenous religious authority (Blackburn 2010). These examples illustrate that religious mobility was not a one-directional process of domination but a site of negotiation, resistance, and transformation, where indigenous religious actors actively shaped their spiritual traditions in response to imperial pressures.

3. Religious Mobility and Empire: A Historical Overview

Religious mobility has been a defining feature of empire building, as colonial states actively shaped, regulated, and co-opted religious movements to consolidate their rule. Empires historically engaged with religion in three key ways: by incorporating religious elites into governance structures, facilitating missionary expansion to assimilate local populations, and leveraging religious identities to divide, control, and justify imperial authority (Motadel 2018). This section provides an overview of how various empires—including the British, French, Dutch, and Ottoman empires—engaged with religious groups, the role of missionary networks in religious conversion, and how state-sponsored religious movements were used as instruments of imperial policy (Turner 2018).

3.1. Imperial Engagement with Religious Groups

Religion played a crucial role in the administrative and ideological frameworks of colonial empires, where governing authorities sought to co-opt religious leaders and institutions to ensure political stability. The British Empire, for instance, took a pragmatic approach to religion in India, Africa, and the Middle East, using indirect rule to incorporate local religious elites into governance. The British patronized Hindu and Muslim leaders in India, maintained the influence of Islamic authorities in Nigeria and Sudan, and supported Christian communities in Egypt and Palestine, ensuring loyalty while suppressing radical religious movements that threatened colonial authority (Metcalf 1995; Makdisi 2000).

The French colonial administration, particularly in north and west Africa, imposed a more direct approach, integrating Islamic courts and Sufi orders into governance structures while also using missionary schools to promote French culture. However, when religious movements posed a challenge to colonial rule, they were met with suppression, such as the crackdown on Islamic reformist movements in Algeria or the repression of anti-colonial Catholic groups in Indochina (Conklin 1997). The Dutch Empire in Indonesia similarly employed religious co-option and control, supporting Javanese Islamic elites while restricting radical interpretations of Islam that could fuel resistance (Ricklefs 2012). The Ottoman Empire, by contrast, governed its diverse populations through the millet system, which granted religious communities a degree of autonomy but also reinforced religious hierarchy and loyalty to the state (Masters 2001).

3.2. The Co-Option of Religious Elites and Suppression of Dissent

While empires often relied on religious elites to maintain order, they also suppressed dissenting movements when they posed a threat. The British crackdown on Wahhabi-inspired movements in India following the 1857 Rebellion exemplifies how religious opposition was met with state violence and stricter regulations on Islamic scholars and mosques (Bayly 2004). Similarly, the French suppression of Sufi-led resistance in Algeria, such as the efforts of Emir Abdelkader, demonstrated the limits of religious autonomy under colonial rule (Clancy-Smith 1994). In southeast Asia, the Dutch and British authorities sought to control Buddhist and Islamic networks, limiting transnational connections that could fuel anti-colonial movements. The British monitored the Hajj pilgrimage from colonial India, fearing that contact with global Islamic networks could inspire rebellion (Tagliacozzo 2013). This highlights how religious mobility under empire was both facilitated and restricted, depending on its political implications.

3.3. Missionary Networks and Religious Conversions

British India, Africa, and Southeast Asia

Missionary expansion was deeply intertwined with colonialism, often operating as the ideological arm of empire. In British India, Christian missionaries played a key role

in education, social reform, and conversion efforts, establishing schools, hospitals, and churches (Viswanathan 1998). Missionary groups such as the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society sought to convert Hindus and Muslims, framing their work within imperial civilizing discourses (Porter 2004). In Africa, missionary activity was instrumental in introducing Western education and healthcare, but it also led to conflicts with indigenous traditions. The French Catholic missions in west Africa and the British Protestant missions in eastern and southern Africa facilitated the expansion of Christianity, but they also contributed to the erosion of local belief systems and created divisions between converts and non-converts (Hastings 1994).

