



**On the Margins**  
*Jews and Muslims*  
*in Interwar Berlin*

**Gerdien Jonker**

BRILL

## On the Margins

# Muslim Minorities

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*Jews and Muslims in Interwar Berlin*

*By*

Gerdien Jonker



BRILL

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Every advance in culture, it has been said, commences with a new period of migration and movement of populations. ... One of the consequences of migration is to create a situation in which the same individual finds himself striving to live in two diverse cultural groups. The effect is to produce an unstable character – a personality type with characteristic forms of behaviour. This is the ‘marginal man’. ... It is in the mind of the marginal man – where the changes and fusions of culture are going on – that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress.

ROBERT E. PARK, *Human Migration and Marginal Man* (1928)





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This is the place to thank every single one of you.

Berlin, June 2019



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# Glossary

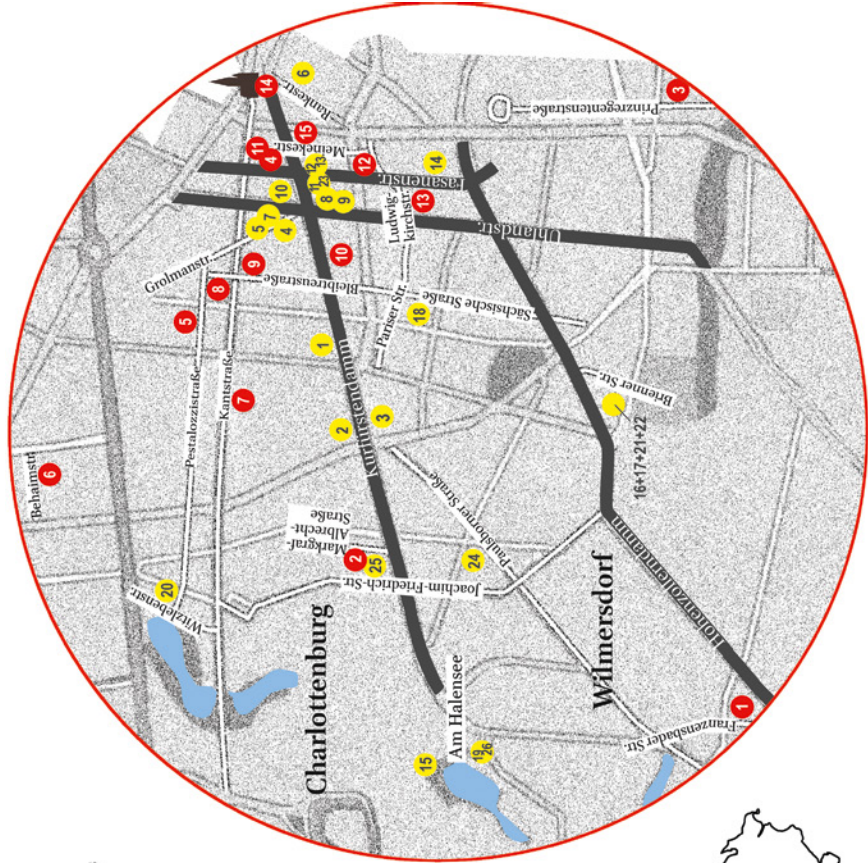
<i>abajee</i>	father (Urdu)
<i>adab</i>	behaviour (Arab) Islamic etiquette
<i>Ahmadiyya</i>	followers of Ahmad (Urdu), Indian Muslim reform movement
<i>Al mu'tamar al islamiya al 'amn amajee</i>	General Islamic Congress
<i>Anjuman Ishaat we Islam Lahore</i>	mother (Urdu) Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam
Aryan	noble; the supposed speakers of an archaic Indo-European language; identifier of a racist ideology
Begum	honorific title for Muslim women in Northern India
<i>Berliner</i>	a person who identifies with Berlin (German); <i>Berliniy-ha</i> (Persian); <i>Berlini</i> (Urdu); <i>Berlintschik</i> (Yiddish)
<i>chali</i>	empty (Urdu)
<i>Cheder</i>	Hebrew primary school
Chinchpokli	Jewish cemetery in Mumbai for survivors of the holocaust
<i>Chinesien</i>	exotic China (German), a fictitious place in German songs and literature
civilization paradigm	a belief in equality between world civilizations, first launched as a concept by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803)
Comintern	Communist International or Third International, organization that advocated world communism (1919–1943)
<i>Di Yidishe Stime</i>	<i>The Yiddish Voice</i> , expressionist Yiddish journal published in Kaunas in the 1920s
<i>Deutsch-Moslemische Gesellschaft</i>	(German-Muslim Society), German organization for converts in the Ahmadiyya mosque
<i>Earlkönig</i>	King of the shadows (German), German mythological figure; famous Schubert song
<i>Ehefähigkeitszeugnis</i>	certificate from the authorities of one's home country stating that there is no legal impediment to entering a marriage in Germany
<i>Eid-al-Adha</i>	Muslim sacrificial festival

<i>Eid-al-Fitr</i>	Muslim festival at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan
<i>Gedenkstätte Stille Helden</i>	Memorial of Silent Heroes (German), museum commemorating the Berliners who helped Jews survive the holocaust
globalization	process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide
<i>Grossmutterchen</i>	grandmother (German)
<i>Hafiz</i>	a person who knows the Qur'an by heart
Halacha	legislation (Hebrew), the Jewish legal tradition; Jewish law
<i>hartal</i>	strike, the countrywide suspension of economic activity that Gandhi proposed
<i>Haskalah</i>	enlightenment (Hebrew), the acculturation of the European Jewry as envisioned by Moses Mendelsohn (1729–1786)
Hinde	Indian woman (Yiddish)
<i>Hindutva</i>	the essence of Hinduism
<i>Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>	Academy for Jewish Studies in Berlin in the tradition of <i>Haskalah</i>
<i>iftar</i>	breaking fast (Arabic), meal after sundown during the month of Ramadan
<i>ijtihad</i>	exploration (Arabic), the process of the canonization of the Islamic tradition
<i>jadid</i>	renewal (Arabic), Muslim educational reform
Jamia Millia Islamia	(National Islamic University) near Delhi
jihad	the defence of Islam through an appeal to intellect and rationality; refining the inner self; legitimate war in defence of Islam
<i>kafir</i>	Muslim non-believer
<i>kashrut</i>	forbidden (Hebrew), Jewish legal food prescriptions deriving from <i>Halacha</i>
<i>Khutbah</i>	sermon
Lange Mandi	Long Market (Urdu), a Muslim bazaar within the city walls of old Lahore
<i>Lebensreform</i>	life reform (German), various protests against the Prussian military spirit, a romantic yearning for nature and a natural way of living, and the wish to shape one's life towards individual fulfilment
<i>Luftmenschen</i>	people living from air (Yiddish), self-description of Jewish refugees in Berlin

<i>Luftschutz tut not</i>	air protection is needed (German), suborganization of voluntary Nazi firemen
<i>Mahlzeit Kollege!</i>	may it go down well, comrade! Popular expression among German communists
Mazdaznan	religious movement founded by Otto Hanisch in 1890, merging Zoroastrism, Christianity and tantric Hinduism. The prescription of a vegetarian diet, bowel cleansing, yoga and meditation gained popularity among life reformers in search of alternative healing methods
<i>Mischling</i>	of mixed race (German), legal term for a child with one Jewish parent
Mirza	nobleman (Persian), member of the Muslim elite in Northern India
Modernism	rationalist movement in Muslim British India that identified with the <i>mu'tazilites</i>
Mughal	Muslim ruling class in the sub-continent (1586–1858)
<i>mujaddid</i>	reformer of the age (Arabic), Islamic term for a person who brings renewal to the religion
<i>mu'tazilites</i>	Muslims who adhere to the Islamic rational tradition that places man at the centre of history
<i>Nachrichtendienst für den Orient</i>	News Service for the Orient, German government body that collected information about the enemy during the First World War
<i>Naqib-ul Wali</i>	one who studies the ways of those near to God (Arabic), honorific title
<i>nu!</i>	well! Popular Yiddish turn of phrase
Ordensburg	Nazi elite school
<i>Ostjuden</i>	Jews from the East (German), refugees from the 1920 pogroms in Eastern Europe
pogrom	demolition (Russian), violent attack on Jewish minority populations in Russia and Poland, sometimes bordering on genocide
purdah	the practice of screening women from men or strangers, especially by means of a curtain.
Raja	king, ruler, Hindu honorific title
<i>Reichsmark</i>	currency used in Germany between 1924 and 1948
restitution	payments for damage or loss of property during the Second World War
<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	head of the year (Hebrew), Jewish New Year

Scheunenviertel	Barn Quarter (German), an extremely poor part of Berlin in which Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe settled
sharia	law practice (Arabic), the Islamic legal tradition, Islamic law
Sheikh	head of a Sufi lodge, honorific title
<i>shura</i>	consultation, Muslim council
Sufism	Islamic mysticism
<i>Tagdid</i>	renewal (Arabic), the merging of traditional with Western knowledge
Theravada	School of the Oldest (Pali), southern tradition of Buddhism
Theosophy	wisdom of the divine (Latin), a mix of religious studies and magic, also called modern spirituality, of which Elena Blavatski (1831–1889) was the leader. With Henry Olcott she founded the Theosophical Movement in 1875. In India, the movement inspired the reform of both Buddhism and Hinduism, and in the West, it encouraged experimenting with ‘eastern’ religions
<i>typus inversus</i>	man who turns to his own type (Latin), a term introduced by Hans Blüher (1888–1955) to stress that men who engage in male sexual relations are more masculine than other men
ulema	Muslim scholarly elite
Uranian	term borrowed from Greek philosophy to indicate the ancient roots of sexual relations between men
<i>Verein der Inder in Zentraleuropa</i>	(Association of Indians in Central Europe), organization of Indian students in Berlin
<i>Vilnerkes</i>	the inhabitants of Vilna (Yiddish)
<i>Volk</i>	the racial community (German), part of Nazi ideology
<i>Volksgenossen</i>	members of the <i>Volk</i> (German), those who belong as opposed to those who are excluded
<i>Wandervögel</i>	wandering birds (German), hiking movement in the romantic tradition associated with the concept of <i>Lebensreform</i>
<i>Yiddishkeit</i>	the essence of being Yiddish (Yiddish)
zamindar	the landed gentry of Northern India (Urdu)





- Jewish Public Places
- Muslim Public Places

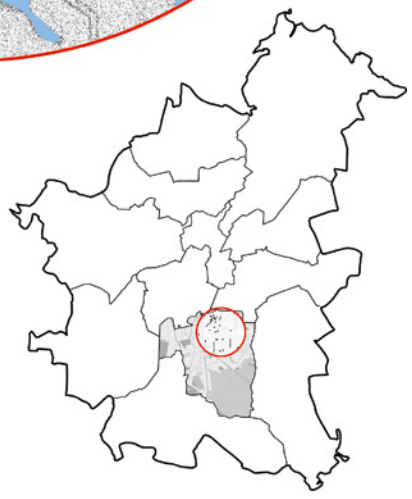


FIGURE 1 Map of Muslim and Jewish places in West Berlin

## Key to Map of Muslim and Jewish places in West Berlin

### ● Muslim Public Places

#### *Restaurants, jazz bars and entertainment*

- 1 Hotel Tempo, Kurfürstendamm 59
- 2 Alhambra Cinema, Kurfürstendamm 68
- 3 Soliman's Circus School, Kurfürstendamm 169
- 4 Café Cosmopolitan, Grolmanstraße 35
- 5 Restaurant Orient, Grolmanstraße 47
- 6 Ciro Bar, Rankestraße 31
- 7 Restaurants Azarbaizjan and Shark, Uhlandstraße 20/21
- 8 Carlton-Bar, Uhlandstraße 171
- 9 Sherbini Bar, Uhlandstraße 173
- 10 Hindustan House, Uhlandstraße 179
- 11 Restaurant Humboldt, Fasanenstraße 23
- 12 Restaurant Orient, Fasanenstraße 74
- 13 Djamil-Bar, Fasanenstraße 74
- 14 Restaurant am Hohenzollernplatz, Fasanenstraße 55
- 15 Soliman's Orientalisches Café am Halensee, Am Halensee

#### *Mosques and missions*

- 16 Lahore-Ahmadiyya Mosque, Brienner Straße 7/8
- 17 Deutsch-Moslemische Gesellschaft, Brienner Straße 7/8
- 18 Sufi Lodge Hazrat Pir Inayat Khan, Sächsische Straße 10
- 19 The India News Service and Information Bureau Ltd., Am Halensee
- 20 Ahmadiyya-Qadiani Mosque, Witzlebenstraße

#### *Organizations*

- 21 Mai'at Shaa'iv Islamiyya (MSI), Brienner Straße 7/8
- 22 Berlin Branch of The Islamic World Conference, Brienner Straße 7/8

- 23 Islam Institute, Fasanenstraße 23

- 24 Ma'ahad-ul-Islam zu Berlin, Paulsborner Straße 20
- 25 Zentrales Islam-Institut Deutschland, Joachim-Friedrich-Straße 17
- 26 Association of Urdu Students, Am Halensee

### ● Jewish Public Places

#### *Synagogues, bathts and schools*

- 1 Franzensbader Straße 7/8
- 2 Markgraf-Albrecht-Straße 11/12
- 3 Prinzregentenstraße 69/70
- 4 Fasanenstraße 79/80
- 5 Pestalozzistraße 14/15
- 6 Behaimstraße 11
- 7 Kantstraße 125
- 8 Bleibtreustraße 2
- 9 Bleibtreustraße 50

#### *Organizations*

- 10 Verein jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Kurfürstendamm 200
- 11 Sitz der zentralen jüdischen Organisationen, Kantstraße 158
- 12 Haus der zionistischen Organisationen, Meinekestraße 14
- 13 Gesellschaft deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, Ludwigkirchstraße 44

#### *Café Houses*

- 14 Romanisches Café, Am Breitscheidplatz
- 15 Café des Westens, Kurfürstendamm 225



# Introduction

This book is a spinoff from my previous one, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress*. While conducting research on the Lahore-Ahmadiyya Muslim reform movement, which was operating in Berlin during the interwar years, I came across a curious photograph. Taken in Berlin in 1935, it depicts a group of boys and girls standing and kneeling on a Persian carpet, which, judging from its size, was a prayer mat. The children are frozen, as if in a still-life, in a garden with a meadow and some shrubbery. Their ages range from about six to sixteen and they look exactly like children did at that time and in that place. The boys are wearing short trousers and wide collars and the girls have ribbons in their bobbed hair. They tilt their smiling faces to the camera. A vaguely proprietorial looking man in a three-piece suit is posing next to the carpet with his hands casually shoved into his back pockets. The caption reads, 'Muslim children receive religious instruction from the Imam of the Berlin Mosque, Dr S.M. Abdullah'.<sup>1</sup>

Through my research I already knew Dr Abdullah.<sup>2</sup> I had learned that his predecessor had built a mosque in Berlin in 1924, that he had invited the Berlin population to join hands between 'East and West', and that, when taking his place in 1928, Abdullah had encouraged intellectual exchange and intercultural marriage. In the photographs featuring the mosque community, I had noted an increase in mixed couples with babies in their arms.<sup>3</sup> Now, for the first time, I wondered whether those children were still alive.

Although unable to trace any of the children in the actual photograph, during my research I was able to establish contact with some of their descendants in a wide range of geographical places, including Warsaw, Stockholm, Woking, Jerusalem, Mumbai and Cape Town. With some, I conducted lengthy email exchanges in which they shared their memories and sent me letters and photographs. Others I was able to meet. During those visits I was shown the various heirlooms they kept in their homes and listened to their stories. Four times I faced the towering task of making an in-depth analysis of a collection of papers and documents.

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1 *Moslemische Revue*, (3) 2, 1935. The picture was reproduced in Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016) 180.

2 Biographical note in Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 57–60. For a summary of the Lahore-Ahmadiyya Movement, see Chapter 3.

3 *Moslemische Revue*, (2), 1929, p. 3; 1930 (1) 2.

There is a growing literature on the shared interests of Jews and Muslims in the twentieth century, in places ranging from the Russian Empire and Baltic Sea countries to Morocco and Palestine.<sup>4</sup> In such different regions, under particular historical circumstances, Jews and Muslims saw themselves ‘as groups with intertwined histories, cultures, beliefs, even blood’.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, finding references to Muslims in Jewish family archives and vice versa in Berlin in the interwar years, came to me as a surprise and, after my first such discovery, I deliberately started to look for more. The search brought to light a small network that covered a series of overlapping circles. Although Jews and Muslims in interwar Europe have been studied independently, with each new find it became increasingly evident that the relationships between them had been overlooked. In this study, I propose to describe the micro and macro religious histories that their meetings implied.

I apply the term network in a pragmatic sense here.<sup>6</sup> It is crucial that the communication happened in a defined space and time, occurred at different levels and included several friendship circles and personal networks. I found photographs of mixed (Jewish and Muslim) couples at *iftar* meals, New Year dances, and marriage parties. I read letters that described their friendship and student circles, and in the course of my research I learned about personal networks, work contexts and regular places of meeting. The exploration of shared interests showed in every document.

Assumptions presented themselves. With each meeting and each private archive, it became increasingly obvious that the encounters between Jews and Muslims in the interwar years had encompassed visions of the world at large and had been given shape in the participants’ private lives. In its different activities, the group seemed to encircle the same amalgam of topics, in which religious renewal, reform of the self, political independence, and equality

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4 Michael Brenner, *Jews and Muslims in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist–Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Vincent Lemire, *Jerusalem 1900: la ville sainte à l’âge des possibles* (Paris: Colin, 2013); Jessica Marglin, *Across the Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); and Ivan Svanberg and David Westerlund (eds) *Muslim Tatar Minorities in the Baltic Sea Regions* (Leiden: Brill, 2016) explore a number of intersections between Tatars and their Jewish neighbours, including help given to Jews during the Holocaust. See Gerdien Jonker’s (2018) book review of Svanberg and Westerlund in *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 7 1–4.

5 Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors*, 235.

6 Manuel Castells, ‘Toward a sociology of the network society’, *Contemporary Sociology*, 29 (2000), 693–9; Camille Roth and Jean-Philippe Cointret, ‘Social and semantic coevolution in knowledge networks’, *Social Networks*, 32 (2010), 16–29.

between civilizations were central. While trying to realize those aims in their personal lives, the protagonists embarked on an adventure to transcend borders, geographies, religious traditions and conventional expectations to achieve cross-border cooperation. Focusing on a future in which injustice, discrimination and unequal treatment (of people and of civilizations) would have disappeared, they not only discussed and developed all kinds of projects, but also took part in sporting events, arranged dances and had love affairs. In other words, they behaved like any international student group would behave today, except that at that time there were no precedents to follow.

By including their landlords, neighbours, doctors and dentists in their circle – in Lucie Hecht's case even her parents and their friends – over a period of approximately sixteen years, from 1923 to 1939, Muslim émigrés in Berlin and some of their Jewish neighbours formed a network, albeit a somewhat fragile one. Although the world outside this network seldom appears in the documents, in 1933 it was clear to all involved that their meetings had been taking place in the shadow of other, larger happenings in Berlin. As Jews became threatened, their friendships with Muslims gradually moved underground. The catastrophe took its course. After the war, the network existed only in the memories of those who had survived it; the magnanimous dream of a cosmopolitan group of avant-garde people ready to change the world had evaporated. Afterwards, they even found it difficult to explain what it had all been about to their children.

From the start, it was my intention to gain an overview of the width and diversity of this encounter. The endeavour stood in sharp contrast to the historical depth that some of the archives disclosed. The narrative tension it caused became particularly painful in the case of the Oettinger family. Their history has been laid down in my book, which translates as *The Heart must have Something to Hope for: A Family History of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*.<sup>7</sup> Because the experiences of the Oettinger family throw such a sharp light on the encounter between Muslims and Jews in Berlin, it is summarized below.

The documents and papers that the Oettingers had kept since the mid-nineteenth century show four generations of Prussian Jews trying to flee discrimination and find emancipation. Each generation of the Oettinger family seems to have taken decisions that threw the next onto an ever more daring

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<sup>7</sup> Gerdien Jonker, *‘Etwas Hoffen muß das Herz’: Eine Familiengeschichte von Juden, Christen, und Muslime* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018). The story of Lisa Oettinger's heirlooms was originally published in Gerdien Jonker, 'Lisa's things: matching Jewish–German and Indian–Muslim traditions', in Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra (eds) *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2017), 279–310.

course. Great-grandmother Bertha designed imaginative lace patterns from which her husband made his fortune. Grandmother Johanna experimented with international cuisine and designed her home with Oriental flair. Mother Emilia embraced the 'life reform' movement (*Lebensreform*) and explored a range of different religions. Lisa and Susanna Oettinger, born in Berlin in 1908 and 1910 respectively, found their way into the Ahmadiyya mosque and joined its vibrant community. The two converted to Islam, found (and lost) Indian lovers and husbands, and planned their futures as emancipated women in Muslim India.

In 1933, Susanna had a daughter out of wedlock whom she called Anisah Oettinger and whom she brought into the mosque community. Very soon, however, she became the victim of Nazi legislation against the Jews and was, along with the rest of the Jewish population, excluded from German society and, consequently, Anisah spent most of her childhood in hiding. Miraculously, with support and Red Cross packages from Abdullah, she, her mother and grandmother all survived the war.

Eighty years after those dramatic events, by which time I had seen the documents and heard Anisah tell her story, I decided to put my original focus aside for a moment to make way for the voices of the Oettinger family over the course four generations: their experiences encompassed their attempts as Jews to assimilate into mainstream German society in the age of the German colonial empire, experiments with the life reform movement and its association with a reformed, cosmopolitan form of Islam at the time of the Weimar Republic, survival strategies during the Nazi terror and, finally, a new beginning in barren postwar England.<sup>8</sup> Understanding that story has been at the heart of my attempt to find an inroad into the wide range of intersections between Jews and Muslims in Berlin.

## 1 Contents of the Book

In this study, I look at the Jews and Muslims in interwar Berlin who sought opportunities to interact with one another. Over a period of almost twenty years, they developed a web of contacts that allowed them to explore a network of friends, neighbours, business partners and lovers. German politics set the switches for their encounters, while the urban setting of West Berlin provided the contact zone. During my research a number of stories surfaced of Egyptians,

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<sup>8</sup> Jonker, *Etwas Hoffen*, 94–122 is published here as Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is a reprint of Jonker, 'Lisa's things'.

Persians and Indians helping Jews during the Nazi persecution and it becomes clear that their connections were based on solidarity and a firm wish to continue and deepen their friendships.

Although their initial meetings often occurred in fleeting contexts, the Indian missions in Berlin were what served to crystallize them, not least because their message spoke to the Jewish minority from the heart. The European Jews and Indian Muslims, around whom this study revolves, had some important characteristics in common. Treated as minorities in their home countries, and living on the margins of society in Berlin, both groups inhabited the outer fringes of their respective traditions. In Chapter 1, I describe the political framework and urban context in which it became possible for Muslims and Jews to interconnect. In Chapter 2, I look at the Muslim Indian missions in Berlin and ask why it was that Indians set up missions to cater to Germans, whereas Tatars, Persians and Arabs did not. I then go on, by looking at five case studies, to examine these encounters from the viewpoints of the actors involved, juxtaposing male and female views, and visions of global equality with more down-to-earth personal relationships. The latter reveal the in between spaces in which the protagonists interacted and recreated their lives together. In the Summary and Conclusion, I once again revisit the narrow interlude of time wedged between the great catastrophes of the twentieth century in which these people were able to discover their shared interests.

## 2 Approaches

Before launching into this history, it is necessary to say something about the questions that governed the research and the methods applied to it. The questions covered three general areas – *intergenerational transmission* (the protagonists' origins and what they brought with them); *crossroads of encounter* (the topography and choices of professions, partners and religious or political engagements); and the *perspectives of the descendants*. The research that unfolded uncovered an extraordinary wealth of material, which at times bordered on the overwhelming. To keep abreast of such abundance, I applied a mix of methods. First, unifying time and place helped keep in check the narrative strands that went in every possible geographical and historical direction. Second, depending on the source materials, I gave as much attention to matters of transmission between generations as to the crossroads of the encounters. Sometimes the descendants' retroactive understandings helped to put the two into perspective. Third, I treated memory on a par with historical reconstruction. In fact, using history and memory as two distinct entries into the same



past helped bring the stories to life. Fourth, wherever possible, I visited the places where ‘things happened’ to stimulate my historical imagination. Fifth, a systematic comparison of group photographs helped disclose the scope and width of the network more than any description in the written materials could possibly have done.

On the following pages, I examine two canvasses in some detail. Because they serve to balance assumptions and field observations in the later chapters, the topics involved have a bearing on the overall framework of the book. The first addresses the question of with whom are we dealing, Muslims and Jews, or migrants and minorities? The second discusses their global imaginings on questions of equality, of which the protagonists’ personal situation was one cornerstone, and equality among civilizations the other.

### 3 Muslims and Jews, or Migrants and Minorities?

The first canvas depicts the combination of religious advancement and geographical change that the protagonists embraced. It shows Muslim and Jewish religious reform in the nineteenth century when people were distancing themselves from their traditions and places of origin, were crossing religious and physical borders, were becoming foreigners on the margins of another society, and fusing with a different culture. For the men and women in this study, these were the moments that governed their decision making. What they had in common was a hunger for change. Nevertheless, when bearers of different traditions mix, questions of origin, loyalty and intergenerational transmittance inevitably surface. The canvas touches on the opposing loyalties that necessarily arise whenever one explores the margins. How did the actors deal with their respective traditions when engaging, or even fusing, with one another? As the case studies reveal, in one way or another, they all addressed this dilemma.

The sociologist Robert E. Park saw the ideal prototype for the advance of culture in the concept of ‘marginal man’. Migrants create situations in which they face the task of keeping loyal to the way things were done at home, yet they adapt to the otherness of their new surroundings. What may happen in such situations is what Park called ‘the fusion of civilizations’: newcomers and the natives who are willing to receive them may create something new together. The people whom Park observed in Chicago in the interwar period arrived from five different continents.<sup>9</sup> The central characters in this study met in

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9 Robert E. Park, ‘Human migration and the marginal man’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 33 (6) 1928, 881–93.

Berlin in the same period. Unlike the former, their mix included Muslim émigrés from the colonized world, Jewish refugees from the Russian borderlands, and German Jews. Although the latter were the hosts, on their home ground so to speak, the German majority despised them and subjected them to manifold discrimination. Because there were also artists, emancipated women and homosexual men in their ranks, German Jews faced not one, but multiple exclusions.

These then are the Jews and Muslims who will make their entry in this study. A range of different scholarly works pertain to them, including those on Muslim Modernism in India, the Jewish *Haskalah* in Germany, and communist Jews in Russia. To orient the reader, I offer a short introduction to each area. This is the place to stress that these different literatures are put into conversation for the first time here. Reading them together helps to outline the mental spaces the protagonists shared. They raise the question of whether the fusion that Park saw happening in Chicago was also happening in interwar Berlin. And, if so, where did it intersect?



In nineteenth-century British India, the modernization of the indigenous populations began with the issue of religious reform, which for Muslims took the form of Muslim Modernism and adaptation to Western education.<sup>10</sup> In northern India, Ahmadiyya missionaries were towering figures in that respect. Their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad challenged the Christian missions, criticized the Christian religion, and offered himself as a ‘reformer of the century’ (*mujaddid*) in its stead. Moreover, in challenging the Christian theology of death and crucifixion, Ahmad claimed that the God of the Muslims was still alive, and that He was speaking to him in his dreams and visions.<sup>11</sup>

Ahmad’s followers not only read his publications but also studied at Islamia College in Lahore. In combining religious and ‘worldly’ subjects, this college encouraged its pupils to counter the notions of a rigid, inflexible tradition and, if needs be (and that need was indeed felt), to act as religious authorities

10 Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Avril Powell, ‘Islamic Modernism and women’s status: the influence of Syed Ameer Ali’, in Avril A. Powell and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (eds) *Rhetoric and Reality: Gender and the Colonial Experience in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Muhammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India 1857–1914* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2006).

11 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 12–35.

themselves.<sup>12</sup> Before being sent to Europe, Abdullah and the other Ahmadiyya missionaries studied and afterwards taught at Islamia College. Khwaja Sadrudin (1881–1981) immersed himself in didactics. Fazlul Karim Khan Durrani (1894–1946) became a sociologist. S.M. Abdullah (1898–1956) and his assistant Imam Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza (1903–1937) would later enrol in Berlin University to write their dissertations in chemistry.<sup>13</sup> These missionaries were not part of the religious ulema. They were religious reformers by choice and deliberately engaged in modernizing Islam from a platform outside the Islamic tradition.

Muslim Indian students in Aligarh College near Delhi were modernists as a matter of course; their teachers were convinced that only a rational approach to Islam in combination with the creation of a secular space would allow Indian independence to happen. A deeply felt historical experience fired their conviction. These modernists ‘felt that the intellectual debasement of Muslims, largely responsible for their political decline, had started from the moment when theological speculation was put to an end and the doors of intellectual discovery (*ijtihad*) were closed’.<sup>14</sup>

The modernists in Lahore differed from those at Aligarh over the degree of secularism they thought that Indian society should obtain. Nonetheless, all Muslim Indians in Berlin upheld the rational tradition of the *mu'tazilites* who, a thousand years before, had subjected Islamic tradition to rational questioning, and they were convinced that Muslim India needed to revive that tradition to revive Islam.<sup>15</sup> We shall see how, in his endeavour to produce a German translation of the Quran that met the requirements of a modern age, Sadrudin sat down with other *mu'tazilite* translators in the Berlin mosque. Zakir Husain and his friends turned to the mosque for prayer and supported him (see Chapters 1, 2 and 7).

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Religious reform in Jewish Europe began with the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, which, around 1850, held the Jewish communities in Germany in

12 Maria-Magdalena Fuchs, *Islamic Modernism in Colonial Punjab: The Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam Lahore 1884–1920* (Princeton: dissertation 2019).

13 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 36–63.

14 Syed, *Muslim Response*, 8, 34–70.

15 David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 204–52.

its grip.<sup>16</sup> Initially, the debate addressed the need for adaptation, which included translating the Hebrew prayer book into German, introducing organs into synagogues, recognizing the need for a secular sphere by separating the state and religion, and acculturating Jews into German society. In the 1870s, by which time the older generation had died away, many Jewish children were being baptized. All the German-Jewish protagonists of this study – Emilia, Lisa and Susanna Oettinger, Hugo Marcus, Gerda Philipsborn and Lucie Hecht – were born into Berlin families that had already distanced themselves from Jewish traditions and were living secular lives. Inspired by the wish to become accepted as Germans, many Jews nonetheless felt uncomfortable in church. Although themselves baptized Jews, Lisa and Susanna's parents thoughtfully left the box for religion empty when registering their daughters in the family book.<sup>17</sup>

Like many other German Jews of the secularized generation, his daughters experimented with a mixture of Theosophy and the life reform movement to shape their religious individualism before embracing Islam in the Berlin mosque (Chapters 3 and 4). Likewise, Hugo Marcus joined the youth movement and embraced the back-to-nature cult. To shape his nascent individuality, he also declared his love for men. Gripped by the religious turn in the 1920s, he finally concluded that embracing Islam was the natural continuation of the form of Judaism he had experienced at home (Chapter 5).<sup>18</sup>



Unlike the German Jewry, Luba Derczanska and her friends were born in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, on the borderlands between imperial Russia and the Prussian and Habsburg empires. Their families still faithfully adhered to the Jewish religious rites and spoke Yiddish, the Jewish tongue, at home. During her studies in Berlin, Luba Derczanska neither experimented with religious alternatives nor converted to Islam. Like most young Jews in Russia, she supported the Bolshevik revolution. Because of her commitment to fight imperial power and the discrimination it imposed, subjects with which she was intimately familiar from being a Jew in Russia, once she settled in Berlin, Luba Derczanska joined the Indian Bureau, or more formally the India News and

16 Ismar Ellbogen and Eleanore Sterling, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* (Berlin: Jüdische Buchvereingung, 1935) 203; Abraham Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften Band 1*, edited by Ludwig Geiger (Berlin: Louis Gerschel Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1875); Arno Herzig, *Jüdische Geschichte in Deutschland* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002); Christoph Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002).

17 Jonker, *Etwas Hoffen*, 20–37, 84–86.

18 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 144, offers his conversion story.

Information Bureau Ltd, the mission that organized the anti-colonial struggle on a worldwide scale. She became involved in the bureau's activities, made friends with Indian Muslims, and found a Muslim partner for life. In Luba Derzanska we meet an agnostic who nonetheless sought to honour the tradition of her parents. Engaged to a Muslim man who took his religion seriously may have favoured that approach. It certainly accounts for the fact that the two sanctified their marriage in no less than two religious institutions, of which the mosque in Berlin was one and the reformist synagogue in Vilna the other (Chapters 6 and 7).

Because the people in this study belonged to religious minorities in their respective countries and could neither determine nor influence majority opinion, they saw themselves very differently from how others viewed them. Desperately wanting to be good Europeans, Jews throughout Europe were turning away from Judaism to embrace other creeds – Christianity and high culture in Germany and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Nevertheless, as Maria Stepanova put it in *Nach dem Gedächtnis (After Memory)*, whether assimilation or revolution, ‘the twentieth century has shown that nothing a Jew could do with himself – his offspring, his immortal soul, or his perishable body – changed anything in his contract with the outer world. ... In the termination camps they were all considered to be of the same ilk, atheists and baptized Jews included’.<sup>19</sup>

On a different level, despite the huge effort to establish equality between the Muslim minority and the Hindu majority in India and to create a secular Indian society together, Hindus turned their Muslim Indian counterparts into an isolated ethnic minority, branding them as foreigners and invaders, and decrying them as undesirables. In modern India, Indian Muslims are under attack.<sup>20</sup> Back in the interwar period, whatever words Jews and Muslims found to lift their minority status to a different level, whether they positioned themselves as Europeans, non-Jewish Jews, modernists, Hindustanis, or citizens of the world, in the face of the massive aggression that followed it seems to have been to no avail. However, the people who engaged with each other in Berlin did not yet know about that future. They acted as if they could re-create their own anew. It is that moment of creativity that this study wishes to convey.

19 Maria Stepanova, *Pamjati, Pamjati* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2017). German translation, *Nach dem Gedächtnis*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2018). The quotation was taken from the German publication, p. 181 (author translation).

20 Paul R. Brass, *Forms of Collective Violence: Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Modern India* (Palam Vihar: Three Essays Collective, 2006); Rajmonan Gandhi, ‘Hindus and Muslims’, in Rajmonan Gandhi, *Eight Lives. A Study of the Hindu–Muslim Encounter* (New York: State University Press, 1986), 1–18; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

#### 4 Global Imaginings

Focusing as they do on the circulation and exchange of things, people, ideas and institutions across continents, projections and imaginings of the world as one interconnected space are the bread and butter of global historians.<sup>21</sup> Although historians have been aware of trans-connections for much of human history, in the nineteenth century large swathes of the inhabited world experienced trans-local, transnational, trans-continental, transcultural and trans-religious interactions as never before.<sup>22</sup> Whether in China, British India, North Africa or Europe, the colonization of the world saw the growth of a middle class that reached across continents to share their ideas and knowledge in a manner hitherto unknown. As Christopher Bayly noted, ‘as world events became more interconnected and interdependent, so forms of human action adjusted to one another.’<sup>23</sup> Setting the switches for a new narrative of world history, Bayly stressed that adjustment occurred ‘not only in great institutions as churches, royal courts, and systems of justice, but also in the ways in which people dressed, spoke, ate, and managed relations within families.’<sup>24</sup>

This is what happened in Berlin in the interwar years, a European metropolis in which Jews and Muslims met on the margins of German society. Although Muslim missions from India played a key role in the encounter, Arabs and Persians were part of it as well. The way in which the local Jewish minority responded to their messages is of the essence here. To describe this peculiar range of actors, imagining themselves on the world stage while building networks on the ground, I borrow from global historians and will focus on the microcosm that sprung into existence.<sup>25</sup> Focusing on a microcosm enables one

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21 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad and Olivier Janz, *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen: Tendenzen und Theorien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Presenjit Duara, Viren Murthy and Andrew Sartori, *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell 2014); Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: Norton, 2014); Douglas Northrop, *A Companion to World History* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009); Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

22 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 14–22.

23 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 1.

24 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 1.

25 See Tonio Andrade, ‘A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Towards a Global Microhistory’, *Journal of World History*, 21 (4) 2010, 573–91; Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006); Angelika Epple, ‘Calling for a practice turn in global history: practices as drivers of globalizations’,

to trace the micro strategies that the protagonists developed to negotiate the challenges they encountered. In doing so, it is germane to follow Linda Colley's advice, which was 'to examine how a momentous and disruptive moment in global history was experienced' and, for that, she singled out one woman with an extended family.<sup>26</sup> Here, however, I propose to trace five parallel lives.

The flip side of the coin, or so global historians say, was that colonial administrations, Christian missions, Western businesses and travellers all took good care to ensure that the colonized peoples adjusted to Western civilization (with British civilization as its top standard) and not the other way around; for that reason the power relationship was lopsided, one that was imposed by some and had to be endured by others.<sup>27</sup> However, colonial rulers were not omnipotent. The peoples they ruled found crafty means to push them back. Along the axis of power stretching from West to East, interconnectedness simply had very different impacts for those involved.

As we shall see in Chapter 1, this state of affairs propelled Arab, Persian, Tatar and Indian activists and students from the colonies to continental Europe, especially to Berlin, which was one metropolis outside the British Empire in which they were welcomed and treated as equals. In Chapter 2, I go on to explain that the Indians also set up missions in Berlin with purposes ranging from introducing religious reform, overthrowing political regimes and supporting anti-Western pan movements. They had good reasons to do so. At the top of the axis, on the European side, the desire for world rule rubbed shoulders with a craving for self-enrichment. As the rulers of the biggest empire, the British, claiming to be the heirs to the highest civilization ever, legitimized their grip on world power. At the bottom of the axis, in the places where they governed their colonies and emptied them of their riches, Muslim Indians fought for an equal place beside the Hindu majority population, for they feared

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*History and Theory*, 57 (3) 2018, 390–407; Anne Gerritsen, 'Scales of a local: the place of locality in a globalizing world', in Douglas Northrop (ed.) *A Companion to World History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 213–26; Baz Lecocq, 'Awad El Djouh: a story of slave trade in the mid twentieth century', in Iva Peša and Jan-Bart Gewald (eds) *Magnifying Perspectives: Contributions to History, A Festschrift for Robert Ross*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 149–65; Hans Medick, 'Turning global? Microhistory in extension', *Historische Anthropologie*, 24 (2) 2016, 241–51; Matti Peltonen, 'Clues, margins, and monads: the micro-macro link in historical research', *History and Theory*, 40 (2001) 347–59; Lara Putnam, 'To study fragments/whole: microhistory and the Atlantic world', *Journal of Social History*, 39 (3) 2006, 615–30; Marcia Schenk and Jiyoung Kim, 'A conversation about global lives in global history', *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques*, 18, 2018.

26 Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*, 300.

27 Hunt, *Writing History*, 44–78.

that the British system of divide and rule would not leave enough place for them.

Arriving in Germany with a message of civilizational equality, the Muslim Indian missions sent a powerful signal to the badly treated Jewish minority, a signal that Muslim émigrés from the Arabic and Persian speaking world failed to send. Some of the missions pressed for religious reform, others preached world revolution, but they all addressed the pressing question of civilizational equality. For their Jewish neighbours, the missions worked like magnets, drawing communists, members of the life reform (*Lebensreform*) movement and emancipated women in their wake.

Although the wider setting of the Indian–German encounter has been the subject of several studies, none of these has addressed its religious dimension, yet Muslim Indians set up more religious than political initiatives. Moreover, the religious reformers and the communists did not shy away from joining hands. In fact, it was their politics of open borders that set the switches for the encounter that forms the subject of this book.

What the protagonists in the case studies had in common, their entry pass into the network so to say, was their conviction that ‘equal coexistence’ was possible. The term harks back to a philosophical concept addressing the equal coexistence of world civilizations.<sup>28</sup> In the age of empire, when colonizers claimed that theirs was the highest civilization, colonized peoples fought to have their own traditions and histories acknowledged, claiming that all civilizations, wherever they happened to have matured, were on a par.

In the encounter between Jews and Muslims in Berlin in the 1920s, this was the message that the protagonists adopted and the message that gave shape to the details of their lives. Ever since the ‘civilization paradigm’ gained currency in the 1880s, and irrespective of whether the protagonists were born in Berlin, Vilna, Aligarh, or Lahore, it became part of their mental horizon and reassured them that, although they belonged to religious groups that were treated as minorities in their own countries, and although they were threatened with violence and discrimination, all people were equal and each of their ‘civilizations’ could hold up to the test when compared with another.

Global historians have coined this work in progress ‘the civilization paradigm’, and they have noted that it was held in high esteem in India. Building on German philosophical thought, the philosopher and poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) developed a form of writing history in which he juxtaposed ‘the

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28 This concept was first launched by Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791). For a short overview of its genesis, see Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 37–47.



material West' against 'the spiritual Orient'.<sup>29</sup> Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) based his concepts of civil disobedience and non-cooperation on it. On arriving in Berlin, the first booklet that the Muslim Indian student leader and follower of Gandhi, Zakir Husain (1897–1969), published was a collection of Gandhi's latest speeches in German.<sup>30</sup> Forty years on, in a letter he wrote to President Nasser during the Arab–Israeli conflict, Khwaja Abdul Hamied (1898–1972), Husain's friend from the days of the Non-Cooperation Movement, defended the equal coexistence of Jews and Muslims, which formed the basis of this conviction and was his own lived experience.<sup>31</sup>

An acknowledgement of fundamental equality compels one to keep one's borders open. The realization that the network surrounded itself with fuzzy borders fitted in with my other findings.<sup>32</sup> Whoever participated in it was ready to loosen the ropes and launch into the border crossings that would surely not only change the world but also secure their future. Wherever world regions and world religions were at stake, or whenever differences in upbringing, expectations and habitus presented themselves, the protagonists' belief in fundamental equality helped to soften the line between 'us' and 'them'.

For marginalized peoples trying to move onto the global stage, this was the bottom line. It made the meeting of Jews and Muslims stand out from all other transcultural encounters in interwar Germany. Some of those others embraced the great 'pan' ideas of their time – pan-Arabism, pan-Islam, pan-Indian – and developed ideas that were decisively anti-Western.<sup>33</sup> Others still, in search of stable political models, embraced totalitarian visions. Indians, Persians and

29 Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

30 Zakir Husain and Alfred Ehrentreich (eds) *Die Botschaft des Mahatma Gandhi* (Berlin-Schlachtensee: Volkserzieher-Verlag, 1924).

31 Reproduced in Khwaja Abdul Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Press, 1972), 331–8.

32 The literature on fuzzy and solid borders is immense. I notably benefited from Jörg Baberowski, 'Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder: Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel', in Jörg Baberowski, Hartmut Kaelble and Jürgen Schriewer (eds) *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder: Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2008), 9–17; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Anchor Books, 1967); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Rudolph Stichweh, 'Selbstbeschreibung der Weltgesellschaft', in Jörg Baberowski et al. (eds) *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder: Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2008), 21–53; Tzvetan Todorov, *Die Eroberung Amerikas: Das Problem des Anderen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002); Andreas Wimmer, 'The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: a multilevel process theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 113 (4) 2008, 970–1022.

33 Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*.

Arabs studying in Berlin in the 1930s befriended the Nazis, joined their organizations and, in the war, collaborated with them.<sup>34</sup>

The encounter that is lent visibility here existed in the shadow of the large ideologies of the day, but it certainly failed to win the contest. Fusing cultures and traditions was not on the agenda of the powers to be. However, rather than considering themselves the victims, the Jews and Muslims in Berlin recognized one another as minorities. In Europe, Jewish minorities were facing mounting discrimination. In British India, the former Muslim ruling class had been reduced to a minority among many and, despite the huge effort of peaceful resistance against the British, the Hindu and Muslim populations were drifting apart. Learning about each other in Berlin seemed to produce a creative intersection, or so this study suggests. However short-lived their activities, the traces they left behind offer a helpful example of actors who are unafraid to envision a common future against the reigning ideologies of their time, who manage to keep their borders open, and to join forces against all the odds.

## 5 The Sources

Working with private archives raises questions of a systematic nature. Of such archives, it is impossible to separate description from the manner in which they were discovered and how the sites were accessed. Tracing them depends on many factors, of which luck may be paramount for a good portion of them. Also, once discovered, private archives are not automatically accessible to the researcher. Because they came into existence as a result of emotional bonds and often include a mixture of wanted and unwanted memories, why would their owners allow a stranger to pry into them? Likewise, if descendants decided to protect their collections, they did so for a reason, usually to honour their parents. Although the supplicant at the kitchen table was encouraged to share that reason, it made mining private archives a fragile enterprise from the start. A brief summary to each in turn concludes this Introduction.

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Hugo Marcus's involvement in the mosque and its networks lasted longest of all, namely from 1923 to 1939, and even continued from a distance after he had fled from Berlin. When he died in 1966, he left behind in orderly stacks against the walls of his room the writings of a lifetime – notebooks, handwritten letters

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34 Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*.

and corrected prints.<sup>35</sup> W.R. Corti, a Swiss activist with plans to set up an archive on German philosophers, collected the papers. Since the archive never materialized, after his death Corti's wife donated the papers to the Swiss National Library in Zurich, which stored them in 40 containers in the order that Marcus had intended and only summarily listed their contents. Because Marcus divided the papers into very broad categories, such as 'private', 'manuscripts', 'typescripts', 'lectures', 'translations', anybody wanting to discover the details of his involvement in the mosque inevitably has to read them all. They include letters and articles pertaining to his work as mosque manager; short stories describing his relationships with men inside and outside the mosque; different versions of his conversion narrative; restitution claims detailing his persecution by the Nazis; and letters received. Marcus envisaged the merging of two equal civilizations, which from his perspective found their apotheosis in European philosophy on the one hand and Islamic theology on the other. Notes on his personal network retreat behind that aim. Photograph albums one searches for in vain (Chapter 5).

Lucie Hecht worked as a translator for the Indian Bureau and related communist organizations in Berlin between 1923 and 1933. For the rest of her life she kept the papers that she had been able to rescue from that period. In a telephone call, her nephew Harald Hecht told me how, when she died in 1981, he flew to Germany to take care of her apartment. Alas, unaware of his aunt's history, he disposed of the contents of her flat as quickly as possible. Lucie Hecht's archive would have been irreparably lost, but for Horst Krüger, a scholar at the East Berlin Academy of Sciences. In the 1960s, Krüger, in search of information on the Indian Bureau, wrote to Lucie Hecht and she responded with a long description on the inner workings of the bureau, to which she added newspaper clippings, articles she had translated, photographs and short descriptions of people she once befriended, and copies of her Indian letters. Lucie Hecht's focus had been on group building. A group photograph with names on the back discloses her personal network, connecting the Indians of the bureau with her parents and their friends in Potsdam, including scientists from the nearby Einstein research centre. Although the correspondence survived in the Krüger papers, it was insufficient for an individual case study. However, whenever the Indian Bureau is discussed, Lucie's views are given ample coverage (Chapters 2 and 6).<sup>36</sup>

35 Private archive of Hugo Marcus (c.1890–1966) in the W.R. Corti Papers, Zentralbibliothek, Zurich, Switzerland.

36 Lucie Hecht's private collection in the Horst Krüger Papers, Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin, box 33, 240–1, box 60, 433.

The Hamied family's private papers are kept in the archive of the family firm in Mumbai.<sup>37</sup> Its main source materials, which focus on the period between 1925 and 1929, disclose the views of Khwaja Abdul Hamied and Luba Derczanska respectively, revealing information about their personal and overlapping networks. The archive consists of a trove of 650 letters in six different languages. Luba and Hamied conducted a private correspondence in German and English with one another. Letters in Yiddish, Polish and Russian that Luba Derczanska received from family and friends in Vilna and Moscow before the war throw light on her Jewish communist past, as do the photographs and letters from her best friend in Berlin, the experimental biologist Esther Tenenbaum. A handful of letters in Urdu help to open up a view on the couple's relationship with the Hamied family in Aligarh. The archive also contains Hamied's memoir which he left behind unfinished when he died in 1972, depicting amongst others his Jewish teachers and friends. A private photograph album with names written underneath each picture shows the faces of the people mentioned in the letters and reveals at least two personal networks – Luba's Jewish circle and Hamied's revolutionary Indian one. It is here that the faces of the Ahmadiyya missionaries also make their entry – on outings together and receptions in the Ahmadiyya mosque (Chapters 6 and 7).

The next find occurred within the precincts of the Lahore Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> During the course of renovation work in 2017, some inbuilt cupboards were found that housed parts of the prewar mosque archive (1928–39). These files, which contain correspondence, invitations, records of marriages and conversions, information about lectures, and the mission journal, offer a view from the perspective of Abdullah as the main mosque administrator. Since it was his job to network, the researcher comes across communications that veer in several religious directions. For example, there are records of contacts with the Inayath Khan Sufi Lodge, the Theosophical Society of Germany, the Buddhist House in Berlin, as well as with the Jewish Reform community, also in Berlin. Unfortunately, Abdullah's private correspondence was destroyed when the Ahmadiyya mosque in Woking, where he lived after the war, changed hands in the 1960s. A small consolation is that the six private photograph albums he left behind in Berlin fully disclose what the files do not, namely the scope and width of his personal network. Abdullah was a methodical man. One of the albums is dedicated to the Oettingers, another to Rolf Baron von Ehrenfels with whom he undertook a tour through India in the

37 Private Hamied family archive (c.1900–89), Cipla Archive, Mumbai.

38 The Ahmadiyya mosque archive (1928–2004) is presently being processed to become part of the National Archive of Berlin.

1930s, and yet another to the community members with whom he and his wife used to play tennis or went on outings together. The fourth album is of photographs of receptions with famous personalities; and the fifth records a visit to Berlin by his brothers and cousins. Across the albums, there are also several photographs of members of the Indian Bureau, most notably V. Chattopadhyaya, commonly referred to as Chatto (Chapters 2 and 3).

The most curious archive of all is that of the Oettinger family.<sup>39</sup> Lisa Oettinger participated in the network between 1929 and 1937, at which point she and her future husband left for Lahore. Her son was given custody of two large trunks from the Lahore bazaar, which Lisa packed for him in the 1950s. Its contents were designed to press upon him that he was heir to two equal civilizations, the one Jewish, the other Muslim, a fact he should never forget. Lisa was an artist. She focused her heritage on merging the two civilizations in one collection. Stacked like a jigsaw puzzle, the trunks contain the lace and artworks of her Jewish ancestors; a specimen of Mughal art she received from her husband's family in Lahore; paper jottings stating which ancestor produced what, and inevitably closing with the exhortation that it 'MUST stay in the family'; family documents and letters; and photograph albums. No less than five of the latter contained pictures of the mosque community in the 1930s, which showed the Oettinger sisters at *iftar* gatherings and other festive occasions, rowing with their friends, or receiving them at home. As in Abdullah's photograph albums, members of the Indian Bureau, including Chatto, as Virendranath Chattopadhyaya's associates fondly referred to him, regularly make their appearance (Chapters 3 and 4).

Besides the collections enumerated here, several other private archives were consulted, though in ways that were less systematic. The most important among these is the private archive of the Soliman family,<sup>40</sup> a family of circus artists who, around 1900, were entertaining the whole of Berlin with a variety of distractions, including a circus, an Oriental café and the very first cinemas Berlin had ever seen. The three Soliman brothers all married German women – Mohamed married Martha Westphal, Abdel Aziz Gertrud Schweigler, and Omar Else X. When a mosque was erected in their neighbourhood, they regularly went there to pray. However, although the members of the Soliman family could be counted among the Lahore Ahmadiyya mosque's regular worshippers,

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39 Private Oettinger family archives (c.1860–2000), Woking and Hassocks, U.K. Susanna Oettinger took care of her mother and daughter during the war. They miraculously survived, as did the papers in their possession. However, after the war Susanna refused to refer to the war period for the rest of her life. The documents and photos she inherited from her mother were found in a box under her bed after her death.