Southeast Asia saw a similar pattern, where Christian missionaries, particularly Jesuits and Protestants, established schools and churches in Burma, the Philippines, and Malaya. However, their impact varied depending on colonial policies; while Spanish rule in the Philippines actively promoted Catholicism, the Dutch in Indonesia allowed Islam to remain dominant but sought to regulate it (Ricklefs 2012).

3.4. Islamic Scholars, Traders, and the Transmission of Knowledge

While European Christian missions were state-supported, Islamic religious mobility functioned through independent networks of scholars, traders, and pilgrims. The Ottoman and Mughal empires were central to the transmission of Islamic knowledge, with religious scholars (ulama) traveling across imperial borders to exchange ideas, promote reformist movements, and resist colonial rule (Robinson 2000). For example, the Hajj pilgrimage was a major conduit for religious and intellectual exchange, connecting Muslims from south Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. However, colonial authorities frequently attempted to control pilgrimage routes to limit exposure to anti-colonial ideas (Tagliacozzo 2013). Similarly, Sufi brotherhoods (tariqas), such as the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, played an essential role in preserving Islamic knowledge and mobilizing resistance against European rule in north and west Africa (Clancy-Smith 1994).

3.5. Buddhist Expansion and Colonial Patronage in Southeast Asia

Buddhism in southeast Asia was deeply affected by colonial rule, as Western powers sought to either control or reform Buddhist institutions. In Sri Lanka and Burma, British authorities attempted to regulate monastic life, sometimes supporting Buddhist institutions to maintain order while restricting radical elements that aligned with nationalist movements (Blackburn 2010).

The Buddhist revivalist movements in the 19th century, particularly in Sri Lanka, engaged with both Western education and indigenous traditions, leading to the emergence of modern Buddhist nationalism (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). In Thailand, a semi-independent kingdom, Buddhist reforms were influenced by European models of centralization, demonstrating the complex ways in which colonial encounters reshaped religious institutions.

3.6. Religion as Justification for Colonial Expansion and Manipulation of Sectarian Divisions

Empires frequently used religion as a justification for conquest, framing colonial rule as a civilizing mission. The British and French empires invoked Christian rhetoric to portray their expansion as a means of bringing enlightenment and progress to "heathen" populations (Porter 2004). The Spanish and Portuguese empires went further, establishing direct partnerships between missionary orders and colonial administrations, making conversion a formal requirement for indigenous subjects in the Americas and the Philippines (Rafael 1993). In the Islamic world, colonial powers also manipulated religious movements to maintain control. The British cultivated alliances with conservative Islamic groups

in India and Sudan, selectively supporting certain religious leaders to prevent radical anti-colonial mobilization (Metcalf 1995).

One of the most enduring legacies of colonial rule was the strategic use of sectarian divisions to maintain imperial control. The British in India reinforced religious identities by categorizing populations along Hindu–Muslim lines, fueling divisions that later shaped communal conflicts and postcolonial politics (Pandey 1990). Similarly, the French in Lebanon institutionalized sectarian divisions, granting political privileges to Christian Maronites while marginalizing Muslim communities, a policy that had long-term consequences for national unity (Makdisi 2000).

4. Christian Missionary Networks in British and French Colonies

European missionaries played a crucial role in religious conversions and education during the colonial era. Under the British and French empires, Christian missionary networks facilitated both the spread of Christianity and the implementation of colonial policies. In British India and French Indochina, missionary organizations established schools, hospitals, and churches that often worked in tandem with colonial administrators (Porter 2004). These institutions not only provided education and healthcare but also acted as tools of cultural transformation, aligning indigenous populations with European values and governance structures (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

Missionary agendas were closely tied to colonial bureaucracies. European powers frequently used missionaries as intermediaries to introduce Western legal, economic, and social norms. For example, British missionary schools in Africa promoted English literacy and Christian ethics, reinforcing British hegemony (Stanley 1990). French Catholic missions in Algeria and Vietnam similarly sought to assimilate local populations into French culture through religious instruction (Harries 2007).