40 Private Soliman archive, Berlin (c.1900–70s).

and for three generations they solemnized their mixed marriages there, they did not participate in its community life. Perhaps the mosque's life-reform views of lived Islam – lectures, tea parties, tennis matches and country hikes – ill-suited their own idea of Islam. The Soliman archive contains the papers, documents and photographs of three generations and covers the period from 1900 to the 1970s. Alas, it was not possible to view it in its entirety, but what I did see enriches our knowledge of Muslims in Berlin in the interwar years. We will return to this archive on different occasions.

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Between them, the archives disclose an extraordinary wealth of material. The questions I raised at the beginning of this Introduction, touching on matters of intergenerational transmission, crossroads of encounter, and the perspectives of the descendants, helped to order them and make a manageable selection. Nonetheless, what we have before us now are mere beams of light on a landscape, which for the most part remains in the dark. The archives offer enough material though with which to start drawing a map of communications and highlighting its *raison d'être*. Should other collections come to light in the future, they will help to fill the blanks. The journey into discovering the friendships and values that Muslims and Jews shared in the interwar period has only just begun.



**PART 1**

*The Setting*







## Crossroads

In 1918, the world was in a bad way. The First World War had ushered in the European powers' scramble to build empires and achieve economic and military supremacy at any cost. By the time a peace treaty was finally concluded, no fewer than four empires had vanished from the face of Europe, but hostilities were yet to cease. While the German, Habsburg and Ottoman empires were being dismembered and revolution was destroying the Russian one, a new war over territorial rights, which lasted until 1923, was erupting in the borderlands between Russia, Poland and the Baltic states. Millions of Jews who had lived in those borderlands for centuries became the target of pogroms and ethnic cleansing.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Tatar and other Muslim minorities in Russia were also discovering that the new Soviet state that succeeded the Russian Empire was suppressing their historical claims to a religious and cultural identity.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the British and French were occupying large swathes of the former Ottoman empire – the British claimed Sudan, Egypt, Palestine and Jordan, and the French Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. North Africans and Indians who had laid down their lives to secure war victories for 'their' empires, discovered that, once the peace treaty was signed, those very empires had conveniently forgotten their promises to accord them citizen rights and self-government. Iraqi villagers opposing British occupation were subjected to aerial bombing. In 1919, British forces opened fire on a peaceful protest against the occupation of the Indian city of Amritsar, which ended with hundreds dead and thousands wounded.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History. Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 369–80. For the situation of Jews in the borderlands, see Franziska Davies, Martin Schulze and Michael Brenner (eds) *Jews and Muslims in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union*, Religious Cultures in Modern Europe, vol. 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Henry Morgenthau Sr, *Mission of the United States to Poland*. Paris, 3 October 1919, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Mission\\_of\\_The\\_United\\_States\\_to\\_Poland:\\_Henry\\_Morgenthau,\\_Sr\\_report](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Mission_of_The_United_States_to_Poland:_Henry_Morgenthau,_Sr_report).

2 On Tatars and other Muslim peoples in the Soviet Union, see Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen and Dmitriy Yermakov (eds) *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, Islamic Studies, vol. 200 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1996); Hiroaki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, the Caucasus and Japan, 1904–1944* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

3 Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 380–93, map of the dismembered Ottoman empire on p. 383.

Amid this chaos, Germany became a focus for revolutionary forces. After its defeat in the war and loss of its empire, a feeble government, reeling from the effects of disastrous imperial policies and unable to establish itself in the capital, set up parliament in the provincial town of Weimar; and the population's trust in the authorities dwindled to zero. In the early years of the Weimar Republic, between 1918 and 1923, attempts at uprisings shook the country. Expecting a communist revolution in Germany to break out at any moment, Moscow transferred the Communist International (Comintern) to Berlin. In its wake, a steady flow of Russian communists settled in the German capital and, in turn, attracted communist sympathizers to the city from across Europe.<sup>4</sup> In Munich, Adolf Hitler gathered disappointed returnees from the front and roused them into bitter resistance.<sup>5</sup>

November 1923 saw numerous forces simultaneously coalescing. With the Soviet daily newspaper *Pravda* expectantly noting how 'the air smells of revolution', two well-stocked weapon caches intended to support the imminent uprising were discovered in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> In the south of Germany Hitler was instigating his famous Beer Hall Putsch while, on the western border, the French were marching into the Rhine region to press their claim for restitution payments from Germany. As if this were not enough, a stock exchange crash of unprecedented magnitude was bringing untold financial instability and leaving middle-class families penniless overnight. Widely circulated reports were emerging of harried German citizens rushing to the shops with wheelbarrows full of banknotes. There were also reports of Germans plastering banknotes on the walls of their apartments.

Into this theatre of disruption Berlin received a stream of migrants and refugees from eastern Europe. Some 360,000 'White Russians', having fled the revolution, sought temporary refuge in Berlin. In their wake came 63,500 Jews, who had been a target of both 'white' and communist attacks.<sup>7</sup> Moscow dispatched

4 Politik 19. Rußland, Bd 1–5, Bolschewismus, Kommunismus (3. Internationale), AA PA R 31.706–10.

5 Vanessa Conze, *Das Europa der Deutschen: Ideen von Europa in Deutschland zwischen Reichstradition und Westorientierung 1920–1970* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2005), 25–100; Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, 'Suchbewegungen in der Moderne: Religion im politischen Feld der Weimarer Republik', in Friedrich Graf (ed.) *Religion und Gesellschaft: Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 177; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities. A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 327–400.

6 Politik 19. Rußland Kommunistische Waffenlager in Berlin (1923–1925), AA PA R 31.813 k (6.10.1923).

7 Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (eds) *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture* (London: Modern Humanities Research, 2010); Gertrud Pickhan,

its own personnel into these Russian-speaking exile populations to prepare for the, in their view, inevitable communist revolutionary takeover. Yet more Russians had been present in Berlin since the commencement of hostilities, among them 18,000 Tatar soldiers who had spent the war in Muslim prisoner-of-war camps south of Berlin. When the camps were disbanded at the end of the war, these soldiers refused to return to Russia because of the altered political state of the country they had left behind.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, another stream of migrants arrived from the Middle East and South Asian subcontinent. Envoys from Afghanistan and Persia, both of which countries had supported the Germans during the First World War, arrived at the border expecting assistance in return for their former loyalty.<sup>9</sup> An uncertain number of Muslim travellers drifted between Berlin and other western European capitals rallying support for their anti-colonial cause, expecting sympathy and backing from the Germans, who had lost control of their own imperial subjects and were looking for ways of thwarting the British. Last but not least, approximately 5000 students from Persia, Afghanistan, the Arab-speaking countries, Turkey, Tatarstan and India arrived with the intention of completing their studies at German universities and engaging in the exchange of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

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*Transit und Transformation: Osteuropäisch-jüdische Migranten in Berlin 1918–1939* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Karl Schlögel, *Das russische Berlin: Ostbahnhof Europas*. (Munich: Pantheon/Verlagsgruppe Random House, 2007); Karl Schlögel and Karl-Konrad Tschäpe, *Die russische Revolution und das Schicksal der russischen Juden: Eine Debatte in Berlin 1922/23* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2014), 67.

8 Sebastian Cwiklinski, 'Between national and religious solidarities: the Tatars in Germany and Poland in the inter-war period', in Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (eds) *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 64–89; Gerhard Höpp, *Muslime in der Mark: Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914–1924* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1997).

9 Politik 2. Afghanistan, Bd 1 (1920–1923), AA PA R 77.898.

10 On Afghans see Marjan Wardaki, *Knowledge-Seekers between Afghanistan and Germany: Negotiation, Exchange, and the Production of Technical and Scientific Ideas, 1919–1945* (dissertation in progress). On Arabs see Gerhard Höpp, 'Die Sache ist von immenser Wichtigkeit ... Arabische Studenten in Berlin' (1989), Ms. in Gerhard Höpp Papers (Berlin); Gerhard Höpp, *Muslim Periodicals as Information Sources about Islamic Life in Germany, 1915–1945* (Berlin: Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, 2000); Gerhard Höpp, 'Zwischen Universität und Straße: Ägyptische Studenten in Deutschland 1849–1945', in Konrad Schliephake and Ghazi Shanneik (eds) *Die Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Republik Ägypten* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 31–42. On Indians see Lothar Günther and Hans-Joachim Rehmer, *Inder, Indien und Berlin* (Berlin: Lothus-Verlag, 1999); Douglas T. McGetchin, 'Asian anti-imperialism and leftist antagonism in Weimar Germany', in Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (eds) *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth*

Faced with few options, the Weimar government attempted to enact a treaty with Moscow that would normalize relations and clear the way for the critically needed export of German goods to the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the Foreign Office turned a blind eye to any relationships that Muslim émigrés struck up with Russians. The diplomats responsible for monitoring the traffic between the students and Moscow contented themselves with observing that ‘the exodus of Egyptian students to Berlin’ was merely a result of intensive propaganda by the Egyptian National Party.<sup>12</sup> They also observed that, although Persians sometimes acted as ‘Bolshevist agents’, they also pursued their studies in Germany,<sup>13</sup> and that, true, Indians served as a cover-up for the sprawling communist network in Berlin but also opened doors for German exports to India.<sup>14</sup> Urgent requests by the British to put a stop to what they considered subversive activities were simply ignored.<sup>15</sup>

It came as no surprise that the India Office in London judged these developments to be dangerous and London set up an ‘Interdepartmental Committee

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*and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2014), 129–39; Benjamin Zachariah, ‘Indian political activists in Germany, 1914–1945’, in Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (eds) *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2014), 141–55. On Persians see Mohammad Alsulami, ‘Iranian journals in Berlin during the interwar period’, in Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (eds) *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 157–81; Antoine Fleury, *La pénétration allemande au Moyen-Orient 1919–1939* (Paris: Brill, 1977); George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1949); Ahmad Mahrat, *Die deutsch-persischen Beziehungen von 1918–1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1977); Bernard Vernier, *La politique islamique de L’Allemagne* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1939). On Tatars see Sebastian Cwiklinski, *Die Wolga an der Spree: Tataren und Baschkiren in Berlin* (Berlin: Die Ausländerbeauftragte, 1998); Iskander Giljazow, *Muslimen in Deutschland: Von den zwanziger Jahren bis zum ‘islamischen Faktor’ während dem zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Gerhard Höpp archive, 1990); Höpp, *Muslimen in der Mark*. And on the Turks see Ingeborg Böer, Ruth Haerkötter and Petra Kappert, *Türken in Berlin 1871–1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002).

11 The Treaty of Rapallo re-established diplomatic and economic traffic between the two countries and was concluded in 1922; see Sebastian Haffner, *Der Teufelspakt: 50 Jahre deutsch-russische Beziehungen* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968).

12 Höpp, ‘Die Sache’, 1.

13 Politik 2. Iran III. Politische Beziehungen Persiens zu Deutschland (1929–32), AA PA R 78.106.

14 Politik 26. Indien, AA PA R 77.461 (1921–24) on the Indian Information Bureau.

15 Politik 26. Indien, AA PA R 77.461 contains articles in the British press and urgent letters from the India Office in London on the bureau’s revolutionary activities but is uncritical of them. See, for instance, the memorandum from the British Embassy in Berlin of 25 August 1923, and the internal correspondence that follows.

on Eastern Unrest'.<sup>16</sup> In Cairo, the Egyptian National Party's money transfers were thwarted.<sup>17</sup> In Amritsar, where a crowd had gathered after two nationalists were arrested, Brigadier-General Rex Dyer, before ordering his men to open fire on the demonstrators, declared that, 'you people talk against the government, and persons educated in Germany ... talk sedition. I shall uproot all these'. The colonial government in Delhi backed his actions.<sup>18</sup>

The postwar German capital had become a city beyond such control. It was therefore possible not only to conspire and agitate but also to explore the in between spaces in which to mix, interact, engage with other cultures and exchange ideas. Unlike Paris or London, the allure of Berlin during the Weimar Republic grew for Muslim intellectuals eager to escape the constraints of the British Empire. In Berlin, Muslims from diverse places and cultural traditions met and engaged intellectually not only with Germans, but also with one another. A confluence of factors and conditions created an environment that was conducive to such contacts, that allowed them to engage in projects together and, often, to foster lifelong friendships.

## 1 Migrants and Minorities in the European Metropolises

Over the last decade, the phenomenon of Muslims travelling to the main interwar European metropolises of London, Paris and Berlin, as well as to some smaller European countries such as the Netherlands, Lithuania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania, has received fresh scholarly attention.<sup>19</sup> In addition, a number of scholars have explored the subject of European converts to Islam in the first half of the twentieth century, thus pinpointing one possible European reaction to the presence of Muslims.<sup>20</sup> However, a systematic comparison of the actors and of the political and societal settings in which they were received is yet to be undertaken. However, to evaluate the situation in Berlin, it

16 Höpp, 'Die Sache', 4.

17 Höpp, 'Die Sache', 5.

18 Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Abacus, 1997), 474.

19 Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid (eds) *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2015); Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (eds) *Islam and Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (eds) *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers* (New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2014).

20 Jamie Gilham, *Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850–1950* (London: Hurst, 2014); Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*; Geoffrey Nash (ed.) *Marmaduke Pickthall: Islam and the Modern World* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017).

is necessary to establish under what conditions Muslim students could engage with local populations in other metropolises. A short survey of such dynamics in London and Paris during the period in question is therefore tentatively offered here.

In London, the epicentre of an empire that presided over the lives of 98 million Muslims, the number of actual Muslim students was negligible. Around 1900, no more than 1000 Indians were allowed to complete their studies at British universities, a number that grew to a mere 7128 in 1932.<sup>21</sup> The British maintained a strict watch on student agitation (no more than a few hundred are reported to have attended nationalist meetings in 1932);<sup>22</sup> they also ensured the strict segregation of the Indians from the rest of the population.<sup>23</sup> Persian students, whom the Shah regularly sent to European universities in an attempt to Westernize the country, were discouraged from settling in London.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from employing 70,000 unskilled North African menial workers, Paris emerged as the European base from which Latin American, Chinese and Vietnamese activists established organizations to prepare for independence. The civil rights advocate Roger N. Baldwin, passing through in 1927, saw 'a huge mass of migrants' and dubbed Paris 'a hotbed of anti-imperialism with global reverberations'.<sup>25</sup> Baldwin was sufficiently impressed to postulate that, 'never in history have so many of them from so many lands found refuge in one place'.<sup>26</sup> However, he overlooked an important fact. Although the French governed an empire on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean in which 20 million Muslim subjects resided,<sup>27</sup> scarcely any Muslim students were permitted to study in the capital. In fact, the number of North African students in Paris never exceeded 270.<sup>28</sup>

Like the British, the French closely scrutinized the foreigners in their midst, be they 'protégés' or 'anti-imperialists'. The French scholar of Islam Bernard Vernier systematically counted the number of Muslim students living in France

21 Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 184, 294.

22 Schneer, *London 1900*, 294.

23 Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930* (London: Routledge, 2013), xiv-xvi.

24 In 1932, there were 80 Persian students in London, see Fleury, *La pénétration allemande*, 215.

25 Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5, student numbers on 120-1.

26 Quoted in Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 3, 314.

27 Bouda Etemad, *La possession du monde: Poids et mesures de la colonisation (xviii-xx siècles)* (Brussels: Éditions complexe, 2000), 236.

28 Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 25-30, 120-1.

and Germany in the 1930s and estimated that 1031 Persian students were arriving on an annual basis. He also noted that they were forced to live in dormitories under close police observation.<sup>29</sup>

The German Empire, by contrast, governed far smaller Muslim populations and, apart from a handful of travellers to the Orient who brought back Romantic descriptions of mosques, Bedouins and mesmerizing deserts, the Germans seldom had any contact with them. Thus, when the Muslim students, almost all of whom were male,<sup>30</sup> continued to arrive throughout the 1920s, the well-read middle-class population projected lofty images of 'Oriental wisdom' and 'the meeting of East and West' onto them. For their part, young German intellectuals sought reprieve from their humiliating predicament of having been defeated in a war and then labelled belligerents. The proclamation of the Weimar Republic following the Kaiser's abdication precipitated armed revolt from both left and right-wing political activists. Amidst this national turmoil, German intellectuals opted for a middle road that allowed them to transcend the hard-edged boundaries that had emerged in the postwar European political imagination. Oriental studies and Theosophy became popular. The scriptures, religions and people from the East were regarded as 'wise' and a revelation. German intellectuals were likewise drawn to the study of Islam. In this setting, Muslim students, particularly from India, were received with much enthusiasm.<sup>31</sup>

The Jewish refugees lacked the powerful resources of the Muslim newcomers, namely social standing and money. The majority of eastern European Jews who arrived in the West were desperately poor. The only resources they brought with them were energy, intellect and the will to change their precarious situation.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the friendship that the Germans offered to the Muslims was not extended to the Jews. Not only in Berlin, but also in Paris and London they were viewed with that mixture of prejudice and distaste so typical of Europe's history of anti-Semitism.<sup>33</sup>

29 Vernier, *La politique islamique*, 39. See also Fleury, *La pénétration allemande*, 215.

30 Apart from the daughters of Tatar scholars.

31 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 94–119; Suzanne L. Marchand, 'Eastern wisdom in an era of Western despair: Orientalism in 1920s central Europe', in Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (eds) *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 341–61.

32 For Berlin, see Jüdisches Museum Berlin, *Berlin Transit: Jüdische Migranten aus Osteuropa in den 1920er Jahren* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); for London see Mark Mazower, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017); for Paris see Luc Boltanski, *La Cache* (Paris: édition Stock, 2015).

33 William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).



Whether Tatars and Jews from Soviet Russia, or Muslims from various colonial empires, the newcomers wholeheartedly identified with Berlin; the Persians called themselves *Berliniy-ha* (Berliners)<sup>34</sup> and the Indians likewise described themselves as *Berlini*.<sup>35</sup> The Berlin air not only smelled of revolution, but also emitted a feeling of inclusive self-identification with an extremely diverse group of people, which certainly helped to create the ‘contact zones’ that soon emerged as sites of social and intellectual exchange.

Marie Louise Pratt introduced the term ‘contact zones’ to describe the fluid fields of cross-cultural interaction in colonial India, in which, according to her analysis, it was possible ‘to move suddenly and unexpectedly from a position of similarity to one of difference’.<sup>36</sup> In the context of Berlin in the interwar period, such contact zones might well have functioned in a contradictory way. In other words, it was possible ‘to move suddenly and unexpectedly’ from a position on the outside to one on the inside. In fact, there is ample evidence to support such an understanding of Berlin in the interwar years. The Jewish communist Ilja Ehrenburg, for instance, resorted to a biblical reference to describe his surprise at discovering that meetings that would have been impossible anywhere else just happened in Berlin. As he put it, ‘there was a place in Berlin that reminded me of Noah’s Ark because it peacefully gathered good and bad. It was an average German coffee house, where on Fridays Russian writers met’.<sup>37</sup> Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, who was himself a refugee from St Petersburg, used the word *Berlintschik* to describe the refugee scene.<sup>38</sup>

As we shall continue to see, in some of the case studies Indians interacted with Jewish communists from Russia and other European countries (Chapters 6 and 7), whereas in others they engaged with German Jews and the transnational Muslim scene (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Some of those engagements developed against a horizon of revolution and anti-colonial political activity, while others, using the instruments of the ‘modernists’, and reformist Islam, focused

34 *Berliniy-ha: Andishamanzadan Irani dar Berlin* (The Berliner: Persian Thinkers in Berlin) (University of California, 1979) offers an in-depth description of Persians and their activities in Berlin during the years 1915–30.

35 Khwaja Abdul Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Press, 1972), 35.

36 Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

37 <https://db-artmag.de/archiv/07/d/thema-enke.html>.

38 Simon Dubnow, *Buch des Lebens: Erinnerungen und Gedanken. Materialien zur Geschichte meiner Zeit*, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2005), 71ff. The term had been in use among *Haskalah* thinkers since the time of Moses Mendelsohn (1729–86), the great reformer of Jewish tradition.

on *Lebensreform* (reform of the self) and personal refinement.<sup>39</sup> Although depicted as self-evident in the letters and writings housed in the various private archives, those engagements were of a fragile, transient nature, for they depended on a whole string of factors and conditions that, in the interwar period, happened to coalesce.

Although there was nothing inevitable about Indians, German Jewish intellectuals, eastern European communists and Muslims from around the globe engaging with one another, certain factors clearly made it easier. To begin with, Muslim travellers from India and the Middle East were not attuned to Europe's history of anti-Semitism because, in the Muslim world, ideas about religious coexistence and sharing religious spaces differed from both one another and from those that were prevalent in Europe.<sup>40</sup> In addition and equally important was the fact that the German Jewish middle classes had developed a keen interest in the Orient. Not only did German Jewish scholars discover parallels between Sharia and Halacha Muslim and Jewish religious legal codes,<sup>41</sup> but some of them also travelled to India to teach at Muslim universities. For example, Gotlieb Wilhelm Leitner taught at Lahore University and Joseph Horowitz held a post at the Anglo-Muslim University of Aligarh.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the Jewish 'Renaissance' of 1900 adopted a distinctly Oriental flavour,<sup>43</sup> with Jewish poets and painters romanticizing 'the Morning Land' – the region bordering the eastern Mediterranean, which they regarded as a shared space of origin

39 For an explanation of these terms, see the Introduction.

40 Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Anna Bigelow *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim Northern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); [www.sharedsacredsites.net](http://www.sharedsacredsites.net).

41 Susannah Heschel, 'German–Jewish scholarship on Islam as a tool for de-Orientalizing Judaism', *New German Critique*, 117 (2012), 91–109; Martin Kramer, *The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1999); Michael M. Laskier and Yaacov Lev (eds) *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Raphael Patai, *Ignaz Goldziher and His Oriental Diary: A Translation and Psychological Portrait* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

42 Heschel, 'German–Jewish scholarship'; Gudrun Jäger, 'Orientalistik jenseits aller Nationalismen: Der jüdische Gelehrte Josef Horowitz und sein Verständnis von Annäherung zwischen Judentum und Islam', *Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte: Forschung Frankfurt*, 3–4 (2004), 80–3; Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 30–3; Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds) *Orientalism and the Jews* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2005); Amit Levy, 'Der wissenschaftliche Nachlass von Joseph Horowitz', *Archives of German–Jewish Scholarship* (Marbach: Deutsches Literatur-Archiv Marbach, 2018), 28–33.

43 Inka Bertz, 'Eine neue Kunst für ein altes Volk': *Die jüdische Renaissance in Berlin 1900 bis 1924*. Ausstellungsmagazin Jüdisches Museum (Berlin: Berlin Museum, 1991).

in which Christians and Muslims cohabited and in which Jewish people had their roots. German Jews at that time and place were transfiguring the notion of shared origins into romantic images. For example, the poet Else Lasker-Schüler, who wrote 'I dance in the mosque',<sup>44</sup> drew pictures of herself in Oriental costume and encased the lovers in her poems with a blend of biblical and Oriental myths.<sup>45</sup>

The most important factor, however, the one that set the levers for the emergence of a zone of contact, lay in the Islam-centred politics of several generations of German politicians. The imperial politics of former times had established an ideological framework in which Muslims were encouraged to opt for Germany, and Germans – be they Jewish or Christian – eyed the newcomers with curiosity. Weimar politicians continued along that path by establishing an infrastructure for the Muslim newcomers, which included not only housing, building plots and tennis courts, but also student grants, language courses and joint chambers of commerce with Bukhara, Egypt and Persia. What the Muslims encountered at university and in the homes of their German hosts, what made them feel welcome and ready to establish and maintain friendships, was the special affinity that the Germans had long promised to people in the Muslim world and which will be described in the following pages.

## 2 German Imperial Politics

In colonial matters Germany was a latecomer and the ways in which it attempted to expand its territory and power mirror this.<sup>46</sup> When, in 1884, the leading colonial powers carved up the rest of the world between them, the Germans were given some territories in sub-Saharan Africa and far eastern New Guinea. However, as offshore territories to which to export goods, these acquisitions fell far short of German expectations. Given that the British had

44 Else Lasker-Schüler, 'Ich tanze in der Moschee', in *Die Nächte von Tino von Bagdad* (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919), 7–8.

45 Sigrid Bauschinger, *The Berlin Moderns: Else Lasker-Schüler and Café Culture* (Berlin: Metropolis, 2000), 72–8.

46 For this section, I benefited greatly from Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Volker Berghahn, 'German colonialism and imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler: review essay', *German Studies Review*, 40 (1) 2017, 147–82; Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler 1871–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1995); Francis R. Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

colonized most of the world's territories and peoples, followed closely by the Russians and French, and sorely in need of fresh markets for its commodities, Germany sought out new lands in which to establish strategic relations. This constituted the beginning of the German politics of 'middle Europe', which foresaw close economic and military cooperation between the countries of central Europe under Germany's leadership.<sup>47</sup>

Cultivating friendships with Muslim peoples across the globe while simultaneously building an infrastructure for emerging nation-states in the Middle East appeared to offer a promising alternative. For that reason, from the beginning of the German empire to the end of the Second World War, a succession of German governments engaged intensely with the Muslim world. At the beginning of this period, Germany signed treaties with the Ottoman Empire to modernize the latter's army and develop export structures, while simultaneously offering assistance to the new nation-states emerging to the south, such as Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. When, in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II visited Jerusalem, he famously also visited Damascus to swear eternal friendship on Saladin's grave to all the Muslim peoples.

The First World War marked a shift in this outlook. The German and Ottoman empires became comrades-in-arms and pan-Islamism advanced to a key stage in German politics. Their joint declaration of jihad against the British was a strategic attempt to raise the masses against the enemy (it failed); wherever Muslim soldiers appeared on European battlegrounds, their prisoners of war were treated cautiously.<sup>48</sup> Everywhere in the Middle East, Germans were supporting local insurgents behind the enemy lines, giving them training, weapons and information. The *Nachrichtendienst für den Orient* (News Service for the Orient or NfO) in Berlin set up Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan, Tatar and Indian 'national committees' to serve as intermediaries and as possible political actors after the war.<sup>49</sup>

Contemporary observations clearly spelled out the stakes.<sup>50</sup> As the influential Orientalist Hugo Grothe (born 1869) observed, 'shared German–Turkish interests ... are vital for our future. They are neither accidental nor a constellation

47 Friedrich Naumann's *Mittel-Europa* (1915) provided the cornerstone of a German politics that envisaged the eventual colonization of eastern Europe, <https://archive.org/details/centraleuropeonaumgoog/page/n8>.

48 Höpp, *Muslimen in der Mark*.

49 Wolf Dieter Bihl, *Die Kaukasuspolitik der Mittelmächte* (11) (Wien: Böhlau, 1992), 23–8.

50 C.H. Becker, *Deutsch-türkische Interessengemeinschaft* (Bonn: Verlag Friedrich Cohen, 1914); Arthur Dix, 'Das Ende des kolonialpolitischen Zeitalters?' *Koloniale Rundschau* (Berlin: Reimers, 1918), 223–33; Hugo Grothe, *Deutschland, die Türkei und der Islam: Ein Beitrag zu der Grundlinie der deutschen Weltpolitik im islamischen Orient* (Leipzig: Verlag von

of the moment, but result from the deepest tendencies of the World Empires England and Russia'.<sup>51</sup> What the Germans hoped to achieve through the war, he thought, were 'export markets, economic and cultural exchange, and the development of mutual interests'.<sup>52</sup> The friendship the Kaiser had offered to the Muslim peoples took the shape of a very concrete 'German–Turkish friendship', envisioning a future in which the two peoples would become entwined on many social levels.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, the infrastructure was constructed to pave the way for an extensive population exchange. In 1916, the newly founded German–Turkish Society enrolled 300 Turkish apprentices in German schools. It likewise took care of 350 orphans who received free schooling and education in German workshops, and 450 skilled workers were selected to receive additional training in German industries.<sup>54</sup> The society, backed by Ottoman war minister Enver Pasha and German commanders-in-chief Liman von Sanders and Von der Goltz Pasha, and flanked by German industrialists, envisaged that from 1918 onwards, the hundreds of arrivals would become thousands. In addition, the exchange would not be limited to the groups already under consideration, for university students and nurses in training were scheduled to follow.<sup>55</sup> Once again, the two governments concluded official treaties to solidify the proceedings.<sup>56</sup> A mosque built in Berlin's old city centre (Kupfergraben) and financed out of the pockets of the two sovereigns, was to symbolize the bond.<sup>57</sup>

However, events did not turn out exactly as envisaged. With the arrival of American soldiers onto European battlefields, the Germans and Turks lost the war and their respective empires. The local Muslim insurgents behind the British enemy lines, whom Germany had previously supported, were suddenly abandoned and forced to fend for themselves. The 'national committees' no

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G. Hirzel, 1914); Albrecht Wirth, *Die Geschichte des Weltkriegs* (1) (Stuttgart: Union Deutscher Verlagsgesellschaft, 1917), 277.

51 Grothe, *Deutschland*, 6.

52 Grothe, *Deutschland*, 17.

53 Carl Anton Schäfer, *Deutsch–türkischer Freundschaft* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Verlagsanstalt, 1914).

54 Schäfer, *Deutsch–türkischer Freundschaft*.

55 Hans Hermann Russack, *Türkische Jugend in Deutschland: Bericht der Deutsch–Türkischen Vereinigung*. (Berlin: Selbstverlag, 1918). Cf. Halil Halid, 'Soziale Dienste, Bildungsstätten und deutsche Zähigkeit in Zeiten des Mangels: Eine Recherche an der Heimatfront', in Ingeborg Böer, Ruth Haerkötter and Petra Kappert (eds) *Türken in Berlin 1871–1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 143–61.

56 *Verträge zwischen dem deutschen Reiche und dem Osmanischen Reiche* (Contracts between the German Reich and the Ottoman Empire) (Berlin: Reichstag II, 1917).

57 Bihl, *Die Kaukasuspolitik*, 23.

longer had a function and the Indians, Persians, Tatars and Egyptians who had engaged in them found themselves stranded in Berlin. The way in which the war effort came to naught left Germany tottering on the brink of civil war. To underline their utter defeat, the victorious powers forbade the two former empires to continue their relationship. In 1919, the last of the German soldiers were pulled out of Constantinople<sup>58</sup> and just 5000 Turks remained in Berlin.<sup>59</sup> For some time, diplomats in Berlin continued to correspond with their counterparts in Ankara,<sup>60</sup> but in retrospect, many felt that Germany had exploited Turkey during their dalliance, 'as if squeezing the juice from a lemon that is later discarded'.<sup>61</sup>

This was the moment in which young intellectuals from all over the Muslim world, perceiving Germany to be their friend, migrated to German-speaking cities. Their first destination tended to be Berlin, but other university cities like Munich, Vienna, Stuttgart, Zurich, Geneva, Frankfurt, Bonn, Hamburg, Leipzig, Breslau and Königsberg also attracted sizeable foreign student populations.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to Paris and London, these were cities without residents from the colonies. In fact, as we know from memoirs and private letters, the Muslim students were often the very first foreigners from outside Europe with whom Germans mixed. An amalgam of political and personal reasons informed the students' choice. It was a widely held belief that Germany was an avowed friend of 'the Muslims' and its universities were considered among the best in the world. The country possessed advanced technology and industry and German thinkers, especially Goethe and Nietzsche, appeared high on the students' reading lists. With the doors to social and intellectual exchange within the German-speaking realm open, Muslim intellectuals travelled there readily.

### 3 Contact Zones in Berlin

There was one neighbourhood in Berlin that helped the encounter more than any other place in the capital. This was the borough of Wilmersdorf, which was

58 Politik 3. Türkei. Deutschtum im Ausland, AA PA R 78.577 (2 March 1932).

59 Politik 2. Türkei. Politische Beziehungen der Türkei zu Deutschland (1920–23) AA PA R 78.484 (22 April 1922).

60 Politik 2. Türkei. Politische Beziehungen der Türkei zu Deutschland (26 April 1922 et passim).

61 Politik 3. Türkei. Deutschtum im Ausland. The German text of the quotation runs, 'Deutschland hat Türkei ausgenutzt wie Zitrone die man auspresst und Schale fortwirft' (2 April 1930).

62 Vernier, *La politique islamique*, 25–51.

then in the process of being developed. In 1911, Ludwig Meidner painted a picture of the U-Bahn subway being constructed through the wasteland that would soon be transformed into the rapidly expanding suburb. The painting depicts a moonscape of sandy pits and dunes in which people were arduously labouring, the houses and fencing of the encroaching city already on the horizon.<sup>63</sup> A decade later, spacious apartments for affluent middle-class families lined the streets of Wilmersdorf and many of the courtyards were converted into artists' studios. The area's topography was unusual in that the popular Kurfürstendamm, one of Berlin's most famous avenues, with its lively bars and every form of entertainment, lay to one side, and Grunewald, an area of woods and lakes that forms a natural border for the city was on the other. This newly established area became the social space in which bohemians gathered and to which the families that were thriving during the empire, moved (Figure 1: Map of Muslim and Jewish places in West Berlin, pp. xvi-xvii).

Unencumbered by any of the traditional or religious structures that commonly dampen the emergence of social dynamism, the cultural and religious infrastructure that materialized in Wilmersdorf was something of a novelty in Berlin. By the middle of the 1920s, 13.5 per cent of the newcomers were Jewish and no fewer than five Jewish schools opened their doors. A municipal synagogue was erected on Prinzregentenstrasse and a large number of secular Jewish organizations moved into the side streets of Kurfürstendamm.<sup>64</sup> Jewish families became a well-known fixture of Wilmersdorf street life, and Egyptian, Persian and Indian students moved in as their neighbours. The Islam Institute, a self-organized body of Muslim students headed by Muhammad Abd-an-Nafi Shalabi, was assigned a villa on Fasanenstrasse along with a government subsidy.<sup>65</sup> Indians fixed their missions in the still empty spaces. An Indian from Lahore, Sadruddin undertook to build a mosque on a garden plot behind Fehrbelliner Platz that the municipality had offered to the Lahore-Ahmadiyya organization.<sup>66</sup> Johannes Steinmann and Baron von Barany, acting on behalf

63 Ludwig Meidner, 'U-Bahn Bau in Berlin-Wilmersdorf' (1911), Stadtmuseum Berlin. <https://sammlung-online.stadtmuseum.de/Details/Index/172435>.

64 Udo Christoffel (ed.) *Berlin Wilmersdorf: Ein Stadtteilbuch* (Berlin: Kunstamt Wilmersdorf, 1981); Carolin Hilker-Siebenhaar, *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1987), 149–52, 230–45.

65 Fasanenstrasse 23. There is no file in the registry offices, but a description of the opening ceremony plus a photograph of the main actors was published in *Die Islamische Gegenwart* (1927), 1–4.

66 Briennerstrasse 8–10, registry office Berlin-Charlottenburg No. 8769. A description of the opening ceremony plus a photograph of the community was published in the *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1925), 1.

of Hazrat Pir Inayat Khan, established a Sufi Lodge in a nearby private apartment.<sup>67</sup> The Hindustan Association of Central Europe, which Zakir Husain and Muhammad Mujeeb led and the Foreign Office backed, purchased a 'club-house' on Halensee, in which the India News Service and Information Bureau (henceforth Indian Bureau), headed by V. Chattopadhyaya, settled.<sup>68</sup> Only the Berlin Islamic Community, set up by the Indian revolutionaries Jabbar and Sattar Khairi, lacked the means to move into the neighbourhood.<sup>69</sup>

From reading across different sources, it is clear that Wilmersdorf and the adjacent quarter of Charlottenburg harboured a number of Muslim and Jewish organizations and meeting places, among them a mosque, a Sufi Lodge, several synagogues, umbrella organizations, student bodies, cultural and commercial clubs, as well as numerous bars, restaurants, jazz clubs and other places of entertainment.<sup>70</sup> Vibrant entertainment, at which the Egyptians excelled, was available to the left and right of Kurfürstendamm. A jazz musician, Abdel-Aziz Helmi-Hammad ran the renowned Carlton Bar at Uhlandstrasse 171, a stately building with a portico and four sturdy pillars facing the street. Other jazz establishments with in-house orchestras were the Ciro Bar run by Mostapha Ciro and the Sherbini Bar run by Mostafa Sherbini.<sup>71</sup>

67 Sächsische Strasse 10, registry office Berlin-Charlottenburg, 94 VR 4635.

68 Politik 26. Indien, AA PA R 77.461 (1921–1924), memorandum of the British embassy in Berlin (25 August 1923).

69 The registry offices kept track of the ups and downs of this organization, VR B Rep. 042/Nr 26590, as did the Foreign Office. Diplomats of the Weimar republic closely observed both the political (Politik 26. Indien, AA PA R 77.461 et passim) and religious (Politik 16. Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften/Islam, AA PA R 77.456 et passim) activities of these Indians. Persians also received a good deal of attention (Politik 2. Persien, AA PA R 901/25950; Politische Beziehungen Persiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1–8, AA PA R 78.106 et passim). The Afghan file was rather thin (Politik 2. Afghanistan Bd. 1–4, AA PA R 77.898 et passim) and the Tatars and Turks attracted hardly any attention at all (Politik 2. Politische Beziehungen der Türkei zu Deutschland Bd. 1–5, AA PA R 78.484 et passim). Of all the Muslims in Germany, the Egyptians received the most attention, partly because they sent 500 students a year who needed attention and partly because the Weimar republic exported a lot of goods to Egypt (Politik 2. Ägypten, AA PA R 901 / 25934). When the Nazis gained power and politics vis-à-vis the Muslim world were stepped up, the files grew fast.

70 Vera Bendt, Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, Thomas Jersch and Nicola Galliner (eds) *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1987); Helmut Engel, Stefi Jersch-Wenzel and Wilhelm Treue (eds) *Geschichtslandschaft Berlin Part II: Charlottenburg: Der neue Westen* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1985); Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–93, complemented by the sources for this book; Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and Hermann Simon (eds) *Juden in Berlin* (Berlin: Henschel, 2001); Johannes Schnelle, '... und im Inneren empfängt einen der Orient'. *Camil Ağazade und seine Orientrestaurants im Berlin der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Berlin: Humboldt University, 2019). See Figure 1 in this book.

71 Höpp, 'Die Sache'; Höpp, 'Zwischen Universität und Strasse'.



The bohemian watering holes – Café Josti, Café Léon, Café des Westens and the Romanisches Café – were in the lower parts of Kurfürstendamm around Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche. The Soliman family, circus artists and tight rope specialists by profession, controlled the upper reaches of the boulevard. There, Abdel Aziz ran a ballet school, Omar produced a children's show and Mohamed had set up Berlin's first ever wax museum and cinema complex. Some of the many cinemas that the Soliman women ran only closed their doors 1961.<sup>72</sup>

The iron laws of financial necessity dictated how first contacts were established. Agnes Smedley, a renowned international communist who worked for the Indian Bureau in the 1920s, claimed to have seen Prussian heads of family approaching foreign-looking young men in the street to enquire if they still needed a room<sup>73</sup> because, after the financial crash, erstwhile wealthy families, sorely in need of foreign currency, were having to take in foreign boarders. For the Marcus family, the crisis began when Poland nationalized all the Prussian factories within its borders. As I mention in Chapter 5, by 1921, Hugo Marcus was teaching German and philosophy to Indian students. Being one of those Germans who could explain the work of Nietzsche to them, they brought him to the mosque and, once introduced, Marcus and his group of Indian students became enamoured with one another and thus began many long friendships. Some years later, the same pattern of events occurred in the Oettinger family when its female members began their lifelong friendship with Dr Abdullah. The photographs in Chapter 3 convey the awkwardness and intense curiosity that accompanied their initial encounters.

A study of the many and detailed lists of addresses in the registry files reveals that Indians, Persians and Egyptians preferred to reside in rooms in either Wilmersdorf, or on the opposite side of Kurfürstendamm in Charlottenburg. The Indian novelist Vikram Seth describes just such an arrangement in a moving account of his great uncle Shanti Seth. When he first arrived in Berlin, Shanti was clutching a slip of paper containing an address on Mommsenstrasse that another student had given to him. When he went to find out what the address held in store, he stumbled upon the Caros, a secular Jewish family who provided him with a room and a place at their dinner table, and who wholeheartedly adopted him as friend of the family. From then on, Shanti shared their sailing tours and tennis matches in summer and skiing holidays in winter.

72 Private Soliman family archive; see also Frank Gesemann and Gerhard Höpp, *Araber in Berlin* (Berlin: Der Ausländerbeauftragte, 1998), 7–46.

73 Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 117.

After the Second World War, he married Henny Caro, the eldest daughter and only member of her family to have survive the war.<sup>74</sup>

On the streets, at home, in seminar rooms, jazz bars and the mosque, a multi-layered contact zone soon grew up around these people's many shared interests. First, it was essential to secure foreign currency. There was also a need for private German lessons. There were families who adopted foreign students into their midst; there were clusters of friends who played tennis or went sailing at weekends; and there were Muslim political and religious events to which Germans were invited. Besides, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Indian missions promoted a form of reformist Islam that endeavoured to elicit a real contribution from the local population. Whoever participated in it, the contact zone offered many opportunities to move 'suddenly and unexpectedly' from the position of being an outsider to one of being an insider. In later chapters, I shall examine more closely the strategic advantages of making that move. In the meanwhile, the internal Muslim perspective still needs looking into before moving on to the perceptions of the neighbours.

#### 4 A Muslim Ecumene in the West

Whatever opportunities there might have been to meet their German neighbours, the Arabs, Afghans, Persians, Tatars, Turks and Indians first and foremost engaged socially with one another; what they discovered was a substantial Muslim community deriving from practically every corner of the globe. On 29 May 1922, Eid al-Fitr was celebrated at a military base 30 miles outside Berlin where a small wooden mosque remained from a former Muslim prisoner-of-war camp. In preparation for the festival, Jabbar and Sattar Khairi, the two revolutionary Indians in the 'Indian National Committee' during the war who afterwards were marooned in Berlin, issued invitations. In response, it would appear that every Muslim who happened to be in Germany at that moment, whether the remaining Turks, former prisoners of war, newly arrived students, businessmen, political exiles, stranded revolutionaries, or the Turkish, Persian, Afghan and Egyptian ambassadors and their personnel made an appearance.<sup>75</sup> Abdul Jabbar Khairi, the initiator and founder of the Berlin Islamic Community, afterwards claimed that no fewer than '42 different Muslim nations' had

74 Vikram Seth, *Two Lives: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

75 Berlin-Charlottenburg Registry Office, VR B Rep. 042/Nr 26590, 7-40; Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 70-2.

been assembled.<sup>76</sup> The Ahmadiyya missionary Sadruddin wrote home to Lahore that he had seen a crowd of 15,000 men.<sup>77</sup> It was a true Muslim global moment and, to all appearances, the first one ever in a Western country.

Acting as imam, Abdul Jabbar Khairi informed this audience of his plan to launch a Muslim organization that would further Muslim interests in Europe, a plan to which all present readily agreed. Thus, the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin (Muslim Community of Berlin) was born. What is of interest here is the shuffling that followed for positions.<sup>78</sup> The 'first choice of delegates', arrived at through consultation (*shura*) on 29 May, consisted of a list of 16 names of Arabs, Indians, the Persian deputy ambassador,<sup>79</sup> and two Germans.<sup>80</sup> A week later, the list was altered to include the Turkish ambassador<sup>81</sup> and a well-known Tatar scholar.<sup>82</sup> In November, when the community met again to celebrate Eid al-Adha, another attempt was made to establish a balanced list. The *shura* list that was finally presented to the registry office included two Tatars, two Persians, five Indians, a number of Egyptians and other North Africans, one central European<sup>83</sup> and one woman.<sup>84</sup>

During the 1923 Eid al-Fitr, the struggle to establish a *shura* that would mirror the global dimension of Muslims in Berlin continued. The new list now included the Afghan ambassador,<sup>85</sup> the founder of the Islam Institute,<sup>86</sup> and no less than five Tatar nobles and scholars.<sup>87</sup> It was considered important to

76 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 71 fn. 41. For Jabbar Khairi, see Heike Liebau, 'Networks of knowledge production: South Asian Muslims and German scholars in Berlin (1915–1930)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (CSSAAME)* (forthcoming 2020).

77 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 82.

78 What follows is drawn from an analysis of the membership lists in the 'Islamische Gemeinde Berlin' file in the Berlin-Charlottenburg Registry Office, VR B Rep. 042/No. 26590, 7–40.

79 Professor Dr Mirza Hassan, deputy ambassador to Berlin 1921–32.

80 Dr Khalid Banning, the prosecutor general, and Dr Muhamed Brugsch, son of the famous Orientalist, agreed to do the necessary paperwork.

81 Dr Schükry Bey, ambassador to Berlin until 1924.

82 Ramazan Kurtmemett (n.d.).

83 Esad Bey or Lev Nussimbaum (1906–1943) was a young Jewish refugee from Kiev who simply embraced Islam in the Turkish Embassy. See Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 141–2; Tom Reiss, *The Orientalist. Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life* (New York: Random House, 2005).

84 Adelheid Capelle (n.d.) was the wife of the Indian revolutionary Hidayet Ahmed Khan. Her Muslim adopted name was Nur Bandi.

85 Khulam Siddiq Khan, ambassador to Berlin 1922–25.

86 The Syrian Haj Mohammed Abdul Nafi Tschelebi (1901–33).

87 Among them Chalid Pasha (Prince of Dagestan and president of the *shura*), Melki Dzaforoff and Agha Bala Golieff.

represent the different geographical areas, not only because of the rural Muslim traditions that could be found within them, but also because each of the travellers introduced to Berlin specific traditions and trains of thought on Muslim renewal (*jadid*).

In the years to come, an incremental process of discovery and inclusion became the established pattern for Muslim cooperation, one moreover in which Tatars advanced as the leading force to keep the global dimension afloat. Although there were the inevitable quarrels and fallouts, it is remarkable to what lengths the different national groups would go time and time again to accommodate one another. Towards achieving that aim, establishing proportional representation was considered key but difficult. The Uzbek scholar Alimcan Idris (1887–1959) seems to have been the leading force behind that initiative,<sup>88</sup> which a number of Muslim organizations supported. Its workings are best explained by looking at the proceedings of the Berlin branch of the *Al mu'tamar al islamiya al 'amn* (General Islamic Congress), the weekly minutes of which detail how things were done.<sup>89</sup>

Taken over a period of eight months, from October 1932 to May 1933, the minutes show that, after ten years of experience with a transnational but continuously fluctuating Muslim community, a certain inclusive routine had been established. To set up the Berlin branch, six representatives of the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin and four from the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque organized a founding meeting, at which their first act was to appoint the Arab religious scholar Dr Said Ali Chodscha as an independent president.<sup>90</sup> The group then reached out to renowned Tatar scholars who lived in exile in Berlin. It won over Dr Rahmati<sup>91</sup> and Musa Carullah<sup>92</sup> as acting theologians, asking them to draw up a list of rotating preachers for the Friday *Khutbah* (held in the Ahmadiyya

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88 Initially a member of the Tatar National Committee and imam of the Muslim prisoner-of-war camp near Berlin, Alimcan Idris worked for 35 years to anchor Muslim religious life in Germany.

89 The congress took place in Jerusalem in 1931, after which branches were established in the main centres of the Muslim world. The publications of the congress are still housed in the mosque library of the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque at Briennerstrasse. The protocols were filed in the Berlin-Schöneberg registry office, VR 9 E 1.33.

90 Dates not known. He was one of the rotating preachers in the Ahmadiyya mosque and published in the mosque journal.

91 Gabdul-Rashit Rahmatulla (1900–64), linguist and specialist of Central Asia manuscript literature (Turfan). He was co-opted as a scholar in the Turfan Research of the Prussian Academy of Science.

92 Musa Carullah Bigiev (1875–1949), who acquired the name of 'the Islamic Luther', translated the Quran into the Tatar language. He was considered a beacon of Muslim educational reform.

mosque).<sup>93</sup> Because Tatars more than any of the other Muslim group excelled in reformist education, in the months following this settlement 13 more Tatars were co-opted and assigned responsibility for educating children and teaching converts.<sup>94</sup> The group responsible for preparations for the Eid al-Adha festival, however, was again a carefully chosen international assortment of one Tatar, two Persians, two Arabs, one Indian and one German (the convert Hugo Marcus).<sup>95</sup>

Looking back on this odd transnational mix of religious scholars, linguists, diplomats, students, journalists and political entrepreneurs, in which Shi'ites peacefully rubbed shoulders with Sunni Muslims, one is impressed by their will to establish a durable Muslim infrastructure in the West. Their aim, or so I suggest, was not to fight Western hegemony but to create a place outside the empire, outside the reach of the conservative ulema, in which to launch the mission of Muslim reform; Europeans were invited to join them provided their presence furthered their aims. Seema Alavi's discovery that transnational Muslim configurations consisted of much more than anti-Westernism validated this suggestion.<sup>96</sup> However, whereas Alavi presents Mecca as the centre of Muslim renewal, Muslims in interwar Berlin embarked on an attempt to place the German capital on the Muslim map. The discussions that took place in the Ahmadiyya mosque on translating the Quran were an integral part of this venture.<sup>97</sup>

In the winter of 1924 and 1925, Ahmed Zeki Velidi Togan (1890–1970), a linguist and renowned expert on central Asian manuscripts, was on a tour of western European capitals and made a stopover in Berlin. During his stay there, both the Tatar and German scientific communities went out of their way to accommodate him. Alimcan Idris threw dinner parties at his home, where Togan met many students from Turkestan. He received invitations to speak at the Oriental Club, and leading German Orientalists, among them Eduard Sachau, Theodor Noldeke, F. W.K. Muller, Albert von Le Coq, and Gotlieb Weil, the director of the *Staatsbibliothek* (State Library) Oriental department,

93 Berlin-Schöneberg registry office, VR 9 E 1.33, protocols 1–3.

94 Berlin-Schöneberg registry office, VR 9 E 1.33, protocols 6–9, 19.

95 Berlin-Schöneberg registry office, VR 9 E 1.33, protocol, 13.

96 Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

97 The following draws on a voluminous chapter called 'Our Life in Berlin' in Zeki Velidi Togan, *Memoirs: National Existence and Cultural Struggles of Turkestan and Other Muslim Eastern Turks* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2012), 435–75. The memoirs were first published in Turkish (*Hatirilar*, Istanbul, 1967). Togan claims that they relied on the copious notes he took during his time in Berlin.

consulted him. However, as Togan claims in his memoir, his most important encounter was with Finnish Tatars from Helsinki who came to Berlin to discuss with him the details of their translation of the Quran into Finnish.

In advance, the translator, Georg Pimonow, himself a Finnish convert to Islam who received financial and other assistance from the merchants Zinahtullah Ahsen and Imadeddin, prepared 57 questions on topics relating to his translation of the Quran for which he still sought answers. A working group formed in the Ahmadiyya mosque, in which the aforementioned Uzbek Alimcan Idris, the Tatar Dr Yakub Sinkevic,<sup>98</sup> the Indian Sadruddin,<sup>99</sup> and the Persian Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh<sup>100</sup> were invited to assist Togan in this important task. When Togan suggested that the Finnish Tatars also invite Professor Noldeke, who after all 'was in Berlin and alive', their translator retorted, 'I read the writings of Europeans, among them Noldeke and Goldziher; there is nothing I can learn from them. It is important for me to learn the ideas of Muslim Intellectuals'.<sup>101</sup>

The translators' questions all targeted the historicity of the Quran. They were, as Togan phrased it, 'of a *Mu'tazili* reasoning', which is the rational tradition in Islamic theology that harked back to Greek philosophy and with which Togan declared himself to be on good terms,<sup>102</sup> as to all appearances were the other scholars present. Soon after the Finnish encounter, Sadruddin began his own translation of the Quran into German. When it was finally published in 1939, a number of commentaries under the heading 'foreign sources of Islam', which basically addressed the historicity of the Quran, offended the Ahmadiyya community in Lahore.<sup>103</sup> In the scholarly surroundings of Muslim Berlin, this scholar had felt free to investigate the subject. In Lahore, however, where conservative and liberal forces continued to grapple with one another, there was less space for such unencumbered scholarly enquiry.<sup>104</sup>

98 At the time of the Quran consultation, Dr Yakub Sinkevic (1884–1966), was head mufti of the Polish Tatars, a linguist and a Turfan specialist.

99 Sadruddin (1880–1980), was an education teacher at Islamia College in Lahore before he migrated to Europe. At the time of the Quran consultation he headed the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin.

100 Sayyed Hassan Taqizadeh (1878–1970), a Shi'ite scholar from Tabriz, during the First World War headed the Persian National Committee. At the time of the Quran consultation he engaged in knowledge transfer via Persian journals he published in Berlin.

101 Togan, *Memoirs*, 469.

102 Togan, *Memoirs*, 469, 471; cf. Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalam: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazili Cosmology* (Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994).

103 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 205–6.

104 Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900–1947*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Having made the Quran available as a text to European audiences, one can safely conclude that the transnational Muslim community in Berlin, represented through its leading scholars, felt sufficiently confident to lift the art of Quranic interpretation to the level of modern historical scholarship, and that they did so without the assistance of the German specialists in town. Togan, for his part, was satisfied with the outcome. As he noted, 'Pimonow's translation was published in a good package by Zinahtullah Ahsen. According to those scholars who speak Finnish, it is one of the best Kur'an translations in Europe'.<sup>105</sup>

## 5 Echoes in Berlin Society

Did any Muslim religious activities feature in Berlin's daily papers? The answer is yes, but with reservations. Muslim public life was only visible to the German public gaze if it was glamorous or involved a scandal of some sort. The Foreign Office and building authority archives, plus Lisa Oettinger's private possessions, contain substantial collections of paper clippings that report on such events. When, for instance, Mubarak Ali, the representative of the competing Ahmadiyya branch in Qadian in North India, who had been posted on a mission to Berlin, was preparing to lay the foundation stone of what was to be a representative mosque in the centre of Charlottenburg, the daily papers were clearly very interested. Journalists commented on Mubarak Ali's personal appearance ('elegant, modest, and sympathetic') and on his affluent style ('the renowned millionaire'). They described his far-reaching plans for what was going to be a centre for Muslim students, with libraries, study rooms and separate dormitories for Muslim women, with an attractive restaurant for the general public and, of course, the majestic mosque itself, replete with domes and minarets.<sup>106</sup> The papers carefully noted that the Afghan and Turkish ambassadors, the German secretary of state, and several Berlin University professors had honoured the ceremony with their presence. Amid the unrest that held Germany in its grip, the capital was experiencing a rare global moment and, as the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* noted, 'the exotic flair of Berlin is now in progress'.

<sup>105</sup> Togan, *Memoirs*, 471.

<sup>106</sup> In its archives, the building authorities kept clippings from 7 and 8 August 1923 of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*; and of the 7 August 1923 of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*; *Vossische Zeitung*; *Berliner Tageblatt*; *Berliner Börsen-Commentar*.

Unfortunately, Mubarak Ali had to postpone his building operations shortly thereafter because he lost all his capital in the crash and, within just a year, his mosque project had been consigned to history. However, in 1925, the press closely followed the erection of another mosque, that of the Ahmadiyya branch from Lahore, this time on garden land in Wilmersdorf. Once the dome of the mosque was visible, the Berlin daily papers regularly reported on the annual Muslim festivals that took place within its walls. From 1930, these festivals were also broadcast on the radio. The newspapers carried photographs of sheep being slaughtered in the mosque garden, of hundreds of shoes at the entrance to the mosque, and of an exuberant mosque community on its steps.<sup>107</sup>

Although little understood, the press relished any public quarrels among the Muslims. It so happened that the Egyptians strongly opposed the Ahmadiyya building venture, not because the Ahmadiyya community supported Muslim reform of a kind that had already received a good deal of criticism in India, but because they initially broadcasted their thoughts in English, a language that the Egyptians associated with the British oppressor. Accusing the Ahmadiyya of British sympathies, the Egyptians therefore craftily disrupted the foundation laying ceremonies and did not stop shouting until the police stepped in.<sup>108</sup>

However, what counted most among the Muslim community, its transnational character, the steady creation of religious infrastructures, and the translations of the Quran into European languages, were bypassed. At best, the media depicted Muslims as the bringers of international flair to the city, at worst as troublemakers who should best be sent home. At close range, the Muslim 'friends' were treated cursorily. Moreover, by the time the First World War had ended, any former fond memories of German–Turkish friendship had fallen into a black pit.

There was, however, one exception. While still a city reporter tracking down curious or pitiable refugees, newcomers and other city dwellers, Joseph Roth also sought out the group of 5000 Ottoman subjects who remained in Berlin after the war had been lost. His sketch, 'The Club of Poor Turks', opens a window onto a world otherwise ignored by the German press:

There are very many rich Turks in Berlin. They live in the western part of town. They visit the stock exchange between eleven and twelve in the morning and make a lot of money. Between eleven and twelve at night

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107 Collection of clippings on the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque (1929–34) in the private archive of Lisa Oettinger.

108 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 79–80.



you can trace them to the liquor dens of West Berlin where they spout the Quran and get rid of their money again. Even more money is lost in the opium dens, where they study the comings and goings of the harem at their leisure. I know a Turk who came from Constantinople to Berlin especially to observe life in a harem. And he swore to me that Constantinople is not nearly as Turkish as Berlin.<sup>109</sup>

With his ethnographical descriptions of the Turks of west Berlin, Joseph Roth deftly captured the nightlife around Kurfürstendamm. He also traced the remnants of the skilled workers who had been sent to Germany some years previously to receive additional training. He assured his readers that, 'sure, there are still Turkish craftsmen around', but that:

Those people are simply not Turks but Berliners. Because their stork knew nothing about architectural styles, they so happen to have been born behind the Aghia Sophia instead of the *Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche* (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church). These stray Berlin Turks marry German women, resole German shoes, and sing 'the God who made the iron grow', just like the Germans do. I personally know an Egyptian, Abdul Rahim Miligi, of the famous Miligi clan in Cairo, who is as dark as the darkness of his country and an orthodox Muslim, who leads a bourgeois and happy family life in Berlin with a pious, white Dutch woman, with whom he has blond, Lutheran children.<sup>110</sup>

Joseph Roth, the Jewish author who dedicated a large part of his life to describing the poor and dispossessed Jews of eastern Europe, found in 'the Turks' (the Ottoman Empire once stretched from the Black Sea to Egypt) a curious contradiction that set his imagination in motion. The Muslims he stumbled upon on Kurfürstendamm had adjusted to Berlin in ways that most eastern European Jews would never accept. The Turks, as Roth noted, had become Berliners. They looked, sang, spoke, and yes, lived exactly like their neighbours. Before the arrival of the Persians and Indians, even before the arrival of Russian Jews, the Ottomans identified with Berlin.

109 Joseph Roth, 'Der Club der armen Turken', *Neue Berliner Zeitung*, 30 June 1920. Reprinted in Joseph Roth, *Das journalistische Werk Bd. 1, 1915–1923* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009); and in Gert Mattenklott, *Jüdisches Städtebild Berlin* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1997), 213–5. Translation by the author.

110 Roth, 'Der Club der armen Turken'. The Kaiser-Wilhelm Memorial Church stands on the boundary between Wilmersdorf and Charlottenburg, where it dominates the lower part of Kurfürstendamm.

## 6 On Being Neighbours

It is time to ask what that peculiar notion of a Berliner really meant. What elements went into its construction? Why did Persians and Indians refer to themselves as such? Despite all its chaos, Berlin seems to have been a city in which people immediately felt at home. As Ilja Ehrenburg had noted, it functioned as a kind of Noah's Ark in which people from very different backgrounds could coexist peacefully. Berlin had the capacity to transform people. It gobbled up foreigners and spat out a species of homo sapiens wishing for nothing more than to marry and settle down with a German woman. In due course, staff members of national committees, former inmates of disbanded Muslim prisoner-of-war camps, students and political activists were added to the artisans about whom Joseph Roth wrote in the Berlin daily newspapers. Even the religious leaders, of which better-known examples include Seyyid Hassan Taqizadeh, Schükry Bey, Abdul Sattar Khairi and Hazrat Pir Inayat Khan, shared the wish to intermarry.

Indeed, a good proportion of the Muslim immigrant population seemed to be following a trend to settle down in German society by marrying into it. Wherever one looks, in registry files, memoirs and not least the private archives that form the basis of this book, the reader comes across Muslim men anchoring themselves through marriage and German (European) women eager to break conventions by marrying Muslim men. Love certainly played a part but, for the Germans, a desire for the exotic was an additional factor. Hugo Marcus, for whom women were not an option and homosexual relationships illusory at best, placed the concept of desire high on his list of philosophical explorations. His texts clearly spoke from the heart to a good part of the community (Chapter 5).

In her path-breaking article, 'Making the empire respectable', Ann Stoler draws attention to the supremacy of the white male, which was widespread in the colonial world. Only white Western males, Stoler concludes, were entitled to dominate indigenous women sexually, or, as she put it, 'sexuality illustrates the iconography of power'.<sup>111</sup> In this colonial powerplay, indigenous males were considered sexually dangerous. Whether Indian or African, they were accused of 'primitive' sexual urges and 'uncontrollable lust'.<sup>112</sup> Approaching a white woman carried the risk of a public flogging. Although outside the colonies, in

111 Ann Stoler, 'Making the empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures', *American Ethnologist*, 16 (1989), 634–60, quotation on p. 635.

112 Stoler, 'Making the empire respectable', 641.

London and Paris, flogging was not condoned, Muslim students from the colonies remained strictly segregated in those cities.

Not so in Berlin. While Indians, Egyptians and North Africans may have been penalized for such behaviour in their home countries, in the German capital they were greeted with open arms. Inter-marriage, which had nothing to do with German politics but derived from the Romantic ideals of the German middle classes, rose significantly after the First World War, from approximately 3.5 per cent in 1910 to 6.5 per cent in 1925.<sup>113</sup> Although a number of different nationalities engaged in such marriages, there were certainly many Tatars, Indians and Egyptians among them. Inter-marriage helped them to adjust to their foreign surroundings; it turned them, as Joseph Roth readily noted, into Berliners.

Nonetheless, the issue of inter-marriage split public opinion. Although Muslim–German marriage was an example of the extent to which German society was willing to accept the foreigners in its midst, German registrars did their utmost to prevent such marriages taking place. Match-making across boundaries was met with racist eugenic reservations, especially if Islam were involved, and registrars did everything in their power to prevent such marriages taking place.<sup>114</sup> The Civil Registrar (*Der Standesbeamte*), depicted Muslims as members of a semi-civilized nation, and marrying them was deemed ‘highly undesirable’. German registrars even felt it their duty to warn ‘foolish German girls’ and save them from ‘an utterly gloomy future’. Miscegenation with Muslims, the journal repeated time and again, was ‘not in the interest of girls of white race and culture’.<sup>115</sup>

The registrars may have warned the couples, but they could not prevent them from marrying – and marry they did. A curious fact came to light at the beginning of the Second World War, when, faced with the British military authorities in Egypt having taken high Nazi officials into custody, the Germans registered the Egyptians in Germany with a view to selecting hostages to exchange.<sup>116</sup> During the registration it came to light that every single one of the 400 Egyptians who remained in Germany had married a German woman.

113 Christoph Lorke, ‘(Un-)Ordnungen der Moderne: Grenzüberschreitende Paare und das deutsche Standesamtswesen in der Weimarer Republic’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (2017), 259–97, n. 11; Christoph Lorke, ‘Challenging authorities through ‘undesired’ marriages: administrative logics of handling cross-border couples in Germany, 1880–1930’, *Journal of Migration Studies*, 4 (1), 2018, 54–78.

114 Lorke, ‘Challenging authorities’.

115 Lorke, ‘Challenging authorities’.

116 Ägyptische Zivilgefangene in Deutschland (AA PA R 41.394 + 41.395); Deutsche Zivilinternierte in Ägypten (AA PA R 41.766).

The lists that the Foreign Office, the Egyptian embassy, and the Gestapo respectively compiled contain all the familiar names associated with 'Orient' and 'entertainment' in the Weimar Republic – for instance, the ballet master from Kurfürstendamm Abdel Aziz Soliman and the jazz musician Abdel-Aziz Helmi-Hammad. Thanks to such records, Abdul Rahim Miligi, of whom Joseph Roth had painted a fleeting portrait, suddenly became a fully-fledged person with a very real family; his wife was called Gertrud and they had two children, Emil and Sadika.

Much to the chagrin of the Nazi government, some of the wives applied for permission to leave Germany and 'return home', as the letter writers put it. Having been apolitical all their lives, they did not want to be drawn into it now. Other women argued that their husbands should be left alone because of their loyalty to the Nazis.<sup>117</sup> However, whatever the couples' political position, the moment of their visibility also became the moment in which cosmopolitan Muslim Berlin, with its many institutions and attempts at Muslim reform, with its lively panoply of entertainment and intellectual exchange, disappeared from the city for good.

No structural moment of encounter between Tatars, Persians, Egyptians and their Jewish neighbours in Berlin could be discovered. That is to say, no Tatar, Persian, or Egyptian organizations, either religious or secular, were creating spaces into which to invite Jews. But many Jewish families had Muslim lodgers, neighbours ran into one another at the cobblers or carpenters. Young Jewish Berliners visited the jazz clubs and liquor dens, as did the Egyptians. As Joseph Roth's story illustrates, it was not too difficult to meet. Jews and Muslims became friendly and some young people married across the religious divide.

Under the extreme duress of the Jewish persecution, new friendships were formed and some Muslim Berliners helped to rescue Jewish Berliners from the Holocaust. In that respect, there is a clear indication that Persians, Afghans and Egyptians, although supporting the Nazi Regime, did not join the Nazi frenzy but kept their own standards of human behaviour. In the chapters ahead, the engagement of Muslim Indians with European Jews will be discussed in detail. This chapter may be concluded by mentioning the names of those Egyptians, Persians and Afghans who helped save Jewish lives.

First, jazz musician Mostafa Sherbini, the owner of the Sherbini Bar, was married to Yvonne Solman, whom the Gestapo identified as a Jew, but because she held an Egyptian passport she was allowed to leave the country. Likewise,

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117 Ägyptische Zivilgefangene in Deutschland (AA PA R 41.395), 40–3.

Jewish Liesbet Loszynski from Königsberg appeared to have a Palestinian passport, so she too was allowed to leave.<sup>118</sup>

In 1941, during a nightly air raid, Afghan diplomat Abdul Dowleh met Ursula Heidemann in a bomb shelter on the corner of Uhlandstrasse and Düsseldorfstrasse in Wilmersdorf. It was reportedly love at first sight and, although Ursula was Jewish and earmarked for deportation, the Afghan embassy obtained official approval for the couple to marry and, although remaining in Germany, they somehow survived.<sup>119</sup>

The year 1941 was also when Laura and Hosein met.<sup>120</sup> Laura was on the verge of being deported and Hosein, an attaché in the Persian embassy was desperately keen to marry her. Since their initial encounter had taken place at a reception thrown by Mufti Al-Husseini, the Palestinian leader whom the Nazi government had entrusted with training Muslim army chaplains, they turned to the Mufti for help. Al-Husseini was the face of Muslim support in Nazi Berlin. Apart from his engagement with Muslim soldiers in German armies, he headed the Islamic Central Institute (*Islamische Zentralinstitut*), the organization the Nazis had set up as a platform from which to organize their Arab collaborators and Al-Husseini served as the Friday preacher in the mosque after the Ahmadi missionaries had left the country.<sup>121</sup> More than any other Muslim, he was in a position to pull strings and so he did. The couple acquired official permission to conclude a Sharia marriage in the Ahmadiyya mosque and they eventually survived the war.

Perhaps following their example, in 1943 jazz musician Abdul-Aziz Helmi-Hammad, owner of the Carlton Bar, secretly married Jewish Anna Boros at a night-time Muslim ceremony in the home of his good friend Dr Muhammad (Mod) Helmy, with Ahmed Muhamed Riad and Hamed Al-Safty, board members of the Islamic Central Institute, as their witnesses. By then, Anna had already gone into hiding, but was still working as a nurse in Mod Helmy's

118 See in AA PA R 41.394.

119 The story was discovered by descendants of the Heidemann family during research for a so-called *Stolperstein* (stumbling block), the little copper stone that is laid in front of Berlin houses in memory of the former Jewish inhabitants. Private communication by Volkhard Mosler (June 2017).

120 A search in the restitution files accidentally brought this couple to the surface. Private communication with Anja Reich, 18 February 2019. Because of ongoing research, their names were changed.

121 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 107–9.

medical practice. Although Nazi bureaucrats gave no credence to Sharia marriage certificates, with the help of her friends she too survived.<sup>122</sup>

Stretching out a helping hand to people in distress is a sign of good neighbourly relations and, in that respect, the Solimans played a pivotal role. Myriam Mahdi, the last survivor of the Soliman family in Berlin, remembered how her aunts Myriam, Hamida and Fadila, the owners of three cinemas in West Berlin, used to warn any Jews in the audience whenever they sighted the secret police nearby.<sup>123</sup> These were the years in which young Jews in hiding spent their days in the cinema, a dangerous practice that the Soliman sisters went along with but that the Gestapo used to its own ends.<sup>124</sup> There are letters of thanks in the Soliman archive testifying that the sisters helped to ensure the survival of William and Ruth Baum and of the Baron family. Rosa Tannenbaum, an old school friend of one of the sisters was, however, discovered and deported on 4 March 1943.<sup>125</sup>

It is noteworthy that the names quoted above surfaced by accident, either in the context of local acts of remembrance or as part of a privately nursed family memory. Perhaps more names will surface in the future. The relationships that Afghans, Egyptians, Persians had with Jews may have been accidental but they were no means unfriendly. It seems more relevant that the Jews and Muslims of this chapter recognized each other as Berliners, and engaged in the tumultuous city to a greater extent than their German neighbours.

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122 This story accidentally came to light during through research undertaken by the medical doctor who inherited Helmy's medical practice after he died. See Igal Avidan, *Mod Helmy: Wie ein arabischer Arzt in Berlin Juden vor der Gestapo rettete* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2017); Ronen Steinke, *Der Muslim und die Jüdin: Die Geschichte einer Rettung* (Berlin: Piper, 2018).

123 <https://www.panama-verlag.de/shop/Produkt/welt-im-licht-kino-berlin/>. Interview with Myriam Mahdi in Berlin (18 March 2016).

124 Peter Wyden, *Stella* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

125 Soliman Private Archive. With thanks to Martina Voigt of Gedenkstätte Stille Helden in Berlin for confirming Myriam Mahdi's account with a search through the different sources.

## The Spaces in Between

Before launching into the case studies, this chapter endeavours to offer a review of Indian missions in Berlin. Towards this aim, it addresses state archives safeguarding information on Indians next to the memoirs and private archives of various individuals, asking what kind of knowledge the sources reveal. Once this archival topography is established, I examine the group photographs that the private archives revealed. Apart from giving faces to the people who appear in the book, the photographs also reveal details about their relationships and networks that the archivists cannot 'see'. Originating from private albums once belonging to key actors in the Indian network, the photographs provide important clues to questions about negotiating space.

To understand how the Indian missions established contact with one another, how communists, nationalists, religious activists and secular intellectuals reached out to local actors, how the Germans received them, what they discussed, and how transnational networks were consequently forged between India and Germany, it is important to offset the observations of the Foreign Office against the private papers of the actors concerned. Researchers have consulted the Foreign Office before on the topic of Indians in Berlin, but because their focus was mainly on 'revolutionaries', they failed to examine the files on the Indians' religious activities. It is only when they were examined in relation to one another that the files disclose a fuller picture.

Nonetheless, despite attempting to enlarge the canvas, blank spots of necessity remain. First, the Foreign Office ignored minor players like Inayat Khan's Sufi Lodge and the Hindustan Association of Central Europe. Consequently, we lack an outside perspective of those two organizations. It did not help either that the Nazis destroyed the registry files of the Sufi Lodge and Indian Bureau. All that remains is a notice, added in 1946 to the file on the Sufi Lodge, that this organization was closed in 1933 because of its 'international character' and the many Jews in its ranks.<sup>1</sup>

The private and family archives give insider perspectives on the Indian Bureau, the Hindustan Association of Central Europe, and the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque respectively. Although no such archive surfaced from within the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin, we nonetheless have an inside view. This comes from

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1 File of the Sufi Lodge of Inayat Khan, 95 VR 4635 (1925–1933). Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg.

two famous Jewish converts to Islam, Leopold Weiss (later Muhammad Asad), and Lev Nussimbaum (also known as Esad Bey or Kurban Said), who joined the Gemeinde in the 1920s. Leopold Weiss, a journalist, lived predominantly in the Middle East from where he sent articles on the Muslim world to the *Islam Echo*, the journal of the Gemeinde, but as far as we know, he never described the Gemeinde itself.<sup>2</sup> However, Lev Nussimbaum did. Under the pseudonym of Kurban Said, he wrote a novel about an Ottoman princess who arrived in Berlin to study linguistics with the famous German Turcologist Willi Bang but in practice spent her days in the Muslim establishments around Kurfürstendamm.<sup>3</sup> The princess meets the Khairi brothers who are sitting in a smoke filled den and plotting the Islamic world revolution. She enters the elegant Orient Club with its illustrious visitors, listens to jazz in the Orient restaurant, and visits the coffee house on Uhlandstrasse where the missionary Sadruddin is standing behind the counter. An intimate connoisseur of Muslims in Berlin, and highly sceptical of them at the time of writing, Lev Nussimbaum left us some rare portrayals of the Indian actors who will be introduced in this chapter.

Viewed together, all these sources convey to us how the Indian missions in Berlin communicated and, through these, how the network as was wrought. The chapter forms a prelude to the case studies which continue to illustrate that (and why) Jews were among the missions' most active members.

## 1 A Survey of Indian Missions in Weimar Berlin

The Indians in Berlin during the interwar years left a broad paper trail, not least because the Germans kept a close watch on their activities. The German Foreign Office is a leading source.

First, initial attention focused on the Indian insurgents who in the First World War made up part of the Indian National Committee, which the wartime German government funded and directed. During the war, with German support and with a view to revolutionizing the masses in India, the committee acquired the backing of 56 Hindustani (Hindu and Muslim) aristocrats.<sup>4</sup>

2 A narrative of their conversion to Islam can be found in Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 141–4; Reiss, *The Orientalist*; Günther Windhager, *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad: Von Galicien nach Arabien 1900–1927* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002).

3 Kurban Said, *The Girl from the Golden Horn* (New York: Barnes & Nobel, 2001). Originally published as *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Vienna: Zinnen-Verlag, 1938).

4 Heike Liebau (2010) “Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelungen”: Unabhängigkeitskomitee in den Akten des Politischen Archivs des Auswärtigen Amts (1914–1920), *Archival Reflexicon*. [www.projekt-mida](http://www.projekt-mida); Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja (eds) *When the War Began*



However, when left stranded in Berlin, most of these insurgents then turned to Moscow for a new political opportunity to continue serving the cause of the Indian people. The Russians co-opted M.N. Roy, a prominent committee member and the first to be accepted into the Russian Communist Party, and sent him to Tashkent where, in 1920, the Communist Party of India was founded.<sup>5</sup> Other committee members, among them Moulvi Barakatullah, Muhammed Umar, the brothers Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar Khairi, V. Chattopadhyaya and Tarachand Roy, travelled to Moscow in 1921 to see if and how the Russians could help them fulfil their aims.<sup>6</sup> In the end, though, they remained in Berlin and took advantage of the fact that the city was outside the British Empire to launch their political activities.

Second, the Foreign Office also kept close track of the transnational organizations that followed suit. In 1921, V. Chattopadhyaya set up the Indian Bureau as a transnational platform between India and Germany.<sup>7</sup> Under his leadership, it provided a meeting place for other committee members, offered help to students arriving daily from India, commissioned translations and reached out to German industries in search of a foothold in India. When the Third International, the Soviet Union's brainchild to bring other countries into the communist struggle, decided to move headquarters to Berlin, the Indian Bureau was incorporated into the city's sprawling communist network.<sup>8</sup>

Third, diplomats kept a watch on the activities of Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar Khairi, two members of the Indian National Committee who embraced pan-Islamism through setting up the Berlin Islamic Community (*Islamische Gemeinde Berlin*) in 1923.<sup>9</sup> The place and time were well chosen for that. Not only from India but from every corner of the Muslim world, students flocked to Berlin. In fact, in the interwar period, Berlin became the main meeting place to prepare for independence outside the empire. Rallying for the organization during the Eid festival of 1923, Abdul Jabbar Khairi claimed to have gathered as many as 45 Muslim 'nations' under its roof, not to mention the German and other European Muslims. It was an important international moment, which,

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*We Heard of Several Kings': South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011), 106.

5 Kris Manjappa, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

6 Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

7 AA PA R 77.461 (1921–1926).

8 AA PA R 31.707 (1922–1930); Barooah, *Chatto*.

9 AA PA R 78.240 (1924–1928); R 85.281 (1926–1934); R 78.241 (1929–1931); R 78.242 (1932–1936); R 10.4801 (1936–1939).

Khairi asserted, would not only raise awareness among the Indian masses but would also revolutionize the entire Muslim community across the globe.<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, when Ahmadiyya missionaries from Lahore arrived in Berlin in April 1923, diplomats opened a new file on the newcomers, which they labelled ‘Churches and Religious Communities: Islam.’<sup>11</sup> This is to say that, since Ahmadiyya missionaries did not engage in any political activities, they were assigned to the ‘Church’ section. In his very first letter to the Foreign Office, Sadruddin came straight to the point by writing, ‘I have enough money with me for the erection of a mosque which I must quickly set up here, for the Muslims here have no church to attend.’<sup>12</sup> German civil servants, for their part, were quick to establish that the Lahore-Ahmadiyya Movement, although a Muslim sect, seemed to be a peaceful organization that fitted in well with German intentions to create a harmonious, democratic society. Ahmadiyya, the reports said, had abolished jihad as war and instead laid emphasis on efforts to civilize oneself. When the Germans also discovered that Ahmadiyya missionaries told Muslims to obey existing governments, whether Muslim or otherwise, they found them an attractive plot on the outskirts of Berlin-Wilmersdorf on which to build. Soon, the dome of the first mosque that Berlin had ever witnessed appeared over the treetops of Fehrbelliner Platz. Six years after it had opened its doors, the missionaries founded a suborganization through which to express the intensive Muslim–German networking in which they engaged, namely the German–Muslim Society (*Deutsch–Moslemische Gesellschaft*).<sup>13</sup>

Fifth, one Indian organization to escape diplomatic scrutiny was the Hindustan Association of Central Europe (*Verein der Inder in Zentraleuropa*). Founded in 1923 by Zakir Husain, it offered an academic rather than a political forum. Seeing Hindus and Muslims as equal members of a future Indian state, it kept its distance from the high-flying missions of the other three such organizations. The association was mainly occupied with engaging in an intellectual encounter with German society and translating key concepts from one cultural tradition to the other.<sup>14</sup> On arriving in Berlin, Zakir Husain made sure that Gandhi’s most recent speeches were translated into German and his friend Abid Hussain translated the literature on Germany’s latest pedagogical reforms into Urdu. Their mutual friend Gerda Philipsborn took those ideas to

10 Register Office VR B Rep. 042/Nr 26590 (1922–1955).

11 AA PA R 77.456 (1923). Politik Indien 16/Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften: Islam.

12 AA PA R 77.456 (5 March 1923).

13 AA PA R 78.241 (1928–31); Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–76.

14 Razak Khan, *The German Connection: Actors, Institutions, Networks, and the Reformation of Modern South Asian Islam*. Special issue of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (CSSAAME)*, forthcoming 2021.

India where she set up a Waldorf kindergarten at the Jamia Millia Islamia university. Another feature of the Hindustan Association was that it sought a separation between religion and the nation, in this case the Indian nation. This did not mean that it turned its back on religion; on the contrary, its suborganization, the Association of Urdu Students assigned its Muslim members a private space in which to engage in Muslim festivals.<sup>15</sup> Photographs of these gatherings betray its active role in getting Germans, Indians, Jews and Muslims around the same table.

Sixth, and last, the other mission to remain under the radar was the Sufi Lodge, initiated in 1925 by the musical genius Inayat Khan (1882–1927), himself descended from a long line of Sufi masters in the Punjab and the founder of Universal Sufism. According to the scant evidence available in the registry office, the lodge recruited well-to-do Germans into its ranks who, after Khan's death, appointed the Persian Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär (1884–1962), a revolutionary and a member of the Persian National Committee in Berlin during the First World War, as their Sufi master.<sup>16</sup> When the Sufi Lodge closed down in 1933, both master and pupils joined the Ahmadiyya mosque.

This then is the list of Indian missions in Berlin, as seen through the lens of the state archives and beyond. However, much more was going on behind the scenes. In June 1924, for instance, diplomats noted that the Indian Bureau had folded because of 'lack of money', which a letter from Chatto himself, stating that another Indian organization in Berlin-Halensee had taken over the work, corroborated.<sup>17</sup> The previous year, British Intelligence discovered that a certain Hindustan Association had purchased a new clubhouse near Halensee and, on the Berlin Foreign Office's recommendation, had given the lease to Chatto. British Intelligence also asked the Germans what measures they intended to take.<sup>18</sup> For state security reasons, German diplomats kept their silence. After all, the British had barred German industry from India, a punishing measure that deeply hurt the German economy.<sup>19</sup> The Indian Bureau, however, was forging a whole new web of relationships between Germans and Indians, one that pointed to a promising future together.

There is still a footnote to this. In 1924, German Buddhists set up the Buddhist House in Berlin-Frohnau. There were already pre-existing ties with Theravada Buddhism in Ceylon and some German Buddhists had already travelled

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15 Private Hamied archive, Mumbai, File D02015-11-01 (1925–1927), examples 34 and 50.

16 Berlin-Charlottenburg registry office, 94 VR 4635.

17 AA PA R 77.461 (10 June 1924).

18 AA PA R 77.461 (25 August 1923).

19 AA PA R 30.615 (1921–1926).

to the island to set up their own Buddhist convent. The Ahmadiyya mosque and the Buddhist House were in regular communication.<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of the Berlin public, the Buddhist House counted as yet another Indian mission. Until 1954, however, when the newly founded state of Sri Lanka set up the 'Buddhist Mission to Germany', it remained a purely German enterprise.

## 2 Experimenting with Indian Secularism

With this archival material at hand, it becomes possible to enquire into the nature of the network that Indian intellectuals created in Berlin. For a start, they arrived in the city with a religious and cultural self-understanding in their luggage that differed from that of other Muslims. Having grown up in multi-religious India around 1900, Indians were still familiar with the practice of pluralism that had once been what Dumont called 'the cement of Mughal power', and that continued to exist under British rule, although in ways that had become much more precarious.<sup>21</sup> Drawing from that self-understanding, Indian intellectuals took great care to establish relations with a large range of groups. In the previous chapter, I explained how they merged with the transnational Muslim community, which was in the process of creating its own religious infrastructure. In this chapter, I shall show how the Indians cultivated ties among themselves – Muslims with Hindus, and Ahmadiyya missionaries with devout communists. As the case studies demonstrate, the Indians also wove a web of relations with Europeans. At this point in the text, it is noted that Muslim Indians in Berlin created spaces for encounters that differed from those of other Muslim organizations and explicitly drew in non-Muslims.

Surely, Egyptians, Persians and Turks also brought their experiences of interreligious coexistence in their luggage,<sup>22</sup> but the ways in which Indians reached out to Christians and Jews in Berlin was not always understood. Some

20 Bhikkhu Bhodi, *Promoting Buddhism in Europe*. www.BuddhaSasana (2000); Paul Dahlke, 'Unser Haus', in Paul Dahlke et al. (1926) *Die Brockensammlung: Zeitschrift für angewandten Buddhismus* (Berlin-Frohnau: New Buddhist Publishing House), 4–6, 89–93; Hellmuth Hecker, *Lebensbilder deutscher Buddhisten: Ein Bio-Bibliographisches Handbuch*. Vol. 1: *Die Gründer* (1990) and Vol. 11: *Die Nachfolger* (1992) (Konstanz: Universität Konstanz); Gerdien Jonker, 'Das Archiv des Buddhistischen Hauses in Berlin-Frohnau'. Projekt-Mida.de/reflexicon (2019). It is interesting to note that Jewish interest in Buddhism was considerable. See Sebastian Musch, *Jewish Responses to Buddhism in German Culture, 1890–1940* (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2019).

21 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*; Louis Dumont, 'Nationalism and communalism', in Louis Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India* (Paris: Mouton, 1970) 30–70.

22 Albera and Couroucli, *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*.

Muslims in Berlin even viewed Indian practices of inclusion with abhorrence. In 1924, for instance, the Egyptian political activist Mansur Rifat fumed against the Ahmadiyya missionaries with whom he shared the Berlin space. Scolding the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement for being ‘crazy’ and ‘paranoid’, Rifat thought he had proof that Ahmadis ‘now cunningly and sneakily shelter themselves under the most vicious and false accusations of the Moslems by appealing to the Christians and Jews.’<sup>23</sup>

The bone of contention, or so it seems, was the Ahmadiyya community’s declared loyalty to the British, a loyalty that Arabs, especially Egyptians, abhorred. In one of his many political pamphlets, Rifat noted that ‘Muslims connect the idea of bloody wars with the coming of Mahdi, as he shall kill all Christians and Jews and extend the religion of Islam with the sword and spare no one who shall not accept Islam.’<sup>24</sup> By this, Rifat meant that the struggle for political independence would not halt in the face of violence and that the British better beware. England was the enemy, and Muslims who tried to puncture that image of the enemy were clearly suspect. In this contested field, the transnational Muslim community in Berlin often pitted political perceptions of the freedom struggle against the equally political practice of inclusion. As was explained in the previous chapter, it took all the mediation skills that some of the Muslim actors could muster to keep the community together.

When considering the Indian missions in Berlin in their entirety – there were six plus two suborganizations – a different interpretation becomes possible. There were three Muslim missions (if one counts Mubarak Ali’s aborted attempt to build a mosque on behalf of Ahmadiyya-Qadiani, their number rises to four), two Hindu–Muslim political associations and one academic organization. Thus, operating with the language and symbols of politics, a portion of the Indian National Committee crew who remained in Berlin after the war, the revolutionary Indian Bureau, and the much more moderate Hindustan Association of Central Europe joined hands to create a shared secular space in which German and European communists collaborated with the Indians. Operating with the language and symbols of religion, by contrast, Jabbar Khairi’s pan-Islamist movement, which he lodged in the Berlin Islamic Community, the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mission, and the Sufi Lodge of Inayat Khan,

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23 Mansur Rifat, *Total Demoralisation of the Ahmadiyya Sect: Further Evidence in Regard to their Activities as British Agents and Menace to Islam* (Pamphlet No. 111) (Berlin: Morgen- und Abendland-Verlag, 1924) 1, 5. The complete collection of Rifat’s pamphlets can still be found in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin.

24 Rifat, *Total Demoralisation*, 5.

each created a shared religious space in which Germans and Europeans were heartily welcomed.

In the religious milieu, the Indian activists and members of the German life reform movement shared knowledge and engaged in social exchanges. In the political milieu, Indian activism became fused with European communism. Notwithstanding their considerable differences, the two worlds interacted with each other at different levels. In hindsight, it seemed odd that communists should have cooperated with religious believers and vice versa. However, all Indians shared a common background and fields of social experience, which they brought to a new level through their perception of 'Hindustan' as a model for Indian secularism.

The Indian perception of secularism is neither the separation of church and state nor the development of private forms of religion, as in Europe.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on Ashis Nandi, Anna Bigelow described it as the 'equality of distribution of state services to all religious communities and equal representation and respect in the public sphere'.<sup>26</sup> Indian secularism, she holds, builds on the received knowledge that, for the last 500 years, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Jews and Muslims learned to maintain a religious equilibrium through creating shared religious spaces. Often starting from the tomb of a local Muslim saint, India's inhabitants developed practices of pluralism, using storytelling, symbolic gestures, and local politics as their instruments. Bigelow outlines the creation of shared spaces as a process through which each religious group adds its own achievements and, through those, holds its own stakes. In that manner, shared spaces were able to grow into 'key sites of the town's moral past', conveying to the inhabitants who they were and, consequently, how to navigate a shared future.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1920s, Indians were aware that shared spaces were delicate structures that needed the support of those in power. It is therefore conceivable that the Indians in Berlin adopted the idea of secular practices as a way of stabilizing and guiding India's pluralism. Viewed from that angle, the behavioural practices they encountered and the spaces they created fused to offer a new airing

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25 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Peter L. Berger (ed.) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999); Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

26 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, 5.

27 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, 7.

of the old received wisdom that one should share one's space with others, whoever those others might be.<sup>28</sup>

### 3 Glimpses from Private Archives

A word about the difference between state and private archives is perhaps again appropriate. State archives reflect governmental and administrative views and interests. They store the stream of the day-to-day decisions that are made when civil servants administer the law. In effect, they constitute the country's political memory. Whether through border controls, diplomatic observations, police actions or changes in a person's civil status, individuals are captured in that memory whenever their actions coincide with the routine work of the state.

Private archives, by contrast, arise from emotional bonds.<sup>29</sup> During their lifetime, individuals amass birth certificates, school reports, diaries, letters, manuscripts, photograph albums, books with inscriptions and stacks of crumbling musical notes – things that pertain to particular stages of their lives and that convey their emotions. Most private archives deliberately emphasize the cherished occasions, leaving aside the less pleasing aspects of a person's life. Often enough they include a random collection of things that had been stored away in cupboards or at the backs of drawers and had remained there for years on end. Once the owner dies, their continuation becomes fragile. Unless steps are taken to safeguard these memories, the objects in which they are embedded are usually thrown away.

Of course, exceptions occur. When people grow into public figures, their private archives provide a basis for memoirs and biographies. Such was the case with Khwaja Abdul Hamied, who studied in Berlin in the 1920s. He moved in and out of the Hindustan and Urdu associations, the Indian Bureau and the Ahmadiyya mosque, only to return to India with a well stitched up Jewish

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28 Many of the Ahmadiyya mosque's early publications associate 'democracy' with every participant being allowed to have his or her say and being listened to. See Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 19–25. Later in his life, one visitor to the mosque, Khwaja Abdul Hamied, recaptured his thoughts on sharing space in several publications, including K.A. Hamied, *What is Hindi?* (Bombay: Alisons & Company, 1956); and Khwaja Abdul Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Press, 1972).

29 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

network that changed both his career and his private life. Hamied's memoirs explain how all that came to pass.<sup>30</sup>

The personal archives of some of the Indian and German students in Berlin at the time reveal that there were others among Hamied's circle of friends whose recollections have attracted attention. Zakir Husain, who became the fifth president of independent India, has been honoured with several biographies.<sup>31</sup> The life of Gerda Philipsborn, the German Jewish singer who befriended Zakir Husain and followed him to India, was lovingly portrayed after her untimely death.<sup>32</sup> Indian ornithologist Salim Ali wrote an intriguing account of his career as India's first bird man.<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Asad described his journey from being the heir to a dynasty of rabbis in Galicia to becoming a Muslim scholar in Lahore.<sup>34</sup> Barely a trace remains of the Ahmadiyya intellectuals Sadruddin and F.K. Khan Durrani,<sup>35</sup> though Dr Sheikh Abdullah, the third imam in the Ahmadiyya mosque, is remembered in an impressive collection of obituaries.<sup>36</sup> Writing was not the only medium through which to keep memories alive. Lisa Oettinger, one of the first female artists to enter the art academy in Berlin, launched headlong into a cosmopolitan lifestyle by marrying the assistant imam of the Ahmadiyya mosque, Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza. Later in her life, she bequeathed two trunks full of annotated objects to her son explaining that he was heir not to one, but to two cultures – her own German Jewish heritage and his father's Mughal one.

What one sees time and time again in the photographs is that couples were marrying across religious divides, in this case the one between Muslims and Jews. The general German enthusiasm for such marriages has attracted little scholarly attention. Kris Manjapra mentions a number of mixed couples in

30 Khwaja Abdul Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Press, 1972).

31 Ziaul Hassan Faruqi, *Dr Zakir Hussain: Quest for Truth* (New Delhi: S.B. Nangia, 1999); M. Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain: A Biography* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972); A.G. Noorani, *President Zakir Husain: A Quest for Excellence* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967); Ali B. Sheikh, *Zakir Husain: Life and Times* (Delhi: Zakir Books, 1991).

32 Anita Kashap, 'Gerda Philipsborn: obituary', *The Jewish Advocate*, Delhi, 1943. Reprinted in Gene Dannen, 'A Physicist's Lost Love: Leo Szilard and Gerda Philipsborn'. [www.dannen.com/lostlove](http://www.dannen.com/lostlove). 26 January 2015.

33 Salim Ali, *The Fall of a Sparrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

34 Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954).

35 Jonker, *Ahmadiyya Quest*, 54–7.

36 Mahmudah Abdullah, 'My loving husband', in Anon., 'Obituary: Dr Abdullah Shaikh Muhammad', *The Light*, 35 (special issue) 1956, 26 August, 6–7.



passing.<sup>37</sup> In his outstanding work on interwar Paris, Michael Goebel records the number of French colonial marriages that took place in that city and noted that 5000 of the 60,000 North Africans living there entered into liaisons with French women, but that fewer than 700 actually married them.<sup>38</sup> Both authors regard cross-cultural relationships as mere outlets for sex and love. Such things happen, they seem to imply, but do not really have much to do with global networking. In Germany, however, it was by no means a trivial phenomenon. Rather, marrying across cultural and religious divides seems to have been a stable feature of the kind of cosmopolitics in which Germans engaged. Especially among the bourgeois and fashionable classes in Germany and India, marrying outside one's cultural and religious world was believed to be an enabling means of connecting 'East and West', perpetuating a network of familial relationships that outlasted the marriage partners' lives. Ahmadiyya missionaries in Berlin catered to this trend by offering legal advice and preparing the necessary paperwork that allowed couples to enter the union.<sup>39</sup> Of course, Indians and Germans, Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Jews constituted categories that could not be discarded, but by turning themselves into 'citizens of the world', as some of their gravestones remind us,<sup>40</sup> the partners tried very hard to overcome them.

#### 4 The Visual Archive

Emilia Oettinger and her daughters Lisa and Susanna, Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza, S.M. Abdullah, Khwaja Abdul Hamied, and Luba Derczanska are only some of those who engaged in the encounter between Jews and Muslims in the interwar period. We are familiar with their faces from photographs of the Ahmadiyya community, farewells at train stations, meetings with important visitors, private and public Eid festivals, student gatherings, lectures in the Ahmadiyya mosque, sports events and outings. Being the heyday of photography, hundreds of photographs to document events have made their way into dozens of photograph albums.

37 Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 97.

38 Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 91.

39 The mosque archive in Berlin contained hundreds of documents on mixed marriages.

40 As in Woking's Muslim Burial Ground at Brookwood Cemetery, Woking (UK), among others.

Some of these photograph albums have resurfaced in recent years. I stumbled across six in the possession of Lisa Oettinger's son<sup>41</sup> and four more had survived in the mosque archive that seem to have belonged to Imam Abdullah and another was found among the possessions of Khwaja Abdul Hamied's children. In all, 11 albums and several loose photographs came to light. The Oettinger and Abdullah albums contain snapshots of life in and around the Ahmadiyya mosque – they show community gatherings, Eid festivals, evening lectures, afternoon teas, garden parties, tennis matches, and eager guests congregating around food-laden tables. The viewer can see Indian men and German women who are obviously couples and, looking at their faces in the photographs, it soon becomes apparent that such couples sought out each other's company: they form joyous little bands of friends whose stories await discovery. Likewise, the Hamied album provides snapshots of life in the Hindustan Association of Central Europe, with faces around the table at an Eid festival then reappearing in group photos marking some important event.

When such albums come to light, they typically confront the viewer with an array of family members, friends and cherished acquaintances. The owners of the albums usually selected the photographs long after they had been taken, placed them in chronological order and inked in half-forgotten names on the side to keep the memory alive. The resultant gallery of personal highlights is an illustration of the owners' narratives about themselves, their contemporaries and their circumstances. For us, who have no access to that memory, such albums merely function as a spotlight on an otherwise lost past, encircling significant moments of personal encounter and leaving everything else – homesickness, misery, enemies, foes – in the dark. Still, there remains a lot to see and a survey of the group photographs that are scattered among the pages drives home the obvious point, namely that many more actors were engaged in the network than those we know by name.

At this point, I present a handful of these photographs for examination. I selected the first because most of the *dramatis personae* are listed on the side, thus providing an important means of identifying not only the people in the photograph, but also those in other photographs that I chose because they showed odd combinations of actors, albeit presumably not odd to the actors themselves. However, for us born later in time, depending on what the written sources tell us, seeing these faces side by side may come as a revelation. This is because the photographs prove not only that the Hindustan Association was in communication with both the Indian Bureau and the Lahore-Ahmadiyya community, but also that they show how the Ahmadiyya missionaries went about

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41 Jonker, 'Lisa's things', 279–310.



FIGURE 2.1 The Indian Bureau, c.1925

establishing their contacts and, once established, how far those networks reached.

When Zakir Husain left Berlin in 1926 to join the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Islamic University) in Delhi, the Hindustan Association of Central Europe, of which he had been the founder, could not have helped but feel the void; at least, filing through Hamied's private photograph collection gives that impression. The album, which depicts Hamied's very own 'Berlin' moment, starts with pictures of his sea passage from Bombay to Trieste before moving on to his first room in Berlin, his first love, Luba, and his friends from the Non-Cooperation Movement days in Aligarh, Zakir Husain, Abid Hussain and Muhammad Mujeeb. We see him on boat tours, enjoying picnics and with his fellow students in the laboratory. In the early group of photographs Hamied is still one of many. It is only when Zakir Husain left Berlin and Tarachand Roy took over as president of the Hindustan Association of Central Europe that he gradually moved centre stage.<sup>42</sup>

In September 1926, Hamied took the initiative and, as he describes in his memoir, organized that year's Eid festival, to which 'I invited some important

<sup>42</sup> The photograph album in the private Hamied archive has 34 pages and 117 photographs.

people and friends living in Berlin'.<sup>43</sup> His memoir includes a photograph of that event, which shows a number of men and women, both Indian and European, sitting around a festive table. In his private album, however, this photograph is followed by the one printed above, which shows the same group of people, this time with their names recorded on the side (Figure 2.1).<sup>44</sup> The text around the photograph reads as follows:

*Standing left to right:* Mr Muhammed Umar, Mehdi Hasan, Mr Nambiar, ?, ?, Mr Chattopadhyaya, ?, ?, Professor Tarachand (Roy), ?, Mr Shahidi, Rauf Malik.

*Sitting left to right:* ?, Dr Hamied, Fräulein Luba, Nizamuddin, ?, ?, Agnes Smedley the famous communist, Mrs Surasini, Mrs Shahidi, Mrs Jacob, Mrs P/Frada, Barkat Ali.

With respect to his reference to 'important people and friends', we know that Nizamuddin and Shahidi were Hamied's closest friends and that his fiancée Luba befriended the communist women Mrs Jacob and the P/Frada sisters Sonia and Dunia. We also know that Mr Shahidi had married a well-known convert who in the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque was known as Hildegard Rahel Scharf.<sup>45</sup> This then was his circle of friends – Indian Muslim men and their non-Muslim European spouses – whom he invited to celebrate Eid (only Nizamuddin's fiancée, Estusia Tenenbaum is missing from the picture).

Hamied doubtlessly counted V. Chattopadhyaya as among these 'important people', describing him as 'a brilliant man' and 'very well-known among the official circles in Berlin'.<sup>46</sup> In the photograph, he is standing behind his lover Agnes Smedley and his sister Surasini. The latter married his closest ally, the journalist A.C.N. Nambiar who, after the war, became Indian ambassador in Bonn. As we know from the biographies of German communists who worked for Chatto, this quartet made up the inner core of the Indian Bureau, of which Chatto was the 'soul'.<sup>47</sup> Many Indians came and went, the biographers relate, but the paid officers were all European communists, men like Louis Gibarti

43 Khwaja Abdul Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Press, 1972), 55.

44 Private Hamied archive, photograph album, 22–3. The question marks are his.

45 Hildegard Scharf, Irma Gohl and Huda J. Schneider, 'Drei Europäerinnen bekennen sich zum Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 53–9.

46 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 35.

47 Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrwegs* (Cologne: Edition Hohenheim, 1981), 93–106; Babette Gross, *Willy Münzenberg, eine politische Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1967), 197.

and Joseph Langyel, who in 1926 were already starting to prepare for the League against Imperialism, which was launched at the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels in 1927.<sup>48</sup> It is an educated guess that some of the European-looking faces against which there is a question mark are theirs. If this is correct, it would throw some light on the nature of Hamied's relationship with the Indian Bureau. He seems to have been familiar with the 'important people', even jotting down that Agnes Smedley was 'the famous communist', but later in life he could no longer recall the names of the more ordinary supporters.

The group photograph depicts the relationship between the Hindustan Association and the Indian Bureau at a specific moment in time, namely the first Eid festival after Zakir Husain left Germany. Hamied thought it appropriate to assemble ex-members of the Indian National Committee (M. Umar, Chatto, Tarachand Roy and Barakatullah), Indian students (Hasan, Shahidi, Malik and Nizamuddin), and European communists (Luba Derczanska, Agnes Smedley, Mrs Jacob, Sonia P/Frada, maybe also Louis Gibarti and Joseph Langyel) around the festival table. Question marks notwithstanding, it can be noted that around the table to celebrate the end of Ramadan is a mixed group of communists, their sympathizers, Hindus, Muslims, Indians, Europeans, men and women.

Is there someone in the photograph whose presence attests to a link with the pan-Islamist brethren in the Berlin Islamic Community? According to the organization's membership records, none of the people identified in the photograph had ever claimed to be a member.<sup>49</sup> However, when, in June 1928, students in it challenged Abdul Jabbar Khairi's authoritarian, non-transparent leadership, Abdul Rauf Malik and the Hamied couple (Hamied had recently married Luba Derczanska in the Ahmadiyya mosque) were among the signatories.<sup>50</sup> The example makes clear that the Indian Muslim-German network stretched and overlapped in every direction, but that foes did not necessarily invite each other.

Although no Ahmadiyya missionaries seem to have been invited, links to the Ahmadiyya mosque are easy to detect. An examination of the *Moslemische Revue* shows that, a year earlier, Khwaja Abdul Hamied, a well-versed *Hafiz*, had recited the Quran at the opening ceremony and that 'Professor Barakatullah, the famous Indian scholar' was among the distinguished speakers at the

48 Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau*, 102–7. Among the women collaborators she counted Agnes Smedley, Lucie Hecht and herself.

49 Register Office, VR B Rep. 042/Nr. 26590, 59–64.

50 Register Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR B Rep. 042/Nr. 26590, 30–47.



FIGURE 2.2  
Ahmadiyya missionary  
Sadrudin at a meeting with  
the Indian Bureau, c.1926

mosque's 1926 Eid reception.<sup>51</sup> The following pictures show that, among those who responded to Hamied's invitation, not only he and Barakatullah but also the Shahidi couple formed a bridge between the non-religious communists of the Indian Bureau and the religious intellectuals of this Muslim reform organization.

The above photograph is also from the Hamied album (Figure 2.2). It was of poor quality to begin with and has deteriorated over time, but it is still possible to discern 12 Indian men in their winter coats, hats in hand, with no women present. The artificial grotto behind them suggests that they are in one of the princely gardens surrounding Berlin, a popular tourist attraction even today. Khwaja Abdul Hamied (note the little beard that in his memoir he claimed to have shaved off in December 1926) poses in the centre. To his left we see Sadrudin, easily recognizable by his turban, which in Berlin was the hallmark of the Ahmadiyya missionary. To his right stands Chatto, recognizable by the typical slant of his head and the moustache that would soon become highly fashionable in Germany. These three men make up the centre of the group and the accompanying inscription reads 'Moulvi Sadrudin, Berlin 1926', suggesting that the gathering was to mark the occasion of receiving the missionary into their midst.<sup>52</sup>

Why did Hamied include this photograph in his gallery of recollections? The composition of the group suggests that it was he who introduced the Hindu leader of the Indian Bureau to the Muslim missionary. From its position in the album, tucked between several group photos of Indians (Muslims and Hindus), we may assume that this was a moment of some importance. Although a chemist by profession and more interested in securing a position in a German

51 *Moslemische Revue* (1925/2) 1; *Moslemische Revue* (1926/2): 49.