Despite these efforts, indigenous communities often resisted or adapted Christianity in ways that reflected local traditions. In Africa, the emergence of African Independent Churches (AICs) exemplifies this adaptation. Movements such as the Kimbanguist Church in the Belgian Congo integrated Christian teachings with indigenous religious practices, challenging both colonial and missionary authority (Sundkler 1961). Such responses highlight the agency of local populations in shaping religious mobility under empire.

5. Islamic Networks Across the Ottoman and Mughal Empires

Islamic religious mobility flourished under the Ottoman and Mughal empires, facilitated by extensive networks of scholars (ulama), Sufi orders, and pilgrims. Ulama traveled across imperial domains, transmitting Islamic knowledge and reinforcing religious authority. In the Mughal Empire, scholars from Persia and central Asia were invited to court, influencing both governance and religious discourse (Eaton 2003). Similarly, the Ottoman Empire served as a center of Islamic learning, with cities such as Istanbul and Cairo attracting scholars from across the Muslim world (Zilfi 2010).

Sufi orders played a significant role in the spread of Islam under colonial rule. These mystical movements adapted to changing political contexts, often resisting European intervention. In British-controlled India, for example, Sufi networks provided alternative religious and social structures, mobilizing resistance against colonial policies (Green 2012). Similarly, in north Africa, Sufi leaders led anti-colonial movements, as seen in the case of the Sanusi order's opposition to Italian rule in Libya (Ahmad 1993). One of the most significant disruptions to Islamic mobility under empire were British-imposed restrictions on the Hajj pilgrimage. By limiting travel from British colonies, particularly India, Britain sought to prevent political agitation and the spread of anti-colonial sentiment among Muslims (Low 2008). This had profound geopolitical implications, as the control over religious

mobility became a tool of imperial governance, affecting the relationship between colonial subjects and the broader Islamic world.

6. Buddhism, Empire, and Colonial Southeast Asia

Buddhist institutions were deeply intertwined with colonial administration in southeast Asia. In British Burma and French Indochina, colonial authorities sought to co-opt Buddhist monastic structures to facilitate governance. In Burma, for example, the British strategically managed Buddhist monastic education to control rural populations and mitigate nationalist uprisings (Turner 2014). French administrators in Cambodia similarly worked with Buddhist elites to maintain stability while subtly discouraging monastic activism (Girling 1972).

Reformist Buddhist movements emerged as responses to Western influence. In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was driven by figures like Anagarika Dharmapala, who sought to modernize Buddhism and resist Christian missionary influence (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). Similar movements in Burma and Thailand led to the strengthening of Buddhist nationalism, which later played a role in anti-colonial struggles (Ishii 1986). Buddhist networks between Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand facilitated religious exchanges that transcended colonial boundaries. Monks traveled between these regions to exchange ideas on reform and nationalism, creating a transnational Buddhist consciousness (Blackburn 2010). These interactions demonstrate how religious mobility under empire was not merely a function of colonial control but also a site of resistance and reimagination of religious identity.

7. Religious Artifacts, Texts, and Pilgrimage Networks

The movement of religious artifacts, relics, and manuscripts has historically been shaped by the forces of empire, trade, and migration. Colonial networks facilitated both the expropriation and diffusion of religious objects, often under the guise of preservation or collection. British, French, and Dutch colonial enterprises, for example, transported Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic manuscripts and relics from south and southeast Asia to European museums and libraries (Cohn 1996; Said 1978). Similarly, Christian relics and sacred texts were disseminated through missionary efforts, influencing local religious practices in Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Chidester 1996).

The colonial control over religious artifacts had dual effects. On the one hand, it led to the erosion of indigenous religious practices, as sacred objects were often desacralized in Western institutions. On the other hand, the circulation of these objects allowed for new transnational religious linkages. The distribution of Qur'anic manuscripts across the Indian Ocean, facilitated by colonial postal services, enabled the spread of Islamic scholarship between south Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Alatas 2019). Likewise, Buddhist relics taken from Burma, Sri Lanka, and China found their way to Western museums but also strengthened diasporic Buddhist identities in places like Britain and the United States (McDaniel 2011).