52 Hamied private archive, photograph album, p. 6. Winter 1925 seems to be a more likely date. Zakir Husain is absent, but still wearing a beard.

chemical plant than in the political in-fighting around him, Hamied was deeply interested in the German–Indian intellectual exchange and, like his friend Abid Hussain, attended Professor Spranger's lectures. The lessons he learned there about the German educational environment shaped both his professional and personal life. He must have detected that Chatto and Sadruddin had views in common, namely a belief in international brotherhood and the future of an Indian nation-state steeped in socialism. In his biography of Chatto, Nirode Barooah is clear that, though acting within a Bolshevik framework steered by Moscow, Chatto was in effect a nationalist rather than a communist.<sup>53</sup> Starting from a different place, Sadruddin wrote articles that explored the connection between internationalism and international religion. What humanity really needed, he stressed, was a common bond that would enable everyone to have the same rights, duties and options. For this Ahmadiyya intellectual, there was not a shadow of doubt that this bond should be Islam. Whereas Europe was still pursuing the petty and small-minded aim of nationalism, Islam offered a model of universal mankind that allowed for brotherhood, justice, equality and democracy.<sup>54</sup>

These were lofty ideas, but this was a time and place in which many lofty ideas permeated the public discourse. The Indians in Berlin searched in every direction for ideas and allies to help them overcome the East–West divide with a view to embarking on a future together. Chatto developed models for a socialist nation-state that India might adopt after the war, while Sadruddin sought to introduce religion into the intellectual debate, which he saw as a stepping stone towards an internationalism that would encompass Hindus and Muslims alike.

We do not know what was said during that meeting, but it must have been important because, in the following years, the Indian Bureau and the Ahmadiyya community stabilized their relationship. Imam Khan Durrani, who in June 1926 came to replace Sadruddin, did not leave any private possessions from which to draw conclusions about his personal relationships with other Indians in Berlin,<sup>55</sup> but he did, however, hand his address book over to his successor Abdullah. On his arrival in Berlin in June 1928, one of the first things this missionary organized was a get-together with Chatto. A snapshot commemorating

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53 Barooah, *Chatto*, 157–77.

54 Sadruddin, 'Was hat der Islam der Menschheit gebracht?' *Moslemische Revue*, 1, (1925) 2–11.

55 [www.durrani-dreams.com](http://www.durrani-dreams.com).



FIGURE 2.3 Indian–German couples in the mosque garden, c.1929

the occasion survives in Abdullah’s private photograph album with a handwritten date, ‘6 July 1928’ (Figure 2.3).<sup>56</sup>

Abdullah stands third from the left, an amiable Chatto at his side. The two men are surrounded by no less than four mixed couples. We recognize Shahidi standing on the far right, while his wife Hildegard Scharf, the one with the white frizzy hair, sits in front of him. Nizamuddin is the young man in the middle with the flower in his pocket. His fiancée, Estusia Tenenbaum, sits on the far left with a flower between her lips. Standing behind her is a man who often appears in the mosque photographs of this period. He could be M.A. Faruqi, a dedicated Ahmadi who explored the intellectual currents flowing between Islam and communism in the mosque’s publications and who married a German woman.<sup>57</sup> Until 1933, the couple attended every mosque event and came to the annual meetings of the German–Muslim Society. However, once the Nazis came to power, they left the country in a hurry, along with most other people who had openly sympathized with socialism or communism, and who had

56 Ahmadiyya Mosque archive, Berlin, photograph album, *Abdullah*.

57 His main publications are still in the mosque library.





FIGURE 2.4 Eid al-Fitr at the mosque, 1929

expressed their ideas in the Weimar period.<sup>58</sup> The album does not tell us why the group had gathered, but the venue (the mosque garden), everybody's fine clothes and the flowers all point to a wedding ceremony. Whether or not that was the case, it is nonetheless worth noting that the occasion called for the presence of V. Chattopadhyaya.

The last photograph to testify to the vibrant relationship between the Indian Bureau and the Ahmadiyya mosque was taken on the occasion of Eid 1929 (Figure 2.4).<sup>59</sup> This time the venue is the mission house next to the mosque, featuring a table around which 14 people are assembled. It is only a wobbly shot, but we can discern Chatto sitting at the front of the table and facing Hugo Marcus, the imam's right-hand man and the main theorist of European Islam. Sitting next to them are two, yet unidentified, Indians. Behind them, Lisa Oettinger looks at the camera. Two places down we notice her mother Emilia Oettinger next to Abdullah, the one with the blinking spectacles. The woman at the far end of the table is Frau A. Faruqui. A festive flower arrangement almost hides her

58 The names of the fourth couple, the thin man with the spectacles and the woman in the buttoned dress, still await identification.

59 Ahmadiyya mosque archive, Berlin, photograph album *Abdullah*.

husband from sight. In the middle of the table we still recognize Albert Seiler on the right, Susanna Oettinger, G. von Gutzkow and Werner Schubert on the left – all converts or enthused ‘friends of Islam’, whose faces are familiar from the pages of the mission journal.

Incidentally, the choice of guests suggests that the participants are celebrating yet another event. One month earlier, Hugo Marcus, Emilia Oettinger, G. von Gutzkow and Werner Schubert had set up a board to help Abdullah found the German–Muslim Society, the convert organization to promote Ahmadiyya ideas in interwar Berlin. The Faruquis, the Oettinger daughters and Seiler had been present to approve the board.<sup>60</sup> Who we perceive in the photograph then is the inner mosque community sitting around the Eid table. They have just agreed to shape a future in which Muslim and European traditions of intellectual exchange will be merged. Their tools are the reform of the self and the creation of a ‘New Man’, through which the ‘religion of the future’ will emerge. Again, any clue as to why they should invite Chatto is unavailable. All we can see is that he is sitting there, a comfortable smile on his face, witnessing the most significant moment in the history of the mosque.

## 5 Lucie Hecht’s Memories of the Indian Bureau

First and foremost, the photographs reveal information about the Indians’ network in Berlin, which, if anything, was characterized by fuzzy borders and the deliberate interference of Europeans. Furthermore, the photographs clarify that Jewish men and women joined them and, as the case studies show, Lisa Oettinger, Hugo Marcus and Luba Derczanska made further inroads. Now is the time to look at Lucie Hecht’s involvement in the Indian Bureau. Glimpses of its inner workings, which Lucie shared with Horst Krüger in the 1960s, help fill in some of the remaining blanks. By placing Lucie Hecht in her personal network, a tentative portrait is offered here.

Lucie Hecht (1898–1981) was the second child of a Jewish couple in Potsdam-Nowawes, a commuter town near the gates of Berlin. Her father Salo Ernst Hecht ran a medical practice for the poor, which enabled him to provide for his family and, at some point, even purchase a small villa. His wife Olga Löwenhain bore him three children. After the First World War, Lucie Hecht studied languages at Berlin University, but during the bank crash of 1923, she abandoned her studies to work as a short-hand typist to help support her family. By accident, she found a job in the Indian Bureau, about which she knew nothing.

<sup>60</sup> Register Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR B Rep. 042/Nr 26590 (1922–1955), 1–10.

As soon as she entered the premises, however, she became deeply involved in the Indian independence struggle. In her letters to Horst Krüger, she claims to have dealt with the translation work, helped organize the first Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels in 1927 and, after that event, became an ardent supporter of the League against Imperialism. Lucie was devoted to Chatto and stayed with him until the bureau was dissolved and he left for Moscow in 1932. Several sources claim that she had a romantic relationship with him.<sup>61</sup>

From her letters, it seems that she possessed a good measure of the romantic, revolutionizing zeal that Germans of the time reserved for Eastern peoples and their ideas. Full immersion in a movement that strove to rescue 'oppressed peoples' suited her admirably and to Krüger she wrote that she was 'electrified'. The letters still show some of the breathlessness with which she was propelled forward, doing secretarial work during the day, taking Chatto's dictation in the evening and translating deep into the night.<sup>62</sup>

Her description of 'the silent, isolated house, framed by pillars under a vaulted roof, with tall stained-glass windows through which the daylight broke and scattered'<sup>63</sup> perfectly captures the mood of the Indian Bureau in Berlin-Halensee. In her letters, she refers to Chatto as 'a magnetic personality', 'always on the road for India's freedom', and as its 'soul':

Chatto, himself a Hindu of the Brahmin caste, possessed little of the passivity and shy gentleness of the other Hindus, whose daily life was limited by strict regulations of an ethical-religious nature. ... He was actively 'fierce', always on the move, sparking in his conviction, convincing because he lived, did, was, what he believed in.<sup>64</sup>

His vitality, Lucie Hecht writes, also attracted Muslim Indian students, 'first dozens of them, then by the hundreds'.<sup>65</sup> Among them was Zakir Husain, who later became the president of India: he was 'an outstanding personality. He was

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61 Barooah, *Chatto*, 214, 224; Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley*, 145, 451.

62 Lucie Hecht's private collection in the Horst Krüger papers, Box 33, 240-1, box 60, 433-3. Their correspondence was conducted between 1967 and 1968. It contains two letters from Krüger to Hecht, four letters (32 typed pages) from Hecht to Krüger, one letter from Hecht to Suhasini Chatto, a handful of photographs, and several documents.

63 Letter written between 24 April and 16 May 1967, 3.

64 Letter written between 24 April and 16 May 1967, 5.

65 Letter written between 24 April and 16 May 1967, 5.

often in Halensee, arriving with that bold, lively step of the Mohammedans, towering above the tender, darker Hindu students with his fierce personality'.<sup>66</sup>

Her recollections of Zakir Husain and Chatto immersed in debate on the future of India summarizes her understanding of what stood at the core in Halensee:

In this struggle, Chatto, the 'warlike' Hindu, and Zakir Husain, the 'peaceful' Muslim, found one other. When standing together on the platform, deep in discussion, the unity between Hindus and Muslims was achieved at the highest possible level. How often Chatto would place his hand on Husain's shoulder as if he were knighting him or put his arm around him as if he were his son.<sup>67</sup>

To underline that dedication, she sent Krüger a photograph of Zakir Husain, taken in the Indian Bureau's garden in Halensee in 1925. It depicts a young man in Indian dress behind a spinning wheel, which was the symbol of Gandhi and *Hindutva*. Her byline runs: 'Zakir Husein – here behind the spinning wheel – as Gandhi's most loyal and devout disciple. An inspired personality, kind and gentle, deeply interested, thoughtful and taciturn most of the time, but full of inner fire' (Figure 2.5).<sup>68</sup>

The intensity of Lucie Hecht's dedication to the Indian cause was something that the Indians could not wholly comprehend. Muhammad Mujeeb, for instance, painted a portrait of her that conveys something of the cultural distance with which he encountered the German engagement:

Fraulein Hecht was a spinster of an uncertain age, but nearer forty than thirty. ... For me it was an act of courage to look at her, and I do not remember having ever spoken to her. But she was so utterly dedicated that she thought all the time of what she could do for Dr Zakir Husain. She translated his thesis and typed it for him, apart from other miscellaneous work. This was all she could do, but for her it was obviously not enough.<sup>69</sup>

Mujeeb penned those lines in the official biography of Zakir Husain, India's recently deceased president. Since the Zakir Husain Memorial Committee and

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66 Letter written between 24 April and 16 May 1967, 5.

67 Letter written between 24 April and 16 May 1967, 7.

68 Letter written between 4 October 1967 and 3 February 1968. See Figure 2.5. Photograph in Horst Krüger papers, Box 33, 240–1.

69 Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 38.



FIGURE 2.5  
Zakir Husain behind the spinning  
wheel in Berlin-Halensee, c.1925

the minister of education commissioned him to write it, we may assume that his recollections were no mere slip of the tongue.<sup>70</sup> His portrayal of Lucie Hecht may have been a standing joke among friends in Berlin, but putting it in the biography turned it into canonized knowledge. Mujeeb makes it acutely clear that Indian relationships with German women, whether Jewish or not, had their limits if the women's involvement was at stake.<sup>71</sup>

Through her attachment to the Indian Bureau and her translation work, Lucie Hecht related to a wide circle of people. Her personal network included the Chatto siblings Virendranath, Suhasini, Mrinalini, Harin and Saroyino Naidu; the Hindu poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore; Muslim Indian students such as Zakir Husain, Abid Hussain, Muhammad Mujeeb, Khwaja Abdul Hamied, Ishaq Shahidi and Ahmad Nizamuddin; the Indian political activists A.C.N. Nambiar, Rauf Malik and Mehdi Hassan; and the communists Karl

<sup>70</sup> Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, Preface.

<sup>71</sup> Gerda Philipsborn's dedication to Zakir Husain and the Millia Jamia Islamia in Delhi seems to have posed another riddle. See Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 36–9, 54–5.

Radek, Willi Münzenberg, Babette Gross and her sister Margarethe Buber-Neumann, Agnes Smedley, Louis Gibarti and Professor Vladigerrow.<sup>72</sup> Besides, she befriended the other Jewish women in the Indian Bureau, among them Luba Derczanska, Esther Tenenbaum, Sonia and Dunia P/Frada, and Gerda Philipsborn.<sup>73</sup>

The photographs in her collection make it plain that Lucie Hecht used to bring the Indians to her parents' home in Potsdam. Salo and Olga threw tea parties for them to which they also invited their Jewish neighbours. Their own circle included the staff of the Einstein Tower, the observatory in the 'Albert Einstein Science Park' not far from where the Hechts lived. Lucie befriended its director Erwin Finlay Freundlich and his wife Käthe Hirschberg.<sup>74</sup> In the evenings, or so she notes, she often went over to do translation work for them. Her best friends, however, were the Chatto siblings. As she wrote in a letter to Krüger, whenever she went to the observatory on business calls, she used to tow them along with her.<sup>75</sup>

When examining Luba Derczanska's personal network in Chapter 6, we shall see that the two had many friends in common and that their personal networks partly overlapped. However, whereas Luba also befriended women from the mosque, Lucie Hecht's contacts with Muslims remained limited to the Indian Bureau. She appears in the photograph with the three Jewish-Muslim couples at a New Year dance in 1925 (Chapter 6), but in the *iftar* and related mosque photos, she is nowhere to be seen.

## 6 Shared Goals

To conclude this survey of the spaces in between, we must return once more to the web of contacts that was spun between the mosque and the Indian Bureau. What could a Muslim reform movement such as the Ahmadiyya offer to a Hindu nationalist like V. Chattopadhyaya that was valuable enough to sustain a relationship over many years? What tied the Indian Bureau to the mosque? The answer must be sought in the goals the two organizations held in common.

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72 Their names and descriptions of them are scattered throughout her letters.

73 Luba Derczanska's correspondence in the Hamied private archive.

74 In her letter to Suhasini Chatto, she gives details of her parents' fate and that of their friends during the Nazi persecution. Letter dated 10 March 1967. Private collection of Lucie Hecht in the Horst Krüger papers.

75 One memorable photograph in the collection shows the whole group in the back garden of the Hecht mansion. Chatto is sitting next to Lucie and his siblings are lying down at their feet.

There were basically three such goals. The first of these was student assistance. From the beginning, the Indian Bureau explicitly claimed that its *raison d'être* was to provide official papers, accommodation and an infrastructure for newly arriving Indian students.<sup>76</sup> Roy even dourly suggested that Chatto could fix them up with doctoral degrees before they had even finished their studies.<sup>77</sup> The circle in which the people in the Indian Bureau mixed consisted mainly of Indian students, students from eastern Europe and German communists.

The Lahore-Ahmadiyya mission also made it its business to reach out to students. It sought out young Germans in search of self-realization for which it offered them that rare mixture of individual piety and intellectualism that touched a raw nerve in postwar Germany. Their rapidly growing circle included students, artists and the highly fashionable life reformers. These were Germans who engaged in remodelling their lives along the principle of 'life reform', a form of individualization for which they used their bodies as an experimental field, which covered food, clothing, sexuality, body building and religion. It offered a point of entry through which Ahmadiyya intellectuals could introduce their central conviction, born of generations of Mughal aristocrats, that whoever wished to change the world should start by working on their own self.<sup>78</sup>

The second goal was cross-cultural marriage. The Ahmadiyya mosque explicitly addressed what other Indian organizations practised, namely the cross-cultural relationships blossoming almost everywhere. The mosque's imams, Sadruddin, Khan Durrani and Abdullah, each preached, lectured and wrote on gender relations and on the problems that cross-cultural relationships might bring. In fact, the mosque facilitated a large percentage of the cross-cultural marriages<sup>79</sup> of couples who had met in either the Indian Bureau or the mosque. From the photographs, we know that Chatto's presence was required at quite a number of them.

The third and last goal was to do with visions of India's future. A group of young people who looked optimistically into a future together drifted between the Ahmadiyya mosque and the Indian Bureau, but their reasons for doing so varied. The Indians had come to Berlin on a mission to convert the Germans to their way of thinking, and the Germans had allowed themselves to be attracted by it. In this push-pull between India and Germany, the Indian nationalists developed visions of India's future; the Indian religious reformers envisaged a future in which the adherents of different religions would join hands; German

76 AA PA R 77.461 (29 December 1921).

77 Barooah, *Chatto*, 176.

78 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 94–148.

79 The Ahmadiyya mosque archive contains hundreds of marriage certificates.

bohemia contemplated 'wisdom from the East'; German women wanted independence while supporting the Indian cause; and German Jews sought to transcend their borders. In this mixture, India's future provided the screen onto which these people could project their very different dreams. For as long as none were realized, the boundaries between them would remain fuzzy.

In the chapters that follow, those common goals will resurface time and again. Here is the place to say that their fearless approach aptly illustrates the place of Indians in the Muslim–Jewish entanglement. Approaching the subject of cross-cultural and cross-religious bonding, and addressing the 'future man' this would engender, Indians opened up an in between space for down-to-earth, everyday practices, of which the web of relations between the mosque and the Indian Bureau was just one.



In the interwar years, Berlin was a creative place to be. Until the Nazis came to power, the political future was still open for discussion and cross-cultural (emotional and intellectual) encounters bloomed. The unique approach of the Indian associations and organizations brought political activism, religious reform and secular practices into the equation without eroding intellectualism. The political and religious activism of the Indians forged connections between domains of knowledge and its transfer. The Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque, in particular, provided South Asian Muslims with an intellectual space that paved the way for cross-cultural, even cross-religious, bonding. No wonder intellectuals like Chatto, who was neither a Muslim nor in any sense religious, but cared for Indians and the future of India, cherished the relationship.

This chapter has provided an introduction to Indian networking in interwar Berlin by offering an overview of the available primary sources. Scholars on Indians in Berlin have long studied Foreign Office records, but have so far ignored the religious files. The private archives introduced fresh information 'from below' into the text. It has been my aim to link the two sources of information – public and private – to create a broader picture, one that addresses not only organizations and ideologies but also questions of who knew whom, how the network was wrought and how people located themselves within it.

In drawing this picture, the available sources did not necessary converge at pre-given points. For example, the Foreign Office surveillance of Indian organizations was purely from the point of view of security. Several government departments collected reports merely to show that they complied with governmental rules and regulations. The private archives, however, were on a very different footing, for the information they supplied tended to be highly



subjective. The differences between the perspectives of outsiders and insiders are much like beams of light that keep missing each other, and it was only through studying the photographs that the links between the organizations and actors could be established.

Matching unknown faces to the names that appear in memoirs, on membership lists and in state archives is a daunting task. Nonetheless, it soon became apparent that state archives and private papers intertwine in interesting ways that have not yet been fully explored. To acquire a proper understanding of the Indian–Jewish networks that emerged in interwar Berlin, it is necessary to interrogate private and family archives and weave the stories they tell into the fabric of history writing. The five case studies that follow represent an attempt to undertake that task.

**PART 2**  
*Case Studies*





## The Hiking Club: S.M. Abdullah and the Oettinger Women

Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah (1898–1956), also known as ‘the Professor’, went to Berlin in April 1928 to work as a missionary in the mosque. His education up to then had by no means been a religious one.<sup>1</sup> As the son of a prosperous businessman from the Punjab, Abdullah pursued a modern academic career, which British colonial rule had made possible for him and his generation. After attending English-speaking schools, he studied physics and chemistry at Punjab University in Lahore, which culminated in a dissertation that was considered ‘brilliant’.<sup>2</sup> He viewed the position of a missionary as compatible with furthering his studies in Berlin. Far from being a religious scholar firmly anchored in Islamic tradition, Abdullah had worked in a highly abstract scientific discipline that operated with probability models and, in this respect, his profile was not unlike that of other Muslim reformers in the interwar period.<sup>3</sup> From the viewpoint of the Berlin authorities, he was simply one of the many foreign students at that time who travelled to Berlin from all parts of the Muslim world to continue their studies.<sup>4</sup>

1 For short portraits of the four missionaries who worked in Berlin, see Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016), 54–60.

2 Anon, ‘Obituary: Dr Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’, *The Light*, 35 (special issue, 26 August 1956), 2.

3 See, for example, Mehdi Sajid, *Muslime im Zwischenkriegseuropa und die Dekonstruktion der Faszination vom Westen: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Sakib Arslans Artikeln in der ägyptischen Zeitschrift al-Fath, 1926–1935* (Bonn: EB-Verlag, 2015) 40–52, on the education of the Lebanese reformer Sakib Arslan.

4 Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid, ‘Introduction: towards a trans-cultural history of Muslims in interwar Europe’, in Bekim Agai et al. (eds) *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Trans-cultural Historical Perspective* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2015) 1–18. On Arab students at German universities, see Gerhard Höpp, ‘Zwischen Moschee und Demonstration: Muslime in Berlin, 1922–1930’ (parts 1–3), *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1990), 135–46; *Moslemische Revue*, 4 (1990), 230–3; *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1991), 12–9; Gerhard Höpp, ‘Zwischen Universität und Straße: Ägyptische Studenten in Deutschland 1849–1945’, in Konrad Schliephake and Ghazi Shanneik (eds) *Die Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Republik Ägypten* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 31–42; Gerhard Höpp archive, ‘Die Sache ist von immenser Wichtigkeit: Arabische Studenten in Berlin’; see Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–94.

During his studies in Lahore, Abdullah had been a member of the Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam (*Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat we Islam Lahore*). Founded in 1914 in Lahore, it was an upper-class Muslim reform movement that saw its mission as propagating a peaceful form of Islam that would work towards furthering the development of religion in a globalizing world. To achieve this, it adopted the Islamic tradition of greater jihad, the personal 'struggle of the heart'.<sup>5</sup> Rather than taking political action, much less preaching violence, its members saw it as their duty to serve the advancement of the world by continually developing new fields of knowledge and furthering their studies. In this respect, they were not only thinking of themselves but also trying to change and improve their environment through proper action.<sup>6</sup>

The movement was considered controversial in the Muslim world. Its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1834–1908) of Qadian in Northern India, originally aimed to wake up and release new energy to his co-believers living under British colonial rule. To this end, he proposed using reason rather than violence and seeking peaceful solutions.<sup>7</sup> He criticized the British missionaries' interpretations of Islam, grappled with Christianity, Hinduism and Baha'i, and tried to assemble criteria for a global religion. In this endeavour, he received encouragement from Muslim scholars, but when he suggested himself as the medium through which God would speak directly to the Muslims, they turned against him. His claim to the status of a minor prophet turned him into an object of bitter hatred. A group of supporters did form, but most Indian Muslims considered his attempt to give them a new self-awareness to be heretical, and he was severely condemned for it.<sup>8</sup>

After his death, his followers split into two camps. His supporters from Qadian, the village of his birth, did indeed view their founder as a new prophet of Islam, who consolidated the experiences of earlier prophets within himself and advanced them further. Because they also saw themselves as the only true Muslims, considering all others to be *kafirs* (non-believers), they intensified the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Ahmad's students in Lahore, on the other hand, including Abdullah,

5 Rudolph Peters, 'Jihad', in John L. Esposito (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252–6.

6 Muhammad Ali, who was their president from 1914 to 1951, theorized the notion of jihad as 'internal struggle', as practised by the Ahmadis of Lahore. See Muhammad Ali, 'Jihad', in Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Columbus, Ohio: AAII, 1990), 405–43.

7 Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, 'A proposal for the utter extinction of jehad', *The Review of Religions*, 2 (1) (Qadian, 1903) 20–9.

8 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 12–36.

9 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 36–63. Today the followers from Qadian call themselves *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* and they constitute the largest successor organization worldwide.

condemned such radical views. The newfound Lahore-Ahmadiyya presented itself as cosmopolitan, open to the modern world, and liberal. It hoped to renew the Muslim world through engaging in scientific discourse with European thinkers. From its founder it adopted only those aspects that had already found acceptance within Sunni Islam.

The Lahore-Ahmadiyya mission was rooted in the conviction that it should not be left up to the British to determine what Europeans thought about Islam. Instead, Muslims should themselves become active and try to engage in discussions with European elites. To this end, the organization attempted to found missions throughout Europe.<sup>10</sup> Its missionaries built a mosque in Berlin in 1924. They also succeeded in persuading a considerable number of Germans to convert to Islam.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to their success in Europe, for quite a while the intellectuals from Lahore enjoyed a good reputation among Muslim reformers. However, the relationship remained ambivalent because of constant agitation from their brother organization in Qadian.<sup>12</sup>

In 1921, Abdullah married Sakina Begum, the daughter of a zamindar, an important aristocratic landowner who could trace his genealogy back to the Mughal era.<sup>13</sup> The following year, Abdullah was appointed lecturer of physics at Islamia College in Lahore and his future seemed assured. A photograph from this period still hangs in the mission house next door to the Berlin mosque. It shows him alongside his college hockey team, with the British school director beside him, and around him the hockey players with their muscular legs. He himself looks impeccable in a European suit and, as a testament to his position in the landowning class, a turban with the tip pointing upwards is wrapped around his head.

However, Sakina's unexpected death interrupted his career. Abdullah's second wife Mahmuda, a niece of Sakina Begum, remembered in 1956 that at first Abdullah was so disoriented that he vowed never to marry again and to devote

10 Nathalie Clayer, 'Behind the veil: the reform of Islam in interwar Albania or the search for a "modern" and "European" Islam', in Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (eds) *Islam and Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 128–56; Eric Germain, 'The first Muslim missions on a European scale: Ahmadi-Lahore networks in the inter-war period', in Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (eds) *Islam and Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 89–128; Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 36–63.

11 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–94.

12 Umar Ryad, 'Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya, and European converts to Islam', in Bekim Agai, Umar Ryad and Mehdi Sajid (eds) *Muslims in Interwar Europe: A Transcultural Historical Perspective* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2015) 47–88.

13 Anon, 'Obituary', 3.

his life entirely to Islam.<sup>14</sup> And so it happened, although after that everything progressed very differently from what might have been predicted in Lahore.

At the time Abdullah took his vows, the Lahore-Ahmadiyya was looking for a suitable candidate to succeed the missionary in residence in Berlin. Being young, single, diplomatic, with a sharp mind and a talent for organizing, he was selected. We can assume that Abdullah was not averse to leaving his hometown for a while, for he arrived in the German capital as a student in April 1928 to do what all new foreign students did. He registered at Berlin University with a view to embarking on another doctorate but ended up on one of the many German language courses that the university required as a prerequisite for studying in Germany; he also looked around for a private tutor.

He first encountered Emilia Oettinger and her daughters Lisa and Susanna in their private home; three photographs survive that meeting (Figure 3.1). Although still at school, Susanna was giving English lessons to boost the family's income and Abdullah soon became one of her students. In one photograph, he is sitting between the two young women on an art nouveau sofa with a bashful smile on his face. Susanna's hands are tightly folded on her lap and she is looking up at him in awe. In a second photograph he is sitting on a stool at the piano, with the awkward turn of his body suggesting insecurity. In the third picture, which must have been taken later the same year, the sisters are wearing white summer clothing and Lisa has her arm around his shoulder. Yet, the three seem rather anxious. The pictures capture not only their embarrassment and distance from one another, but also a certain curiosity about the unknown and foreign, which had obviously overcome them all. 'Ritterstrasse 91' is written in Emilia's handwriting on the back of the photos, which form part of a collection of about fifty snapshots that Emilia had collected from Abdullah and his Islamic congregation in Berlin between 1928 and 1939. She labelled them with dates, names and places and, in pictures, they tell the story of the impact of the encounter and the friendships that developed.<sup>15</sup>

## 1 Islam in Berlin during the Weimar Republic

The secret of Abdullah's success in Berlin lay in his genteel manner, his practical suggestions for coping with everyday life, and the smoothness with which he could adapt to the different trains of thought in his congregation and steer them towards an Islamic interpretation. During his time as imam, the topics

<sup>14</sup> Mahmuda Abdullah, 'My loving husband', in Anon, 'Obituary', 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> Private Oettinger family archive.



FIGURE 3.1 (3 photographs). S.M. Abdullah's first visit to the Oettinger home, 1928

covered at the monthly evening lectures tended to veer away from the great theories or the minefield of dogmatics, and they certainly steered clear of contemporary political themes. Instead, he and the numerous Indian and German speakers who were invited to lecture in the mosque spoke of Mohammad as a model for a simple lifestyle, of the relationship between the Quran and daily



prayer, of the Muslim way of life, which fitted well with the German life reform movement (*Lebensreform*), of the women whom the Prophet wanted to emancipate, and of one's own soul as a place of understanding.<sup>16</sup> These were themes that impressed his Berlin audiences, who belonged to the bourgeois elite, which the First World War and the chaos that followed during the Weimar Republic, had devastated. Often, they had lost all their capital and were now seeking routes to redemption. Many had experimented with Theosophy before joining the mosque community.

The lectures had been discontinued for some time before Abdullah arrived. The previous missionary had been a poor organizer and, when he went, he left utter chaos behind him. It took until late in the autumn before Abdullah got everything in order and, in October 1928, he was finally ready. Hugo Marcus, who organized the mosque lectures and had been editing the mosque's quarterly publication, the *Moslemische Revue*, since 1923, introduced him to its readers by saying, 'Mr Abdullah has been a university professor in Lahore. He gave up a large sphere of activity to assume the missionary post here.'<sup>17</sup> That set the tone. As young as he was, Abdullah knew how to consolidate his authority and this earned him the epithet 'the Professor', which stayed with him all his life. No one seemed ever to address him by his first name, not even the Oettinger women, who by this time had already adopted him as a family friend.

The Oettingers' relationship with Abdullah opened unimagined possibilities. Emilia Oettinger threw herself and her daughters into life around the mosque, but it was she, the mother, who set the course. As we shall see in the next chapter, her daughters were still very young in 1928, Lisa 20 and Susanna 18, so they did not begin to add their own personal touches to the events until 1932. In the group photographs taken in front of the mosque at the end of Ramadan in March 1929 and at Eid al-Adha the following May, they were already very involved.<sup>18</sup> The corresponding pictures in Emilia's collection have inscriptions: 'FRAU OETTINGER, A HUMBLE PRESENT AS A TOKEN OF HEARTY GRATIFICATION FOR THE PLEASANT COMPANY DURING THE CELEBRATION OF EID AL-FITR ON 12 MARCH 1929, MUMTAZ'. She does not tell

16 This conclusion is based on my evaluation of the *Moslemische Revue* (1930–40). The 88 main articles, almost all of which were based on earlier lectures, treat the following themes: the life of the Prophet (7); the Quran and prayer (19); the soul, mysticism, Aryans, and the East–West encounter (20); a Muslim way of life and German life reform (12); Sharia and gender relations (14); and the history of Islam (14). Not until 1939–40, under the cloud of the Second World War, were there also some political contributions (2).

17 Anon, 'Unsere Versammlungen', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1929), 2–3.

18 *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1929), 1; *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1929), 1; and *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1930), 1.

us who Mumtaz was or what happened to him subsequently. The large quantity of photographs with inscriptions does, however, demonstrate that a new circle of friends quickly developed. The same Mumtaz gave Susanna a picture of himself with the somewhat clumsy inscription: 'TO MY SUSCHEN. MUMTAZ, EID EL-FITR, 15 MARCH 1929'. It was in fact Susanna who was surrounded by admirers, including a certain Munsî and the missionary Majid, who wrote the following on his passport photograph: 'SUSE. IN REMEMBRANCE ALWAYS. BERLIN, 4 DECEMBER 1929'.

The collection includes pictures of Mumtaz, Munsî, Majid, Abdullah (with and without inscriptions), and of unidentified women and men. They show the two sisters somewhat awkwardly wrapped in saris in the company of aristocratic Indian men and refined Indian ladies, and at large parties with long tables set for the end of the day of fasting. They also feature the initiative that their mother introduced to the congregation in spring 1929, namely walking tours of Berlin, which became a fixed part of mosque life, at least until it all finally fell apart in 1939.

Hiking was an integral part of the German life reform movement and Emilia Oettinger was a veritable hiker. When she introduced her passion to the congregants of the Ahmadiyya mosque, she received positive feedback. Although the Indians did not share precisely the same ideas about reform, which involved physical exercise, love of nature, and sunbathing, theirs were similar. Abdullah, who had grown up in the culture of British colleges, was an athlete and had led the hockey team at his college in Lahore. A hiking group was formed and, before long, the new friends were putting on their walking shoes and taking off for entire days. While hiking, they got to know each other and sometimes went to restaurants together. Soon, however, outdoor picnics became a popular pursuit. The first hike, which was 'from Rehbrücke to Templin', was also the most ambitious. It started almost 20 miles south of Berlin, led right through the city, and ended five days and 80 miles later in beautiful Templin in Brandenburg. The 'tour to Kienitz Lake' was also a rather long hike that led from the centre of Berlin to about 50 miles into the Oderbruch marshes. In the autumn of 1929, the distances covered became shorter and settled at under 20 miles. Berlin was surrounded by nature and one did not have to go far to get there. Forests, lakes and meadows provide constant backdrops to the photographs of the numerous hikes to the Kalkberg (limestone mountain) in Rüdersdorf, the Sacrow Lake near Potsdam, and the Hellsee Lake north of Bernau. Hanging in the Oettinger's dining room were colour photographs of all the larger lakes around Berlin.<sup>19</sup> Emilia's photograph collection included stacks of

19 Found in Lisa Oettinger's chests. Private Oettinger archive. See Chapter 4.

the same views, but with the decisive difference that they were populated by Indians.

Apart from the three Oettinger women, 'the Professor' is the only person to appear in every single photograph. From 1932 onwards, when Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza became assistant imam, he was also part of the hiking group. After a visit to Lahore in 1933, Abdullah returned with his new wife Mahmuda, and she too joined the group. There are also other Indian faces on the photographs that can no longer be identified. The group appears to have included a total of eight to ten people. Neither ice, snow, rain nor sweltering heat kept them from taking their hikes. With a hat and coat in winter and a throwing stick in summer, they continued to hike all over Brandenburg under Emilia's leadership for a good ten years. Over this time, close friendships developed that remained intact throughout their lives.

Life reform got the mosque moving. Emilia's cheerful face appears in the group photographs at the tennis court ('our corner in Grunewald forest'), during her frequent sunbathing breaks in the mosque garden, and at rowing parties and sailing trips on the Wannsee Lake. Physical activities and a love of nature soon provided a casual setting in which young people could socialize and romances easily blossom. The German physical culture movement, which had almost a million registered members in the Weimar Republic, viewed the 'body as a sacred space, and its care as a sacred act'.<sup>20</sup> Feeling one with nature was also a fixed aspect of the German way of giving meaning to life and spirituality. That Emilia and her daughters combined Islam with life reform shows that they too sensed a certain spirituality in their experiences with their bodies and with nature.

The Indian side, however, saw physical activity more as a concession to modernity.<sup>21</sup> For Abdullah, this was about 'polishing' body and spirit, and thus refining them. For his missionary work to be successful, he had to adapt to his congregation and learn everything he could about it. At the heart of his mission, though, was the need to convey the Muslim tradition in a form that was accessible to Christian and Jewish Europeans. In the monthly lectures, he sometimes strayed from the main themes to encourage his congregants to seek common ground between Indians, Germans, Muslims and secular Europeans. In the *Moslemische Revue* articles, this common ground was neither 'Eastern'

20 Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der neue Mensch: Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2004) quotation on p. 24, statistic on p. 425.

21 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914* (London: Blackwell, 2004), 12–9 et passim.

nor 'Western', but a space in between the two, albeit a space that had yet to be found. When Abdullah assumed his post, it was still uncertain where such a space might lie – in thought, action, emotion, or perhaps all three? In this search, the central Muslim themes – coping with everyday life, finding a new order of gender relations, and understanding the soul – took on both a theoretical and a practical face. A form of interculturality was developing in the mosque, being pondered out loud and experimented with in everyday life.

## 2 The Founding of the German–Muslim Society

Two years after Abdullah arrived in Berlin, the search for common ground assumed its own organizational structure and, on 22 March, the German–Muslim Society was founded and its charter submitted to the district court.<sup>22</sup> According to the statutes, the future society would bring together Muslims and non-Muslims who wanted to work for the greater social acceptance of Islam. As suitable means to achieve this goal, the founders suggested 'outreach work, lectures, and intensive congregational life'.<sup>23</sup> Muslims and non-Muslims could join the society, with the latter divided into those 'who accept the goals and purposes of the Society' and those 'who sympathize with them'.<sup>24</sup> Whether Muslim, supporter, or sympathizer, all members had the same voting rights. Initially, only Muslims could run the organization. To correct this asymmetry, however, two non-Muslims were invited to sit on the executive board.

Emilia Oettinger declared her willingness as a non-Muslim to sit on the board. It is impossible to determine to what extent she helped to write the by-laws. In any case, one can imagine that the subject was discussed on many a hike. The minutes of the board's first meeting contain the names of the seven executive members, including Emilia. The official photograph taken on the day the society was founded shows all of them (Figure 3.2).<sup>25</sup> It is apparent from the composition of the executive board that the forces that came together in the society were very varied, which a short presentation of the *dramatis personae* illustrates.

Hugo Marcus (1880–1964), the philosopher who was chairman of the board until 1935, is sitting in the middle. Like Emilia Oettinger, Marcus was a life

22 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, No. 8769, 'Satzungen', 1. See *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1930) 53–4.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, No. 8769, 'Report' No. 1, 2.



FIGURE 3.2  
The founding board of the German-Muslim  
Society, 1930

reformer and, like her, had hiked as a youth and raved about German nature.<sup>26</sup> However, whereas the Oettinger family was at the centre of the mosque's community life and very visible in the photographs, Marcus was a secretive person who kept to his own male circle and was barely visible. As I shall explain in Chapter 5, the missionaries allowed him a wholly different form of male bonding, one in which he found acceptance for just who he was. There was little apart from their unwanted Jewish heritage that he and the Oettinger women shared. However, whereas the Oettinger family already had a history of having left the faith, Marcus was the first in his family to leave Judaism and it must have thus been difficult for him. Although he considered himself a Muslim as early as 1925, it was not until May 1936 that he decided to withdraw officially from the Jewish community.<sup>27</sup>

To his right is 'Professor S.M. Abdullah, secretary general', wearing the head covering that in Berlin was considered a sign of his position. To his left is Emilia Oettinger, the 'non-Muslim member', who at 54 was the oldest on the executive board. These three formed the core of the German-Muslim Society in 1930. The division of labour was clear. While Marcus held the lectures and Emilia coordinated the 'intensive congregational life', Abdullah was in charge of 'out-reach' and of holding the reins.

Standing behind these three are the four people who were to integrate the four most important interest groups into the mosque community. On the far left is Dr A. Mansur, an Egyptian doctor who represented the Egyptian Muslims in the mosque. These were the Egyptian circus artists, restaurant owners and jazz musicians from around the Kurfürstendamm, who led a secular life and came to the mosque only to get married and to break their fast.<sup>28</sup> After the Nazi takeover they would be joined by the Sufi community of Inayat Khan and its

26 For the story of his conversion, see Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 144–5.

27 The Centrum Judaicum Berlin archive contains a card certifying his having left the Jewish community, no. 10D90, on 18 May 1936; Hugo Marcus private archive, box 1, certificate of conversion to Islam on 30 November 1932.

28 Private Soliman archive.

charismatic Sufi master, the Persian Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär (see below). The more politically active Arabs in Berlin tended to avoid the mosque.

Standing next to Dr Mansur is a certain G. von Gutzkow, the representative of a relatively large group of Prussian aristocrats and former military officers. Not much is known about him, but evidence of the commitment of former officers to Islam can be found throughout the issues of the *Moslemische Revue*. They are testimony to the profound shock the men endured on the battlefields of Europe, combined with positive experiences with Muslim communities in North Africa. The Prussian aristocracy formed its own group in the German–Muslim Society, which displayed a military interest in Islam from a perspective that would last through from the First to the Second World War.<sup>29</sup>

To the right of Gutzkow is M.T. Ahmad, the treasurer. At that time Ahmad was still a medical student at Berlin University. His head covering indicates that he belonged to the Indian landowning class. His contributions to the *Moslemische Revue* mark him out as a conservative thinker.<sup>30</sup> More than twenty-five years later he would write a reference in Lahore for Hugo Marcus, who at the time was fighting for restitution; Ahmad wrote that it was Marcus who taught him German, introduced him to German culture and society, and edited his scientific articles written in German.<sup>31</sup> While the Oettingers and Abdullahs were connected through friendship, so too were Marcus and Ahmad, and this must have gone a long way towards ensuring the smooth functioning of the executive board.

Werner Omar Schubert is on the far right of the photograph. The minutes of the meeting record that he is a Muslim and the deputy auxiliary secretary. Schubert had also joined the Nazi Party prior to 1930 and, without explicitly wanting to become politically active, he represented the people in the German–Muslim Society who supported Nazism. This group was interested in the affinity between so-called Nordic culture and Islam, which was introduced into the discussion by travellers to the Orient such as Else Marquardsen-Kamphövener and university professors R.H. Grützenmacher, Gotthard Jäschke, Ernst Kühnel, Hans-Heinrich Schaeder, and others.<sup>32</sup> In his contributions

29 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, biographies on pp. 36–63; military interest in Islam on pp. 182–212.

30 *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1993), 46–7; *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1933), 69–84.

31 Private archive of Hugo Marcus, box 1, certificates and expert reports.

32 A comparison of the lists of lectures in the mosque archive and the articles in the *Moslemische Revue* shows that not all the transcripts of the speeches were published. For example, Else Marquardsen-Kamphövener gave a strongly anti-Jewish lecture in 1936 titled 'Leben und Sendung des Propheten Muhammad' ('Life and Mission of the Prophet Muhammad'), which she was unable to publish until 1941 in *Die Auslese*. See Ahmadiyya Mosque archive, no. 38; Ludmilla Hanisch, 'Akzentverschiebung: Zur Geschichte der

to the *Moslemische Revue*, Schubert accorded himself the title of Sheikh, which gave him a certain authority commensurate with his experience with Islam in the Islamic world.<sup>33</sup> He too remained in office until 1935. He then changed sides, along with others in the German–Muslim Society such as Fischer, Konieczny, Beyer, Seiler, Hiller, and Klopp von Hofe, who were ‘100 per cent’ committed to the Nazi Party, and joined the Muslims in the Berlin Islamic Community, which at that time were leading a worldwide campaign against the Ahmadiyya.<sup>34</sup> For the German–Muslim Society this represented a turning point, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

There was no representation in the German–Muslim Society specifically for Jews, but it would also not have been in their interest. Like the Oettingers, members of the Hermann (architect K.A. Hermann had built the mosque in 1924), Weiser and Barthelemes families (to name just a few) were seeking ways of leaving Judaism behind them. In their eyes, the German–Jewish synthesis, for which their families had fought for generations, did not suffice.<sup>35</sup> Some came from secularized Jewish families, others had previously converted through baptism,<sup>36</sup> but most had experimented in some form or another with life reform and Theosophy prior to engaging with Islam.

The number of baptized Jews in Berlin was particularly high<sup>37</sup> and, in the whole of Germany in 1924, there were 35,000 mixed marriages, in which the

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Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft während des dritten Reichs', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 18 (1995), 217–26; Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 192–9; David Motadel, 'Berlin's Muslim Moment', in David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 38–71.

33 *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 39–47; *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1932), 17–26.

34 Ryad, 'Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya', 80–1.

35 The most important representatives of German Jews approved of the German–Jewish synthesis; their members were largely secularized. See Avraham Barkai, *'Wehr dich!' Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.) 1893–1938* (Beck: Munich, 2002), 3 et passim.

36 The private archives of the Oettinger family and Hugo Marcus provided information on this, as did conversations with descendants of the Oettinger and Hermann families. Additional information came from the written correspondence between the Gestapo and the German Foreign Office. Abdullah's adversary Habibur Rahman also mentioned some names (AA PA 104.801, August to November 1939).

37 A committee of the Protestant Church in Berlin-Brandenburg traced the Protestant baptized Jews who belonged to their congregations in the period 1850–1940. In the 12 districts examined, the number tended to be rather high – for example, the St Marien and St Nikolai congregations in Berlin-Mitte (451 members); the Sophien church in Berlin-Mitte (344 members); Wilmersdorf (350 members); Grunewald (300 members), and Lichterfelde (147 members). Hildegard Frisius et al., *Evangelisch getauft – als Juden verfolgt: Spurensuche Berliner Kirchengemeinden* (Berlin: Working Group on Christians of Jewish Descent during the Nazi era in the Protestant Church, 2008), 30–1, 74 n2, 224, 261, et passim.

Jewish partner remained a member of the Jewish community. The number of men of Jewish heritage who were baptized and married to Christian women is unclear.<sup>38</sup> The number of children from mixed marriages was estimated to be 112,000 in 1935.<sup>39</sup> Part of this group had already explored religious alternatives within the framework of the life reform movement. The many different missions that were established in Germany after the First World War offered a unique opportunity to do this.<sup>40</sup> Those who ended up in the proximity of the mosque came into contact with an innovative force that was permeating German culture. As explained in Chapter 2, the Ahmadiyya mission was by no means the only one around. There were also the Berlin Islamic Community, the Inayat Khan Sufi Lodge, the Buddhist House, and the many Theosophical lodges that offered alternative visions in which a synthesis between Europe and the Orient was worked out. The Jews were among the most active members of most missions.<sup>41</sup>

38 Beate Meyer, 'Mischehe' und 'Mischlinge', in <http://www.swr.de/swr2/stolpersteine/themen/mischehe> (13 July 2016); Kerstin Meyring, *Die Christlich-jüdische Mischehe in Deutschland 1840–1933* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1998), 92.

39 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *The Years of Persecution 1933–1939* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 150–1; James F. Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 2.

40 No summary exists. For entries on Buddhists, German Faith Movement groups, anthroposophists, and non-denominationists (Freireligiöse) see Diethart Kerbs and Jürgen Reulecke (eds) *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen* (Wuppertal: Hammer Verlag), 495–611. For remarks on religion and life reform see Kai Buchholz, Rita Latocha, Hilke Peckmann, Hilke Wolbert and Klaus Wolbert (eds) *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe der Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900* (Darmstadt: Häusser-media, 2001), 187–211. On the School of Wisdom in Darmstadt, see Suzanne L. Marchand, 'Eastern wisdom in an era of Western despair: Orientalism in 1920s central Europe', in Peter E. Gordon et al. (eds) *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 341–60.

41 With respect to the Berlin Islamic Community, much has been written on Leopold Weiss and Lev Nussimbaum. For an overview of the literature and a summary of the (conversion) biographies, see Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 133–45. With respect to the Sufi movement, after the Nazis came to power, the Inayat Khan Sufi Lodge disbanded and wrote to the registry office that 'the Sufi movement as such no longer exists, because ... as an international movement it entitles Jews to equal rights'; Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, No. 94 VR 4635 (1 November 1933). On the Buddhists, see Sebastian Musch, *Jewish Responses to Buddhism in German Culture, 1890–1940* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2019). With an eye to the Buddhist House in Berlin-Frohnau, Martin Baumann, "Importierte" Religionen: Das Beispiel Buddhismus', in Diethart Kerbs and Jürgen Reulecke (eds) *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen* (Wuppertal: Hammer Verlag, 1998), 518 noted that 'the share of early Buddhists who had been Jews was remarkably high relative to the population (roughly one-third)'.





FIGURE 3.3 The Ahmadiyya community, c.1935

In sum, in 1930 S.M. Abdullah held together an extremely heterogeneous society that brought together not only Indians, Tatars, Arabs, Persians, Germans, Ahmadiyya Muslims, orthodox Sunni, Shi'a and non-Muslims, but also secular Christians, Jews, liberals, conservatives and Nazis. Although the German-Muslim Society was expressly non-political, the political differences were at this time already becoming apparent. In the group photograph taken at the Eid al-Fitr celebration in 1935, everyone can be seen together (Figure 3.3). According to Abdullah, at this time the congregation already contained around 100 converts and 400 'friends of Islam'.<sup>42</sup>

Emilia's eldest daughter Lisa became a Muslim in 1933. Emilia herself remained among the 'friends' and did not convert until 1947. Yet, whatever form of affiliation they chose, the mosque was their life from then on. It was where they talked, hiked, played tennis, had 'wild' romances and gave birth to children. Their friendship with Abdullah was their compass. For the Oettinger women, the central themes discussed in the mosque, such as new ways of living, gender relations and the nature of the human soul, had practical consequences. From 1930 onwards, discussions on the 'new men and women' who

<sup>42</sup> Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, No. 8769/annual report 1931.

would unite Europe and Islam, kept the congregation in suspense and left a deep impression on the lives of Lisa and Susanna. In the next section, we shall go into this in greater detail.

### 3 New Men and New women

There were many visions of the 'New Man' being bandied about in Germany before the Second World War. All the major political movements, as well as the art scene, the life reform and the physical culture movements, were interested in fashioning a human being of the future who would be capable of mastering the challenges of the new age. To this end, communist Russia was paying homage to the notion of a 'common, grounded' human being who, in the daily struggle for survival had learned to shoulder both the constant and the changeable and to create a balance between them. In the words of the literary critic Alexandr Voronsky in 1923, 'in the lazy, fat-assed "Oblomov" Russia, a new human race appeared – simple and strong as nails'.<sup>43</sup>

As strong as nails is what the Nazis also wanted to be. They wanted their youth to be as 'swift as a greyhound, as tough as leather, and as hard as Krupp's steel', or so Hitler told them in the Nuremberg stadium in 1935.<sup>44</sup> Realizing that such an ideal was a huge undertaking, in an elite training centre called Ordensburg, young boys were turned into 'living tools of the Führer', prepared 'to prove their manliness, their courage, their determination and audacity at any time'.<sup>45</sup> In other words, they were being used in the war as cannon fodder to be sacrificed for the Nazis' goals.

Members of the life reform and physical culture movements believed in individual self-reform. In *Der neue Mensch*, Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe describes the infinite range of body practices with which people could start 'working' on themselves. These include rhythmic dancing, gymnastics, yoga, Mazdaznan, meditation, Rune exercises, hiking, open-air swimming, nudism, home training, bodybuilding and muscle competitions. Artists like Fidus (Hugo Höppener) raved about 'strength through beauty' and painted muscular, nude bodies.<sup>46</sup> His followers revered him as a 'sacred temple' with a 'sacred duty' to

43 Cited in Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History*, translated by Joanne Turnbull (New York: Arcade, 1990), 45.

44 <https://www.dw.com/en/hitlers-odd-appeal-to-german-youth/a-16410476>.

45 Franz Albert Heinen, *Ordensburg Vogelsang: The History of the NS-Elite Training Centre in the Eifel*, translated by Laura McLardy (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2014), 53.

46 Janos Frécot, Johann Friedrich Geist and Diethart Krebs, *Fidus 1868–1948: Zur ästhetischen Praxis bürgerlicher Fluchtbewegungen* (Berlin: Rogner & Bernhard, 1997), illustration sec-

eradicate the 'severe social upheavals that we and the entire world are going through' by returning to 'primal healthy conditions'. If this were performed well, then the pressing problems of the day would be solved, as if by magic.<sup>47</sup>

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the members of the life reform (*Lebensreform*) movement within the German–Muslim Society – and they were in the majority – should want to produce their own draft. By bundling together various forces in the society, their model considered someone who broke away from Europe to merge with the Orient as a 'true European'. It was only in 1936, when pressure from the secret police became unbearable and members were leaving in droves, that the creative energy expended on shaping such a 'New Man' also waned.