8. Colonial Expansion and the Reshaping of Pilgrimage Routes

The colonial era significantly reconfigured pilgrimage networks by imposing restrictions, altering infrastructure, and in some cases, repurposing religious sites for state control. The British Empire, for instance, regulated the Hajj pilgrimage from India to Mecca, fearing it as a potential space for anti-colonial mobilization (Low 2008). By implementing passport requirements, quarantine stations, and surveillance mechanisms, colonial powers sought to control religious mobility while also profiting from it (Tagliacozzo 2013).

In Buddhist contexts, colonial intervention led to the commodification and restructuring of pilgrimage sites. The British in Sri Lanka transformed Anuradhapura and Kandy into archaeological and touristic spaces, often diminishing their religious function for local practitioners (Blackburn 2010). Similarly, under Japanese imperial expansion in Korea and China, Buddhist pilgrimage routes were co-opted into state-led nationalist projects, altering the dynamics of religious mobility (Jaffe 2015). The colonial manipulation of pilgrimage routes had long-lasting effects. Many of the restrictions imposed on Islamic pilgrimage persisted into the postcolonial era, shaping modern border policies in Saudi Arabia and beyond (Peters 1994). Likewise, the transformation of Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage sites into national heritage zones continues to influence contemporary religious tourism and state–religion relations (Singh 2013).

9. Diasporic Communities and Religious Mobility Under Empire

Diasporic communities played a crucial role in sustaining religious mobility under colonial rule. Displaced populations—whether due to slavery, indentured labor, or economic migration—relied on religious networks to maintain cultural continuity (Ullah 2010). South Asian Muslim communities in east Africa, for example, maintained transoceanic religious ties through mosque patronage, Islamic scholarship, and manuscript circulation (Brenner 2001). Similarly, Chinese Buddhist and Taoist communities in southeast Asia established temple networks that connected them to their homeland despite colonial fragmentation (Kitiarsa 2012).

The role of Indian indentured laborers in the British and French empires is particularly illustrative. Hindu and Muslim migrants carried religious texts, icons, and oral traditions to the Caribbean, Mauritius, and southeast Asia, adapting their practices to new environments while forging hybrid religious identities (Jayaram 2004). Likewise, Catholic and Protestant missionary networks followed European migrants, further entrenching colonial religious structures while also enabling indigenous reinterpretations of Christianity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

These diasporic religious networks not only maintained traditions but also facilitated resistance. Islamic Sufi networks in the Maghreb and west Africa, for example, utilized religious mobility as a means of resisting French colonial rule, forging connections between spiritual and political struggles (Reese 2018). Similarly, Hindu reform movements like the Arya Samaj and Sikh migration networks leveraged transnational religious mobility to challenge British racial policies in Canada and South Africa (Ballantyne 2006).

The historical interplay between empire, colonialism, and religious mobility reveals both the disruptive and adaptive capacities of religious communities. While colonialism often sought to restrict and manipulate religious mobility, diasporic communities, pilgrimage networks, and the circulation of sacred texts and artifacts ensured that religious traditions transcended imperial boundaries. These transnational religious networks remain vital in shaping postcolonial religious identities and global spiritual connections today.

10. Religious Resistance, Syncretism, and Indigenous Agency

Religious identity played a crucial role in anti-colonial resistance movements throughout history, particularly in the context of imperial expansion and colonial subjugation. The Mahdist revolt in Sudan (1881–1899) stands as a key example of religious-based resistance, where Muhammad Ahmad declared himself the Mahdi (the guided one) and led an Islamic revivalist movement against Egyptian and British colonial rule. His movement mobilized religious sentiment to challenge imperial domination, advocating for a return to Islamic governance and rejecting foreign influence (Holt 1970). Similarly, anti-colonial Sufi movements across north and west Africa, such as the Sanusi Order in Libya and the Tijaniyya

and Qadiriyya orders, played vital roles in resisting European encroachment. These movements often framed colonial rule as an existential threat to religious and cultural autonomy, thereby rallying local populations around religious solidarity (Triaud and Robinson 2000).

In southeast Asia, Islamic resistance against colonialism was prominent, particularly in Indonesia, where the Padri War (1803–1838) reflected the influence of Wahhabi-inspired reformism against both Dutch colonial rule and local syncretic Islamic traditions (Ricklefs 2006). Meanwhile, in India, the 1857 Revolt—often referred to as the First War of Independence—had strong religious dimensions, as both Hindu and Muslim factions resisted British rule, in part due to perceived religious infringements (Metcalf and Metcalf 2012).

Blending Local Traditions with Imposed Religious Structures

Colonial encounters frequently led to syncretism, where indigenous groups blended local spiritual traditions with imposed religious structures. In Latin America, Catholicism adopted indigenous elements to facilitate conversion, resulting in a fusion of pre-Columbian and Christian symbols, as seen in the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, which integrated Aztec religious imagery into Marian devotion (Lafaye 1976). Similarly, in the Philippines, Spanish missionaries encountered strong animist and indigenous religious traditions, leading to localized Catholic practices, such as fiestas and veneration of indigenous–Christian hybrid deities (Rafael 1993).

In Africa, the spread of Christianity and Islam often led to local adaptations. African independent churches, such as the Aladura movement in Nigeria, merged Christian doctrine with indigenous spirituality, emphasizing healing, prophecy, and direct communication with the divine (Peel 1968). Likewise, in the Caribbean, enslaved Africans developed syncretic religions like Vodou in Haiti, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil, blending African spiritual traditions with Catholic saints and rituals (Matory James 2005).

Islamic adaptation in southeast Asia provides another example, as local communities infused pre-Islamic traditions into Islamic practices. The Wali Songo (Nine Saints) of Java, for instance, employed Javanese mystical traditions (Kejawen) to facilitate the spread of Islam, creating a syncretic form of Sufi-influenced Islam that retained elements of Hindu–Buddhist cosmology (Azra 2004). This blending of traditions often allowed local populations to maintain indigenous cultural identities while embracing new religious frameworks imposed by colonial or missionary enterprises.

11. Religious Identity in Anti-Colonial Nationalist Movements

Religious identity frequently became a powerful tool in anti-colonial nationalist movements, shaping political struggles for independence. In India, Mahatma Gandhi effectively mobilized Hindu religious symbols and ethics—such as non-violence (ahimsa) and self-discipline (swaraj)—to unify resistance against British rule (Brown 1991). By framing nationalism in religious terms, Gandhi galvanized mass support while also fostering an inclusive resistance movement that resonated across caste and religious lines.

In the Middle East, Islamic revivalist movements became integral to anti-colonial struggles, with figures such as Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood advocating for the restoration of Islamic governance as a response to Western imperialism (Mitchell 1969). Similar movements arose in Algeria, where the National Liberation Front (FLN) invoked Islam as a unifying force against French colonial rule (Evans and Phillips 2007).

Southeast Asia also witnessed the use of religious identity in anti-colonial nationalism. In Indonesia, leaders like Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta incorporated Islamic rhetoric to unite diverse ethnic and religious groups against Dutch colonial rule, culminating in Indonesia's independence in 1945 (Ricklefs 2006). Similarly, in Burma (Myanmar), Buddhist

monks played a significant role in mobilizing resistance against British and later Japanese occupation, blending nationalist and religious aspirations (Schober 2011). Religious identity thus proved to be a potent force in resisting colonial rule, fostering both unity and legitimacy for nationalist movements. While colonial powers often sought to suppress or manipulate religious institutions, these movements reclaimed religious agency, demonstrating how faith remained an enduring source of resistance and adaptation.