Hugo Marcus, the German–Muslim Society's thinker, made a start in 1930 with a discussion in the *Moslemische Revue*.<sup>48</sup> He stated that 'we have to create new human beings because we ourselves are responsible for heaven and hell'.<sup>49</sup> With that, he made it clear that he was interested in neither making the common man a hero nor in exalting youth. It was close to his heart to create human beings who accepted responsibility for themselves by seeking the divine within their soul. The proper setting for this, according to Marcus, was neither politics nor the physical culture movement, but religion. Only religion has the force, he said, 'to open our soul' and to awaken 'a different, second, greater human being'.<sup>50</sup> Religion for him was 'the beating heart' together with the 'feeling soul' and he called their fusing 'sacred'.<sup>51</sup>

With regard to the present, Marcus said, precisely the right moment had come to bring such a person to life. 'The new cultural situation', he said, has acquired so much sobriety and new objectivity, that it was virtually predestined to gain experience with the sacred. For this reason, he was now seeking 'the objective person with a warm heart', who could explain how he shaped his life.<sup>52</sup> He saved the surprise for the end. Where could you meet such a person and bring them to life? In the author's view, the proper place for this would be 'in the sacral experience of the erotic'.<sup>53</sup>

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tion, 403–82.

47 Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der neue Mensch*, 13–4.

48 Hugo Marcus, 'Die Religion und der Mensch der Zukunft', *Moslemische Revue*, 2, (1930), 65–74; *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1930), 94–8; *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 24–31.

49 Marcus, 'Die Religion', 66.

50 *Ibid.*, 68 et passim.

51 *Ibid.*, 69 et passim.

52 *Ibid.*, 74 et passim.

53 Marcus, 'Die Religion', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 97 et passim. We will return to the subject in Chapter 7.

His appeal received very different responses. Rolf von Ehrenfels was the first to react. He was a young baron from Austria, a follower of phenomenology, and a rising star in the life reform movement.<sup>54</sup> Just one year previously he had converted to Islam in the Berlin mosque and was named co-publisher of the *Moslemische Revue*. Ehrenfels advocated a methodical manner of life. He encouraged simplifying one's lifestyle in all areas of human action; these included gender relations, home furnishings, clothing, nutrition and child raising; it also covered the conscious perception of one's immediate environment and approaching the sacral sphere in a concentrated manner. Ehrenfels did not refute eroticism, but shifted its focus. Praying five times a day, he said, should be the basis of one's life because, more profoundly than eroticism, praying was capable of healing the soul. According to his views, however, it was a simple lifestyle in which the soul could position itself that could best confront modern times. He viewed the objects of Islamic culture as leading the way in this regard.

Ehrenfels was succeeded by Faruq H. Fischer, a young Nazi ideologue whom Marcus introduced to the mosque in 1934 amid much ado.<sup>55</sup> Fischer saw the solution in hygiene, athletics, bonding with nature and in being subordinate to the nation (*Volk*). He believed that to renew oneself, you had to feel as if you were part of the whole. You should not smoke or drink alcohol, you should eat vegetarian food and lead a simple life: these were the prescriptions that both life reform and Islam were proposing to the people, but, as Fischer saw it, the 'Führer of the German people' was already doing just that. 'Our leaders are acting in a Muslim sense' was his triumphant conclusion. An individual merging with another person, referred to as eroticism, received no further mention from him.

As a homosexual, Hugo Marcus was probably thinking of men when he drafted his vision. However, the women in the German–Muslim Society also paid attention to his words, for they resonated well with their own ideas. The views of Abdullah's assistant imam, Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza (1906–37), who

54 Baron Omar R. Ehrenfels, 'Der Islam und die junge Generation in Europa', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1931), 81–91; Baron Omar R. Ehrenfels, 'Islam als Lebensform', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1936), 2–6. Cf. Siv Hackzell, *Umar Rolf Ehrenfels: Mother-right Anthropologist of the 'Vienna School' in the Cultural Triangle Europe–India–East Africa* (BA thesis at Stockholm University, Department of Social Anthropology, 2011).

55 Fischer was temporarily appointed a board member and made a member of the editorial staff of the *Moslemische Revue*. Faruq H. Fischer, 'Ist der Islam unmodern?' *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1934), 62–74. Behind this Muslim *nom de plume* was Hans Fischer, the man who was celebrating great acclaim in the Ruhr basin region as the author of anti-Semitic comedies and farces.

came from the famous Bakhsh family in Lahore, were closer to those of the women. His father Mirza Khuda Bakhsh had been an early follower of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and had written a concise synopsis of the latter's theological work.<sup>56</sup> Like Abdullah, he had studied physics and chemistry and learned how to work with abstract probability calculations. Azeez Mirza did not like either the individualism that Marcus's proposal advocated, nor Fischer's appropriation of it. In 1932 he gave two lectures in the mosque in which he succinctly depicted the difference between German members of the life reform (*Lebensreform*) movement and Indian religious reformers:

The essence of Islam is live and let others live. Let the Darwins of Europe cry out 'survival of the fittest'. It may be true, but the point is, are you going to allow the unfit to die and wither away? ... A child, when he takes his birth, is quite unfit to live an independent life. He is too weak to make his way through the world. Do you then propose to let him alone and let him die? Where Darwin insists on 'the survival chances of those bringing benefit', Islam teaches us something very different. It tells us to serve the weak and prepare them for an independent life.<sup>57</sup>

In his attempt to reject the right of the fittest, which he associated with Europe, Azeez Mirza was only to a limited extent speaking out for the weak. None of his listeners would have objected to his chosen example of a helpless child. By turning to the child, he was expressing veiled criticism of oppressive Nazi policies, yet broaching a subject that appealed to the feelings of the people, especially the women, in the German–Muslim Society. The debate thereby took a totally new turn.

Azeez was also attempting to change the men. The new image of humanity that he had in mind, however, was rooted in a very different tradition.<sup>58</sup> As he was growing up, there was a debate in Ahmadiyya circles in Lahore on the need to educate women. Women were supposed to study the religious texts and thus be in a position to raise their sons properly. Studying the Quran in depth could also help them support their husbands and, if necessary, correct them. At times, it dealt with a cautious restructuring of gender relations. The image of

56 <http://wiki.qern.org/mirza-ghulam-ahmad/biography/followers/mirza-khuda-bakhsh>.

57 Private Archive Oettinger, two manuscripts: 'The Spirit of Islam I' (23 August 1933) and 'The Spirit of Islam II' (10 December 1933). Passage cited from 'The Spirit of Islam I', 8–9.

58 The following is based on Avril A. Powell, 'Duties of Ahmadi women: educative processes in the early stages of the Ahmadiyya Movement', in Anthony Copley (ed.) *Gurus and their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 128–59.



FIGURE 3.4 Young men in the mosque kitchen, Eid al-Fitr 1933

the modern Muslim wife that was thereby drafted closely resembled the Victorian helpmate, thus improving the compatibility of the mission, which the Lahore-Ahmadiyya was at the time preparing.

His attempts to continue this discussion in Berlin arose from the need to address, at least to some extent, the expectations of emancipated women. This was captured in a photograph in the mission house kitchen depicting young Indian men with their sleeves rolled up and wearing aprons. They are earnestly chopping vegetables and stirring pots. Azeez wrote the following on the back: 'GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES. SATURDAY THE 20TH OF JANUARY AND JUST A DAY AFTER EID AL-FITR 1933. ON OUR WAY TO ENJOY THE EID DAYS. 12 NOON. AZEEZ MIRZA, BERLIN'<sup>59</sup> (Figure 3.4).

Azeez Mirza was not a Quran scholar, but a physicist. The quotation he chose was not from the Quran, but from Benjamin Franklin, the American publisher, scientist, and inventor (1706–90) who not only helped draft the American Declaration of Independence, but also dedicated himself to the struggle to abolish slavery. Azeez meant this seriously, for he sent the young

59 This photograph is also in Emilia Oettinger's collection (Oettinger private archive).

German–Muslim Society men into the kitchen. He wooed the hearts of German women, particular that of Lisa Oettinger, who certainly noticed. She later became his wife and he gave the photograph to her mother.

The women did not say much, but they did act. They chose Indian partners and the *Moslemische Revue* helped them inform themselves very accurately about the legal situation in Muslim countries and the Sharia regulations that prevailed there.<sup>60</sup> An intercultural marriage, including the children it produced, seemed to them to be an innovative cultural mission that the couple had to master together.<sup>61</sup> As many photographs show, the mosque was a sort of matchmaking centre. For Lisa and Susanna Oettinger, this presented a unique opportunity. In 1932, five years after they first met Abdullah, the two of them each brought home an Indian fiancé. It is worth noting that Hugo Marcus's appeal to create a 'new human being', the so-called New Man, took a very different turn for the women in the German–Muslim Society.

It is telling that Abdullah kept largely out of the debate. Before it ensued he had already written a long text on the status of women in Islam.<sup>62</sup> In it, he defended the classical Islamic position, which stipulates that the genders complement each other but are equal before God. Then again, he emphasized the role of education, which would turn unknowing women into educated spouses, which could raise a traditional marriage to a higher level. Abdullah's 'New Man' thus involved a cautious modification of gender relations. Once it appeared in printing, every bride and groom was given a copy of his treatise on their wedding day.<sup>63</sup>

In a further step, he invited the Sufi master Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär to the mosque to speak about the soul. Kazemzadeh was a fascinating person.<sup>64</sup> After the First World War, during which he had a revolutionary career,

60 S.M. Abdullah, 'Die Stellung der Frau im Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1929), 113–32; Anon, 'Recht, Einbürgerung und Ehegesetze in Ländern mit islamischer Bevölkerung', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1935), 50–3; Mehmed Begovic, 'Allgemeine Übersicht über die Entwicklung und die Prinzipien der islamischen Ehe', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1934), 74–89; Mehmed Begovic, 'Die Anwendung des Schariarechts in den Balkanstaaten', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1935), 54–60; Gotthard Jäschke, 'Die Form der Eheschließung nach türkischem Recht', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1940), 35–7; D.M. Kauschansky, 'Hauptelemente des türkischen Eherechts', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1934), 6–13.

61 Latifa A. Roessler, 'Ein Arbeitsfeld für die muslimische Europäerin', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1934), 13–6; Hildegard Scharf, Irma Gohl and Hudah J. Schneider, 'Drei Europäerinnen bekennen sich zum Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 53–9.

62 Abdullah, 'Die Stellung der Frau im Islam'.

63 Private Oettinger archive; private Soliman archive.

64 Jamshid Behnam, 'Iranschär' and 'Iranschär, Hossein Kazemzadah', in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.) *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 13 (2006), 535–6 and 537–9.

he settled down as a bookseller in Berlin. Then, in 1925, he underwent a spiritual volte-face and joined both the Theosophical Society and the Inayat Khan Sufi Lodge, where he carved out a new career for himself as a charismatic preacher. By 1930, Kazemzadeh was one of the most successful spiritual speakers and writers in Berlin. From the publishing company he headed, it is apparent that he not only edited books on Theosophy and Sufism separately, but also combined them with each other.<sup>65</sup> His lectures at the mosque would fill the house to the brim and the transcripts of some of his speeches were published in the mission's journal.<sup>66</sup>

According to Islamic tradition, questions about the soul fall into the realm of the Sufi orders, though inferences about it are also drawn from the Quran. Given that in many parts of the Islamic world, the activities of mystics are considered a legitimate supplement and reinforcement of Sharia, it was just a logical step for Abdullah to steer the 'New Man' debate in that direction. With Kazemzadeh's appearance on the scene, the members of the life reform (*Lebensreform*) movement suddenly confronted the figure of a Muslim mystic – a doubting, searching, suffering person attempting to kindle the divine spark through exercise and renunciation. For Muslims, this had always been a difficult and strictly regimented endeavour, although Kazemzadeh's mixture of Sufism and Theosophy probably made it easier for life reformers to understand the basic ideas of Islamic mysticism. Lisa Oettinger was clearly attracted by his comments because, from the archive she left to her son, it is apparent that he provided fertile ground for the development of her own personal religiosity (Chapter 4).

It was Kazemzadeh who introduced the concept of the Aryan soul into the debate – and with that the lofty notion of 'Aryan' descent, which Indians and Persians, as well as Germans, claimed for themselves. He thus brought in a long series of scholarly lectures and treatments dealing with the essence and the history of Islamic mysticism, the origins of Aryans, and their mutual relations

65 Starting in 1929 Iranschär Verlag published *The Aquarian Path: A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Study of Esoteric Philosophy and the Ancient Mysteries*. The publisher's programme included works on Persian mysticism, *Die Heilkraft des Schweigens* (1929), *Die Gathas von Zarathustra* (1930), and *Barg Sabz/Grüne Blätter* (1933).

66 Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Wie sollen wir meditieren?' Ahmadiyya Mosque Archive (Berlin, 1932); Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Aus dem Leben eines Sufimeisters des Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1933) 50–9; Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Meine Pilgerfahrt nach Mekka, der heiligen Stadt des Islams', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1935) 75–87; Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Die Seele kennen und Verlangen', Mosque Archive, Berlin (1935); Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Das Mysterium der Seele', Ahmadiyya Mosque Archive, Berlin (1936); Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär, 'Die Ursachen des Leidens', Ahmadiyya Mosque Archive, Berlin (1936). See *ibid.* nos. 17, 26, 34.



in the East and West. Between Hugo Marcus's soul, which he once wanted to tear open to awaken a 'different, greater human being', and the intercultural melting pot, in which 'Aryans' from East and West came together, lay a long and winding road full of surprises. In addition to the possibility of entering into intercultural marriages, this seems to have been the main attraction of the German–Muslim Society.

#### 4 After Hitler's Seizure of Power

The Nazi Party platform of 1920 gave a clear-cut answer to the question of who would be permitted to live in Germany in the future. If it were up to them, from then on only *Volksgenossen* (members of the German nation), that is, people of 'German blood', would be citizens.<sup>67</sup> All others would be subject to the legislation pertaining to aliens. The Nazi Party warned non-Germans that it would be best for them to leave the country. On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler, the Führer of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party, took power. 'The end came much more rapidly than ever envisaged and with a radicalism that no contemporaries could ever have imagined'.<sup>68</sup>

The radical changes taking place on the streets of Berlin did not go unobserved by the mosque congregation. Yet, nobody discussed the Storm Detachment (*Sturmabteilung*) marches, the nightly raids, the brawls on Kurfürstendamm boulevard, the burning of the Reichstag, the public book burnings, or the boycott of Jewish shops, which included shattering their windows and looting their shelves. On the surface, everything remained as it had been. In January, the month of Ramadan began. All the discussions in the *Moslemische Revue* were about doing without food and the power of perseverance. Only Johanna Hudah Schneider, an older member of the congregation in Zurich around whom the Muslim students there had rallied, wrote an article in the *Moslemische Revue* of April 1933 that carried any mention of the gloom that surrounded them: 'it seems as if everything is senseless in the face of the gigantic will of a superior power of darkness to annihilate, to destroy the good and elevate the evil'.<sup>69</sup>

67 Diemut Majer, *Fremdvölkische' im Dritten Reich: Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Rechtssetzung und Rechtspraxis in Verwaltung und Justiz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der eingegliederten Ostgebiete und des Generalgouvernements* (Boppard: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1981), 83–4.

68 Karl Schlögel, *Das russische Berlin. Ostbahnhof Europas* (Munich: Pantheon, 2007), 73.

69 Johanna Hudah Schneider, 'Der Sinn des Leidens: Meditation', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1933), 27–8. In 1931 she also published a conversion report in the *Moslemische Revue*;

Directly following the Nazis' assumption of power, the same Hudah Schneider sent Azeez Mirza a series of postcards with urgent requests and questions.<sup>70</sup> 'How are all of you? I'm very worried. Just a word' (2 February); 'I'm very worried and I am thinking of you in the dreadful chaos. Please stay at home until the 5 March, so that nothing happens to you' (24 February).<sup>71</sup> Other postcards contained requests for Azeez to check on certain Muslims mentioned by name from whom she had not heard for a while. Hudah Schneider was concerned that, given the daily attacks in the streets on people who looked like Jews, her Muslim friends might be in danger. In fact, as we know from various sources, they were.<sup>72</sup> Because the German public was sold such a negative picture of 'Orientals', in which Jews and Muslims were indistinguishable (hooked nose, beady eyes and dark skin), migrants from Turkey, India, or Egypt, as well as dark-skinned Jews from Germany, were spat at and insulted on the streets. Consequently, some migrants sought ways to show that they were 'friends' of the German people. The Turkish modiste Rebia Tevfik Basokcu, who as Madame Saadi ran a successful business in Berlin, took advantage of the old German–Turkish 'brotherhood in arms' adage and planted a Turkish flag in the sand whenever she went bathing in the Baltic Sea.<sup>73</sup>

Muslims of Jewish descent experienced the effects of the political upheaval. Hugo Marcus's older brother, Dr Richard Marcus, who was the district commissioner of Leipzig, 'was the first government official in Saxony to be dismissed, spied on and driven to his death'.<sup>74</sup> When the congregation heard the news, the local committee of the Islamic World Congress convened a meeting in the mosque on 15 May 1933 to express their condolences to Marcus and, at the following meeting, he thanked the committee for its thoughtfulness.<sup>75</sup>

Emilia Oettinger and her two daughters were concerned with something else. Susanna had become pregnant from her Indian fiancé who then abandoned her. On 10 June 1933, she gave birth to a child with dark skin who soon developed a full head of strikingly dark curls. The timing was extremely

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Scharf et al., 'Drei Europäerinnen', 53–6. In 1937 the journal published her obituary, *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1937), 32.

70 Private Oettinger archive, Lisa Oettinger's postcard album.

71 The Reichstag elections took place on 5 March 1933.

72 Höpp, 'Zwischen Universität und Straße'.

73 Rebia Tevfik Basokcu, 'Überlebenskampf und Karriere einer Modistin in den Goldenen Zwanzigern', in Ingeborg Böer, Ruth Haerkötter and Petra Kappert (eds) *Türken in Berlin 1871–1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 221.

74 Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1, autobiographical outline, c.1956.

75 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, No. VR 9 ER 1.33, report 19 (15 May 1933) and report 20 (29 May 1933).

unfortunate. Like any Oriental-looking people on the streets, dark-skinned children also faced hostility, were spat at, insulted by neighbours and often expelled from school.<sup>76</sup> From the moment of her birth, Susanna's child Rani was welcome nowhere. Not only had she been born out of wedlock, but also her dark skin and hair attracted hostile behaviour from which her mother could hardly protect her.

The situation of the Jews in Germany, including those with 'only' one Jewish parent, changed rapidly.<sup>77</sup> The sisters also felt threatened; although they were raised without a religion and had at most an academic interest in Judaism, they were now branded as Jews. Viktor Klemperer, who was baptized and married to an 'Aryan' woman, was the son of a Reform rabbi. He kept an extensive diary of the changes taking place. He saw a picture of his father in the anniversary issue of the *Jewish Reform Community*, and wrote that 'in it was ... a history of its efforts on behalf of Germanness. It now appears nothing short of tragic.'<sup>78</sup> Although the two sisters were supposed to enjoy a 'special status' because they were of mixed blood (*Mischlinge*), they were increasingly isolated, harassed, treated as outcasts, and ultimately exploited as forced labourers. Even if the details of the persecution had not yet been determined at that time, in early 1933 the threat was already hanging over them like a dark cloud.

Far away in Lahore, the political upheaval in Germany was not viewed as bleakly as it was by those directly affected. In 1934, Lahore-Ahmadiyya president Muhammad Ali sent his congratulations to the Nazi regime: 'we welcome the new regime in Germany, as it promotes the simple principles of life inculcated by Islam.'<sup>79</sup> Not only the president, but also members of the mosque in Berlin expressed admiration, drawing parallels between Islam as they perceived it and the Nazi regime. The composition of the board of the German-Muslim Society was changing. At its annual meeting, Emilia Oettinger, the apolitical life reformer, received only three votes.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, she stepped down, but remained connected to the society as a member. She also continued

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76 Eyewitness accounts can be found in Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz and Dagmar Schultz (eds) *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 56–76; Gorch Pieken and Cornelia Cruse, *Preussisches Liebesglück: Eine deutsche Familie aus Afrika* (Berlin: List, 2008), 150, 170 ff.

77 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 145–5, 368 fn. 38.

78 Viktor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*. Part 2: *Diaries 1933–1941* (New York: Random House, 1998), 119 (22 April 1935).

79 *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1934), 45.

80 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR no. 8769 (11 October 1934).

to attend the annual members' meeting, accompanied either by Lisa or Susanna.<sup>81</sup>

Society members who were also members of the Nazi Party – Hikmat Beyer, Albert Seiler, Faruq Fischer, Omar Schubert and Amin Boosfeld – collected most of the votes in 1934.<sup>82</sup> Although a Jew, Hugo Marcus was once again confirmed in his position,<sup>83</sup> but had to resign the following year due to increased Gestapo pressure on board members. The Nazi dominance on the executive board did not seem to disturb him. When he announced his resignation, he suggested Klopp von Hofe, an SS man, as his successor.<sup>84</sup> In this way the society adapted to the new conditions. The following year Abdullah reported to the Foreign Office:

Our president Mr Boosfeld is a member of the victims' circle of the NSDAP [Nazi Party];<sup>85</sup> our second secretary Dr Klopp von Hofe is a member of the NSDAP and the SS; the treasurer Mr Schubert is a member of the Labour Front, and the first assessor Mr Beyer is a member of the NSDAP.<sup>86</sup>

In 1936, 50 Muslims in Berlin who supported the Nazi regime denounced the German–Muslim Society to the Gestapo<sup>87</sup> and several board members in the society joined them.<sup>88</sup> The denunciation was part of a concerted worldwide attempt by the media to attack the Ahmadiyya movement. Muslims in Berlin then took this opportunity to try to take control of the mosque, which they considered essential in the power struggle to become the official representative of the Muslim world in Nazi Germany. Their attack therefore targeted Abdullah as the on-site representative.<sup>89</sup>

The conflict, which highlighted the differences between the Lahore-Ahmadiyya and the other Muslims in Berlin, resulted in heated debates. As was explained in the Introduction, the missionaries were not part of the ulema, the Muslim scholarly elite, but proposed religious reforms on their own initiative

81 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR no. 8769 (21 September 1935; 19 September 1936; 20 September 1937; 8 September 1938).

82 VR no. 8769 (11 October 1934).

83 Ibid.

84 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR no. 8769 (21 September 1935).

85 This refers to the 'Circle of Victims of the NSDAP', It includes early Nazi Party members who received prison sentences in the Weimar Republic.

86 AA PA, 104.801 (31 August 1936).

87 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 120–1; Ryad, 'Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya'.

88 Ryad, 'Salafiyya, Ahmadiyya', 90–1.

89 AA PA, 104.801 (1936–1939).

and as they themselves thought best. Worse, their proposals were based on cosmopolitan ideas and principles of negotiation that were targeted to include Western audiences. The other Muslims hated their lecture evenings, hiking groups, tennis matches and tea parties, which they regarded as un-Islamic. In the battle for the mosque, they spied on Abdullah's private life, secretly photographed him and sensationalized his lifestyle in the Arabic and Urdu daily newspapers with devious reports and suggestive photographs. The petitions that the 50 denouncers signed claimed, among other things, that Abdullah spent time with 'impure' women, played tennis with his wife while other Muslims were praying, and ate and participated in the sale of pork. In addition, they said, he was letting the Berlin mosque degenerate into a tearoom.<sup>90</sup>

Abdullah was fighting for his life. Not only did he feel forced to submit declarations to contradict the slander in two different directions, but he was also having to deal with the division that cut right through his congregation. His innumerable letters to the Foreign Office asserting his innocence were piling up and his Muslim adversaries were taking him to court.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, Azeez Mirza was desperately trying to repair the mosque's damaged image by installing traditional religious structures. One of their resolutions was to introduce 'Muslim evenings' twice a month with a view to 'answering religious questions objectively'.<sup>92</sup>

These were all accusations that got the Muslim readership's adrenalin flowing, but what got the Nazi administration to its feet concerned the Jewish members of the mosque, more precisely the claim that the German-Muslim Society was 'a shelter for criminals, communists, and Jews'.<sup>93</sup> This accusation led to an in-depth investigation by the Nazi Party that lasted for three years and that targeted not only the mosque but also the survivors of the Inayat Khan Sufi Lodge and a number of Egyptian bars. While the final report denied the presence of criminals and communists, it confirmed that the mosque indeed served as 'a shelter for Kurfürstendamm Jews'.<sup>94</sup> Although its wording drew attention to the density of the relationships between Muslims and Jews in the district, the investigation was nevertheless discontinued in 1939. With an eye to

90 According to the Lahore daily *Zamindar* of 5 June 1936. The photos and texts were sent to the Foreign Office and are located in the file: AA PA, 104.801 (1936).

91 AA PA, 104.801 (Abdullah to Pilger) (31 August 1936).

92 Registry Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR no. 8769 (19 September 1936).

93 AA PA, 104.801: Declaration of the 50 signatories to the Gestapo (23 February 1936); investigation report of the Nazi party to the Chief of Police in Berlin (13 April 1937). Not until three years later did the Gestapo issue a final judgment: Gestapo to Reich Minister of the Interior for Church Affairs (11 February 1939). See also Chapter 4.

94 AA PA, 104.801 (NSDAP to the Chief of Police, 13 April 1937).

the approaching war, nobody in Nazi Berlin wanted to damage relations with any Muslim representatives in the capital. Despite obvious differences between Nazi and Muslim interests, and despite the latter's closeness to the Jews, the Nazi regime saw all Muslims in Berlin as allies and potential allies in the upcoming war.<sup>95</sup> Until then, it wanted to keep all options open.

Things quietened down in the German–Muslim Society. The lecture and publication series continued, but no new joint initiatives were launched. Instead, the centrifugal forces dominated. Anyone wishing to avoid becoming a suspect in the eyes of politically active Muslims in Berlin moved to the Berlin Islamic Community. All the others withdrew into their private spheres.



Why did the Oettinger women remain in the hornet's nest, especially after the German–Muslim Society had declined? They shared neither religious nor political motives, but only their friendship with the two imams. Their futures were at stake. Lisa had converted to Islam and was engaged to Azeez, the second imam. Susanna was still hoping to find a partner in the mosque and her friends were there. They continued to go hiking in Brandenburg and sunbathing in the mosque garden, and were happy to be part of an international, cosmopolitan society. The Abdullaha and Azeez Mirza had become part of their extended family and seemed to hold the keys to the future in their hands. In 1937, when the worst attacks were over, Lisa and Azeez moved to Lahore. As we shall see in the next chapter, the couple promised to apply for visas as soon as they arrived in Lahore, so that the rest of the family could join them. However, because of the dramatic developments that took place on their arrival, that plan never came to fruition and waiting for them was to no avail. When the war started in the autumn of 1939, the Abdullaha delayed their departure in the hope that the documents might still arrive to allow both families to embark on the passage together. In the end, they travelled alone to Lahore, while Emilia, Susanna, and Rani remained behind, waiting with their bags packed.

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95 Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 38–71.

## An Artist's View: Lisa Oettinger between 'Civilizations'

In the summer of 2013, I flew to London to meet two people whose mothers had converted to Islam in the Berlin mosque before the Second World War. At that time I was doing research on the Lahore-Ahmadiyya Muslim reform movement and its mission activities in interwar Europe.<sup>1</sup> Some group photographs that I had seen made me realize that the Ahmadiyya mission not only facilitated Indian–German marriages, but also catered to the children born of those relationships. My search for them was fuelled by the hope of finding material evidence that might throw light on the mission from a family perspective. This trip was going to mark my first encounter with any of the descendants.

As a matter of fact, the people I was going to see had Muslim names. Suhail Ahmad, born in 1949 in Karachi, was the son of the Berlin painter Lisa Oettinger and hotel proprietor Nazir Ahmad, who was a member of the Ahmadiyya in Lahore. Suhail's cousin Anisah Christina Rani, born in Berlin in 1933, was the daughter of Lisa's sister Susanna Oettinger and the Indian N.T. Gulrajani from Karachi, who in the 1930s ran an export business in Berlin. I had come across Lisa's and Susanna's names many times in the mosque archive and in registry office files. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1930 their mother Emilia Oettinger co-founded the German–Muslim Society, the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mission's organization for converts. When Ahmadiyya elders alerted me to the fact that there were Oettinger descendants living in the vicinity of London, I did not think twice before visiting them.

Little was I prepared for what I found. Anisah was in the possession of papers that seemed to contain the story of the Oettinger family in a nutshell. Among them were documents proving her mother's and grandmother's conversion to Islam; her grandfather Friedrich Oettinger's papers showing that he converted to Christianity in 1885 and left the Jewish community in Berlin some time after that; the marriage contract between Friedrich's parents Louis Oettinger and Johanna Lewinsohn, which said a lot about Jewish marriage in Prussia in the late nineteenth century; and a document issued by the local Prussian administration in 1866 granting Louis permission to leave Marienwerder in

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1 Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016).

western Prussia, where he was registered as a member of the Jewish community. The Oettingers, these documents proved, were of Jewish descent and had relinquished their Judaism prior to their conversion to Islam.

At first, Suhail Ahmad presented me with the five photograph albums that his mother Lisa had put together in 1957 to explain to him her early life in Berlin, the life of her first husband Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza, their social life in the Berlin mosque, their honeymoon in India, and her life in Lahore.<sup>2</sup> The next time I visited him he also showed me two large trunks, which had been padlocked in his mother's bedroom since 1957 and which he left untouched after she died in 2006. When we opened them they appeared to be filled with fragile things from Marienwerder, Berlin and Lahore, each item wrapped in tissue paper with a note from Lisa exhorting him to safeguard the contents – 'MUST remain in the family!' – and laid out in a jigsaw pattern in the trunks.

Talking to Suhail Ahmad and Anisah Christina Rani I realized that I had found two cousins trying to make sense of a religious legacy that in many ways was even more complicated than the jigsaw puzzle we uncovered in the trunks. Their own relationship with the Oettinger family was intense. As a child, Anisah had been hidden in Nazi Germany and the experience had left her with disturbing memories and a severed relationship with her mother, Susanna. From her perspective, being a young person in Germany had been traumatic, yet 'home'. From Suhail's viewpoint, the past took on a very different shape. Born in Karachi, he had lived with his mother until her death at the age of 98 and their life together had been peaceful. Lisa had painted, was proud of her Prussian and Jewish heritage, but urged her son to acknowledge the importance of having come from two wholly different backgrounds – German culture and Islamic civilization. Thus, with the sense of responsibility this brought him, he became the guardian of his mother's legacy.

Because their mothers had fallen out with each other after the war, the cousins had been unaware of the other's family treasures or memories, but my entry into their lives reunited the two sides. Seated in Anisah's drawing room, they examined each other's things, exchanged reminiscences, compared their experiences and looked at me for help whenever German history threatened to slip into incomprehensibility. This became my role in the proceedings. During those visits (I went back six times), I became involved in the memories and anecdotes of a family that was not mine, yet entrusted me with its family treasures, trusting that I would turn them into a story that would explain to them what it was all about. Together, we unravelled a religious history, which in

2 Private Oettinger archive containing 'Lisa's Berlin album'; 'Azeez's album'; and albums 'Mosque and Friends'; 'The journey to India'; and 'Lange Mandi (Lahore)'.



retrospect seemed strange yet appeared to have been quite commonplace at the time of it happening.

In the course of four generations, the Oettinger family had progressed from being traditional Jews to German Jews with a secular outlook; proved their German loyalty by baptizing their children; dabbled in life reform to express their individuality; experimented with Islam; became convinced Muslims; and produced Muslim children who in turn became Christians. In the end, I wrote a book in which I assigned each generation its role in the journey – great grandparents in Jewish Marienwerder, grandparents in Jewish secular Berlin, mothers Susanna and Lisa in the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque, and cousins in England puzzled by their religious past.<sup>3</sup>

The focus of this chapter is on Lisa Oettinger and her trunks. It starts with the supposition that the collection she bequeathed to her son in 1957 carries a meaning and that the items she selected were meant to serve as its carrier. I therefore ask, what kind of collection did she procure and why? In trying to find the answer, it became clear that there was more to it than meets the eye. Unlike the rest of the Oettinger archive, the contents of Lisa's trunks led towards the unravelling of not just one, but two family stories, which Lisa had knowingly joined – these were her own German–Jewish past and her husband's history rooted in reformist Islam.

At this point in the narrative, a short biographical note may orient the reader. Born in 1908, Lisa Oettinger belonged to the very first generation of women to enter the Art Academy in Berlin. An independent artist, in 1929 she joined the quickly growing Lahore-Ahmadiyya community and in 1933 embraced Islam. She assumed the name Zubaidah and became engaged to the assistant imam Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza, whom she married in 1937 in the Sarajevo mosque. From this city, the couple embarked on an extended journey to the Orient, with Lahore as their final destination. Tragically, Azeez died within weeks of their arrival there. In 1939, Lisa remarried, this time to an Ahmadiyya supporter and wealthy hotel owner named Nazir Ahmad. Having given birth to a child out of wedlock in 1949, she eventually travelled to England to pursue her son's education, leaving India and her husband behind. In 1956, mother and son settled in Woking in the vicinity of another Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque and they remained together for the rest of her long life until, in 2006, Lisa Zubaidah Ahmad died peacefully in her sleep.

This chapter is divided into four stages. Since the objects Lisa selected from her mother's household in 1937 to prepare for life in Lahore relate to a

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3 Gerdien Jonker, *‘Etwas hoffen muß das Herz’: Eine Familiengeschichte von Juden, Christen und Muslimen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).

discussion in the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin at that time, the first stage is to recover that discussion and link it to an item in one of her trunks. The second stage entails examining the trunks she packed in Woking, England, 20 years later in 1957. Once that has been achieved, the items in the trunks are 'unwrapped' and their contents systematically ordered and traced back to the families for whom they serve as a memory – either the Oettinger family (with its links to a Jewish past) or the Ur-Rahman family (with its Mughal connection).

Lisa Oettinger's collection saved two families from being forgotten – the Oettingers from Marienwerder and the Ur-Rahmans from Lahore. The collection allows them not only to live on in their things, but also to join their family traditions in one box. For that reason, her collection is neither specifically Jewish nor specifically Muslim; it is in between. If anything, that has been Lisa's legacy to her son.

## 1 1937: Establishing a Muslim Household with Jewish Heirlooms

Lisa Oettinger was a painter with a long artistic legacy. Her father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been businessmen who valued the beauty of things. Back in Marienwerder, the family had designed and produced lace artefacts and trimmings and, in Berlin, switched to art deco glassware. When it was her time to choose a profession, Lisa studied industrial design and specialized in interior decoration. Her choice was a timely one. When she entered the Berlin Art School in 1927, German interior designs were undergoing something of a revolution. Instead of the heavy furniture and draperies of the German colonial empire, the younger generation preferred white lacquer furnishings, which they combined with Oriental carpets and African art.<sup>4</sup> Lisa's portfolio is filled with Chinese dragons, Japanese women, Egyptian sphinxes, apes, dancing mice, birds of paradise and flowers of every possible colour. They bear ample witness to the fact that she believed in, and catered to, a turn to the Orient as her contribution towards improving individual lifestyles.<sup>5</sup>

Lisa believed in the power of art and took *things* seriously – and in this she was not alone. In 1933, when she converted to Islam in the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin, she met a group of like-minded people who were also looking for ways of living like a Muslim and furnishing their homes accordingly. Their

4 Enno Kaufhold, *Berliner Interieurs 1910–1930: Fotografien von Waldemar Titzenthaler* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2013).

5 Private Oettinger archive, Three Portfolios (Berlin 1927–1931).

animated discussions about the 'New Man' fired her imagination into finding ways of applying her art to certain traditions and expectations with which she was not yet familiar. To understand the objects that later ended up in the trunks beside her bed, we shall therefore have to make a little detour into that mosque and look at the trains of thought that entered the debate and her mind.

As explained before, when Germany realized it had lost the First World War and was branded the guilty party, the country was in turmoil. Berlin had become a centre for paramilitary organizations and uncontrolled street fighting. Food and fuel were scarce. People starved. Missionaries from around the globe were quick to notice that the German people were on their knees. As one of them noted, 'among all the countries of the world, there does not appear to be so much scope for the propagation of Islam as there is in Germany'.<sup>6</sup> Christian, Muslim, Baha'i and Buddhist missionaries soon set up mission posts in Berlin and other German cities and many Germans, especially life reformers, but also Prussian officers with experience of the gas and the trenches, thankfully received them.

Missionaries from the Ahmadiyya reform movement in Lahore, British India, set up shop in Berlin in 1923. They preached a peaceful Islam that urged people to stay away from politics and start working on themselves if they wished to improve the world. The missionaries, who were highly cultured descendants of the landed gentry in northern India, embodied what they preached. The press marvelled at their 'elegance' and 'exotic flair'.<sup>7</sup> In their version of Islam, good manners and a thorough knowledge of Sufi poetry took pride of place.

What the Ahmadiyya missionaries from Lahore sought was intellectual exchange and the establishment of an interface between up-to-date European thought and Muslim quests to modernize Islam. Towards that aim, they built a mosque in Berlin, itself a little marvel of Mughal art, and, on opening its doors, it offered a platform for forward-thinking discussions on the future of mankind. Reform-minded Germans, both Jews and Christians, attended the lectures in great numbers and the sympathetic public soon dubbed Islam a modern, democratic religion that was 'up with the times'. In the course of the mission's existence – it ended in 1939 when German armies invaded Poland

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6 Abdul Sattar Khairi (1885–1944) founded the Berlin Islamic Community in 1922. The quotation is in Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63. See also Suzanne L. Marchand, 'Eastern wisdom in an era of Western despair: Orientalism in 1920s central Europe', in Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (eds) *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 341–61.

7 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 78–9.

and the last missionary left Berlin – 500 visitors actually embraced Islam and even more became 'friends of Islam', the official term for the supporters of the Ahmadiyya quest. In 1930, missionaries, their German friends and converts, and a number of Indian, Persian and Egyptian Muslims joined hands to form the German–Muslim Society (*Deutsch–Moslemische Gesellschaft*), a society for the propagation of Islam and creation of friendships between 'East and West' (Chapter 3).

When Lisa joined the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque, discussions about the 'New Man' held the German–Muslim Society in its grip. In Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s, a lot of people were talking about this imaginary figure, or ideal type imbued with every possible ideology. German followers of the life reform movement, for instance, believed in the individual fashioning of the self through bodily exercise. Consequently, they saw the body as 'a holy temple', to which they assigned 'the holy duty' of remedying 'the social disturbances that we and the whole world experience at present'. From their perspective, to rescue the world, one needed to return to an 'original, healthy state'. Once that stage was reached, they believed, mankind's current problems would disappear in no time at all.<sup>8</sup>

The Nazis' 'New Man' also bore a bodily aspect. On addressing German youths in Nuremberg in 1935, Adolf Hitler unfolded his vision that they should be 'as nimble as greyhounds, as tough as leather and as hard as Krupp's steel'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he invited them to become the 'living tools of the Führer', ready at all times to prove their 'manliness, courage and firmness'.<sup>10</sup> In the reality of the war that followed, these youngsters were thrown in as suicide fighters and sacrificed for his aims.

Between these two extremes, the missionary wing of the Lahore-Ahmadiyya constructed an ideal 'New Man' that borrowed from both, yet differed in decisive ways from the speculations of the others.<sup>11</sup> Most German converts to Islam were life reformers. However, although embracing physical exercise, they strove to alter their lives through experience of the divine, an exercise in which the body was treated as the main gateway to God. Hugo Marcus, president of the German–Muslim Society and himself of Jewish descent, suggested that one start by centring on the body. Writing in 1930, in the tumultuous political

8 Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der neue Mensch: Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004) 13–4.

9 <http://www.dw.com/de/flink-wie-windhunde-zäh-wie-leder-hart-wie-kruppstahl/a-16373027>.

10 Franz Albert Heinen, *Ordensburg Vogelsang: The History of the NS-Elite Training Centre in the Eifel* (Berlin: CH Links, 2014), 53.

11 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 111–3.

and societal climate leading up to National Socialism, he observed that 'in the present situation' the best one can do is keep a sober head and an objective mind. Only those with the courage to hold onto both, Marcus postulated, are properly prepared to encounter the sacred. From his perspective, the 'New Man' was going to be 'a sober man with a glowing heart' who did not eschew the challenge of 'fusing' the extremes in his soul and shaping them into something new. Hinting at 'the sacred experience of eroticism', Marcus suggested that having sex was *the* place to accomplish the impossible.<sup>12</sup>

Although this infuriated the German–Muslim Society, many responded by offering alternatives to their president's provocative suggestion. Among them was Omar Rolf von Ehrenfels, a young baron from Austria who had just been appointed editor of the *Moslemische Revue*, the Ahmadiyya mission's journal edited in Berlin. Instead of eroticism, he recommended looking at how German Muslims moved their bodies, dressed themselves and furnished their homes. Ehrenfels saw the Oriental way of living on the floor as a way to progress. First, he argued, this was an expression of solidarity with nature and thus a feature of advanced civilization – more natural and therefore better than European culture. Instead of putting chairs and tables in their houses, the baron urged, German Muslims should consider sitting, sleeping and praying on the floor, and also serving their meals there. Second, or so he thought, 'the floor perspective' was the way to enhance the beauty of daily life. Only those who master the view 'from below', he wrote, are able 'to design their homes from top to toe in artistic beauty' and through this 'live in beauty'.<sup>13</sup>

With its direct implications for modern interior design, his words went straight to Lisa's heart. In 1937, when she and Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza, assistant imam of the Berlin mosque,<sup>14</sup> got engaged to be married and the two of them prepared to travel to Lahore in British India, she singled out an abundant amount of lace from the family collection. There were handmade table settings, all kinds of trimmings, lace and various fabrics, some of which were large enough to cover a room. To this she added the family album containing photographs dating back to Jewish Marienwerder in the nineteenth-century; landscape paintings that used to hang in the dining room at home; much thumbed German poetry and song books; Schubert's *Earlkönig* as the apotheosis of German culture; a greasy, hand-written book of recipes; her grandmother's

12 Hugo Marcus, 'Die Religion und der Mensch der Zukunft', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1930), 65–74; *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1930), 94–8; and *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 24–31. Quotations on pp. 68, 69, 74 and 97.

13 Baron Omar R. Ehrenfels, 'Der Islam und die junge Generation in Europa', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1931), 81–91. Quotations on p. 85; cf. Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 111.

14 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 60–1.

collection of Romantic poetry; ivory carvings of Goethe and Schiller; her mother's German song books containing piano pieces for four hands; albums filled with postcards for cultured conversation; her father's first tooth, hair lock and worn leather baby shoes; and many more smallish things with a family story.

These were the things with which Lisa Oettinger planned to adorn her future home. The collection suggests that she planned to live on the floor, to cover it with her grandmother's lace and thus adapt to Oriental culture in a manner that she deemed civilized. The collection also intimates that she considered herself a bearer of German culture and was planning to exhibit that knowledge in Lahore. Other German women in the Ahmadiyya mosque confirmed her vision. Some even wrote in the mission journal that 'out there' was a task waiting for the 'European woman', namely to mix with other civilizations and religious traditions yet uphold and spread European, more specifically German, culture.<sup>15</sup>

Comparing the contents of Lisa's suitcases with the lists of household goods that other migrants from Germany drew up before the war, there seems to have been an absence of the more conservative objects. Even when taking into account that, during her move from Lahore to London in 1954, she must have left some of her possessions behind,<sup>16</sup> and that the sizes of the two trunks she rearranged for her son in 1957 imposed certain restrictions, their contents amply demonstrated that her artistic understanding of 'Muslim life' governed her original choices.<sup>17</sup>

In her path-breaking essay, 'Beyond words', Leora Auslander suggests that there is an interplay between objects of the past and the narratives that accompany them.<sup>18</sup> Words may express what happened in the past, but only things can hand on the feeling of what that past was like. Things are never mute, for they serve as tools in many different communications. Their presence in the home for instance enforces certain routines. Things are exhibited, polished and admired, hated, broken and thrown away. They get lost and are found

15 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 113–9; Latifa A. Roessler, 'Ein Arbeitsfeld für die muslimische Europäerin', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1934), 13–6; Hildegard Scharf, Irma Gohl und Hudah J. Schneider, 'Drei Europäerinnen bekennen sich zum Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 53–9.

16 Suhail Ahmad recalled that there had been a notebook in which his mother had written down the things that were left behind or sold, each with a short description and date. Although never thrown away, the notebook remained mislaid throughout the time of my research.

17 Johannes E. Everlein, 'Erste Dinge – Reisegepäck im Exil: Eine phänomenologische Lektüre', in Doerte Bischoff and Joachim Schlör (eds) *Dinge des Exils* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2013), 23–35.

18 Leora Auslander, 'Beyond words', *American Historical Review*, 110 (4) 2005, 1015–45.

again. The very sight of them arouses images, memories and emotions. In our daily dealings with them, things become associated with the memories they embody. They are considered to be spirited objects that are thought to bring the past back to life.

When Lisa chose things from her mother's household in Berlin, she did not yet know what the future held in store. Indeed, shortly after their arrival in Lahore, her husband died and she was left alone in a totally foreign family. We may assume that, in her new surroundings, the lace and trimmings, Friedrich's shoes and her grandmother's cookery book took on different roles, speaking to her from the past in moments of despair and encouraging her to regain her bearings and become independent, thereby triggering the interplay about which Auslander speaks. In the life reform language of her time, Lisa strove to restore the relationship between art, aesthetics and religion in Muslim Lahore, and she believed that things – both old and new – could help her establish that relationship. In the end, she managed. That too is the legacy she wanted to convey to her son.

## 2 1957: Looking Back

In spring 1957, exactly 20 years after she had left Berlin, Lisa Oettinger, now living as Mrs Louise Zubeidah Ahmad in the vicinity of the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque in Woking, England, took stock of her life. Among other things, she filled two large trunks with objects that were meaningful to her, wrapped them in tissue paper and plastic bags, and attached little slips of papers to each on which she explained which of her grandmothers had stitched which piece of lace, where they had been in the family home in Berlin, and which things she had picked up in India, and why. Below, she invariably wrote 'MUST remain in the family!' To these she added the books and music sheets that had originally been bequeathed to her as a girl and that she now bequeathed to him. She put the breakable things in boxes and metal caskets locked with a key. Then, she arranged everything into a pattern that assigned each thing its place in the trunks. Finally, on 8 April 1957, trusting that he would only read it much later in life, she wrote a letter to her son explaining what had gone wrong in the past and why. She placed the sealed envelope on top of the collection. She had created an archive of things. Once she was ready, she padlocked the trunks and put them next to her bed where they remained until her death in 2006 (Figure 4.1).

When the trunks were opened in 2014, the 'reading' of their contents began. However, an archive of things is not a chronological table. Lisa's trunks were



FIGURE 4.1 Lisa's trunks in Woking

filled with objects that pointed in a number of geographical directions, covered different cultural traditions and informed us about historical periods that were sometimes far apart from one another. Forms, textures and smells may have hinted at their origin, but without the story behind them, it was impossible to associate the objects with their original bearers, let alone disclose the memories they encapsulated.

The written instructions that Lisa left behind provided us with minimal information, but nonetheless showed the way. Some of the words she used captured family relations – *Muttchen* (mother), *Großmuttchen* (grandmother),



*Großvater*, (grandfather), ‘your great grandmother’, ‘auntie’, and so forth. Place names like Berlin, Lahore, Karachi and Woking established geographical relationships. It was enough to make a first ordering in which the things initially became separated again: Germany and the Jewish family on the one side, Lahore and the Muslim family on the other.

Where the trunks fell silent on the Oettinger past, Anisah’s stack of family documents came to the rescue. Taking my lead from those, I travelled to Marienwerder, now Kwidzyn in Poland, to establish their origins. I then proceeded to visit cemeteries and archives to trace the family history to Berlin.

The political situation in Pakistan proved too precarious at the time of research to conduct a comparable family search there. To gain knowledge about the Ur-Rahman family, I therefore consulted the photograph albums that Suhail Ahmad still keeps. The album, titled ‘Lange Mandi’<sup>19</sup> contained about 300 photographs of home interiors, festive occasions, picnics, hikes and boat outings on the Ravi river near Lahore, the bungalow in which Lisa had established her independent life and in which her second husband, Nazir Ahmad, the hotel proprietor, had become Suhail’s adoptive father. Lisa had painstakingly given each of these photographs an explanatory caption. Here, words like *amajee* (mother), *abajee* (father), ‘my brothers’, ‘my sisters’, helped to disentangle the intricate web of relationships. In addition, Ahmadiyya elders provided me with background information. Where everything else failed, there was still the letter she wrote to her son.

In the trunks we also found traces of Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza, Lisa’s first love and legitimate husband. Although their relationship was short-lived, the five years in which they got to know each other, fall in love and eventually marry affected her further life deeply. The memories of him that she treasured were almost all of a textual nature – his declarations of love, the books and dedications he presented to her, his notes on a *Hafiz* translation, his collection of aphorisms of German poets, and the lectures he gave in the Berlin mosque. Besides, there was his prayer mat and the medals and badges he acquired in Berlin. These things, together with the photograph albums she filled with his pictures, were enough to grasp the nature of their friendship. They also explain her decision to join their respective families in one and the same collection.

I shall now attempt to order the contents of the trunks with a view to figuring out how they were put to use. For good measure, I start with the oldest layer containing the Oettinger family treasures, which were chosen in Berlin. They

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19 *Mandi* means market in Urdu. *Lange Mandi* is a Muslim bazaar within the city walls of old Lahore. The Ur-Rahman (Baksch) family lived in one of its ancient merchant palaces (*havalis*).

are followed by Azeez's possessions and his gifts to Lisa, which tell us something about their life in Berlin and the nature of their friendship. Then, to end, I look over the things she collected in Lahore, which reveal her emotional ties to the Ur-Rahman family and a deeply felt respect for the beauty of traditional Mughal handicrafts.

### 3 Links with the Jewish Past

On putting together all the things chosen in Berlin in 1937, it becomes abundantly clear that they originate from three different households. When great-grandmother Bertha Oettinger died in Berlin in 1906, her things, or at least some of them, found their way into the home of her son Louis and his wife Johanna. When Johanna died in 1914, her son Friedrich, who lived with his parents until he was 34, would have chosen things that were either dear to him, were still useful, or that embodied a family memory. Whatever there may have been among all that stuff – gold-rimmed porcelain crockery, fruit bowls with copper adornments, porcelain dogs and shepherds, plaster and ebony figures from far-flung countries, mantelpiece clocks, silver salt sprinklers, sunset paintings and other knick-knacks that cluttered up the Prussian house and appear in some of the family photographs – Lisa took none of that, not even her father's art deco glass collection. Instead, when it was her turn to choose, she focused exclusively on artefacts from the family's lace producing days and things that came from her father's family that encapsulated their view of German culture.

Remarkably, none of these objects came from the Lāwen family, the family of Lisa's mother. In fact, if ever there were a story attached to this branch of the family, it was never recorded or even mentioned. The things that Lisa packed unerringly bore the markings of German–Jewish culture through three generations of Oettinger women. The list contains:

- at least one suitcase filled with lace and trimmings;<sup>20</sup>
- a suitcase of tablecloths and napkins;
- the family photograph album (1871–1914);
- the handwritten family cookery book (1871–1957);
- five albums filled with postcards (1880s–1937);
- several framed colour photographs of landscapes near Berlin (c.1910);
- several framed colour prints of Berlin streets (c.1850);

20 Suhail Ahmad remembers that, when settling in England after the war, his mother had sold a whole suitcase of lace to British museums to cover their expenses.

- books from the family library;
- sheet music with pieces of famous German composers;
- carved profiles of Goethe and Schiller (c.1850)
- a padlocked box containing family jewellery; and
- baby Friedrich's hair lock, milk teeth and shoes.

How she intended using these objects has already been clarified. She chose the lace, tablecloth and napkins to prepare for a life amid beauty on the floor. She selected the postcards, landscapes, Goethe and Schiller, books and music to sustain her knowledge of German culture. She took the family photograph album to bear witness to her cultured origins and the cookery book would remind her of home and of all the pleasant hours she had spent in the kitchen; it would also encourage her to continue the family tradition of trying out new recipes. Friedrich's baby things were what probably personified her family recollections. Back in Berlin, the future of the departing couple was still unconfirmed, but the hint at Lisa's own fertility seems to have been straightforward enough.

All this can be established with some certainty. What is practically impossible to find out, however, is how these things were actually put to use. A study of the family pictures in the 'Lange Mandi' album yields some idea of how the Ur-Rahman family lived and how Lisa, once she had gained her independence, furnished her own home.

The very first pictures in the album tell us that the Ur-Rahman family routinely lived on the floor and covered the reception rooms with white sheets to receive the couple. In daily life, however, the floors were covered with a non-descript brownish material. None of the photographs show the lace that Lisa had brought, but then only five weeks after their rapturous reception, Azeez died of appendicitis; the family photographs then show Lisa visibly losing weight. Her brothers in law, Khalid, Hamid and Habib surrounded her with loving care and, probably in an attempt to make her eat something at all, carried a table and chairs to the roof so that they could eat 'European-style'.

In the summer of 1938, a year after her arrival, Khalid Ur-Rahman arranged for Lisa to move into a bungalow where she could live on her own and teach at the near-by Islamia high school for girls. There are a number of photographs of the family in the bungalow garden, where they can be seen chatting and spreading a tablecloth on the grass to prepare for the inevitable picnic. Meanwhile, wicker chairs on the veranda show that Lisa, when alone, took refuge in a more comfortable seating position and two pictures of her painting studio confirm this. After her marriage to Nazir Ahmad in July 1939, a studio was built on the side of the bungalow. The photographs, captioned 'THE STUDIO HOUSE-WARMING PARTY', show a big studio table and some low comfortable chairs.

Apart from these glimpses, how Lisa put the Oettinger family treasures to use – the lace, books and music – remains largely unknown. Nonetheless, many of the objects in the trunks show telling signs of wear, thus demonstrating that she actually did surround herself with them. Four examples have been singled out to explain this.

The first one is a heavy package containing large photographs in gold frames tied together with string. On an attached slip of paper, she had written: 'Mum's home country. Pictures of walks and lakes in and around Berlin. Coloured photographic prints dated around 1900, which hung in our dining room and were taken by me to India, where I put them into the present frames. Mum'.

The second consists of numerous plastic bags, each with a little slip of paper in a corner saying 'For Suhail only' or 'MUST remain in the family', containing the stiff linen napkins, tablecloths and handkerchiefs that once made up the stock of her household and that are so beautifully sewn with fine filet inlay work and embroidered rims. Other plastic bags contain specimens of embroidery and bone lace. Their accompanying messages read: 'Done by your great great grandmother', 'This was made by *Urgrossmutterchen*', '*Grossmutterchen* made these embroideries and designed them also!' or simply, 'MUST remain in the family!' Clearly, this was the part of her heritage that Lisa treasured the most.

The cookery book shows especially many signs of wear and tear. Begun by Lisa's grandmother Johanna in 1871, it collects recipes from around the world. Instead of following the Jewish tradition of *kashrut*, the kosher kitchen that forbids pork, shellfish and the combination of meat and milk, Johanna entered 'hash of wild boar', 'goose-liver paté' and 'stuffed crab', thus reaching out to a universe far beyond that of her ancestors.<sup>21</sup> Lisa's mother Emilia continued the tradition and also used the booklet to teach her daughters how to cook. In India, Lisa added kebabs, chutneys and chappatis, in Woking scones and lemon curd. The many grease stains on the pages speak a language of their own.

The only item in the trunks to cover all the Oettingers since they came to settle in Marienwerder in 1836, is the family photograph album – a brown leather case with copper feet, a heavy copper lock, and copper corners to shield the pages. Johanna Lewinsohn started it in 1871 with studio photographs of family members in stilted poses on the occasion of her marriage to Louis Oettinger. Pride of place is given to the engagement photographs of Isidor Oettinger and Bertha Lewinsohn (who married in 1838), followed by the wedding pictures of Louis Oettinger and Johanna Lewinsohn (who married in 1871), and then those of Friedrich Oettinger and Emilia Lāwen (who married in 1907). Pictures of their siblings, children and cousins make it perfectly plain that this

21 Gerdien Jonker, *Setting the Table in Prussia and Lahore: A Jewish Recipe Book in Exile*, www.non-lieux de l'exil/DisplacedObjects, 2015.

was a wealthy family with an appetite for luxurious things and the latest fashion. This album was once an expensive article, a source of family pride and meant to stand on a separate table to be shown to visitors on festive occasions. When Johanna died in 1914, that tradition was discontinued, but after a gap of almost 40 years we once again discern a baby. It is a studio portrait of Suhail on a bearskin taken in Karachi in 1949.

From a combination of the snapshots of the Ur-Rahman family and the objects introduced above, we get a sense of Lisa's life in Lahore. First, the Ur-Rahman family cared for Lisa in her distress, surrounded her with love and found a way of allowing her to live an independent 'European' life yet remain part of the family. For her part, as many of the captions in the 'Lange Mandi' album show, Lisa loved her husband's family dearly and received them whenever she could. When she set up her own household in Lahore, she unpacked her suitcases, reframed the pictures of Berlin and hung them on her walls, put her grandmother's cookery book to intensive use, probably (though this is just a guess) spread her great grandmother's lace on the dining table, certainly used the tablecloth and napkins for the many picnics she organized, and almost certainly would open her family photograph album to show the Ur-Rahmans from whence she had come, to explain who was who and to show them what they looked like.

#### 4 Links with the Mughal Past

To understand how the Oettinger family became entangled with the Ur-Rahman family at all, we have to return to the Oettinger home in Berlin. Lisa's mother Emilia was a cultured woman of from a Jewish family that had already converted a hundred years ago. She was moreover a declared 'agnostic' and a dedicated follower of the life reform movement. Moreover, she was a woman with money to spare, which she gladly spent on the biodynamic foodstuffs grown in the life reform garden plots around Berlin and on nature outings with her daughters. However, in 1923, after having lost his money in the crash, her husband fell seriously ill and, while he was recovering in hospital, Emilia had to reorganize their lives to protect what little was left of the family income. Like many bourgeois families, she let rooms to students, who tended to be in possession of ample foreign currency. Susanna, not yet out of school, taught them German, while Lisa sold her designs to studios specializing in interior decoration.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–85, 113–9.

Once on that track, a quick succession of events took their lives in a new direction. In 1928, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, the newly appointed imam at the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin, rented a room in the Oettingers' flat. Susanna taught him German and her mother Emilia took him on hikes in the woods around Berlin. The family got to know his Indian colleagues at the mosque and, by the next year, all three Oettinger women were celebrating Eid al-Fitr at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.<sup>23</sup> Then, in 1930, when converts and 'friends of Islam' founded the German–Muslim Society, Emilia joined its board as a non-Muslim member.

On observing these events from his hospital bed, Friedrich was more than supportive. Since it was the aim of the German–Muslim Society 'to stimulate an understanding of Islam ... through lectures, intensive community life ... and nurturing friendships between Muslims and their friends in Europe',<sup>24</sup> the Muslim connection seemed to fit nicely with his own experience of side-stepping his Jewish roots. In his time, Friedrich had also been a life reformer and converting to another religion suited his way of thinking well. Besides, the mosque seemed to offer the right kind of environment for his daughters to find suitable husbands. The Indian Muslim elites who supported the Ahmadiyya reform movement and had come to Berlin to further their studies usually belonged to the zamindar, the landed gentry of northern India. As cosmopolitans with a culture of their own, their understanding of Islam was rational and highly internalized, so thus refined their inner selves.

In this cultured environment, replete with potential, Lisa soon met her future husband. Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza (1906–1937) came from the Bakhsh line of Muslim saints and scholars who, since the twelfth century, had left their stamp on Lahore.<sup>25</sup> Originally, he was sent to Berlin to pursue his studies in physics, for the Berlin faculty was considered among the best in the world, but after receiving his degree in 1935, he lingered on as assistant imam, gave lectures on Islam in several institutions, accepted a part in a movie being made in the Babelsberg film studios, was frequently seen on the tennis courts, acquired a journalist's badge with which to cover the Berlin Olympics in 1936, and trained as a volunteer fireman for the Nazi organization, *Luftschutz tut not* (air protection is needed), which prepared Germans for future firebomb attacks.<sup>26</sup>

23 Private Oettinger archive, Emilia Oettinger's photograph collection 1928–1939.

24 Statute of the *Deutsch–Moslemische Gesellschaft* and Protocol No. 1, Register Office Berlin-Charlottenburg, VR No. 8769, 10 April 1930.

25 Mirza means nobleman in Persian and points to a high lineage.

26 Anon, 'Dr Azeez Mirza', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1938), 1–3.

Azeez was waiting, no doubt, to marry his 'Lischen', a wait beset with problems, for which he eventually found the winning solution.

The badges suggest that he did not shy away from associating with the Nazi regime. Azeez was an admirer of the Olympic Games, which the Nazis organized, and the press badge that he acquired from the British Embassy allowed him to visit on a daily basis. The reason why he volunteered to train as a fireman was in case the mosque and adjacent mission house were bombed in the war that everyone was expecting. These acts speak of a resolute and pragmatic attitude, of compliance with, rather than disgust for, the German government. Like other Muslims in Berlin, Azeez looked at the Germans with curiosity, as they were expected to help Indians and other colonized peoples to gain their independence. That Lisa held onto his badges suggests that he must have been proud of them.

The things of his that Lisa brought to Lahore, including his books, badges, presents, texts, prayer mat and the photograph album documenting his role in the mosque, together paint a picture of this young Indian intellectual. With his little beard and dark complexion, always solemnly rising to the occasion wearing a tuxedo for lectures, a multi-coloured turban for ritual occasions, or a camel hair mantle with silk cloth for forages into nature, he must have stood out as the proverbial stranger in Nazi Berlin. What did this young man do to smooth the differences and explain Islam as their common ground?

During their courtship, Azeez gave Lisa delicate little treasures, including a pearl necklace, small green jade bowl, and a star pendant with Quartz inlay, which formed part of the Ur-Rahman heritage and was returned to that family after her death.<sup>27</sup> Also, as soon as he arrived, he started to buy books that marked his forays into European culture. Among his first purchases was Max Henning's translation of the Quran, which he dedicated to Lisa, noting, 'Important things are never considered enough. Goethe. Azeez, 23 March 1933'. His curiosity led him to Goethe's *Faust*, Rousseau's *Emile*, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Greek and Roman culture, European philosophy, and the 'New Man' debate in the mosque. His own views on the matter were documented in two speeches he gave in the mosque in 1933, in which he condemned the ideal of an iron hard, inhuman super hero, whose body must express his power. Instead, he recommended jihad as a way of obtaining inner refinement. Ahmadiyya teachings maintain that the more people speak of war, the more they commit barbarous acts, so advocated looking in on oneself and focusing on 'polishing' one's soul. Azeez too made an effort to be a good person and 'breathe' a cultured

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27 Private Oettinger archive, 'Family heirlooms belonging to Suhail Ahmad, August 2006', unpublished document.

atmosphere. Because of his criticism of Nazi ideology, those speeches were never published. But Lisa held onto two copies, typewritten on long (no longer standard-sized) sheets of paper, tied together with an official looking coloured band and two iron stitches, bearing witness to the mosque's treatment of texts it considered central to its mission.

Azeez took seriously the attempt to bring together European and Muslim 'civilizations' in the things and attitudes of daily life. Taking Lisa's infatuation with the German Romantic poets as an entry point, he made her multiple presents of Sufi poetry, among them al-Hallaj, Rumi, the *Rubaiyat*, and the songs of Mirza Schaffy. They seem to have touched a nerve in her religious feelings, which she shared with large parts of the Berlin mosque community.<sup>28</sup> Seen from a Muslim viewpoint, German Romanticism prepared the way for Sufi love poetry, just as Sufi poetry prepared the way for the core tenets of Islam. Indeed, Romantic Germans do not seem to have had much trouble understanding them. For the German-Indian couples in the mosque, Azeez and Lisa included, poetry functioned as a bridge between Eastern and Western mentalities, preparing the ground for a meeting rooted in aesthetics and emotions rather than in religious rule and theology.

In the trunks, we also found his prayer mat. One can easily imagine that Lisa used it after his death. If so, it provided a continued, emotional communion between the lovers, which only came to an end when she added the mat to her collection of things.

Incidentally, selecting the prayer mat, perhaps more than any of the other objects, points to her state of mind in 1957 when she was compiling the collection for her son. In 1957, she had settled in England for good and, looking ahead into a fast changing future, was trying to find ways of combining her painting with earning money and providing her son with a proper British education. At that time, the mosque in Woking still offered her a rich community life (this ended in 1965 when Pakistani migrants seized control of it), but times were already changing. In the near future, Lisa with Suhail in toe would attend yoga classes and venture into meditation. Although she remained a Muslim and was eventually buried in the Muslim cemetery in Woking, the ideology of the life reform movement continued to inform her attitude towards religion. To her, religion meant experiment and synthesis, rather than holding onto one tradition.

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28 By the mid 1930s, Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranschär (1884–1962), Berlin's most popular speaker on Eastern mysticism, was regularly invited to speak to packed audiences in the mosque. His books and speeches synthesize Sufi poetry with Romantic poetry and Christian suffering, see Chapter 3.



Lisa's own synthesis bore the name Bo Yin Ra.<sup>29</sup> For the rest of her life, she held onto a slim volume in linen, *Das Buch vom Glück* (The Book of Happiness), decorated with art deco vignettes and set in Gothic German script. It tells the story of returning to nature, of deep romantic feelings and the power to create from scratch. On the front page she noted, 'this book is a very great talisman and a *mysterious treasure*. ... Please respect it as irreplaceable'. More than the translation of the Quran, more even than the language of the Sufi poets, this was her understanding of what religion was about, and another legacy for her son.

## 5 How Memory Creates a Family

Knowledge, according to the historian Peter Burke, is 'cooked'. It is processed, codified, tested, interpreted, handed down, heightened to capture the essence of one's tradition and sense of 'who one is' and, eventually, forgotten.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the Oettingers, they gathered the knowledge they needed for their upward mobility through the arts of needlework (designing and making fashionable clothes and home furnishings), cooking (which involved extending their horizons), reading and performing music (which gave them an individual route into German culture), as well as through the art of conversion (which allowed them to escape the constrictions of their social position). From Marienwerder to Berlin, a host of family belongings carried this knowledge down the generations, with the lace, linen, embroidery, cookery book, photograph album, postcard collections, sheet music and poetry books serving as its vehicle.

Rummaging through Lisa's trunks, we also came across a number of objects belonging to the cultural tradition of Mughal northern India, which conveyed a knowledge that was very different from that of the European German-Jewish tradition. From these treasures, Lisa seems to have gleaned the kind of knowledge that helped her sustain life in a foreign country. Among these were some of the things that she had worn (saris, Indian blouses, mantillas, straw shoes and Mughal jewellery) and the things with which she had adorned her home (precious glassware, ingeniously crafted toys, masks and thin paper cuts with intricate patterns). Prior to their storage in the trunks, the saris had been

29 Bo Yin Ra was the pen name of the Austrian painter Josef Anton Schneiderfranken (1876–1943), who taught that happiness lay in the use of one's ability to create with one's own hands.

30 Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

carefully folded, wrapped in cotton and tied with string. The accompanying explanatory note states: 'Saris, gold blouse *Gharara*, petticoats & other blouses worn by Mum in Lahore.'

In Lahore, Lisa became Zubeidah Begum. She acquired the title not only on the strength of having been the wife of a nobleman, *Mirza*, but also because she had become a genuine Muslim, adapting herself to an Oriental way of life and siding with the Muslims against the colonial government. Being highly respected for her wisdom and someone from whom people sought advice, she in turn tried to live up to their expectations by dressing elegantly in Indian saris. Although none her elaborate Mughal jewellery has survived, her photographs nonetheless convey her status. They show a distinguished woman with excellent posture, straight-backed and standing apart from the others. In England, her memory lingered on. When she died in Woking a good sixty years later, Ahmadis from all over the country gathered at her graveside to pay their respects.<sup>31</sup>

She carefully placed the things with which she used to decorate her bungalow in Lahore in straw baskets prior to assigning them a place in the trunks. This time, there was no accompanying note explaining their function, but from looking at those tender little clay figures, glass bottles, wooden masks and paper cuts, it is evident that Lisa was deeply interested in and drew inspiration from Mughal crafts and patterns. One photograph in the 'Lange Mandi' album shows her at work in her studio in Murree, a mountain hill station where rich Lahoris sought refuge from the summer heat. She is painting a pattern on the fringe of a tablecloth, much as she used to do for industrial cloth production in Berlin. The difference is in the quality of the pattern, which is no longer 'Oriental' but an exquisite graphic design reminiscent of traditional Mughal art.

Things are never mute, yet they cannot speak. The knowledge that Lisa acquired in Lahore enabled her to survive and it showed in the way she dressed, lived up to societal expectations, adapted her art to a different culture, yet managed to live on her own in a country where women were not expected to do so. In this respect, the Lahore collection was not unlike the German Jewish collection handed down through the Oettinger family. It was this knowledge that she wanted to pass on to her son. However, when he came to receive the archive of things that she had assembled for him, his insights were his own and not hers, so they triggered memories other than the ones that Lisa had meant them to conserve.




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31 Interview with Nasir Ahmad, an elder of the Lahore-Ahmadiyya community in England and himself a *Lahori Ahmadi* (15 September 2016).

History is unpredictable. In the sealed letter Lisa placed on top of the collection before closing her archive, she explained to her son how very lonely she had been in Lahore and how much she had longed for her mother. Yet, when she went to look for her family after the war, they refused to return to India with her because she had fallen in love with a much younger marine officer from Karachi who was working in the Woking mosque and they somewhat rashly had a child together, Suhail. Unfortunately, the marine officer had been promised to her sister Susanna to ease her entry into India (which by then had become Pakistan). Understandably, Susanna felt that Lisa had 'betrayed' her and the sisters quarrelled. In the end, Lisa had to return to India alone. Her husband Nazir Ahmad graciously took her back, adopted the child as his own and protected her against slander. However, his family objected and in the end they both agreed that Lisa would be better off in England, so that is where she took her son in 1954. Sadly, the rift between the two sisters was never healed and it was only when they had both died, Susanna in 2005, Lisa a year later, that their children got together to contemplate the heritage that their mothers had left behind. The trunks and the documents provided them with a key, but the memories that the objects and descriptions aroused in the cousins differed significantly from the messages they were once meant to convey. From the perspective of the heirs, the memories they stirred were of unhappy childhoods, endless quarrels between the two sisters whom they remembered most for their biting arrogance, rejection of fat or unhappy people, and obsession with German culture. Thus, Lisa's legacy, through which she intended to pass on the precious knowledge of how to survive and which, heavily infused with emotion, conveyed generations of Oettinger experience and a cultural knowledge of northern India, had finally reached its end.

## The Sting of Desire: Hugo Marcus's Theology of Male Friendship

In this chapter, we turn to Hugo Marcus (1880–1966) at a time when the turn-of-the-century German emancipatory debates and his encounter with Indian Muslims in the interwar period were culminating in his theological writings on exalted male friendship. What did this German homosexual of the 1880s make of the distinguished Ahmadi gentlemen from faraway Lahore? What actually happened when the latter made a place for this elderly man who described himself as painfully shy? And how was his theology received? To answer these questions, I continue my earlier discussion of Hugo Marcus, which addressed his conversion to Islam and role as leading thinker of the mosque community in Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

As an adolescent, Hugo Marcus acquired the habit of writing on a daily basis and kept faithful to it for the rest of his life. His writings were on the thoughts that crossed his mind, rather than on any of the things he or others said or did, for reality was not a topic he was able to address. What he noted in his diaries and published in a wide range of books and journals initially took the form of short stories about exalted male friendship, the numbers of which ran into the hundreds. These were followed by thousands of aphorisms on the tension between Eros and Heroism. In fact, as the latter commented on the former, the two were often published together. Like so many of his generation, Hugo Marcus borrowed these topics from Friedrich Nietzsche. As I explain later in this chapter, they aptly express the inner tension with which he wrestled throughout his life.

After studying philosophy at Berlin University, he turned his mind to beauty—in music, landscapes and the human body. For Marcus, any thought of aesthetics posed inevitable questions about balance and belonging, questions that European thought had insufficiently addressed, or so he felt. In his dissertation, he suggested rethinking the issue of unity in the domain of man's innermost feelings, the soul, stating that every soul is full of opposition, and that the feelings it engenders are by nature lawless. He called it the antinomy of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016), 109–13, 144–5, 199–205.

soul. Unity, he concluded, consists of a large variety of forms and feelings that may be interdependent, yet are never the same.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the hundreds of articles and short stories mentioned above, Marcus's search for aesthetics and the acknowledgement of diversity also found expression in a dozen books. His first novel (*Das Frühlingsglück*, Spring happiness) was published when he was 20, his last booklet with aphorisms (*Einer sucht den Freund*, Looking for a friend) when he was 81.<sup>3</sup> In different ways, they mark Hugo Marcus's lifelong quest for the seemingly impossible, which was to escape the labyrinth of his mind, dissolve himself and fuse with another.

At the age of 51, Hugo Marcus converted to Islam. He was not exactly an impulsive man, for he had been an active member of the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin for the best part of eight years. During that time Marcus tutored young Indian students in German language and European culture. He also organized lectures, edited the mosque journal and engaged in intellectual debates with the Ahmadiyya missionaries. These activities brought him into contact with men from a wholly different cultural milieu, and one that encouraged the sorts of male friendships that seemed to bring Marcus out of himself. These encounters unleashed in him a torrent of writings, in which he embarked on no less than a complete reappraisal of European thought in the light of his newly acquired knowledge of Muslims and Muslim culture. He studied towering figures like Goethe, Nietzsche, Kant and Spinoza, which allowed him to remain on his home ground yet apply their insights to his understanding of Islam. He was now able to describe all the demons with which he had been grappling since his youth and that had troubled him for the better part of his life in a new light – be they about love, heroism, friendship, pride, modesty, belief, hope, sin, redemption, magic, miracles, mysticism, asceticism, justice or unity. He acquired a new, less constrained, understanding of these issues and 20 of his treatises were published in the mosque journal, *Die Moslemische Revue*. The Central Library in Zurich, which houses the Hugo Marcus collected papers has another 50 unpublished typescripts on the topic of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

2 Hugo Marcus, *Die Philosophie des Monopluralismus: Grundzüge einer analytischen Naturphilosophie und eines ABC im Versuch* (Berlin: Concordia Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1907), 31–55.

3 Hugo Marcus, *Frühlingsglück: Die Geschichte einer ersten Liebe* (Dresden: E. Pierson's Verlag, 1900); Hugo Marcus, *Einer sucht den Freund. Gedanken zum Thema Das Ewige und der Freund* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1961).

4 Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 8 (two containers). The collected papers are stored in 40 containers, numbered Box 1 to 13. The order of the papers reflects the order in which Hugo Marcus left them behind. Apart from an approximate enumeration, there is no archival development.

Writing was Hugo Marcus's life. His collected papers contain a bundle of 35 typescripts with titles including 'The Library', 'The Book', 'How a Book Emerges', 'The Wandering Book', 'A Predestination Theory of Books', 'On the Eternal Fragment', 'Portrait of a Reader', 'The Elite Reader', 'From the Diary of a Literate Man', 'Disastrous Critic', and many more.<sup>5</sup> His writings were his reality. When he fled from Germany on 23 August 1939, he put everything he had ever written in his luggage – yellowed diaries and handwritten manuscripts, typescripts with handwritten corrections, galley proofs fresh from the publisher and his many books. Other Jewish refugees took household goods and winter clothes.<sup>6</sup> What Hugo Marcus chose to carry across the border was 40 years' worth of his own writings, weighing at least a hundred kilos. Once he had settled in Switzerland and was able to receive letters again, his lifelong friend and partner Roman wrote from Berlin: 'My dear, dear Hugo, I am sure you will feel at home wherever your thoughts are.'<sup>7</sup> More to the point, Hugo Marcus only felt at ease if he had all his texts around him.

A short overview of how Marcus's writings were received is perhaps called for here. After he died in 1966, his works, which during his lifetime received little attention, were totally forgotten. Among his collected papers, there are 20 reviews of his books that came out between 1900 and 1912 and they are not always favourable. One reviewer called *The Philosophy of Mono-Pluralism* 'the work of a dilettante'. Another referred to him as 'more a poet than a logician'.<sup>8</sup> In 1912, the leading German *Philosophical Lexicon* assigned Hugo Marcus a 90-word entry. After that, German lexicons ignored him for a whole century until, in 2008, the Swiss finally rediscovered him as a philosopher.<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s, Marcus's conversion received fleeting attention in studies on Islam in Germany, but merely because he had been a Jew.<sup>10</sup> At the start of the new century, interest in Hugo Marcus was rekindled because of his link with homosexual circles.

5 Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 4.

6 Johannes F. Everlein, 'Erste Dinge – Reisegepäck im Exil: Eine phänomenologische Lektüre', in Doerte Bischoff and Joachim Schlör (eds) *Dinge des Exils* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2013), 23–35.

7 Letter from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus, dated 12 December 1939. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.2.1.

8 Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 11.

9 Apart from the 90-word entry on him in Rudolf Eisler, *Philosophen-Lexikon* (Berlin: 1912), 452; the other two were Anon, 'Hugo Marcus', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (2008), [www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D44511.php](http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D44511.php); Anon, 'Hugo Marcus', *Personenlexikon des Kanton Basel-Landschaft* (24 November 2014), [www.personenlexikon.bl.ch/Hugo\\_Marcus](http://www.personenlexikon.bl.ch/Hugo_Marcus).

10 Burkhard Schöder, 'Faschistischer Islam?' *Tip: Berliner Magazin* Nr. 22 (17 October 1966), 62. The text consists of an interview with Gerhard Höpp and Yahya Schülzke on the history of 'Islam and the Third Reich'.

Incidentally, homosexual was a word he himself avoided throughout his writings. In 2008, the Lahore-Ahmadiyya community published a portrait of ‘The German Muslim Dr Hamid Hugo Marcus’, which gave ample attention to his correspondence with *Der Kreis* (The Circle), a homosexual journal founded in Zurich in 1947 that published some of the lofty male friendship stories that Marcus wrote after the war. The portrait, however, failed to include an overview of his writings on Islam.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the historian Marc Baer dedicated two texts to Marcus in which he tried to make sense of a homosexual man being interested in Islam, while barely considering Marcus the novelist.<sup>12</sup>

Reading through the 40 containers of Marcus’s papers in Zurich, one begins to understand the silence that surrounded him. In his struggle to reconcile his body and mind, he reveals a painful history of repression. Because reality was one subject that he could not and would not address, his thoughts are phrased in a terse, almost obscure language that at times makes their reading difficult. Yet, to understand his transformation from a German modernist occupying a respectable niche in society to becoming the spokesperson for the Berlin mosque for 16 whole years, these writings are of the essence. In this chapter, I shall thus take a look at them.

## 1 Coming of Age around 1900

Two years after the Second World War ended, Hugo Marcus’s mother died at the age of 93. Her final address had been an old people’s home in Zurich, which was not far from her son who, ever since he had fled from Germany, had lived in rented rooms near Basel. During the war years, which she spent in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, they had been in regular contact. Every Friday he wrote her a letter; every other Sunday he visited. When she died, the son, torn by grief and unable to take part in the funeral, sat down at his desk to write a funeral speech that summarized her achievements.<sup>13</sup>

11 Manfred Backhausen, ‘Der deutsche Muslim Dr Hamid Hugo Marcus’, in *Die Lahore-Ahmadiyya-Bewegung in Europa* (Wembley, UK: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, 2008), 110–9.

12 Marc David Baer, ‘Muslim encounters with Nazism and the Holocaust: the Ahmadi of Berlin and Jewish convert to Islam Hugo Marcus’. *The American Historical Review*, 120 (1), 2015, 140–71; Marc David Baer, ‘Protestant Islam in Weimar Germany: Hugo Marcus and “The Message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Europe”’, *New German Critique*, 44 (2017), 163–200.

13 The following draws from the funeral speech, an account of the Hepner genealogy by Unknown, and a series of biographical sketches that Marcus wrote when he was applying for Restitution in 1957. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

Cäcilie Hepner (1854–1947) was born into a family of merchants that had acquired its wealth through liquors and spirits. They lived in Jaraczewo near Posen (now Poznan in Poland), where they owned an impressive mansion. Theirs was a cultured family that surrounded itself with books and music. Cäcilie, the eldest daughter, was allowed to develop her talents as she wished. Early on, she studied music and, before marrying a ‘distinguished but somewhat difficult man’, Hugo’s father, she became a singer and performer of German Romantic music. Their best moments, the son would recall, were in music. Musical performance brought the family together. It glossed over the tensions and facilitated an intense feeling of belonging, of melting into one. The mother sang German Lieder, Schubert’s *Winterreise* and *Schöne Müllerin*, Schumann’s settings of Goethe poems, Gustav Mahler’s *Lied von der Erde*. The son accompanied her on the piano, performed Beethoven’s *Appassionata* for four hands with his brothers, and assisted in piano quintets. These moments of bliss were among Hugo’s earliest memories, and they constituted the pillars of his adolescence. Being united in music was the highest feeling he knew. It was to become his benchmark for attaining closeness to somebody else and, because it was she who gave him the experience, he loved his mother more than anybody else.

Hugo Marcus explored that theme in his first Romantic novel, *Frühlingsglück*. Shy, sensitive Guido courts Adeline, who is of noble descent and with whom he shares a longing for beauty ‘of mind and body’. Together they listen to music and together they play Mendelsohn’s violin concerto and the Beethoven Sonatas for violin. They are a high-minded couple, but in his pocket Guido carries a photograph of Ernst, a boy with whom he only exchanged a few words. Guido pines for Ernst and, despite their musical bond, feels lonely in Adeline’s company. He grows resentful. In the end, it is she who tells him that they have to part. *Adé und auf Wiedersehen* (adieu and goodbye) are the laconic words with which she sends him away. For the author, it marks the end of his attempts to find a suitable woman. He will live with his mother for the rest of her life.

In his short story called ‘From distant days: notes from a time long before the war – not of public but of spiritual interest’, Marcus recalls how his life evolved from that point:

Krupp is on his way to Capri. Well, you know! They say that he loves boys. It was even written in a Naples daily. What is Krupp to me? Nothing. And really, that was our relationship. Nonetheless, he was the first man about whom I learned that he felt like I did. I was filled to the brim with mystical imaginations and presumptions about that kind of man. So, what would



he look like and how would he feel about life? Although I myself was a young man of that kind, it did not occur to me to contact him. He simply happened to be the first one I ever saw. He caused in me wonderful, free imaginations, spreading in every direction.<sup>14</sup>

Rare in his work, this account is rooted in an actual historical occurrence. Friedrich Alfred Krupp, the famous industrialist, the German ‘canon king’ who employed 20,000 steelworkers and was close to the Kaiser, was also a regular visitor to Capri. Hugo’s family often visited the island and stayed in the same hotel as Krupp. Marcus’s father had been a steel manufacturer, a producer of trains and rails, so the two men would have been acquainted.

Marcus recollects sitting in the corner of a hotel lounge watching numerous visitors congregating around the great man, Krupp. As he is sitting there he weaves an imaginary web between them, in which he feels that, in a mystical way, being ‘that kind’ automatically ties them together. He imagines himself and Krupp being like Hadrian and Antinous, the famous lovers from antiquity. When he learns, some months later, that Krupp had killed himself, the young Hugo was shattered. Thrown into deep mourning, he feels that Krupp was the friend with whom he shared his most intimate thoughts. To our understanding of how Hugo Marcus communicated, the story is paradigmatic.

However, more was at stake here. Around 1900, denunciations of homosexuality and sexual slander were regularly featured in the headlines of European newspapers. Media attention in Germany focused on members of the court and the Prussian military. There were spectacular court cases, with the defendants convicted of ‘improper’ sexual acts and widely slandered.<sup>15</sup> Prominent men ran the risk of being accused of the kind of ‘improper sexual behaviour’ in which ‘the rich and degenerate’ would indulge. The denunciation of Friedrich Alfred Krupp (he committed suicide in June 1902) was only one such example. It so happened that Hugo Marcus had been watching Krupp at close range as the drama unfolded.

When Marcus came of age, a growing number of public spaces were becoming available in Berlin where men who felt attracted to other men could meet. The researcher and eyewitness Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) describes a

14 Hugo Marcus, ‘Aus fernen Tagen: Aufzeichnungen aus einer Zeit lange vor dem Krieg – kein öffentliches, wohl aber ein seelisches Interesse’ (c.1918). Private archive, Hugo Marcus, Box 4.

15 Norman Domeier, ‘Die sexuelle Denunziation in der deutschen Politik seit dem frühen 20. Jahrhundert’, in Andreas Pretzel and Andreas Weiß (eds) *Politiken in Bewegung. Die Emanzipation Homosexueller im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2017), 103–6.

lively set of semi-clandestine circles stretching across society from the lower middle classes to the imperial court. In every segment of society, there was a wide choice of parties, dances, concerts, picnics and *jours fixes* available on any day of the week for any man looking for a friend.<sup>16</sup> Some cafés and restaurants set certain hours aside for such meetings and about 20 private clubs and bars were frequented by transvestite men. In some of the bars prostitution was offered.<sup>17</sup> Female circles, about which Hirschfeld knew far less, seemed to have preferred pastry shops for their meetings.<sup>18</sup>

Hirschfeld used the now obsolete term Uranian to describe a male homosexual, which he borrowed from Greek mythology on the grounds that it traced the roots of homosexuality back to Antiquity. Nonetheless, the increased visibility of gay people in Wilhelmine society and the growing demands for decriminalization constituted a shift. Hirschfeld, a medical doctor, studied homosexuality and concluded that it was an innocent form of sexual pathology and pleaded with society to be less condemnatory. All men and women are born with male and female hormones, he argued, the only difference being that some men and women simply happen to have more female or male ones than others. He referred to Uranians as 'the third gender' and, in 1897, founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee to popularize his findings and gather supporters who strove to remove that particular anomaly from the penal code.<sup>19</sup>

Then again, Hirschfeld was not alone in influencing public opinion. His opponent Hans Blüher (1888–1955) depicted gay men as super masculine, thus assigning them the pseudo-scientific label of *typus inversus* – a man who turns to his own kind. Blüher disparaged Hirschfeld's subjects as effeminate and branded men in women's clothes as degenerate. As the debate developed over time, he placed them in the same category as Jews (whom he thought effeminate by nature), and accused them of racial inferiority.<sup>20</sup> Men who were attracted to other men not only constituted a culturally elevated race, in his mind, but far more than that, they were born to rule and for that reason must

16 Magnus Hirschfeld, *Berlins Dritte Geschlecht* (1904), edited by Manfred Herzer (Berlin: Verlag rosa Winkel, 1991), 57–69.

17 Hirschfeld, *Berlins Dritte Geschlecht*, 74, for numbers see also 174–5.

18 Hirschfeld, *Berlins Dritte Geschlecht*, 72–4. Social segmentation also characterized the women's circles; Hirschfeld mentions a bakery in the north of Berlin where only Jewish women met.

19 Claudia Bruns, 'Thr Männer seid Männer! Maskulinistische Positionen in der deutschen Homosexuellenbewegung zu Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts: Zwischen Revolution und Reaktion', in Andreas Pretzel and Andreas Weiß (eds) *Politiken in Bewegung: Die Emanzipation Homosexueller im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2017), 28–31.

20 Hans Blüher, *Die deutsche Wandervögelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen: Ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der sexuellen Inversion* (Prien: Anthropos-Verlag, 1920), 6–14.

act as 'real men'. He saw important tasks like building states and exercising power as rooted in sexual male bonding as a matter of course.<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, there was no place for women in such elevated realms. It was Blüher's strong opinion that women should confine themselves to the kitchen and childbearing.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Hirschfeld simply did not see women, Blüher explicitly detested them.

What caused a public debate on homosexuality (as it was soon called) to occur at that particular time and place? Several answers come to mind. First, Hugo Marcus grew up in a country in which young people were trying to free themselves from the constraints of a highly militarized society. Young men were trying to escape from what Max Weber called 'the iron cage of masculine society'<sup>23</sup> and young women were throwing away their corsets. Born into middle-class families that had profited from a period of rapid industrial growth and that could provide their children with money and leisure, theirs was the first generation vehemently to claim room for its individuality. This emancipation was manifested in multiple and assorted ways, many of which, as we have seen in earlier chapters, came under the umbrella of the life reform movement. Liberation of the body was pursued through love of nature and the *Wandervögel* (Wayfarers) movement, sunbathing in the nude, expressive dance, vegetarianism and bodybuilding. Liberation of the mind was to be attained through experiments with art, aesthetics and the esoteric.<sup>24</sup> Experimenting with sexuality became part of the movement as a matter of course.

Second, alongside life reform, a strong women's movement had come into existence that worked towards female emancipation. Access to health care, the protection of women workers, the legalization of abortion, an entitlement to the vote, and admission to universities and the professions were only some of the women's aims. By 1900 they had gained strength and enormous visibility. Young women wanted to explore their sexuality, just as the men did; it stung the latter when the 'girls' joined 'their' local *Wandervögel* sections in large numbers, then bonded among themselves.<sup>25</sup> The women undermined Prussian

21 Bruns, 'Ihr Männer Seid Männer!', 31–7.

22 Hans Blüher, 'Die Frau und die Familie', in Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*. Vol. II. *Familie und Männerbund* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1921), 7–90.

23 Max Weber, 'The iron cage and value-fragmentation', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2007/2017). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>.

24 Kai Buchholz, Rita Latocha, Hilke Peckmann, Hilke Wolbert and Klaus Wolbert (eds) *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900* (Darmstadt: Häusser-media, 2001).

25 Marion E.P. de Ras, *Körper, Eros und weibliche Kultur: Mädchen im Wandervögel und in der bündischen Jugend 1900–1933* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlag, 1988).

society in more ways than any of the other movements, so it was no surprise that in certain quarters they were viewed as a threat.

One aspect of male sexual bonding to appear alongside the large emancipatory movements was its violent reaction to the women's movement and the way women took liberties for themselves. To emphasize their anti-women, super-virile position, Blüher and his friends, declaring themselves 'masculinists' and 'anti-feminist', put themselves forward as a 'male' alternative to the women's movement.<sup>26</sup> The resentment of women did not stop there. As mentioned earlier, the male homosexual spectrum was wide and varied. At one end of the scale were the Uranians, men who dressed as women to 'out' their feminine souls, who ignored the other sex, or at best did not quite notice them. At the other end of the spectrum were the inverts, the men who craved virile masculinity and considered male sexual bonding a 'natural' prerequisite to statesmanship. To attain their aims, they needed women to adhere to their traditional roles and they therefore abhorred female emancipation. One can presume that the majority of homosexual men positioned themselves somewhere in the middle. Whether fusing 'Greek boy love' with 'pedagogical Eros', posing as leaders of the youth hiking movement, or reforming school education, such men preferred to keep their tracks covered.<sup>27</sup>

The place that Hugo Marcus occupied was in the middle. As a young man he fashioned himself a patchwork of emancipatory devices that best answered his needs. He considered himself a life reformer, joined the *Wandervögel* in his youth, took up writing to express his innermost feelings, loved beauty and exalted male friendship, avoided the company of women and, as will become clear, eyed sexuality between men with a mixture of distaste and envy. The Krupp experience might well have served as a salutary warning. Being both rich and Jewish, the Marcus family was vulnerable and, given that it represented everything that was dear to him, Hugo wished neither to damage it nor be separated from his mother. Caught in between, and badly in need of a friend in whom to confide, until the Ahmadiyya mosque community presented him

26 Anon, 'Antifeminismus', in Daniela Weiland (ed.) *Handlexikon der Geschichte der Frauenemanzipation in Deutschland und Österreich* (Munich: ECON Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), 24–8; Hans Blüher, 'Die Theorie der männlichen Gesellschaft', in Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*. Vol. II. *Familie und Männerbund* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1921), 91–110; Bruns, 'Ihr Männer seid Männer!', 27–8.

27 For an overview of the different positions, see Marita Keilson-Lauritz, 'Tanten, Kerle, Skandale: Flügelkämpfe der Emanzipation', in Andreas Pretzel and Andreas Weiß (eds) *Politiken in Bewegung: Die Emanzipation Homosexueller im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2017), 65–78.

with a wholly new reality, his life had become a torment of oppression and inner conflict.

The last factor to tie Hugo Marcus to his generation was the use of a certain vocabulary. What he shared with practically every member of every emancipatory movement, be they men or women, feminists or anti-feminists, life reformers or those who counted themselves among the ‘third gender’, was the appropriation of the language of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Being a generation older than they were, Nietzsche had provided them with all the key words they needed.<sup>28</sup> The young generation took his comment that ‘all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, postulates pain’<sup>29</sup> as a lodestar for their liberation struggle. They understood ‘God is dead – I teach you Super Man’<sup>30</sup> as an invitation to develop their personality and claim their individuality.

It was Nietzsche who advocated vegetarianism, a simple life and a heroic attitude as ways of sublimating sexual desire.<sup>31</sup> It was he who gave them the tools with which to present two different faces – the public ‘Apollonian’ face representing order, reason, the world of the mind and man’s will to power, and the hidden ‘Dionysian’ face, hinting at the frenzy of sexuality, dark passion and chaos.<sup>32</sup> His collection of aphorisms, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was considered essential reading. Many young people thought that merely having it in their pockets was enough to make them part of the big experiment with change, whatever shape that took.<sup>33</sup>

Hugo Marcus studied Nietzsche intensely. More than any other German philosopher, Nietzsche offered him a stage on which he was able to act. For instance, he wove the themes of ‘Eros and the Heroic’ into all his writings in an attempt to defend the need to suppress his feelings. To an even greater extent, however, Marcus drew on the split between ‘the Apollonian and the Dionysian’

28 The following draws on Ulrich Linse, ‘Nietzsches Lebensphilosophie und die Lebensreform’, in Kai Buchholz, Rita Latocha, Hilke Peckmann, Hilke and Klaus Wolbert (eds) *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900* (Stuttgart: haeussler-media, 2001), 165–7; Theo Meyer, ‘Nietzsche: Lebens-, Kunst- und Kulturbegriff’, in Buchholz et al., *Die Lebensreform*, 161–3; Manfred Schneider, ‘Zarathustra-Sätze, Zarathustra-Gefühle: Nietzsche und die Jugendbewegung’, in *Die Lebensreform*, 169–73.

29 Quoted in Schneider, ‘Zarathustra-Sätze’, 170.

30 Quoted in Meyer, ‘Nietzsche’, 161.

31 Schneider, ‘Zarathustra-Sätze’, 171.

32 Alexander Gatherer, ‘The Dionysian and the Apollonian in Nietzsche: the birth of tragedy’ (2010), *The Oxford Philosopher*. <https://theoxfordphilosopher.com>.

33 For an overview of the most popular quotations, see Else Frobenius, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit: Eine Geschichte der Jugendbewegung* (Berlin: Deutsche Buchgemeinschaft, 1927), 35; cf. Schneider, ‘Zarathustra-Sätze’, 170.

sides of his personality, which he turned into two separate spheres of his writing. He described his lifelong struggle with his physical body in the short stories that addressed his 'Dionysian' side. Their in-depth analysis became the task of the philosopher, which called on his 'Apollonian' side. Marcus was not alone in this. The split in his writing mirrored a split in Wilhelmine society, of which he was very much a part.

## 2 The Novelist

In 1904, the year in which Frank Wedekind produced his play *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*), which the censors immediately seized on because of its danger to public decency, the year in which Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned for her disrespectful behaviour towards the authorities, and the year in which a large international women's conference caused an uproar in Berlin, Hugo Marcus published his first collection of aphorisms.<sup>34</sup> In their different ways, these were all manifestations of the new time, filled with the 'morning air' that these young people craved.<sup>35</sup>

Marcus wrote in the introduction that he started the collection at the age of 15 and that it took him eight years to complete. His booklet was a compilation of everything that mattered to a young man at that time and place – love, sex, genius, rebellion and unhappiness. Marcus adopted different literary forms to explore the themes and interlaced the aphorisms with short stories and love poems. More than a century later the booklet makes curious reading, but at the time of publication it received some generous reviews. One reviewer even called the author 'a sublimated Dionysian' on the grounds that he knew how to master dark desires, which civilized Germans should.<sup>36</sup> This must have pleased Marcus tremendously.

A new couple appears in the short stories – the unhappy protagonist of *Das Frühlingsglück* Guido and Heinrich, two boys in a problematic relationship. Guido is outgoing, nervous and talkative, while Heinrich sits in a corner and wraps himself in silence. The aphorisms comment on the relationship and the poems raise it to staggering heights. *Meditations* marks the beginning of a long series of stories about Heinrich and Guido that appear throughout the collected papers in all stages of preparation. They are found in the many containers

34 Hugo Marcus, *Meditationen* (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1904).

35 Joachim Radkau, 'Die Verheißungen der Morgenfrühe: Die Lebensreform in der neuen Moderne', in Buchholz et al., *Die Lebensreform*, 55–60.

36 Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 11, reviews.

marked 'Novelistic Small writings' (Boxes 4, 5 and 6) as well as in 'Journal Articles' (Box 9). They even pop up among 'Translations from the English' (Box 10). Counting them proved a difficult task. Sometimes Heinrich fuses with an 'I'. Guido is sometimes replaced with Albert, Lothar or Eduard. All in all, I identified 700–800 texts that in some way or another belong to them. Written over a period of at least 25 years, Marcus only stopped writing the stories when he started to engage with the Ahmadiyya mosque.

There are no recognizable outdoor settings in which their meetings take place. They usually meet at home, mostly at Guido's, where they sit on separate sofas. Heinrich, it is once said, has already sat 'a hollow' into his cushion. Sometimes, somebody (a brother, a father) performs Beethoven's piano music behind the double doors that separate their space from the main drawing room. They fill their time with talking, or at least Guido talks. There are prolonged silences. After some time, Heinrich will heave himself to his feet and leave.

What do these stories tell us? As they are largely void of action, a look at the poems in the rear is needed to explain the many undercurrents that run between the friends. As one poem notes,

I do not want you to love me/as I do not want to love you myself  
 I want us to fly together/to beauty's highest reaches  
 That we are then united/at their feet  
 Because up there, or so I think/the greatest happiness lies!<sup>37</sup>

Torn between passivity and longing, despair and repression, with the Heinrich and Guido stories Hugo Marcus seems to have compulsively described every single occasion on which he suppressed his body, feelings and chance to love another person. 'Nietzsche is to blame', he noted more than once. Most of those stories remained unpublished, but as he grew older and gained confidence, more and more found their way into print and, between 1916 and 1923, two dozen appeared in expressionist magazines.<sup>38</sup> However, it was in 1915, in *Das Tor dröhnt zu* (*The Gate Slams Shut*), that Marcus published the largest collection of Heinrich and Guido stories.<sup>39</sup>

37 'Ich wünsche nicht, dass Du mich liebst, / ich will auch Dich nicht lieben, / ich will, dass wir zusammen / zur höchsten Schönheit fliegen, / dass wir sodann gemein-vereint / zu ihren Füßen liegen, / in dieser Einheit scheint mir / das höchste Glück zu liegen!', Marcus, *Meditationen*, 194. The poem is much longer.

38 *Die Gegenwart* (The Presence), *Der Feuerreiter* (The Fire Rider) and *Das junge Deutschland* (Young Germany).

39 Hugo Marcus, *Das Tor dröhnt zu* (Berlin: Paß & Garleb, 1915).

*Das Tor* was privately published and the author appeared in it anonymously, but occasionally acknowledged his authorship by writing his name on the back of it.<sup>40</sup> It tells the story of a true love that needed time to develop. Sensitive, creative Guido runs into his old schoolfriend Heinrich when they are students in Berlin. This time, it is Heinrich who does the talking and his tone is reproachful. 'Dear Guido, I am very alone, everything is silent around me', he tells his friend and, 'when you were with me, you were always far away, but you did not notice'.<sup>41</sup> The friends join the *Wandervögel* and Heinrich becomes the leader of the younger boys. He says he wants to be their hero, but 'they do with him what they want'.<sup>42</sup> Once again, Heinrich feels torn between the impulses of his body and his will to move beyond it: 'it is a great consolation to think that Eros – the sting of desire – conjures up the hero'.<sup>43</sup> The sting of desire is the secret motor propelling Heinrich forward; everything else evolves from it.

In a dramatic moment, he asks Guido, 'are you looking at my brow?' 'No', he replies, 'it will not stand between us anymore. I want to overflow in you. I want to be you!'<sup>44</sup> From now on, the pages are filled with reflections on Friendship and The Friend written in large capitals. Bliss emanates from Heinrich's words: he speaks of how they will live in isolation and lose themselves in the boundlessness of their thoughts; how they will listen to Beethoven together; and yes, how they will be one. As Marcus lets him explain, 'I want: not to have you, no, I want to be as you!'<sup>45</sup>

Marcus, the novelist, relentlessly urges Heinrich to reach for the impossible. Heinrich must grow wings and leave himself behind. Consequently, *Das Tor* is full of exalted demands. At times, a claustrophobic tightness pervades, which is painful to behold. Which door is being slammed shut as their love starts to blossom? Is it perhaps the door that seals Heinrich's, hence Marcus's, fate of being compelled to constrain his feelings as a good German Dionysian should? Could this be the reason for the revulsion and shame that the stories exude? One has to consult the philosopher in Hugo Marcus to grasp fully the dilemma he was facing. In 1920, he wrote:

The stronger the erotic urge, the stronger the protective, inhibiting pull. If we want a thing, we at the same time experience a counter feeling that impels us not to want it. We do not want it because we want it too much,

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40 See the copy that is kept in the *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* in Leipzig.

41 Marcus, *Das Tor*, 3.

42 Marcus, *Das Tor*, 7.

43 Marcus, *Das Tor*, 21.

44 Marcus, *Das Tor*, 21.

45 Marcus, *Das Tor*, 8.



because we are enslaved. This is cruel, because in this way we can never find a way out of the inner conflict: it is asceticism out of shame.<sup>46</sup>

Marcus's conclusion that 'we will never find a way out' sums up the dilemma that his generation faced. Groping for more sexual liberty, they were trapped between 'the sting of desire' and society's forbidding strictures. Homosexual desire may have been nothing new, but explicitly writing about the dilemmas it caused in Wilhelmine society was certainly breaking new ground. Marcus was a man of the middle, brave enough to venture into male circles, yet cripplingly constrained by society's demands.

His friends Kurt Hiller (1885–1972) and Arnim T. Wegner (1886–1978), whom he originally met at Scientific Humanitarian Committee meetings and who remained friends for life, seemed to have had much more freedom of movement than he did. In 1916, Hiller started the radical journal *Das Ziel* (*The Aim*), which, among other things, campaigned to end the war and to accord everyone the right to any kind of sexual relationship.<sup>47</sup> At about the same time, Wegner founded the Federation of Radical War Resisters and published poems in which he explicitly addressed male sexuality.<sup>48</sup> Both men addressed homosexuality, but instead of focusing on the homosexual virtuosi of Berlin, they turned to the many young men who encountered it in the war trenches. Hiller and Wegner were activists who tried to revolutionize society from within. For that, they reached out to the centre ground, not to its eccentric edges. They valued Hugo Marcus's work for his attempt to give that centre a voice, and they said so on several occasions.<sup>49</sup> This tells us something about how his writings were received.

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46 Je stärker der erotische Drang, desto stärker auch die schützenden, hemmenden Saiten. Wenn wir eine Sache wollen, so ist zugleich eine Gegenbewegung in uns, die uns gebietet, dieselbe Sache nicht zu wollen. Und zwar sie nur deshalb nicht zu wollen, weil wir sie zu sehr wollen, weil wir so versklavt an sie hängen. Das ist grausam, denn wir geraten auf diese Weise niemals aus dem Zustand der inneren Gerissenheit wieder heraus: Askese aus der Scham heraus', From: 'Das Sexuelle Erlebnis als Schlüssel zum Weltverständnis (Innere Zerrissenheit)', c.1920. Other articles in which Hugo Marcus addressed the subject of inner conflict were 'Die Paradoxien des Gefühls' (Paradoxes of feeling) (1927) and 'Das Tantaluserlebnis' (The Tantalus experience). Private archive, Hugo Marcus, Box 4.