12. Postcolonial Legacies of Religious Mobility

The colonial period profoundly shaped religious mobility, leaving enduring legacies that continue to influence contemporary global religious movements. Through the reorganization of religious institutions, state policies on conversion, and the forced or voluntary migration of religious communities, colonial powers significantly structured the modern religious landscape. These historical interventions have continued to shape religious diasporas, facilitated transnational faith-based movements, and contributed to political conflicts rooted in religious divisions.

12.1. Colonial Religious Policies and Contemporary Religious Diasporas

Colonial administrations often institutionalized and bureaucratized religion, defining religious identities in ways that persist today. European colonial powers categorized religious communities for administrative convenience, sometimes hardening boundaries that were previously more fluid (Chatterjee 1993). For example, British rule in India codified Hindu and Muslim identities, influencing legal frameworks and social interactions in ways that continue to impact south Asian diasporas today (Van der Veer 2001). Similarly, the French colonial policy of laïcité in north Africa led to complex religious affiliations among Algerian migrants in France, where Islam remains a highly politicized identity (Laurence 2012).

Moreover, colonial missionary efforts shaped the patterns of Christian expansion. British and French missionaries spread Christianity across Africa and Asia, often aligning with colonial administrations, which facilitated the establishment of Christian educational institutions, healthcare centers, and social services (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Today, postcolonial Christian diasporas, such as Nigerian and Filipino migrant churches in Europe and North America, maintain transnational religious ties that trace their origins to these colonial missions (Adogame 2013).

12.2. The Rise of Faith-Based Transnational Movements in the Postcolonial World and Political Conflict

Religious movements in the postcolonial era have taken on transnational dimensions, often drawing upon colonial legacies. One of the most striking examples is the global spread of Pentecostal Christianity, particularly in Africa and Latin America. The adaptability of Pentecostalism to local cultural contexts and its emphasis on personal spiritual experiences have contributed to its rapid expansion (Anderson 2004). This growth has also been facilitated by the global networks established during colonial missionary activities, which laid the groundwork for the continued exchange of religious ideas and personnel.

Similarly, Sufi networks, many of which were historically patronized by colonial and pre-colonial empires, have re-emerged as powerful transnational religious movements. Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandi and Qadiriyya maintain influence across south and central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, often fostering interregional connections that transcend national boundaries (Green 2012). These networks function as alternative modes of spiritual and social organization in the postcolonial world, sometimes in opposition to state-sponsored religious establishments.

Colonial interventions in religious affairs also contributed to deep-seated sectarian tensions and the rise of religious nationalism in many postcolonial states. The British policy of divide-and-rule in south Asia, for example, institutionalized Hindu–Muslim divisions, which later escalated into communal violence during the Partition of India in 1947 and continue to shape sectarian conflicts in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Pandey 2001). Religious nationalism in these regions has been exacerbated by colonial-era census classifications and legal systems that reinforced religious identities as exclusive categories (Zavos 2000).

In the Middle East, colonial boundary making and sectarian favoritism have also had long-term consequences. The French mandate in Lebanon institutionalized a confessional system that continues to define political power along religious lines, contributing to ongoing sectarian strife (Makdisi 2000). Similarly, British policies in Iraq favored Sunni elites over the Shi'a majority, a division that has played a significant role in postcolonial conflicts (Dodge 2003).

The postcolonial legacies of religious mobility are deeply embedded in contemporary global religious dynamics. Colonial religious policies have shaped present-day diasporic religious identities, fueled the rise of transnational faith movements, and contributed to sectarian and nationalist conflicts.

13. Conclusions

The historical entanglements of empire, colonialism, and religious mobility have profoundly shaped global religious landscapes, structuring both the facilitation and restriction of religious movements. This article demonstrated how colonial administrations actively engaged with religious institutions—either by co-opting them for governance, suppressing dissenting movements, or enabling missionary expansion—while religious actors themselves navigated, resisted, and transformed imperial structures. The circulation of missionaries, scholars, traders, and pilgrims across colonial networks not only reinforced empire but also fostered forms of resistance, adaptation, and transnational connectivity. Religious mobility was therefore a dynamic force, simultaneously reinforcing colonial hierarchies and subverting them through indigenous agency and hybrid religious identities.