47 Kurt Hiller, 'Vorwort', in *Das Ziel. Jahrbücher für geistige Politik*, vol. 1 (1916). Marcus contributed to vol. 5 (1921) with 'Die Entlarvung der Tiere' ('Exposure of the animals').

48 Arnim T. Wegner, *Das Antlitz der Städte* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1917).

49 Kurt Hiller, *Leben gegen der Zeit* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 74, 107, 231, 408; Arnim T. Wegner, *Zeugnis* (9 August 1958) and Arnim T. Wegner, *Botschaft an die Freunde* (1962). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

The only person to whom Hugo Marcus could reveal his true self was Roman Malicki, a young man with whom he had been to school in Poznan and who, once in Berlin, had set up a successful clothing business.<sup>50</sup> Roman was a practical man, well versed in fabrics, cuts and dresses, and adept at dealing with the most capricious of clients. Accounting and calculating were no mystery to him. His letters to Marcus, at least the few that survived, are filled to the brim with descriptions. Roman cherished *Das Tor* and considered it 'his' book because, in so many words, it showed *that* (although not *how*) Marcus was eventually able to let down his defences.

However discreetly Hugo had set about producing it, the publication of *Das Tor dröhnt zu* was not favourably received in the Marcus family. This may be why, when Hugo Marcus left Berlin on 23 August 1939 with all his books and papers, he did not bring a single copy with him. When Roman passed by the family apartment to say goodbye to Cäcilie, who was planning to follow her son to Switzerland on the last day of the year, he had a revealing conversation with her. In a letter to Hugo, he wrote: 'your mother passed on your greetings to me yesterday. I told her, thank you for allowing me to adore you for 20 long years! Mother: well, you were a friend of Hugo's, were you not? Nothing more. Take the black pelerine with you. I don't wear things like that'.<sup>51</sup> As far as Cäcilie was concerned, their friendship was already a thing of the past. However, instead of the pelerine, Roman stuffed some copies of *Das Tor dröhnt zu* into his pocket, knowing full well that Marcus had left them behind. To Marcus he wrote: 'your mother said, it is not worth it. Who wants to read that? And aunt Clara said, Let me take one in any case – one can always rip them up'.<sup>52</sup>

During this little farewell scene, Alfred, Hugo's older brother, also made an entry. As Roman put it, 'Alfred was there too, ignoring me in his usual icy manner. When I came round to collect my carpet, he refused to give me the table you set aside for me. What shall I say? It is all over now. It can't be helped that bad memories remain'.<sup>53</sup> While the members of the Marcus family failed to appreciate *Das Tor*, they heartily despised Roman and took care to let him know it. Roman's letters to Marcus are revealing. In trying to understand why

50 His letters to Marcus bear the return address 'Roman Malicki, Kantstrasse 30, Berlin-Charlottenburg'. The Berlin address book of 1939 enters him as 'Roman – Konfektionär, Charlöb Kantstrasse 30'.

51 Letter from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus dated 25 December 1939. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

52 Letter from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus dated 4 January 1940. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

53 Letter from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus dated 25 December 1939. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.2.1.

Nietzsche's split between the Dionysian and the Apollonian should have touched Wilhelmine society so deeply, his family is a good place to start.

However, Roman was not dispirited. Quite the contrary, he thought it a good idea to give people copies of *Das Tor* as Christmas presents and receive laudatory thanks in return. Roman told Marcus that, 'my optician wrote to me, "when one has lived through a love such as your booklet describes, one must be a happier human being!" (He thinks that I wrote it myself)'. Alongside this happy piece of news, he added, 'but all in all, I feel that I caused you much worry until 1914'.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the relationship between this couple and the Heinrich and Lothar stories, Roman was Hugo's trusted friend. He remained in Berlin during the war. Given that he was not of Jewish descent, we may assume that his business profited once the Nazis had chased out the Jewish tailors and couturiers.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, Roman proved to be an observant witness of everything that was happening and would regularly inform Marcus about who among their colleagues and friends had been deported and, later, who had returned from the concentration camps. It was Roman who contacted Eva Weisshaupt, a survivor of Theresienstadt, and through her learned about the fate of Marcus's brother Alfred and his wife Gertrud. After the war he also wrote to Marcus about his Polish acquaintances, about how they had been kept as prisoners in forced labour camps under shameful conditions. If nothing else, this much we know about Roman Malicki: he was not afraid to speak out about what he saw.<sup>56</sup>

### 3 The Muslim Theorist

Hugo Marcus's first encounter with Ahmadi Muslims was in Berlin in 1920 and the meeting was quite by chance. After Poland gained independence and the Marcus family's steelworks in Poznan were nationalized, Hugo was forced to contribute to the family income for the first time in his life.<sup>57</sup> He found a niche for himself in private tutoring and, two years after the war ended, Muslim students were streaming into Berlin because of the low cost of living and

54 Letter from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus dated 4 January 1940. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.2.1.

55 Uwe Westphal, *Berliner Konfektion und Mode 1836–1939: Die Zerstörung einer Tradition* (Berlin: Hentrig, 1992); see also Uwe Westphal collection in the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

56 Some 23 letters from Roman Malicki to Hugo Marcus dated between 1940 and 1947. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.2.1.

57 Hugo Marcus, *Biographical Sketch* (1957). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

Germany's good name in the Muslim world.<sup>58</sup> Over the next two chapters, I describe how the Indians settled down in this city, but for the moment it suffices to know that to enrol as a student at Berlin University, it was necessary to have good knowledge of the German language. To meet that demand, the Ahmadiyya imam, Abdullah, would find his way to the Oettinger home in 1928, where Susanna taught him German and her mother introduced him to German culture (Chapter 3).

Hugo Marcus also met Ahmadi students. For instance, Abdul Majid, editor of the *Islamic Review* in London, took private lessons from him in 1922/3 in German, philosophy and literature.<sup>59</sup> When fighting for restitution after the Second World War, Marcus wrote that his Indian students were educated and refined, and wanted to know everything about Nietzsche. Likewise, Arnim T. Wegner, who once sat in on their meetings, noted how much the Indians impressed him.<sup>60</sup> As a teacher, Hugo Marcus was a success. The Indians loved Nietzsche, Goethe and Germany, and they absorbed everything he said. In 1923, when the Ahmadiyya built the mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, they introduced him to Sadruddin (1880–1980), a brilliant and exceedingly witty missionary.<sup>61</sup> Busy founding a Muslim community in utterly foreign surroundings, Sadruddin was quick to recognize that Hugo Marcus would be the ideal man to explain German society to them. He offered him a permanent position, entrusted him with courses and a lecture series on German culture and appointed him editor of *Die Moslemische Revue*. Marcus accepted.<sup>62</sup>

For Hugo Marcus, their meeting was a revelation. Until then he had lived an inhibited and provincial life in the fishbowl of German society and took it for granted that that was what the world was like. His mind was filled with everything German – German language, German music, German philosophy and a particular form of sexual restraint that Wilhelmine society required. If anything, his meeting with the Indians showed him that other worlds existed.

In *Arctic Summer*, a biographical portrait of E.M. Forster, Damon Galgut narrates how this shy young Englishman, Marcus's contemporary and himself a teacher of young Indian students, is taken utterly by surprise when his pupil starts to romp. 'Then he sprang up and seized hold of Morgan, pushing him backward on the couch and tickling him furiously. It was shocking – for the first instant like assault and only then like play.'<sup>63</sup> Likewise, David Lelyveld, in

58 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 63–93.

59 Abdul Majid, *Testimony* (1957). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

60 Arnim T. Wegner, *Zeugnis* (9 August 1958). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

61 A short biography was published in Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 54–5.

62 Hugo Marcus, *Biographical Sketch* (1957). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

63 Damon Galgut, *Arctic Summer* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014), 20.

his history of Aligarh University relates how the Muslim and Hindu students used to include their English professors in childish, touch-and-run games.<sup>64</sup> Touching, romping around, walking hand in hand, even petting, were the expressions of a wholly other self-understanding between men. Erotic relationships existed and, at least for the Indian upper classes, had been considered 'a natural pleasure' until, in 1860, the British colonial administration forbade same-sex relationships on account of its own Victorian inhibitions.<sup>65</sup>

On entering the mosque, Hugo Marcus breathed a different air. It rendered the split between Dionysian and Apollonian meaningless and the Heinrich and Lothar stories became obsolete. Instead, Marcus turned to the wonders of 'religion', a subject that he had never before thought about. In his first piece for the mosque journal, 'The Spirit of Islam', he explained, more to himself than to his Indian audience, what engagement with 'religion' held in store:

*Religion stems from the fear of being alone. Being part of the community is the answer. A community in prayer is the religious equivalent of the worldly community. ... Religion is like art. The two allow for a relationship between the subjective self and the objective world out there. ... Religion is resignation. Religion is not about shaping the world; it is a turn towards shaping the soul. Religion is the technique of the soul. It is a consolation.*<sup>66</sup>

From then on, Hugo Marcus became part of a male community that accepted him in its midst as if it were the most natural thing in the world. From the perspective of the Indians, he was their admired teacher, and a respected philosopher who could explain the subtlety of a foreign culture and bring Weimar society within their reach. Praying together signified the moment of their union. In a text that echoes the Krupp episode, Marcus describes how one day he was praying in the mosque when he noticed a young man kneeling and rising in rhythm with him. Once again, he experiences a mystical bond. As in his youth, when he was sitting in his corner longing for a relationship between himself and the other man, he feels that there must be something going on.

64 David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253–61.

65 Quotation from Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Abacus, 1997), 325ff. See also Ibitsam Ahmed, 'The British Empire's homophobic legacy could finally be overturned in India', *Independent*, 1 September 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk>.

66 Hugo Marcus, 'Das Wesen der Religion', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1924), 79–84, quotations 82–3, author's emphasis.



FIGURE 5.1. Marcus and his students, c.1924.

This time, no Adrian and Antinous come to his mind, but rather the impending Eid al-Fitr festival when all the men will embrace.<sup>67</sup> When the prayer row is formed, Marcus stands 'as if nothing has happened', but a thought nonetheless crosses his mind – 'maybe God is good to you and will bring you more together as you think it possible today'.<sup>68</sup>

Marcus disliked women, so it was unfortunate for him that the mosque community included quite a number of emancipated German women. His contemporary Emilia Oettinger co-founded the German–Muslim Society. Her daughters Lisa and Susanna Oettinger were in search of a cosmopolitan lifestyle and a husband to match. The many group photographs taken at Eid al-Fitr festivals, make it amply clear that emancipated women were at the very core of the community of converts. S.M. Abdullah's photograph albums, from which Marcus is entirely absent, show hiking tours, picnics, tennis matches, sunbathing in the mosque garden, and other forms of socializing. Abdullah took great care to teach the women about marriage laws in foreign Muslim countries. Assistant Imam Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza sent the Indian men into the kitchen to

67 Eid al-Fitr is the three-day festival that brings the fasting period to an end. After morning prayers, everyone present embraces ceremoniously.

68 Hugo Marcus, 'In der Moschee zu Berlin' (c.1938). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 4.

prepare them for a possible match (Chapter 3). Marcus kept his distance. He socialized with the men, but tried to ignore the women. Only once, in a treatise called ‘What does the Quran tell us?’ did he try to lay down the law by stipulating a woman’s place ‘in Islam’.<sup>69</sup> To do so, he first developed a theology of symmetry and balance to which true male love was the centrepiece:

The philosopher Fichte says ‘I am me’. Likewise, the Quran (Sura 1) tells us that ‘God is God’. They mean the same thing, namely that every size is equal to itself. ... The twofold number of similar phenomena (two hands, two feet, two ears) is symmetry and the fundamental law of love. So real beauty consists of nothing but secret covenants of love. And love is the will to beauty. God is God!<sup>70</sup>

After this daring piece of homosexual theology, the author turned to the women:

But what does the Muslim woman do? Obey – be silent – serve the man. Their actions are always in accordance with the holy law – they are in themselves worship. So she resembles – with lowered eyes – a priest. And because she always serves and obeys and does not ask for herself, she does not really know anyone and nobody know her.<sup>71</sup>

This text is the only one in which Hugo Marcus addressed women directly. Taking a stand closer to Blüher than Hirschfeld, he downright told them off, ordering them to stay in their (religious) place, to serve the men with downcast eyes and make themselves invisible. In the same breath, he declared love between men in line with symmetry in nature, and thus more advanced religiously. Needless to say, the text was never published.<sup>72</sup> The Ahmadiyya

69 Hugo Marcus, ‘Was ist uns der Qu’ran?’ (c.1938). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 8.

70 ‘Fichte sagt, “ich bin ich”. Gleichweis sagt uns der Qu’ran (Sure 1), “Gott ist Gott”. Jede Größe ist sich selber gleich. Die Zweizahl gleichgearteter Erscheinungen (zwei Hände, zwei Füße, zwei Ohren) ist Symmetrie und das Grundgesetz der Liebe. So besteht denn die Schönheit aus lauter heimlichen Liebesbündnissen. Und die Liebe ist Wille zur Schönheit. Gott ist Gott!’ Marcus, ‘Was ist uns der Qu’ran?’ Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 8.

71 ‘Was aber tut die muslimische Frau? Gehorcht – schweigt – dient dem Manne. Ihr Tun ist immer Dienst nach heiliger Vorschrift, ist Gottesdienst. So ähnelt sie, mit gesenkten Augen ... einen Priester. Und weil sie immer nur dient und gehorcht und nicht nach sich fragt, kennt sie eigentlich niemand und kennt niemand sie’, in Marcus, ‘Was ist uns der Qu’ran?’ Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 8.

72 Until 1936 Hugo Marcus published in the *Moslemische Revue* either with his name or his initials. After the Nazis forced him to step down as president of the German–Muslim Society, he continued under the pseudonym H.M. Schneider.

were clearly in favour of women. As part of their modernizing strategy, the Ahmadi missionaries wanted to encourage cross-gender relations and through them create global bonds. The women in Berlin responded favourably to them, and tried hard to turn the idea of Indian–German/Muslim–Jewish marriages into a practice that would endure for generations. Seen from that angle, the Ahmadi could not countenance Marcus's attempt to exclude women from the mosque.

#### 4 Looking for a Friend

Throughout 1938, while Hugo Marcus was formulating his thoughts about life in the mosque, the Nazis were stepping up their persecution of the Jews. Aside from the extensive regulations through which Jewish Germans were isolated, 1938 saw the wide-ranging political measures that prepared for their removal.<sup>73</sup> On 12 March, Austria's annexation signalled the beginning of the confiscation of Jewish companies, mass humiliation, flight and eviction. In the weeks leading up to 29 September, the day the Munich Agreement was concluded, 20,000 Jews started to flee from parts of the Sudetenland. On the night of 28/9 October, 24,000 Polish Jews in Germany were pushed over the Polish border with nothing but the clothes on their backs. On the night leading up to 9 November, any Jewish heads of households who still remained in Germany, some 26,000 men, were taken from their beds and imprisoned in concentration camps. The next day all the German synagogues were set on fire.

Hugo Marcus was also convicted. Arrested at his mother's flat, where he had been registered as head of household since his father's death in 1930, he was sent to the concentration camp of Oranienburg in the vicinity of Berlin. In his restitution claim he describes, in a few dry words, how he was released after a month thanks to the efforts of Imam Abdullah.<sup>74</sup> In reality, this was the moment when his Muslim friends really demonstrated their friendship. The Ahmadiyya organization in Lahore offered Marcus a job, along with a visa for Albania and India, as well as transit to Switzerland and his former pupil, Abdul Majid, invited him to come to London and work for the *Islamic Review*. Armed with all these documents, Abdullah came to his rescue. Accompanied by two German gentlemen from the community, he travelled to Oranienburg

73 Leo Baeck Institute, 1938 project – Posts from the Past. <https://www.lbi.org/1938projekt/3/branded>.

74 Restitution Request 1957. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1; broader descriptions can be found in Baer, 'Muslim Encounters', 166 ff; Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 203–4.



to present the camp wardens with both the visa and the money that the travel necessitated, thereby securing Marcus's release.

Missionary Sadruddin offered him his bungalow in Lahore. To Marcus he wrote, 'I gladly offer you my own bungalow. It is not very big and it has not as much furniture as you have at home, but it will do.'<sup>75</sup> Aware that Hugo Marcus lived with his mother and that Cäcilie had a say in what happened, he added in his usual buoyant style, 'please pass on my greetings to your mother. The lady should not worry about her Hamid. Sadruddin will adopt the role of mother in her stead.'<sup>76</sup> But, despite the opportunities on offer, Marcus hesitated. Sadruddin, guessing the cause of the delay and worrying about the consequences, once again urged him to 'please tell your mother that we will all take good care of *Klein-Hugo* [little Hugo] and that he will feel at home here.'<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, S.M. Abdullah left. However, his many letters to Marcus from Lahore show that the missionaries continued to care for their employee. In fact, their cheques only discontinued in 1957 when they learned that Marcus's restitution money would hitherto be able to cover his costs.

In the meanwhile, Hugo Marcus remained in Berlin, where he busied himself with the completion of Sadruddin's translation of the Quran into German. Only when it was published in July 1939 did he pack up his papers and leave. As already mentioned, 85-year-old Cäcilie followed him on 31 December. Once she too had gone, 'our furniture and books were thrown into the courtyard. What happened to them afterwards is unknown',<sup>78</sup> but their departure signalled the end of the Marcus household in Berlin. Marcus's brother Richard was harassed until his death in 1933 and Alfred died in Theresienstadt. His wife Gertrud, one of the few to survive the terror, left Germany for the United States. When peace was finally established, there was no one left to whom the refugees could return.

Hugo Marcus spent the rest of his life in Switzerland. After his mother died, he established contact with *Der Kreis*, a monthly paper for homosexual men that was published in Zurich and for which his old friend Kurt Hiller paved the way. Writing under the pseudonym of Hans Alienus (Hans the Foreigner), for some years Marcus sent in soft stories perpetuating his long-held fascination with sublimated love and eternal friendship. *Der Kreis*, however, was

75 Letter from Sadruddin to Hugo Marcus dated 12 December 1938. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.1.

76 Letter from Sadruddin to Hugo Marcus dated 12 December 1938. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.1.

77 Letter from Sadruddin to Hugo Marcus dated 2 February 1939. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 12.1.

78 Restitution claim 1957. Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

unambiguously homoerotic; it defended homosexual rights and printed photographs of naked men with exposed genitals. Its readership must have been oblivious to prewar notions of Platonic friendship, for the editor stopped publishing Marcus's stories in 1956.

His letters show that he was lonely. For the last ten years of his life, apart from his publishers and the bank, there was hardly anyone with whom Hugo Marcus was still in touch.<sup>79</sup> Hiller seemed to have kept his distance, but stayed informed through the editor of *Der Kreis*.<sup>80</sup> Only Arnim T. Wegner, who painted a loving little sketch of him in 1962,<sup>81</sup> remained loyal to their friendship until the end. During those final years, Marcus took refuge in his old fictional friend Heinrich, the one he knew better than anybody else. His last booklet of aphorisms, 'Looking for a Friend' is dedicated to him. In it, Marcus summarizes his lifelong quest: 'my life is a search for man', 'who wants to be a friend must be a poet on the side', 'being friends is being chosen', 'where the one possesses love, the other must believe', 'let me become as he, my friend, thinks that I already am'.<sup>82</sup> The sting of desire has gone from those observations. What remains is a rare peace of mind, which the author seemed at last to have captured.

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79 Zentralbibliothek Zurich, 'Übersicht über den Hugo Marcus private archive', 6–15 (enumeration of the letters), internal document.

80 Backhausen, 'Der deutsche Muslim Dr Hamid Hugo Marcus', 110–9.

81 Wegner, *Botschaft an die Freunde* (1962). Hugo Marcus private archive, Box 1.

82 Marcus, *Einer sucht den Freund*, 14, 16, 50, 51, 63.

## The Rebels: Luba Derczanska and Her Friends

Among the sources in the Hamied family archive is a strip of celluloid containing a short amateurish film that had been shot in Berlin in the summer of 1932. Its flickering black-and-white images show a slender woman with a stylish beret perched on the side of her head, self-consciously posing in front of Berlin's most famous sites. These are the earliest moving images of Luba Hamied, born Liubov Derczanska, whom her mother nicknamed Hinde (the Indian) and whom her husband called 'a modern Russian woman'. The camera follows her under the lush trees of the Lustgarten, between the colonnades of the Alte Museum and onto the steps of Haus Vaterland, the famous pleasure palace on Potsdamer Platz. Her husband Khwaja Abdul Hamied is at her side. He is a clean-shaven young Indian gentleman with a beaming face; he is dressed in a suit and tie and has a large Borsalino hat on his head. We see him asking directions from a policeman in the centre of Potsdamer Platz, where he buys his wife a bouquet of flowers from a street vendor in front of the Tietz department store. Election posters are fluttering from balconies all around them. This election will presage Hitler's rise to power and will be the last German election until the Nazi regime is defeated. The political atmosphere does not, however, seem to touch the couple. They have just returned from Bombay to revisit the city of their love and they look blissfully happy. A square black Mercedes with sideboards had been waiting at the pavement for the couple and, as Hamied elegantly opens the door for his wife, she speaks silently to the cameraman. In the last shot we see her frowning and raising her hand in an authoritative gesture, as if to say, 'enough!' With that, the filmstrip breaks off.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is about Luba Derczanska. Arriving in Berlin in 1925 to study chemistry at Berlin University, she became caught up in the Indian freedom struggle, not least through meeting Hamied, the man she would marry in the Berlin mosque and follow to India. Whereas Lisa Oettinger, the subject of Chapter 4, was from a secular Prussian Jewish background, for which experimenting with art, religion and different men came naturally, Luba Derczanska was from a traditional Jewish family. Her parents spoke Yiddish at home, visited the synagogue regularly, followed strict rules about child rearing, and valued family loyalty above all else. In the city of Vilna (now Vilnius), which hostile forces invaded no fewer than 13 times between the First and Second World

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1 'Old Family Film Part 1', Hamied private archive, Mumbai.

Wars, which changed between Russian, German, Lithuanian and Polish rule as the armies came and went, and in which communist and nationalist loyalties often tore families apart, it required considerable strength to remain united, and her tumultuous childhood left a clear mark on Luba's life.

## 1 A Jewish Girl from Vilna

Liubov Derczanska was born on 28 February 1903 in Vilna, at that time still part of imperial Russia. She was the eldest of four siblings and her education was typical of that of any upwardly mobile Jewish family – first the Hebrew primary school (*Cheder*), then the Russian imperial secondary school for girls, followed by a year's teacher training.<sup>2</sup> This was a path that many Russian Jewish women had already taken in preparation for higher studies in Moscow or St Petersburg.<sup>3</sup> However, by the time Liubov finished in 1920, the city had become part of the new Lithuanian nation-state and the medium of instruction in her school had changed from Russian to Lithuanian. This bestowed upon her a linguistic training that included not only Russian, but also Lithuanian, German, Polish and Latin. Nevertheless, the Russian career path her parents envisioned for her had evaporated.

Liubov Derczanska was a Russian speaker with a Russian Jewish identity. Like many young Jews around her, once Russia changed from imperial to Bolshevik rule, she sided with the communists. However, the Red Army occupied the city only for a short period, and left it to the Lithuanians to set up a government. A civil war followed in which Vilna changed hands again and became part of Poland.<sup>4</sup> Embracing a nationalist worldview, the new Polish nation-state felt threatened by the communists, so accordingly fought them. From then on, life was precarious for the Jews who had embraced the Russian cause in Vilna.<sup>5</sup> The Derczanska family felt the strain. Rubin and Pauline Derczanska

2 Hamied private archive, Marina Suzman collection.

3 Sophia Dubnov enrolled in the 'Bestushev Higher Courses for Women' in Saint Petersburg in 1903 and Nadeshda Krupskaya in 1887. Both authors offer a lively description of other women in the classroom. See Sophie Dubnov-Erich, *The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnov: Diaspora, Nationalism and Jewish History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Nadeshda Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin* (London: Panther Books, 1970).

4 Theodore R. Weeks, *From 'Russian' to 'Polish': Vilna–Wilno 1900–1925*, NCEEER, Working paper, 2006.

5 Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Generation of Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Jaff Schatz, 'Jews and the communist movement in interwar Poland', in Jonathan Frankel and Dan Diner (eds) *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13–37.

formed part of the liberal minded Jewish middle class. A furrier by profession, Rubin ran a successful shop selling furs and hats on one of the city's main thoroughfares,<sup>6</sup> which most certainly would have suffered during the Polish occupation, in which 2000 Jewish shops were smashed and plundered.<sup>7</sup> However, he was not a man to be easily discouraged and, making a fresh start, began to conduct business at the Leipzig Fair.<sup>8</sup> In a later communist party file on his daughter Fania, he is described as 'a petty bourgeois'.<sup>9</sup> His daughters Liubov, Fania (b. 1905) and Lenka (b. 1910), by contrast, joined the revolutionary youth, the young Russian Jews who believed in the promise of communist equality that would do away with discrimination against Jews, and they set out along their life paths accordingly.<sup>10</sup>

In 1923, Liubov Derczanska acquired a Polish passport, which enabled her to go abroad. Her parents wanted her to leave town, desist from the activities in which she was engaged and enrol at the Academy for Jewish Studies (*Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*) in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> They saw that as a safe option and her father set about making the preliminary arrangements. A document, drawn up by the secretary of a branch of the academy in Vilna assured her of a place at the school for 1924/5. Rubin Derczanska wrote a letter claiming financial responsibility for his daughter during her stay in Berlin and her

6 His business letters read: 'Dertschansky, Wilno, Rudnikastr. 2. *Pelzwarenhandlung und Hutmanufaktur*' (Furs and hat manufacture), Hamied private archive, Marina Suzman collection.

7 When the Polish army occupied Vilnius for the first time in 1919, it attacked the Jewish population on account of its Russian (communist) sympathies, killing intellectuals, ransacking the Choral synagogue, and smashing over 2000 Jewish shops in the city centre. Henry Morgenthau Sr, 'Mission of the United States to Poland/American Commission to Negotiate Peace/Mission to Poland', Paris, 3 October 1919. Internal Report of the American Commission, 4.

8 Hamied private archive, Marina Suzman collection.

9 Comintern Archive in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI)/Akte Derczanska, Fania (Léna) 1933–38, 11.

10 Zvi Y. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (New York: YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, 1988), 96 ff.; Igal Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2011), 97–157; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 105–203, 175–8.

11 The *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* was founded in 1872 as part of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment. In the 1920s it offered a thorough training in Bible, Talmud and history, languages and religious philosophy, reflecting the place of German Jews in Germany. It also produced the first ever female rabbis. Irene Kaufmann, *Die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, 1872–1942* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2006).

mother Pauline wrote to her sister Bertha, who was already living in Berlin, to ask her to keep an eye on her.<sup>12</sup>

All this is merely leading up to the point of this chapter, which is about the entanglement of 'a modern Russian woman'<sup>13</sup> from a discriminated against minority in central Europe in a group of Indians and Germans living in Berlin. In this chapter, which covers no more than eight years, I reconstruct the Jewish network that helped her settle in Berlin, recount the details of how she and Abdul Hamied met and look at how he and his friends were received in her neighbourhood. Luba essentially assumed the role of mediator between her communist and nationalist associates, between her Indian friends and her Jewish landladies, between her Jewish family in Vilna and her Muslim family in India and, later in life, between Russia and the young Indian nation-state.

There are many and varied sources on which to base the narrative. At the end of his life, Khwaja Abdul Hamied wrote his memoirs and took several other steps to secure his legacy. These are consulted, though addressed in more detail in the next chapter. Luba herself saved a cache of 650 letters, which she kept in plastic folders in her cupboard and which were found after her death in 1991. Because the letters were written in German, Russian, Polish and Yiddish, which were languages that her children did not know, their value only came to light later. Mumbai's hot, humid climate had almost destroyed them, but once removed from the plastic folders and safely preserved between acid-free sheets of paper in the Hamied family archive, they were given to me to read when I visited. My astonishment at their contents must have been apparent, for it aroused the family's curiosity. The communication that followed provided the basis for this chapter.

The letters proved to be a veritable treasure trove. Apart from offering insights into the couple's meeting in Berlin, they yielded information on the comings and goings in the Indian Bureau, the Indian revolutionary organization in Berlin discussed in Chapter 2. More importantly, the letters highlight the inclusion of Jews in the Indian network. They, along with Luba's personal documents, film reels and family photographs, as well as information from other archives, provide ample evidence on which to build her story.

Incidentally, before she arrived in Berlin, Luba had already begun to free herself from her parents' guidance. A document with a Kaunas (Kovno) University letterhead and drafted in Lithuanian states that 'Dercanskaite, Liuba, studied in the faculty of mathematics and physics for the winter term of 1924/5,

<sup>12</sup> Hamied private archive, Marina Suzman collection.

<sup>13</sup> This is how Abdul Hamied called her from their early days of courtship, and she loved him dearly for that. Hamied private archive, DO-2015-11-03-45.

where she attended courses in zoology, inorganic chemistry, physics, mineralogy, and histology'.<sup>14</sup> Although her parents wanted her to study Jewish theology and become a religious teacher, Luba's own passion lay in experimental biology. In spring 1925 she left Kaunas again, this time in the direction of Berlin. There is a second witness of her time there, for among her letters is a piece of experimental prose, written by Zacharias Shuster, and dated 1924. A young Yiddish writer, Shuster was part of the vibrant Yiddish scene in Kaunas, where he published the avant-garde journal *Di Yidishe Stime* (*The Yiddish Voice*).<sup>15</sup> The piece is splattered with inkblots, and strokes through the sentences attest to a work in progress, but it nonetheless becomes clear that the author was trying to depict three women students from Vilnius, the three *Vilnerkes*, as he nicknamed them. His portrayal of Luba marks the beginning of her trajectory, no longer the obliging daughter, but also not yet the woman of the world she portrays in the film eight years later:

The second one is slender, the darkest of the three. A face fashioned like a marble. Serious, in unexpected encounters all of a sudden shut up, like a small flower. ... Does not flirt, but who knows her dreams? Up to her ears in learning, as if she wants to reach her goal before the others. ... Speaks Russian, but her *Yiddishkeit* beckons to you in her every movement.<sup>16</sup>

If anything, Shuster's description managed to capture her determination. For the rest of her life, she kept that document in her trove.

## 2 Russian Berlin

In the period between the First World War and the Second World War, secular internationalist utopias thrived. Workers, heads of state, scientists, anarchists,

14 'Atestas', Hamied private archive, Suzman collection.

15 Anon, 'Autobiographical sketch of Zacharias Shuster', *American Jewish Committee*, 7 March 1966, internal document; Sarunas Liekis, *A State within State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania 1918–1925* (Vilnius: Versus Aurus, 2003); Sarunas Liekis, 'Jüdische Autonomie in Litauen. Unabhängigkeit einer Minderheit und das Wesen des sozialen Experiments', in Elke-Wera Kotowski and Julius H. Schoeps (eds) *Vilne. Wilna. Wilno. Vilnius. Eine jüdische Topographie zwischen Mythos und Moderne* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2017), 41–55.

16 Zacharias Shuster, 'Di Drei'. Kaunas, 1924. Hamied private archive, DO-2015-11-06-01. Translation from the Yiddish by Sophie Lichtenstein. 'Yiddishkeit' is something like the essence of being Yiddish.



FIGURE 6.1 Luba Derczanska at the age of 21

doctors, engineers and lawyers all offered visions for a better future for mankind and they went to enormous lengths to shape that reality through institutions. The largest of these, the League of Nations, and its communist competitor, the Third International, were founded in 1919. By that time, international organizations of all kinds and directions had already been established. These included the Theosophical Society, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Rotary Club, Boy Scouts groups, Zionist organizations, anti-slavery societies and central bureaux, which had been founded for everything a globalizing world could possibly need – international railways, educational facilities, stenography services, protection for indigenous peoples, defence of the natural environment, languages and cartographers.<sup>17</sup> As Mark Mazower put it, 'the international had become the terrain upon which widely differing political groups and ideologies mapped their dreams and nightmares'.<sup>18</sup>

With large parts of the world still under colonial rule, the international organizations were by and large Western initiatives. Nonetheless, there were

17 League of Nations Search Engine (Lonsea Database, University of Basel), [www.Lonsea.de](http://www.Lonsea.de).

18 Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin Books, 2012) xiii.



places outside the empire, Berlin for instance, where independence movements from the colonial world were welcomed, even encouraged. The Germans let them in, but Moscow provided the framework. In 1922, the Bolsheviks moved the Third International to Berlin, turning the city into the organizational headquarters of world revolution. The Russian trade delegation served as its front and Willi Münzenberg, the orchestrator of Comintern activity, set up a string of bureaux for 'international literary propaganda', covering up for other activities. The Indian Bureau was one.<sup>19</sup> It is important to remember though that it was not the only platform for colonial subjects in Berlin. Between the two world wars, the city also harboured Middle Eastern, Chinese and Japanese organizations, which were pursuing aims that ranged from communist and Islamic internationalism, to the founding of Chinese, Indian, African and Middle Eastern nation-states.<sup>20</sup>

When Luba Derczanska arrived in Berlin in 1925, she claimed to be a communist. Hamied remembers in his memoir that it was the first thing she told him. She said she was a member of the 'Polish–German–Russian Communist Party', and her first present to him was a portrait of Lenin.<sup>21</sup> As required from communists when crossing borders, she will have applied for membership of the Comintern and regularly visited her local party cell, but in her letters she is silent about that. All she mentions are her visits to the Russian Association in the Russian embassy to listen to the lectures of Bolshevik grandees.<sup>22</sup> The names of Georgi W. Checherin, the Soviet foreign minister, Maxim Litvinoff, the Soviet ambassador in London, and Anatoly Lunacharski, the first Bolshevik Soviet's people commissar are regularly recurring fixtures.<sup>23</sup> Not only did Hamied call her 'a modern Russian woman', but her friends also much admired

19 Diplomats of the Foreign Office in Berlin made precise observations of the unfolding of the Third International in their city. AA PA Rußland Pol. 19, 'Bolschewismus, Kommunismus (3. Internationale) 1924–1930' (R 3.1707–3.1709).

20 *Mitteilungen des deutschen Instituts für Ausländer an der Universität Berlin (1923–1942)* (Communications from the German Institute for Foreigners at the University of Berlin). Chinese and Japanese students appear in rapidly growing numbers in the institute's published statistics.

21 K.A. Hamied, *A Life to Remember: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Lalvani Publishing House, 1972), 39–42.

22 As there is no entry for Luba Derczanska in the Comintern archive in Moscow, her application form, autobiography and recommendation letters will have been stored in the Comintern archive in Berlin and in 1933 transferred to the Soviet Union. A file could not be traced.

23 In her letters to Hamied she frequently mentions the 'Club' or 'Russischer Verband' (Russian Association). Hamied nicknamed it 'the Red Club'. Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01 (Letters 1925–1927).

her determination. Lucie Hecht, who worked for the bureau as a translator, wrote to her, 'I believe you will achieve much and I think Russia needs women like you'.<sup>24</sup>

For Russian speakers, Berlin had much to offer. After the revolution, 500,000 Russians descended on the city. Among them were Russian aristocrats, imperial officers and civil servants who had lost their homes and possessions overnight and had barely escaped with their lives. There were also Russian intellectuals and businessmen who refused to submit to the proletarian Bolsheviks. Most of these people left again as soon as the necessary transit visas had been obtained and ship passages booked, but some settled in the boroughs of Charlottenburg and Wilmersdorf. A Russian orthodox church was erected around the corner from the Ahmadiyya mosque in 1927.<sup>25</sup>

On a different footing, 40,000 Russian Jews regrouped in Berlin's poorest and most miserable neighbourhood, the so-called Scheunenviertel (barn quarter) behind Alexanderplatz. They had fled the warring zones of central Europe, lived through pogroms and massacres, and now made a living as peddlars and prostitutes. They called themselves *Luftmenschen*, people who survived on air.<sup>26</sup> American aid societies and international Jewish relief organizations, in which German Jews participated, catered to their needs. For the German public at large, however, the poverty of the *Ostjuden* (Jews from the East) only confirmed their deeply ingrained prejudices. Soon after galloping inflation took hold, anti-Semitic sentiments culminated in the Scheunenviertel pogroms of 1922/3.<sup>27</sup>

For the majority of German Jews, who had struggled for 100 years to leave poverty behind them and to become accepted as Germans, the large presence of *Ostjuden* in Berlin was embarrassing,<sup>28</sup> not least because they spoke Yiddish, the jargon of the lower Jewish classes. While in central Europe, Yiddish was

24 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-105.

25 Karl Schlögel, *Das russische Berlin: Ostbahnhof Europas* (Munich: Pantheon, 2007). The church still stands today.

26 Anne-Christin Saß, *Berliner Luftmenschen: Osteuropäisch-jüdische Migranten in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012).

27 Jochen Oltmer, 'Prekäre Duldung und aktive Intoleranz: Das Schicksal jüdischer Flüchtlinge in der Weimarer Republik', in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin (ed.) *Berlin Transit, Jüdische Migranten aus Osteuropa in den 1920er Jahren* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), 34–7; Anne-Christin Saß, 'Scheunenviertel', in Dan Diner (ed.) *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2014), 352–8.

28 Gennady Estrakh and Mikhail Krutikov (eds) *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture* (London: Modern Humanities Research, 2010); Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin, *Berlin Transit: Jüdische Migranten aus Osteuropa in den 1920er Jahren* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012).

being rediscovered as a literary language and quickly became the beacon of the emancipated young, to German ears it sounded like corrupt German, a mockery of their language with which the German Jewish middle classes did not wish to become associated.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, in Vilna, Kaunas, Kiev and Odessa, vibrant avant-garde Jewish circles thrived and after the Jewish refugees arrived in Berlin the Yiddish press boomed. Yiddish writers and exponents of Yiddish culture regrouped in the literary cafés on Kurfürstendamm, notably Café des Westens and Romanisches Café, where they sat at their own tables and discussed the revolution.<sup>30</sup>

There is no indication in her letters that Luba Derczanska sought out the company of any of those Russians. She did not mingle with the Russian bourgeoisie (with whom she had nothing in common). She did not engage with the Jewish poor (although her friend Gerda Philipsborn, an opera singer, spent her days helping the orphans). Neither did she visit the places where Yiddish writers met (although she must have known a good many of them). Far from the noisy migrant hubs, she settled in the quietest corner of conventional Jewish Berlin, between Tiergarten and Moabit, on a bend of the river Spree.

### 3 The Jewish Network

The envelopes scattered between the letters show that Liubov Derczanska was now, for the sake of simplicity, calling herself Luba. They also tell us that between March 1925, when she arrived, and December 1929, when she went to Bombay, she moved house nine times. Her first lodgings were in a corner house overlooking the river Spree at Levetzow Strasse 15; then followed a string of sublet rooms around the corner, in which she either had a direct view of the river, or lived in a side street one house removed from it.<sup>31</sup> Apart from the embankment, which was where the big houses were, five smallish streets filled

29 Like Dutch and Danish, Yiddish is a Germanic language that developed from the High German from the fourteenth century onwards, incorporating Hebrew, Russian and Polish words and expressions while progressing. Harald Haarmann, *Weltgeschichte der Sprachen: Von der Frühzeit des Menschen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: CH Beck, 2006), 188; Uriel Weinreich, *College Yiddish: An Introduction to the Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture* (New York: YIVO, 1992), 54–60.

30 Estraiikh, *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin*; Karl Schlögel and Karl-Konrad Tschäpe, *Die russische Revolution und das Schicksal der russischen Juden: Eine Debatte in Berlin 1922/23* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2014).

31 Among these were Altonaer Strasse 12, Thile-Wardenberg Strasse 12, Wullenweberstrasse 3, and Levetzowstrasse 12.

with comfortable apartment buildings criss-crossed the bend, and there was a large synagogue on the corner between Jagowstrasse and Levetzowstrasse. Of liberal persuasion, it could accommodate 2000 visitors and attached to it was a community centre, a religious school and a smattering of community apartments.<sup>32</sup> The names of her landlords – Levin, Bronstein, Rosenthal, Jacob, Kußman, Liebman, Fleischner and Finkel – suggest that Luba settled well into this community, moving from one Jewish family to the next. Because the river bend was heavily bombed during the Second World War, many of those houses no longer exist, but from the towpath overlooking the tree-lined Spree, one gets an idea of the tranquil cosiness it must once have offered.

How is it possible that a young Jewish woman fresh from central Europe, whose voice and manner marked her as *Ostjude*, could be welcomed in this particular setting?<sup>33</sup> Not too far from where she lived and a brisk walk of approximately twenty minutes through Tiergarten and Schöneberg, her aunt lived in an eight-roomed apartment block behind Bayerischer Platz, a newly built neighbourhood into which well-to-do Jewish people had settled. Pauline's sister Bertha had married a German officer, who had been a pilot during the First World War and afterwards acquired a position in the higher echelons of the civil service.<sup>34</sup> The large black car in the film sequence had been his. Bertha was wealthy and felt at ease in the German Jewish milieu. In marrying Arthur Tänzler, she had embarked on a mixed marriage that broadened her horizons. Around 1900, this was still an unusual thing for eastern European Jews to do, but in German Jewish circles it was increasingly recognized as an acceptable entry into German society. By 1910, 10 per cent of the Jewish population had entered such marriages.<sup>35</sup>

In the Derczanska family, in which the conventional and the revolutionary constantly rubbed shoulders, leaving the Jewish fold had been practised before, but that did not mean that the rest of the family had approved. When Pauline's sister left for Berlin to marry into upper-class German society, Rubin's

32 Carolin Hilker-Siebenhaar, *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1987), 134–6. The synagogue was damaged during the war and demolished in 1955.

33 Shuster remarked on her *Yiddishkeit*. A recording of her voice has been preserved in 'A Rose called Zakir Hussain' (Bombay: Film Division, n.d.)

34 In the Berliner address book of 1936, there is the entry of 'Arthur Tänzler, *Landesoberinspektor* und Bertha Tänzler, née Joffe. Berlin W30, Freisingerstrasse 5a. Phone: B 6 Cornelius 2415'.

35 Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 147 ff.; Kerstin Meyring, *Die christlich-jüdische Mischehe in Deutschland 1840–1933* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1998), 94–5. In 1910, ten per cent of German Jews were in mixed marriages.

sister Revekka went to Kharkov in Russia, where she wholeheartedly supported the communist endeavour. From her letters, we know that she was a simple woman – her imperfect Russian–Yiddish and Yiddish–Russian indicate that – who chose a Russian menial worker as a partner and had at least one daughter with him.<sup>36</sup> Her relationship with Rubin was stormy, as was Bertha's with her sister Pauline. Nonetheless, when all was said and done, what counted was the family bond. When her parents arranged for Luba to study in Berlin to become a teacher of religion, it was on the strength of Aunt Bertha already living in that city. When she moved from Kaunas to Berlin, it was only natural for her to ask Aunt Bertha for help.

Luba was more conservative than her aunts. Once in Berlin, she moved in and out of a number of overlapping Jewish circles. Not only were all her landladies Jewish, so too were the doctors she saw – Dr Liebman, Dr Karl Meyer and Dr Weinberg, whom Hamied would later help to flee from Nazi Germany (Chapter 7). The few German women with whom she engaged – Gerda Philipsborn and Lucie Hecht – were also Jewish. She met them in the offices of the Indian Bureau, where they equally supported the Indian revolutionary cause. Gerda Philipsborn belonged to an old, wealthy family in which each new generation embraced different means of changing the world. Her sister Claire ('Clarita') was in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>37</sup> Her sister-in-law Regina was a composer and conducted an orchestra of contemporary music.<sup>38</sup> Gerda was not afraid to dirty her hands. As a bemused Muhammad Mujeeb noted, 'she worked for a refugee camp for Jewish children in Berlin and went to good lengths collecting funds, furniture and other things for them. Often enough she would be seen in the streets of Berlin carrying things on her person for them, very much like an ordinary labourer'.<sup>39</sup> When Mujeeb made this observation, Gerda had already taken it upon herself to introduce his friend Zakir Husain to German high culture – music, literature, philosophy, the cultured German home. It was Zakir, however, who had previously initiated the contact between the pair by introducing Gerda to the Indian cause (Chapter 7).<sup>40</sup>

36 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-05-(92, 96, 98). Both the Russian and the Yiddish translator remarked upon her style of writing. The name of the daughter was Ida.

37 Judith Berlowitz and Camarada Clara, *The (fictional) diary of Clara Philipsborn* (Oakland, CA: Self-Publishing, 2018).

38 Judith Berlowitz, *From the Family Store to the House of Lords: The Jewish Family Philipsborn of Bentschen and their Descendants* (Oakland, CA: Self-Publishing, 2016), 539–44, 564–5.

39 Gene Dannen, 'A physicist's lost love: Leo Szilard and Gerda Philipsborn'. [www.dannen.com/lostlove](http://www.dannen.com/lostlove). 26 January 2015; M. Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain: A Quest for Excellence* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972), 36–9.

40 Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 36.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Lucie Hecht came to the Indian Bureau via a different route. She had been living comfortably with her parents in Potsdam-Babelsberg and studying at Berlin University until, after the crash of 1923, she was forced to look for a job. By accident, she found one with the Indians in Halensee. Lucie was an intense woman and the Indians did not always understand her, as we saw from the rather unflattering portrait that Muhamed Mujeeb, a regular visitor, painted of her and which is discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, however she was received, she was passionate about the Indian cause and was happy to translate whatever her boss thought important: these works included Zakir Husain's thesis, articles by the American communist Agnes Smedley, the poetry of Tagore, and the notes of the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism that was held in Brussels in 1927 (Chapter 7).<sup>42</sup> In 1932, when the political climate forced communists and their sympathizers to leave Germany, the bureau's leader Chattopadhyaya went to Moscow to promote the Indian connection. Gerda Philipsborn followed Zakir Husain to India to help build a national university, the Jamia Millia Islamia, and the bureau collapsed.

Lucie Hecht lingered on for some time in Berlin translating for British and American reporters and, with their support, eventually made her escape to London in 1939. While barely surviving at first, a stroke of luck brought her into contact with the Zionist offices in Great Russell Street and she became the executive secretary of and translator for the Women's International Zionist Organization. She settled down, acquired British citizenship and would have stayed in London for the rest of her life had it not been for her parents and sister, who were groping for a foothold in Germany after the war and badly needing her support.<sup>43</sup> Her contact with Luba Derczanska seems to have been severed.

Luba's best friends were not German. They were, like her, Russian Jews with Polish passports. Hamied mentions them in his memoir – Sonia, Dunia and Estusia. Her letters tell us that Estusia (Esther) Tenenbaum was born in Warsaw,

41 Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 38.

42 Lucie Hecht received fleeting mention in a number of biographies, see Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 214, 224; Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrwegs* (Cologne: Edition Maschke, 1981), 93–106; Babette Gross, *Willy Müntzenberg, eine politische Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1967), 197ff; Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 38; Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 155, 451.

43 In a long letter to Surasini Chatto, dated 10 March 1967, Lucie Hecht recounts what happened to her and her parents during the Nazi persecution. Private Collection Lucie Hecht, Horst Krüger Papers, Box 33, 240–1.

while the sisters Sonia and Dunia P/Frada hailed from Vilna.<sup>44</sup> It is tempting to think that they left that town together, and that Sonia and Dunia were the other two *Vilnerkes* that Shuster captured in his sketch. However, irrespective of whether their friendship went back a long way or began in Berlin, it was with these three women that Luba shared her evenings, the Russian language and a Jewish network that eventually stretched between Vilna, Berlin, Moscow and Bombay. Like her, they were Jewish and loyal communists, and they all studied in the physics department because they were convinced that the future belonged to the natural sciences. The four of them constituted an inner circle, in which their fiancés – Hamied for Luba, and Arthur and Nizamuddin for Estusia – were allowed to participate.<sup>45</sup> Judging from their frequent appearances in the group photographs of Indians in Berlin (Chapter 2), they clearly supported the Indian cause.

Descriptions of how the friends communicated are scattered throughout the letter archive. In 1927, when Hamied went to visit his parents in Aligarh, Luba adopted the habit of describing her daily routines to him. Whether her visits to the Russian Association ('the second night I was there with Sonia and Dunia'), her observations of the Indian winter festival ('there were very many Russians there'), or their nightly gatherings ('Estusia and Arthur are our best and most intimate friends'), her friends were always in the vicinity. When Luba left for Vilna, she described how they all came to the station to say goodbye to her. 'Estusia and Nizam helped me with the luggage. Dunia, Sonia, Azluk and Auntie were in the waiting room. In Warsaw, Dunia's sister came to the station.'<sup>46</sup> It was a tightly knit circle that knew each other well. Estusia wrote trustingly to Hamied, asking him to send her some frogs, 'if possible the kind that is common in India, those small ones. You can put them in a jar with alcohol and put the jar in straw in a box.'<sup>47</sup>

In the same envelope there was also a letter to Hamied from Estusia's fiancé Arthur, which throws light on the position of the men in the circle. He writes:

I have to thank Stusia for her kindness in letting me read all your letters. ... I have already spoken to Luba and Stusia about this, that I cannot forgive myself for having been so foolish in the past. Out of shame and for other

44 Envelopes and scattered remarks across DO2015-11-03.

45 Arthur K. ('Artiuk', 'Azluk') was a student by profession. He frequently paid visits to Estusia Tenenbaum at Gervinusstrasse 4 in Berlin-Charlottenburg. His German was polished although slightly faulty. His parents lived in Berlin and he even introduced Luba to them. It is not known whether they were Jewish.

46 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-06.

47 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-107.

petty reasons, I only met you occasionally. We should rectify that. ... When we discussed things with you at Stusia's place, I was often not very tactful. Please forgive me, I beg you!<sup>48</sup>

After having apologized for his earlier behaviour – he had avoided meeting him and whenever they did meet had been rude to Hamied – Arthur continues to address the topic that was on their minds, namely that Hamied was not a communist, let alone a member of the Communist Party: 'so that is how we spend whole nights discussing ... how we can convert you – Hamied – to our nationality. May Allah rescue you from the thought that I am making jokes. I am bloody serious about this metamorphosis problem.'<sup>49</sup>

Although Luba's friends clearly liked Hamied and their letters are full of endearments towards him, it was a real problem for them that he, unlike them, was not dedicated to the Soviet cause. Hamied was a nationalist, somebody who believed in the future of the Indian nation-state and, in the past, Arthur seemed to have bullied him about it. It must have caused tensions in the group, for, after all, Luba loved Hamied. Arthur's attempt to apologize and to voice his concerns to Hamied in writing, had previously been discussed with Luba and Estusia. That much he admits. Maybe they had put pressure on him to write that letter. That it was not easy for him to do so is apparent from his clumsy salutation: *Mahlzeit Kollege!* ('May it go down well Comrade!'). That was German communist parlance, and very proletarian.

The letters, however, are remarkably taciturn about their lives as Russian–Polish communists in Berlin, revealing little about how they lived, and from what. Much later, in 1935, when they were already scattered across the world – Luba in Bombay, Sonia, Dunia and Azluk in Moscow, and Estusia in Tel Aviv – the latter wrote a long, troubled letter to Luba, in which she defended her decision to have gone to Palestine instead of Russia. What becomes evident from her words is that, for the inner circle, being a communist was a choice for life, and not something one could easily discard. It was aggravating that, for Jewish communists who believed in Russia's future, the choice vehemently excluded Zionism.<sup>50</sup> Estusia must have been in dire straits to side secretly with the

48 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-107.

49 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-107.

50 Mark Mazover paints a lively picture of how deep such feelings ran. Himself from a family of dedicated Vilna communists, he remembers how, at the end of the twentieth century, the question of Zionism still managed to upset his parents' dinner table. Mark Mazover, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), 249.