Engaging with postcolonial scholars, such as Edward Said, Talal Asad, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, this study critically examined the legacies of colonial interventions in religious life. Said's critique of Orientalism highlights how European imperial powers constructed religious identities in ways that served colonial domination, while Asad's work on religion and power illustrates how religious institutions were shaped by colonial legal and administrative structures. Chakrabarty's arguments on the provincialization of Europe further emphasize how postcolonial religious movements remain embedded in imperial histories, continuing to negotiate and redefine faith in relation to past colonial frameworks. These theoretical perspectives underscore the fact that religious mobility under empire was neither an organic process of diffusion nor a unilateral imposition but a contested field of power, resistance, and transformation.

While the paper built a strong argument for religious resistance and adaptation, it is important to acknowledge that religious mobility also facilitated assimilation and collaboration with colonial structures. Missionary expansion, for example, was not only a tool of cultural imperialism but also created a new class of indigenous intermediaries who served colonial administrations. In British India and French West Africa, missionary-educated elites often worked within colonial bureaucracies, reinforcing imperial authority rather than resisting it (Viswanathan 1998).

Similarly, religious institutions were sometimes co-opted into colonial governance. The British alliance with Islamic institutions in Sudan and Nigeria, for example, allowed

them to control local populations through existing religious leadership structures while restricting radical reformist movements (Metcalf 1995). In French Algeria, colonial authorities strategically integrated Islamic legal institutions into governance while simultaneously undermining their autonomy, ensuring religious mobility served state control rather than indigenous agency (Robinson 2000).

Religious mobility also played a role in facilitating sectarian divisions, which colonial powers often exploited to maintain control. In Lebanon, India, and Iraq, imperial authorities institutionalized religious identities within legal and political frameworks, reinforcing communal divisions that persisted long after decolonization (Makdisi 2000). These examples underscore the fact that religious mobility was not inherently liberatory or subversive; rather, its impact was highly contingent on the broader political and structural forces shaping it. By incorporating both the resistance and collaboration aspects of religious mobility, this study presents a more nuanced understanding of how faith traditions were transformed under empire.

The implications of these findings extend beyond historical analysis, offering critical insights into contemporary religious migration, transnationalism, and faith-based diasporas. The legacies of colonial religious policies persist in the governance of religious minorities, the structuring of missionary networks, and the political mobilization of religious movements in the postcolonial world. Future research could further explore the intersections of religion and migration, particularly in the context of refugee movements, global evangelical expansion, and the impact of digital technologies on transnational religious networks. By tracing the enduring influence of empire on religious mobility, scholars can better understand how religious traditions continue to evolve across borders, reshaping cultural and political landscapes in an increasingly interconnected world.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Adogame, Afe. 2013. *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ahmad, Azīz. 1993. *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alatas, Syed Farid. 2019. *The State of Islamic Studies in Southeast Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anderson, Allan. 2004. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Azra, Azyumardi. 2004. *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*. Manoa: University of Hawaii Press.

Ballantyne, Tony. 2006. *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bayly, Christopher Alan. 2004. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bentley, Jerry H., Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds. 2015. Religion and religious change. In *The Cambridge World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. 6, pp. 311–422. [CrossRef]

Blackburn, Anne. 2010. *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brenner, Louis. 2001. *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Brown, Judith Margaret. 1991. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chidester, David. 1996. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Clancy-Smith, Julia Ann. 1994. *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohn, Bernard S. 1996. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conklin, Alice L. 1997. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Conrad, Sebastian. 2016. *What Is Global History?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cooper, Frederick, and Ann Laura Stoler. 1997. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dodge, Toby. 2003. *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Eaton, Richard Maxwell. 2003. *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evans, Martin, and John Phillips. 2007. *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ghosh, Durba. 2019. *Gentlemen of Empire: Imperial Administrators and the Making of British India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Girling, John L. S. 1972. The Resistance in Cambodia. *Asian Survey* 12: 549–63. [CrossRef]

Gombrich, Richard, and Gananath Obeyesekere. 1988. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Green, Nile. 2012. *Sufism: A Global History*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Harries, Patrick. 2007. *Butterfly Economics: Missionaries and Cultural Change in Colonial Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hastings, Adrian. 1994. *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holt, Peter Malcolm. 1970. *The Mahdist State in Sudan, 1881–1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hu, Anning, and Reid J. Leamaster. 2015. Intergenerational religious mobility in contemporary China. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54: 130–52. [CrossRef]

Ishii, Yoneo. 1986. *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*. Manoa: University of Hawaii Press.

Jaffe, Richard. 2015. *Buddhism and the Making of Modern Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jayaram, Narayana. 2004. *The Indian Diaspora: Dynamics of Migration*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2012. *Mediums, Monks, and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Lafaye, Jacques. 1976. *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Laurence, Jonathan. 2012. *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Low, Michael Christopher. 2008. *Empire and the Hajj: Pilgrims, Plague, and Pan-Islam Under British Surveillance, 1865–1908*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Makdisi, Ussama. 2000. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Masters, Bruce. 2001. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matory James, Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

McDaniel, Justin Thomas. 2011. *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Metcalf, Barbara D. 1995. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Metcalf, Barbara D., and Thomas R. Metcalf. 2012. *A Concise History of Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, Richard Paul. 1969. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Motadel, David. 2018. Islamic revolutionaries and the end of empire. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*. Edited by Martin Thomas and Andrew Stuart Thompson. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [CrossRef]

Osterhammel, Jürgen. 2014. *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 1990. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 2001. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peel, John David Yeadon. 1968. *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peters, Francis Edward. 1994. *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Porter, Andrew. 2004. *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rafael, Vicente L. 1993. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Reese, Scott Steven. 2018. *Renewers of the Age: Holy Men and Social Discourse in Colonial Borno*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Ricklefs, Marle Calvin. 2012. *Islamic Thought in Southeast Asia: New Interpretations and Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ricklefs, Merle Calvin. 2006. *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

Robinson, Francis. 2000. *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Salem, Ahmed Ali. 2004. Challenging authoritarianism, colonialism, and disunity: The Islamic political reform movements of al-Afghani and Rida. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21: 25–53. [CrossRef]

Schober, Juliane. 2011. *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Singh, Upinder. 2013. *The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics, and Archaeology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Stanley, Brian. 1990. *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Mission and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Leicester: Apollos.

Sundkler, Bengt G. M. 1961. *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tagliacozzo, Eric. 2013. *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Triaud, Jean-Louis, and David Robinson. 2000. *Le Temps des Marabouts: Itinéraires et Stratégies Islamiques en Afrique Occidentale Française, 1880–1960*. Paris: Karthala.

Turner, Alicia. 2014. *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Turner, Joe. 2018. Internal colonisation: The intimate circulations of empire, race and liberal government. *European Journal of International Relations* 24: 765–90. [CrossRef]

Van der Veer, Peter. 2001. *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Van der Veer, Peter. 2020. *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2010. *Rationalizing Migration Decisions: Labour Migrants in South and South-East Asia*, 1st ed. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2012. *Divergence and Convergence in the Nation State: The Roles of Religion and Migration*. New York: Nova Science.

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2022. The culture of migration in Southeast Asia: Acculturation, Enculturation or Deculturation? *Journal for Cultural Research* 26: 184–99. [CrossRef]

Ullah, A. K. M. Ahsan. 2024. Struggles for identity formation: Second-generation South Asian diaspora overseas. *South Asian Diaspora* 18. [CrossRef]

Viswanathan, Gauri. 1998. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zavos, John. 2000. *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zilfi, Madeline C. 2010. *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.