Zionists.<sup>51</sup> To Luba she describes how the friends reproached her for not being in Moscow with them, how Arthur put pressure on her, accused her of desertion and complained that he was lonely and could not wait for her any longer. She wrote to her about the nightly telephone calls between Moscow and Berlin, the tears, and how her parents in Tel Aviv pleaded with her not to go to Moscow. Finally, she said, she made up her mind, but leaving Berlin in the direction of Tel Aviv made her feel so guilty that even saying goodbye to Auntie Bertha had not been an option, so much did she dread the inevitable questions: 'I do not want to make excuses, because there is no excuse for me. I will tell you the main reason for my silence, it was, I will say it openly, my cowardice. I was ashamed to write to you that I was going home'.<sup>52</sup>

Estusia's letter to Luba lays bare several things. Written three months after she reached Palestine, it describes her struggle over her communist and Zionist loyalties. What it does not mention is that this struggle was taking place in the midst of Nazi Berlin and that the political situation there strongly informed Estusia's decision. The Nazis were stepping up their discrimination against Jews in preparation for the Nuremberg Laws, and Estusia had felt its impact. After writing a brilliant dissertation at Berlin University, she was appointed as a research assistant in the genetics department of the famous Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) for brain research in Berlin Buch. However, when the Nazis ordered the KWI to dismiss foreigners, Jews and women – the majority of the work force – her career was threatened. A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation helped her to stay on for another year, but in 1934 she faced forced emigration.<sup>53</sup>

Nowhere are those conditions mentioned. Instead, Estusia's account centres on a long dissolved circle of friends but one that still managed to influence her thinking. For Azluk, Dunia and Sonia – a chorus backed by Luba's sister Fania, who had also settled in Moscow – it was essential that Estusia join them and they were wondering what was taking her so long. During their nightly telephone calls Estusia will have glossed over the Tel Aviv option simply because she felt ashamed of even considering the possibility. In her own mind, she had not been forced out of Germany. She had committed treason and therefore did not dare to write.

51 In a letter to her mentor Oskar Vogt, dated 1933, she had already confessed that she was a Zionist, C. and O. Vogt Archive, Duesseldorf. With thanks to Annette Vogt for drawing my attention to their correspondence.

52 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-05-05. Translation from the Russian by Botakoz Kassymbekova.

53 Anette B. Vogt, 'Estera Tenenbaum 1904–1963', Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia>.

The letter leaves a question mark over the kind of link that tied the friends together. Was their circle a communist cell, a unit with a special mission in the sprawling Comintern network in Berlin? Margarete Buber-Neumann, a young German communist who for some time also worked for the Indian Bureau, offers an insightful observation into how foreign communists organized themselves in Berlin:

To communist immigrants who did not want to betray their conviction, it was forbidden to assimilate or even to become a member of the Communist Party of their host country. Security reasons forbade that. In their majority they became professional revolutionaries ..., working for one of the numerous camouflaged Comintern enterprises in Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Buber-Neumann's observation raises the question of how Luba and her friends made a living. Their frequent appearance in Indian Bureau group photographs (Chapter 2) seems to indicate that, after Luba met Hamied, they became involved in the Comintern organization, but the details largely elude us. The letters show that Luba herself cooperated with Lucie Hecht in some unnamed tasks about which she spoke to Hamied on several occasions,<sup>55</sup> but did they also provide her with an income? All one can conclude is that her financial status was precarious. Soon after they met, Hamied took her into his financial care. His concern for her speaks from his every letter: 'take the eggs from my fridge. ... You can take as much money as you need from the bank. Everything that is mine is yours.'<sup>56</sup> He paid for her tuition fees and for her doctor, and gave her money whenever he could. Even while he was in Aligarh and she in Vilna, he kept sending cheques to Estusia, which he would ask her to cash and then send the money on to Luba in an envelope, so that she would have no need. Financially, now she was free to devote herself to her studies.

What makes Esther Tenenbaum (1904–1963) stand out from her friends is her distinguished scientific career. She sparkled as a student in Berlin and continued to shine after she migrated to Palestine. In 1936, she found work at the Hebrew University, first as a laboratory assistant and then as a junior assistant until she acquired a lectureship in experimental pathology. Some time after that she joined the Department of Experimental Medicine and Cancer Research from where she worked as a guest scholar in Paris, Cambridge, London and Edinburgh. Finally, she travelled to the United States and worked for a

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54 Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau*, 104.

55 Hamied private archive, DO2105-11-01-(72, 93).

56 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-49.

while at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, where she carried out experiments on brain tissues *in vitro*.<sup>57</sup>

After a series of affairs with different men in Berlin (see below), she remained unmarried for the rest of her life, but in Tel Aviv entered a relationship with the painter Miron Sima (1902–1999). The couple had much in common. Like her, Sima was a Russian refugee who had found a new home in Germany. Whereas she studied in Berlin, he enrolled in the art academy in Dresden where his exceptional talent was quickly recognized. Like she had been, he too was forced out of Germany. However, for the rest of their life together the couple conversed in German, sharing memories of their life in Germany, and feeling homesick. When she died in Tel Aviv in 1963, Sima seems to have taken care of her possessions, of which only some photographs remain.<sup>58</sup>

Estusia's letter to Luba finally manages to throw some light on Luba's position in the network. In the opening sentence, Estusia expresses her astonishment by saying that 'I did not expect a letter from you'. In fact, on the contrary, she had expected Luba to side with the others, especially with her sister Fania who seemed to gain an authoritative voice in the circle once it settled in Moscow. Nonetheless, she knows she can trust her:

Liubochka, I wrote openly about everything because I know I can write this to my best friend. But I ask and beg you not to write about this, not even to Fania. ... Unfortunately, here at home and everywhere around here, people hate Fania's friends and my parents think I would perish there with them.<sup>59</sup>

In 1934, Esther Tenenbaum made up her mind. To all appearances, Luba Derczanska had made up hers too when she decided to marry Hamied and follow him to India. Remarkably, she managed to keep in touch with her friends, both in Berlin and after their departure to Moscow. Although none of the letters that reached her during the crisis following Estusia's desertion survived, Estusia's words amply show that they all trusted her. Letters written in Moscow must have informed her of what was going on. Somebody also sent her the Tel Aviv address. Then she sat down and wrote a letter that managed to bridge the gap once more. Luba was a go-between, a person who was able to keep the balance

57 Vogt, Eстера Tenenbaum.

58 Private estate of Miron Sima in the Mishkan Museum of Ein Harod, Israel. With thanks to Noah Benninga (Hebrew University in Jerusalem) for following Esther Tenenbaum's trail.

59 'Liubochka' is a Russian diminutive that only intimate friends are entitled to use. Here, it is used as an invocation. Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-05-05, translation from the Russian by Botakoz Kassymbekova.

between extremes and bridge differences. In her life with Hamied in Bombay, that quality would still come in useful. However, at the start of their relationship, she employed it to monitor the Indian–Jewish connection. In the process, not only their lives, but also their respective personal networks became dovetailed. In the following section, I recount how that was realized.

#### 4 Micro Strategies of Globalization

Khwaja Abdul Hamied entered Luba's world on 18 April 1925. It was a pure coincidence. His professor had invited him to join a student outing on the lakes around Berlin and she happened to be on the same boat with another group. He performed some card tricks and, looking over his shoulder, she managed to see through his illusion. They started a conversation and, from that, their relationship was born.<sup>60</sup>

Originally, Hamied had come to Berlin with a group of friends whom he had met in the Non-Cooperation Movement at Aligarh University, the full story of which will be related in the next chapter. Like Zakir Husain, Muhamed Mujeeb and Abid Hussain, he was making plans for the future of India and engaged simultaneously in writing a dissertation and meeting Indian politicians. He envisioned his own future in the field of chemistry, the basics of which he planned to introduce to his country. The four of them were regular visitors to the Indian Bureau and, as a matter of course, knew about its communist associations. Later in life he would often recall how he and his friends defended the abolition of violence. While most of the workers in the Indian Bureau did not shy away from the thought of a violent revolution, Hamied and his friends tried to convince them otherwise. That was his position when he and Luba met.

His first letter, the very first in Luba's letter archive, was written four days after they met and, since she had written to him first, it was in response to hers.<sup>61</sup> Their initial encounter had clearly affected Hamied. In his letter, he described how the next day he had felt feverish and unwell, and had consulted a doctor about the possibility of x-ray radiation. He also told her that he could not forget her beautiful eyes and asked if he could please see her again. She was more cautious. Although she gave him a photograph of herself, she decided that he could visit her only once a week, but should write to her about himself on the other days. A month later, he moved to Kirchstrasse 13, which was in her neighbourhood, a mere ten minutes' walk along the towpath. Between their

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60 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 40–1.

61 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-(01-03).

respective rooms there was also a much faster shortcut through Tiergarten. After that move, she stopped writing for a while.<sup>62</sup>

In the summer following their meeting, Luba left Berlin for a prolonged walking tour in the Harz mountains of Germany. Hamied was not allowed to come. The village in which she lodged, and where she received his letters, was called Elend, which is also German for miserable. Henceforth, that is how he described himself, and that is how she addressed him: *Elender Hamied!* (miserable Hamied!).<sup>63</sup> It was their first private joke. The language in which they communicated was German, which she mastered better than he did because of her grasp of Yiddish and her linguistic education. He too managed well; he copied lines from Goethe and from the books she lent him, and took on the difficult German grammar without inhibition, conjugational pitfalls notwithstanding. German was the language in which they settled down together, albeit creating their own version of it as they went along. In fact, for the rest of their lives they would use it in their private communications. It was only during the war, when the Germans attacked central Europe and Luba's anxiety was mounting by the day, that he fell back on English in an attempt to alleviate her anxiety.

For the next two years they lived in a cocoon; it was as if they were in incubation. As students, their life together took place between classroom obligations, exams, political events, and meeting up with friends. Luba studied hard to become a laboratory assistant. Hamied acquired his doctorate and launched into a series of internships in German chemical plants. Whenever he was in Berlin, she would expose him to her communist outlook and to the Soviet embassy, while he would introduce her to his friends from Aligarh and to the Indian Bureau. A photograph of an Eid al-Fitr celebration in Hamied's rooms bears witness to the fact that he also introduced her to the festive spirit of Muslim celebrations.<sup>64</sup> Through his attempts to link Muslim and Hindu Indians, Hamied was used to introducing people to one another who were of different persuasions. Adding a Jewish communist from central Europe fitted in well with that.

After Zakir Husain and Abid Hussain returned to India in 1926, Hamied's most important friends in Berlin were Ishaq Shahidi and Nizamuddin Ahmad. Like Hamied, they studied an abstract field of science and, like him, they courted European women. Shahidi fell in love with Hilde Rahel Scharf and, in their letters to each other, Luba and Hamied repeatedly discussed their relationship.

62 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-(02, 38).

63 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-(04-71).

64 Hamied private archive, Berlin Album, 22.

Shahidi originated from Lahore, where his family had probably been involved in the Ahmadiyya movement. In Berlin, he regularly participated in Ahmadiyya community life. Hilde wrote a conversion narrative in which she describes how they met. Apparently, she first saw Shahidi when she was teaching German to foreigners at Berlin University. They spoke about religion together, and he introduced her to the mosque's lectures and festivals. One day she decided to participate in the prayer as well and that experience accelerated her decision to embrace Islam.<sup>65</sup> They married in 1927.

For some years, Nizamuddin courted Esther Tenenbaum and, whenever the couples were together, he always seemed close to Estusia. In the letters, they are also often mentioned as a pair. In the photographs, we see them repeatedly holding hands. In the end, the courtship failed, although they seem to have continued intermittently. A photograph taken at a New Year dance in 1926 shows them all still together. Hamied, Shahidi, Luba and Nizam are standing. Sonia (or Dunia), Hilde and Estusia are sitting. Shahidi has his hands on Hilde's shoulder and Nizam and Estusia are holding hands. Lucie Hecht is the woman sitting at an angle (Figure 6.2).<sup>66</sup>

Luba's was not the only inner circle to experience an enlargement, for her Jewish network on the Spree also benefited from her relationship with Hamied. At first, she introduced Hamied to her doctors and her various landladies. In the letter archive there is a postcard from Mrs Jacob to Hamied in Aligarh, on which half the neighbourhood have scribbled their greetings<sup>67</sup> and her daughters appear in some of the Indian Bureau photographs (Chapter 2). Mrs Jacob's portrait was later allotted a place in Hamied's Berlin photograph album,<sup>68</sup> and the Liepmans and Rosenthals seem to have enjoyed a similar kind of relationship with him.<sup>69</sup>

Shahidi also moved into the neighbourhood and, judging from the envelopes, he and Hilde lodged with the same group of landladies. For the longest time they lived with the Jacobs at Flensburgerstrasse, a homely street just across the river from where Luba was staying. It is no coincidence that the Urdu Association, of which all the Muslim Indians in Berlin were members

65 Hildegard Scharf, Irma Gohl and Huda J. Schneider, 'Drei Europäerinnen bekennen sich zum Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1931), 53–9. Her photograph was printed on p. 32.

66 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 48–9. Comparing this with other photographs made identification possible, see Chapter 2.

67 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-102, eight different handwritings.

68 Hamied private archive, Berlin Album, 26.

69 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-97, DO2015-11-02-04, et passim. Once Hamied departed for India, the Liepmans and Rosenthals repeatedly sent him the latest news. In her own letters, Luba noted with how much esteem they spoke of him.



FIGURE 6.2 The Red Club, 1926

and to which Luba and her friends were regularly invited, set up headquarters at the Café Köhler, which was neatly situated on the riverbank between their respective places.<sup>70</sup> Aunt Bertha in Schöneberg participated in the growing Indian–Jewish network as a matter of course, inviting the friends to coffee and cake at her home, and sharing in the farewell scenes at the railway station.

Globalization has been defined as the worldwide interlinking of transport, commerce, politics, languages, cultures, and people.<sup>71</sup> From that vantage point, what took place in that little corner of Berlin was globalization at close quarters. To return to Linda Colley, whom we encountered in the Introduction, this micro strategy adopted by people who happened to live together in fact marked

70 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-(34, 50).

71 Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Geschichte der Globalisierung: Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen* (Munich: Beck, 2012).

a momentous period when global history became compressed.<sup>72</sup> Previously, Jews in Europe and Muslims in India had certainly heard of one another. They had sampled each other's manufactured goods, maybe even tasted each other's produce, but back in the 1920s, they had never actually met. When that happened, or so the interactions on the Spree embankment seem to tell us, they were curious about one another and remarkably trusting. When Hamied travelled to India, Estusia asked him to send her frogs. Despite his qualms, Arthur could not restrain himself from asking Hamied to describe the jungle and the Maharajas. Mrs Jacob expressed what everybody felt when she wrote that she hoped he'd be back in no time at all.<sup>73</sup>

That the participants in this little network were either Jewish or Muslim was something that was rarely commented on. Maybe it hardly played a role. As I explained in the Introduction, the Muslims in the group were raised as modernists, searching for ways to harmonize traditional with Western knowledge. All Jewish women came from families that in some way or another had grappled with *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment and afterwards tolerated secular, even atheistic forms of Jewishness. It may be assumed that the participants in the network looked for societal consensus rather than cultural difference. Certainly, they did not spell out theological differences. What the couples and their landladies shared was a secular, middle-class upbringing and, through that, expectations of how to present themselves and to communicate with the other. That seemed to be a stable enough basis upon which to build.

When Magnus Hirschfeld, the famous Berlin professor in sexology and himself a Jew, lectured in Bombay in January 1932, the Hamieds threw a party for him.<sup>74</sup> Hirschfeld was fascinated by their 'mixed' marriage and mused in his diary that marriages between Muslims and Jews seemed unexceptional. Asking the couple how that could be possible, Luba offered him what he called an 'indicative answer': she said it was 'because Muslims are three-quarters Jews anyway'.<sup>75</sup> Her response will have mirrored a standing joke, maybe *their* answer to the Nazi obsession with half, quarter and one-eighth Jews. Nonetheless, it managed to capture the innocence with which participants in the Muslim–Jewish network in Berlin had once behaved.

Within Luba's personal circle, three Muslim–Jewish relationships were established. In due course, one couple broke up, and the other two decided to

72 Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elisabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Random Books, 2007), 300.

73 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-102.

74 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 109.

75 Magnus Hirschfeld, *Weltreise eines Sexualforschers im Jahre 1931/32* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 2006), 320.



marry under Muslim law in the Berlin mosque. That decision, although a guarantee for decency when moving in with each other, also indicated problems ahead. What became a recurring topic in the letters was the question of how to tell their parents, and when.

## 5 The Journey Home

In October 1927, Hamied's time in Berlin was drawing to an end. He had finished his studies, completed a number of internships, and his money was running out. His parents were expecting his imminent return. The lovers were apprehensive. The decision to marry had been postponed until they had each spoken with their respective parents. When Hamied finally booked a ship's passage to Bombay, it was with that in mind. Nonetheless, India was far away and it was unclear how they would continue in the future. Would they ever see each other again? Their farewell reflected that uncertainty.<sup>76</sup>

Before he left, they came up with a new plan. While he was at home seeking an opportunity to speak to his mother, Luba would go to Vilna to do the same. That way, they would be able to describe to each other how things were proceeding. On 15 November, Luba was able to tell Hamied that Sonia had already secured her the certification she required to apply for a job in a Vilna office and, apparently, a precondition for her travel. On 1 December, she disembarked from the Berlin–Warsaw–Vilna express at Vilna railway station.<sup>77</sup>

The letters they sent each other during this time are of considerable length – fifteen or more pages are no exception. They are scribbled hastily and on thin paper, which makes reading hazardous. Only the envelopes are marked in clear script (Luba even typed hers) to ensure that they would arrive safely. Luba addressed hers straightforwardly to his parents in the family mansion 'Masud Manzil' in Aligarh. Hamied, by contrast, had to use cover addresses to keep the relationship secret from her parents. Her friends Sonia, Dunia and Estusia in Berlin and Rahel Felman in Vilna took it upon themselves to receive his letters, then forward them in a new envelope with a different sender's name written on the back.

Luba's visit to her parents, under such circumstances, did not go well. Although the whole family waited for her on the platform, the reception was not what she expected:

76 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-(72–89).

77 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-97.

*Nu*, everybody was at the station and it was all as it should be after three years of absence. It's just that they were shocked about my appearance. My mother could not stop crying because of that. It made me very sorry. These people have not seen me for three years, so now they think I am too thin, but I feel I have not changed a bit since we last saw each other. I am fed the whole day through and not allowed to do anything but a little walk. I do everything mother tells me because I do not want to upset her any further.<sup>78</sup>

Three years earlier, when Luba had taken herself off to Kaunas, her parents had told her not to return until she had finished her studies and, apart from the obligatory *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) greetings, there had been very little communication between them. When she announced this impending visit, her parents told her not to come. She went anyway, but their unease was palpable: 'at home everything was prepared in a festive manner, but I felt instinctively that something was wrong'.<sup>79</sup> Under these circumstances, she could not find an opening to confess to her mother that she was in love and with whom. When she finally did, they flatly refused to condone the prospect of a union with a foreigner of a different religion. Consequently, when Hamied's letter – after having made its circuitous route from Aligarh to Estusia in Berlin, to Rahel Felman in Vilna, from where it was collected by hand – reached her with the good tidings that his mother supported the marriage plan, she had to write back, 'unfortunately I cannot say that of my own mother'.<sup>80</sup>

Instead, her father decided on a new direction for her future, according to which she was going to be sent to Manchester to work in a synagogue. Luba naively agreed:

My father, and my mother as well, want me to go to England after my exam to take up a position there. The reason for this is that my father's best friend lives in Manchester, a city in England, and he very much wants me to come. He is the main cantor in a synagogue there and lives in his own villa. Of course, I agreed to this plan.<sup>81</sup>

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78 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-109. *Nu* is the Yiddish equivalent of 'well!' Luba used it so often that Hamied started to use it too.

79 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-109.

80 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-111.

81 Hamied private archive, D02015-11-01-111.

Upon returning to her familiar surroundings Luba once again became a dutiful daughter. She was the eldest of four siblings and in that role felt responsible. Her letters are full of pride for her little sister Lenka, whom she reports was already playing a role in society, as well as worries about her brother Zorach. Her parents will have put pressure on her to do something meaningful with her life. Little did they realize that this daughter would eventually do what she wanted to do, but would nonetheless support them against all odds. The next year, Lenka became a member of the banned Communist Party and took part in street demonstrations. She was arrested in 1931 and sentenced to four years in a high security prison. On completing her sentence she left Vilna for Russia.<sup>82</sup> In 1932, her sister Fania, having been expelled from France as an unwanted communist, travelled straight to Moscow without even stopping over in Vilna. Rubin and Pauline were shattered. In Kharkov, Aunt Revekka rejoiced.<sup>83</sup>

In December 1927, however, dissention from the family narrative was still unthinkable. The Derczanskis, facing their stubborn eldest, suggested a sensible Jewish solution. In their letters, Luba and Hamied even toyed with the idea of 'Manchester'. Hamied declared he would move there if Luba was to be offered a fixed position, 'otherwise, stay in Berlin and learn English. You won't experience any money problems as long as Hamied lives there.'<sup>84</sup> His words soothed her. Upon returning, Luba looked for an English teacher and also moved out of her neighbourhood. Too many friends, too many distractions, she wrote to Hamied.<sup>85</sup> Instead, she found a room far from the city centre, in the vicinity of her school, where she withdrew to make it through the forthcoming exams and prepare for an independent job. When Hamied returned to Europe in May 1928, she wrote that she could not come to Paris because of the exams.<sup>86</sup> In June, he came to Berlin instead where they married in the Ahmadiyya mosque. However, she waited until August before she sent her parents a telegram with the news.<sup>87</sup> A year later, they were ready to receive Hamied, who recorded their first meeting in his memoir:

I cannot forget the scene at the station where Luba's father, mother, uncles and aunties, her brother, Zorach, and sisters were anxiously waiting to see who their daughter had married. Perhaps they thought that their

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82 Archiwum Akt Nowych (Warsaw), entry Derczanska, Helena, CA KC 9292, Z. (abstract based on police files).

83 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-05-06.

84 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-05.

85 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-06.

86 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-47.

87 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-75.

son-in-law would be a dark looking type of Indian. As we alighted from the train, I could see how happy they felt in greeting their son-in-law, who was very well dressed and was fair and quite handsome.<sup>88</sup>

Hamied had his own interpretation of the family tension, which he translated into the Indian preoccupation with skin colour.<sup>89</sup> Yet, colour seems to have been the least of their worries. What the Derczanskis struggled with was the right degree of modernity. Luba only managed to bridge the disagreement through repeating the marriage ceremony in the choral synagogue in Vilna. No photographs or documents survived this event, but family lore did and it suffices to say that it confirmed her skills as a bridge builder. Returning to Vilna in 1927, she discovered the chasm between central European Judaism and her own, still fresh, experience of the Indian–Jewish entanglement. Her reconciliation with her family allowed her to remain her father’s daughter and keep true to her family roots. Hamied detected the compromise. From his Indian perspective, in which pedigree occupied a central place, he observed: ‘I believe Luba inherited all her fine and noble character from her father and this has made her popular, not only in my family but among the vast number of my friends all over India’.<sup>90</sup> Incidentally, the metamorphosis of this ‘modern Russian woman’ was very different from the one described in Chapter 1. Neither she nor Hamied anchored themselves in Berlin in ways that would have rendered them *Berliners*. Holding onto his Indian identity, Hamied returned to ‘Hindustan’. His idea of a future India involved a shared space in which every religious group, whether Muslim or Hindu, Sikh, Jain, or Jew, would enjoy an equal share of state services and equal representation in the public sphere. In this scheme of things, Luba’s place was prepared, and she, for her part, was ready to become an Indian woman.

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In April 1932, after three years of living in poorly furnished rented rooms in Bombay, trying to make a living selling potency pills in the Far East for which Hamied had acquired the rights in Berlin, the couple had finally saved up enough money to pay for a sea passage to Europe. She badly wanted to visit her

88 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 85.

89 An early testimony of this preoccupation is found in Mirza Sheikh I’tesammudin, *Wonders of Vilayet*, translated by Kaiser Haq (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008). See also Haq’s own observations on pp. xv–xvi.

90 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 86.

parents in Vilna, while he needed to see his business partners.<sup>91</sup> In Berlin, they stayed with Aunt Bertha. It was during this period that the film, described at the beginning of this chapter, was shot, featuring a self-conscious Luba, a beaming Hamied, Aunt Bertha, and Bertha's husband, Arthur Tänzler. The latter poses in the screenshots as a benevolent gentleman with a balding head and round rimless spectacles and, as I mentioned earlier, the car was his. They will have wanted to show the Indian family what Berlin had to offer. The most important tool for this, the hand camera that followed their every move, remains invisible. Cameras for amateur use that could be held with one hand and that could follow moving objects in the street were at that time state of the art, and they were still very expensive.<sup>92</sup> Uncle Arthur no doubt owned the camera too, but it was clearly Luba who directed the script.

These were global citizens at home in the different capitals of the world, with access to the latest technology and equipped with the knowledge of how to behave as a modern couple. Another strip of film shot some days after the Berlin scene shows them in bathing costumes and in the company of another German–Indian couple. This time the place of action is the beach; the men are pushing the women towards the edge of the water and the women are laughing into the camera.<sup>93</sup> Here is another example of globalization at close range, for modernity had devised a wholly new type of man and woman, which in the East and West, in Bombay and Berlin, spoke to the imagination of the middle classes. Indeed, between 1924 when she left Vilna, and 1932 when she returned with her husband to the place of her first love, Luba had moved from one station to the next. She had moved from her Jewish home and communist commitments in Vilna, to a Yiddish setting in Kaunas, to communist friends and a refuge in the German Jewish milieu of Berlin, to her entanglement with an Indian lover and involvement in the cause of Indian independence, and she took something from each encounter as she made her way in the world.

This is not the place to discuss the details of Luba Hamied's life in Bombay, of the support she gave her husband's business, of her daily life and the small things she did to create a shared space for Hindus and Muslims, of her desperate search for her parents after the war only to discover that they had been murdered by the Germans – that part of her life will be addressed elsewhere. To conclude, however, it is important to recognize that she managed to keep a balance between the Indian and Russian sides of her family. This was a rare

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91 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 107.

92 Emanuel Goldberg and Joris Ivens, 'The Kinamo movie camera', *Film History: An International Journal* (20 (1), 2008), 49–58.

93 'Old Family Film Part 1', Hamied private archive.

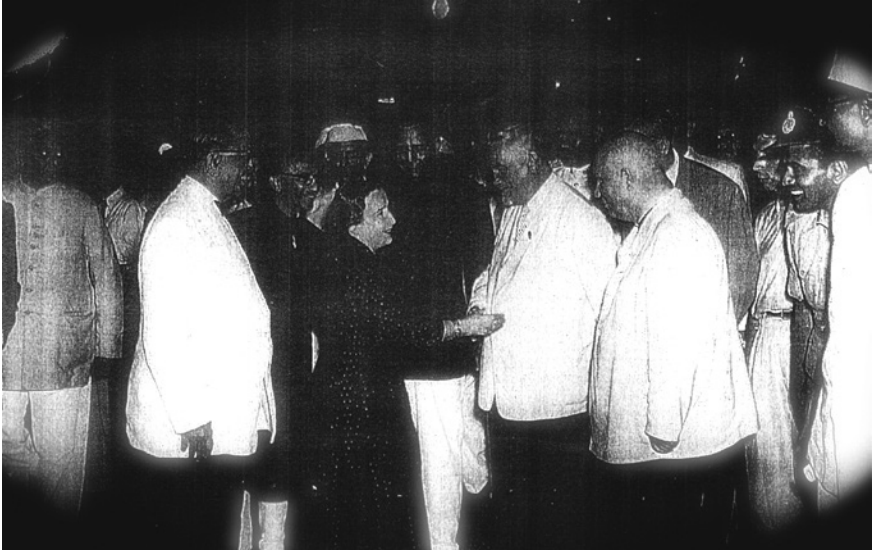


FIGURE 6.3. Luba with Bulganin and Khrushchev in Bombay, 1953

gift, which later in life she was able to extend to include the Indian and Russian heads of state. A photograph in the family collection serves as testimony (Figure 6.3).<sup>94</sup>

In 1956, once India had gained independence and established itself as a non-aligned state, President Nehru invited the prime minister of the Soviet Union Nikolai Bulganin and the secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev on a formal visit in the hope of establishing relations between their respective countries. The photograph shows Luba Hamied stepping forward to grasp Bulganin's hand. Whatever she said at that decisive moment must have been beguiling, for the Russians are clearly enchanted, and not only they. Thus, the Russian girl from Jewish Vilna had furthered India's interests while at the same time connecting to her home base. As everything else, that too was a result of globalization.

94 Hamied private archive, Marina Suzman collection. Cf. <https://www.bulganinandkhrushchevisittoindia>.

## An Indian Muslim in Jewish Berlin: Khwaja Abdul Hamied

When Khwaja Abdul Hamied first met Luba Derczanska on a steamer touring the lakes of Berlin in 1925, and they coincidentally struck up a conversation, one of his first gestures towards her had been to sit down and draw her a map of India (Figure 7.1). Sketching its coastline with the British settlements of Calcutta, Rangoon and Colombo in the east and Delhi and Karachi in the north, he will have explained to her that he came from ‘Hindustan’, a continent that had been under British colonial rule for almost two hundred years, and that it was the home of Muslims and Hindus. His strokes near the upper edge showed the high mountains from where the holy rivers of Hinduism flowed. The names of Lahore and Kashmir pinpointed the old centres of spiritual Islam.<sup>1</sup>

Hamied also charted his own history on the map by marking where he was born (Aligarh), where British soldiers had shot into a group of Muslim protesters (Cawnpore), and where he had flouted his noble Muslim family tradition by enrolling in a lowly leather trade school (Madras). He would then have taken her back to Aligarh where he had been one of the main student leaders in the Non-Cooperation Movement, adding extra dots to indicate Ahmedabad, which was from where Gandhi had coordinated the movement from his ashram, and Bombay, the centre of the Indian independence struggle. He will have told her about key experiences that were still fresh in his mind – how they had walked out of college and organized picket lines, and how he had taught at the Jamia Millia Islamia, the Muslim national university in which the British had no say.

Hamied described himself as a colonial subject and a freedom fighter, a member of an oppressed people but courageous enough to challenge both his family and the British. Meanwhile, words written on the side of the map in German, English, Urdu, Sanskrit and Russian, convey something of the vast chasm the two students had to cross to make themselves understood. The language in which they conversed was German, which he had started to learn the previous year and which Luba had studied at school as a fifth language. The words *leer* (empty in German), *chali* (empty in Arabic), *China* and *Chinesien*

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1 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-01.

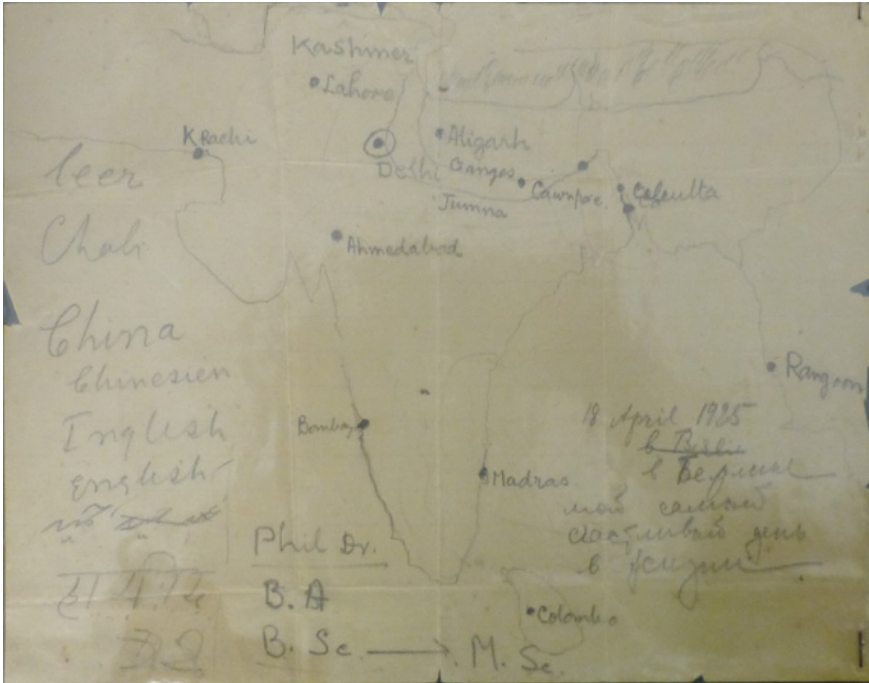


FIGURE 7.1 Hamied's hand-drawn map of 'Hindustan'

provide clues to the course of that conversation.<sup>2</sup> Jotting down his name in Urdu and Sanskrit, the languages of India, Hamied will have explained to her that his first language was nonetheless English (a language she did not yet master), as were his degrees of B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science) and M.Sc. (Master of Science). The underlined *Phil. Dr.* referred to his endeavour to write a dissertation in Berlin.

They talked about India and the independence struggle, not about her field of experience, which would have been the Russian borderlands and the Jewish struggle, just as they talked about his degrees, not hers. In these things he was ahead of her, and this set the direction in which they would head together. Their meeting was a coincidence, but one that left an indelible impression on them both. When Hamied gave her the map as a present, Luba added a note in Russian on the side: '18 April 1925 in Berlin, the happiest day of my life'.

This chapter is about Khwaja Abdul Hamied, a Muslim Indian who arrived in Berlin in 1924, shortly after his first experience of a rebellion against the

<sup>2</sup> 'Chinesien' (exotic China) is a fantasy place frequently evoked in the popular German songs of the time.



colonial power, to study for a dissertation in chemistry with a view to returning to India with the knowledge he needed to help build his country. In Berlin he became acquainted with a Russian Jewish woman, with whom he fell in love and who, in return, would introduced him to her Jewish circle there. They came from very different stations, not only with respect to language, class and tradition, but also in terms of their respective experiences of oppression and the freedom struggle. Whereas her family suffered from the discrimination and violence being perpetrated against Jews in Russia, his family had been the victims of the downfall of the Muslim nobility in India and its subsequent takeover by a foreign power. Likewise, her infatuation with the Bolshevik regime was a far cry from his refusal to cooperate with an oppressive colonial administration. Theirs was an unlikely match, but one that would never have happened but for the accelerated globalization and worldwide migration of recent times. Yet, despite their apparent differences they had much in common. To explain the success of the Muslim–Jewish encounter that ensued from their meeting, in this chapter I intend to look into both issues. As in the previous chapter, the main focus is on the time they shared in Berlin.

## 1 In the Footsteps of Muslim Modernists

Unlike Luba's relatives and forebears, whose legacy had been reduced to a few archival accounts (Chapter 6), Hamied's ancestors proved to be only one click away. There are books written about them and their profiles can be studied on the web. Khwaja Abdul Hamied, born in 1898 in Aligarh, was the son of Khwaja Abdul Ali (1862–1948), district court judge and heir to a long line of Nakshbendi reformers, and Masud Jehan Begum (1872–1957), a princess and heir to a lineage that went back to Shah Durrani, the king of Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> As Hamied grew up, tales of his illustrious maternal ancestors will have been a recurrent topic of conversation. Not too far removed in time stood the looming figure of his grandfather Khwaja Muhammad Yusuf (who died in 1902), his mother's father, a lawyer and the biggest landowner in Aligarh.<sup>4</sup> The Khwaja had been wealthy enough to marry Princess Anjum Sultan, the child of one of those unlucky princes whom the British deported from Kabul at the conclusion of the

3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khwaja\\_Abdul\\_Hamied](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khwaja_Abdul_Hamied). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad\\_Shah\\_Durrani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shah_Durrani).

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khwaja\\_Muhammad\\_Yusuf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khwaja_Muhammad_Yusuf).

British–Afghan wars.<sup>5</sup> Grandfather Yusuf was also a social reformer with enough power and money to support the founding of the Muslim–Anglo College in Aligarh; it would later become Aligarh University.<sup>6</sup> His son Abdul Majeed Khwaja (1885–1962), Hamied’s uncle and another towering figure in the family, was behind many of the key ideas on Muslim Modernism, secular nationalism and Hindu–Muslim harmony that were later associated with Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Movement.<sup>7</sup>

Hamied’s father’s pedigree was no less illustrious. In 1875, Khwaja Abdul Ali’s uncle Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817–98) founded the Muslim–Anglo College, which he modelled on Cambridge University where he himself had studied.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, he introduced Western style education to Muslim Indians, adding European subjects and the English language to the transmission of traditional religious knowledge. Among his coreligionists, this educational reform was still highly disputed, but Khwaja Abdul Ali was among the first graduates of the Muslim–Anglo College and a scion of Western reform and, when his own son grew up, he did everything he could to give him the best of both worlds.

On the first page of his memoir, on which Hamied enumerates his illustrious forebears, he mentions that his father’s line reached back to Khwaja Abdulla Ahrar, the famous Sufi master of the Nakshbendi order who died in 1489 in Samarkand.<sup>9</sup> Like all Nakshbendis, Ahrar supported *Tagdid*, the renewal of knowledge, and urged his followers not to give in to ecstasy, but to model their lives on that of the Prophet and a strict interpretation of Muslim law.<sup>10</sup> His heirs, who still bear the title *Naqib-ul Wali*, ‘one who studies the ways of those near to God’, settled in Delhi and maintained a Sufi Lodge in Agra until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

5 Hazaraha, Fayz Muhammad Katib (2013) *The History of Afghanistan: Fayz Muhammad Katib Hazaraha’s Siray al-Tawarikh*. Vol. 1, *The Saduza’i Era 1747–1843*. With translation, introduction, notes and index by R.D. McChesney (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013).

6 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MAO\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MAO_College). A.K. Sharma, *A History of Educational Institutes in Delhi 1911–1961* (New Delhi: Sanbun, 2011).

7 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul\\_Majeed\\_Khwaja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Majeed_Khwaja).

8 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid\\_Ahmad\\_Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid_Ahmad_Khan). Belkacem Belmekki, *Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan and the Muslim Cause in British India* (Berlin: Claus Schwarz, 2010); Christian Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978).

9 <http://naqshbandi.org/golden-chain/the-chain/ubaydullah-al-ahrar>.

10 Warren E. Fusfield, *The Shaping of Sufi Leadership in Delhi: The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya 1750 to 1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Pennsylvania, microfilm Int. No. 3267).

11 Arthur H. Bühler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Durham: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 73.

The Nakshbendi order in India famously built the arena in which competing ideas about the renewal of Indian Islam were formulated.<sup>12</sup> Very few of the members either adopted English as the dominant language or widened their traditional knowledge to incorporate European teachings, but Hamied's family was among that few. His father, mother, grandfathers, great uncles, uncles and elder brother Khwaja Abdul Hai threw themselves headlong into that endeavour.

Despite the schools that his family had created, Hamied's earliest training took place at home, in a traditional manner and with the help of two private tutors.<sup>13</sup> Starting when he reached the age of seven, they taught him Persian, Arabic and Urdu, made him learn the Quran by heart, and instilled in him *adab*, the Muslim tradition of polite and cultivated behaviour, which is considered the most important feature of one's relationship to other human beings and to the divine.<sup>14</sup> By the time he was ten years' old, Hamied was a *Hafiz* and an accomplished gentleman; he had mastered the cultivated languages of the Muslim world and was able to recite any given passage of the Quran from memory. Only then was he sent to a series of high schools, in Aligarh, Cawnpore, Etawa and Agra, to learn the basics of Western education. Once in college, he discovered his liking for mathematics and chemistry, which in this family of reformers, who traditionally studied law, was a novelty but one that they found acceptable.

Hamied's first deviation from his family's expectations of him occurred when, at the age of 19, he discovered a deep fascination for the widely despised occupation of tanning and manufacturing leather. The beginning of the twentieth century had witnessed an increase in leather manufacturing in India and mounting exports of tanned leather goods. Hamied, who was of a practical nature, wanted to enrol at the leather trade school in Madras, which was the centre of leather tanneries. Although his father did not object to his wishes, or at least did not voice his disapproval, Hamied's decision rather disregarded the value of his ten years of painstaking Muslim Western education. Hamied went to Madras, but after a year, drifted to Allahabad where his brothers Hai and Ishaq were studying at Muir Central College, the oldest British educational

12 Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

13 His education is described in K.A. Hamied, *A Life to Remember. An Autobiography* (Bombay: Patharhij, 1972) 3–12.

14 I. Goldziher, 'Adab', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first edition (1913–1936). [Referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam/Adab](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam/Adab).

institution in India, and there he enrolled in the more challenging discipline of chemistry.<sup>15</sup>

The beginning of Hamied's university studies coincided with the end of the First World War. Four empires had collapsed, borders were being redrawn and new nation-states were coming into being. Millions of people were being driven from their homes. In Russia, where the communist revolution was already in full swing, the region was in the grip of a protracted civil war. Fearing that this might spark similar unrest in India, the colonial government passed a bill against 'anarchical and revolutionary crimes', the so-called Rowlatt Act of 1919, which was to protect the British against subordination and to give them a free hand to subject their subjects to indefinite preventive detention and incarceration without trial. This was also when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948), the lawyer who headed the Indian civil disobedience and Non-Cooperation Movement, called upon Hindus and Muslims to protest against the bill and to unite in *hartal* – a countrywide suspension of economic activity, in which 'shopkeepers do not to open for business, employees not to report for work, factories stay shut, ships are not loaded or unloaded'.<sup>16</sup> They were to remain peaceful and not let themselves be provoked. When the British made the terrible mistake of opening fire on a peaceful demonstration in Amritsar, wounding 1200 and killing 396 (some say 1000) civilians, the movement spread like wildfire.<sup>17</sup>

When Hamied first heard about Gandhi's anti-cooperation call, 'I could hardly understand ... why Gandhiji was exhorting students to give up their studies'.<sup>18</sup> He had just passed his bachelor examinations in science and thought that walking out at this moment in time would be the wrong thing to do. Within two months, however, Muir Central College was ordering Hamied to leave its premises for having organized a condolence meeting following the death of the Hindu activist and social reformer Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920). He obeyed the college, which had accused him of obstructing the government, but took 200 students with him. Their walkout coincided with the annual convocation of the college during which degrees and academic prizes – including their own – were being awarded. Hamied organized a boycott and erected a picket line to prevent participants reaching the Senate Hall, where the event was to take place. He even stopped the carriage of the governor who was to open the convocation. By the time Hamied was arrested, the action had been

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15 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 9–12.

16 Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 225.

17 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jallianwala\\_Bagh\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jallianwala_Bagh_massacre).

18 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 18.

deemed a success, but from then onwards he was a marked man. The British were suspicious of him and saw him as a troublemaker amid a den of conspirators. Three years later, when the movement was suspended, they denied him a passport to go to England to study.<sup>19</sup>

His expulsion from the college changed Hamied's life for good. It made him pledge to 'fight for the freedom of the country', to join the movement, and eventually to contribute towards creating a secular Hindu–Muslim society to promote harmony between the two groups.<sup>20</sup> The earliest known photograph of him captures him at this decisive moment in time. He is a young man with smouldering eyes, reclining in a wicker chair, his hat and walking stick at the ready and its caption reads: 'Author, when passed B.Sc. examination from the Muir Central College, Allahabad University'.<sup>21</sup> We see him, however, rather than the proud owner of a degree, as an impatient young man on the brink of immersing himself in the great adventure of liberation (Figure 7.2).

On returning home, he joined the student protests at Aligarh University, which all the great leaders of independence, including Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and his uncle Abdul Majeed Khwaja, supported. It was here that he met his lifelong friend Zakir Husain, the third president of India after independence, who had previously walked out of Aligarh University with no less than 1000 other students. Like Husain, Hamied was appointed as a reader in the newly founded Muslim national university, Jamia Millia Islamia. At this stage its premises consisted of a bungalow with a few small houses around it and it had no money to pay its staff. His parents gave him some funds to keep him going and with these Hamied, practical as ever, started a chemist shop on Aligarh's main thoroughfare. Meanwhile, the Non-Cooperation Movement continued to gain momentum until an uprising in Bihar in which rioters burned down a police station, killing the policemen in it, forced Gandhi to bring it to an end. 'No violence' had been his dictum and once violence was committed, he withdrew his support from the movement. Half a century later, Hamied's incomprehension at Gandhi's decision still echoes in his memoir: 'we were all taken by surprise and did not know what to do', was how he described the end of India's first ever civil disobedience movement.<sup>22</sup>

19 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 31; see also below, British intelligence on his involvement in the anti-colonial congress in Brussels in 1927.

20 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 20.

21 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*. The photograph in his book was a double spread, but the one printed on this page was taken from his photograph album in the Hamied private archive.

22 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 29.



FIGURE 7.2  
Hamied, student leader and rebel, 1921

## 2 Among Indian Revolutionaries in Berlin

At that time, Indian students wanting to get on in their lives usually went to England to complete their studies. Graduates from British institutions could expect employment in key positions within the administration of British India, and for lawyers to be called to the bar, studying at British universities was simply a precondition. The price of that move was high. Once in England, students often found themselves isolated. As colonial subjects, they were both looked down on and suspected of being a political and sexual threat to British society. Since the best way to avoid sexual contact, or so it was thought, was through social distance, students met with standoffish behaviour and were not allowed to participate in sports events.<sup>23</sup> The British government of India, however, recognizing that a solid Anglo–Indian administration needed Indian students, called for an inquiry. How many were they? The Lytton Report into Indian students counted as many as 1450 in 1921, with approximately 450 new arrivals

23 Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo–Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880–1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) xiv–xvi.

each year.<sup>24</sup> Later counts confirm that to have been a stable figure. At any given point during the interwar period, there were as many as 1500 Indian students in the UK.<sup>25</sup>

Indian students at German universities, by contrast, were far fewer in number. In fact, studying in that country was considered a risk and the British discouraged Indians from socializing with the former enemy. In addition, scholarships were unavailable. Upon their arrival, the students had to learn a language that was foreign to them and, even more aggravating, returnees had little or no prospect of a job.<sup>26</sup> It does not come as a surprise then that, in 1922, the German Institute for Foreigners at Berlin University counted no more than 37 Indians among the 4462 foreign students at German universities, a number that did not greatly vary over the years.<sup>27</sup>

The year 1923 was the exception. In India, the dissolution of the Non-Cooperation Movement had left hundreds of student activists at a loss. In Germany, the bank crash had caused the catastrophic devaluation of the German *Reichsmark*. This meant that while Germans had to pay millions for a loaf of bread, students from abroad with foreign currencies in their pockets were able to live comfortably on very little money. In Berlin, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, the Indian revolutionary and founder of the Indian Bureau, wrote a prospectus for Indian students, which was sent to German consulates throughout the world. The prospectus, which invited Indian students to come to Germany, stressed the cheap cost of living and advised students on how to deal with the British officials. Interested persons, it stated, should travel via Bombay and Trieste and obtain their visa in Italy or France. Once in Berlin, the Indian Bureau would help them with the necessary paperwork.<sup>28</sup>

The German Foreign Office welcomed Chatto's initiative, which, on several occasions, it referred to as 'harmless'. As one civil servant noted, 'numerous

24 Lytton Committee, *Report of the Committee on Indian Students 1921–1922* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922).

25 Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 5–7.

26 Abdul Rauf Malik, 'Indische Studenten in Berlin', *Mitteilungen des deutschen Instituts für Ausländer an der Universität Berlin (Communications from the German Institute for Foreigners at the University of Berlin)* (Berlin, 1928), 27.

27 *Mitteilungen* (1923–1942). The 1923 issue offers several statistics on the students' countries of origin, covering both 1922 and 1923. Indians, of which there were 37, were on the low end, whereas Chinese and Japanese students appear in rapidly growing numbers and eastern Europeans make up the absolute majority (1444) (*Mitteilungen*, 1923, 1–24). For the later years, the number of students rests on a count of the number of participants in the language courses, which processed a stable average of 25–30 Indian students per year.

28 This piece of information comes from British intelligence sent to the Foreign Office in Berlin, AA PA R 77461 (25 August 1923).

Indians doubtlessly feel attracted by the prospect of living comfortably in Germany on 50–100 rupees a month'.<sup>29</sup> Behind the scenes, German diplomats were fully aware of Chatto's plans to keep Indian students away from British influence and to organize them politically.<sup>30</sup> Given that, to protect Indian interests in trade and commerce, the British government in India had stopped allowing German aliens to enter the country, which consequently caused huge losses to German industrialists with businesses in India, the German government was sympathetic to anything that might damage British interests.<sup>31</sup> Besides, Indian students in Germany, or so it was thought, might very well serve as 'a backdoor to India' and, since their presence was considered an investment in future economic relations between the two countries, they were heartily welcomed.<sup>32</sup>

The Indian Bureau proclaimed that helping Indian students in Germany was the main reason for its existence. Towards that end it founded the Hindustan Association of Central Europe, a club in which the students regularly met and which provided them with hostels, Indian food and access to sports fields. This looked innocent enough and the Germans gladly accepted it as the reason for the bureau's existence. However, insiders knew that the bureau also acted to identify potential recruits for the communist struggle.<sup>33</sup> Even more so, it formed part of the sprawling Communist International (Comintern) network headed by Willi Münzenberg, a superior talent for organization and the creator of an interlinking web of communist propaganda centres that covered up for one another.<sup>34</sup> In this hide-and-seek, the Indian Bureau could simultaneously entertain good relations with the German government, function as the official face of Indian anti-imperialism in Germany, gather a number of international communists as collaborators, serve as the hub of subversive activities against the British, and receive financial support from both Moscow and the Indian National Congress.<sup>35</sup>

29 AA PA R 77461 (22 February 1922).

30 AA PA R 30615 (8 January 1921).

31 Lasting from 1921 to 1926, the ban was only partially removed after that period, AA PA R 90740 (1922–24), AA PA R 90441 (1924–25), AA PA R 90742 (July 1925).

32 AA PA R 77446 (28 February 1926).

33 Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 101–2.

34 Helmut Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German communist propaganda empire 1921–1933', *Journal of Modern History*, 38 (3) 1966, 278–97.

35 Benjamin Zachariah, 'Indian political activists in Germany 1914–1945', in Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (eds) *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2014) 141–5. For an inventory of the Moscow funds involved, see Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003) 336–9.



How many students landed on its doorstep remains a matter of conjecture. During 1923, the German Institute for Foreigners observed an increase of 1000 foreign students from Asia.<sup>36</sup> British Intelligence reported 200 politically active Indian students in Berlin that year.<sup>37</sup> Chattopadhyaya seems to have received a great number of them at his home, which simultaneously served as an office, canteen and student club.<sup>38</sup> Hamied mentions that many of his friends left for Europe. He saw them off but he himself was refused a passport on account of his activist record. Only when an influential uncle put in a good word in the right place for him, did he finally receive permission to study in England. Once aboard ship, he changed his destination, took the boat from Port Said to Trieste, and presented himself at the German consulate there, just as the prospectus had suggested. As predicted, the consul did not question his lack of a German visa and quickly waved him through.<sup>39</sup>

In Berlin, Hamied's personal network was rapidly established. It consisted of Zakir Husain and Abid Hussain, whom he knew from the Aligarh experience, and Muhammad Mujeeb, who had come over from England to join them. The four friends frequently met Chatto 'to discuss the problem of the freedom of India', and they seem to have considered him an intimate.<sup>40</sup> The outer fringe appears to have included some members of the old Indian Committee, which during the First World War had worked for the German government in Berlin to revolutionize the masses in India: these included Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar Khairi who were now heading the Berlin Islamic Community and rallying for worldwide Muslim revolution;<sup>41</sup> Comintern member M.N. Roy, who was travelling back and forth between Moscow and the revolutionary centres of the world;<sup>42</sup> Rash Behari Gosh, who threw a bomb at Lord Hardinge in 1912,<sup>43</sup> and Raja Mahendra Pratap, the Marxist revolutionary and president of the first provisional government of India.<sup>44</sup> 'These revolutionaries met us often', Hamied told Uma Shanker in a radio interview in 1970, indicating that the old

36 Although most derived from China, a slight increase of Indians could be noted as well (*Mitteilungen*, 1923, 3, 12).

37 Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014) 223.

38 Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 93, 333.

39 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 31–2.

40 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 36.

41 Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016) 63–94.

42 Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2010) 76–81.

43 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rash\\_Behari\\_Bose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rash_Behari_Bose).

44 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahendra\\_Pratap](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahendra_Pratap).

activists were eager to make contact with the young student leaders. 'However, Dr Zakir Husain and I could not see eye to eye with these revolutionaries because they wanted violent revolution, which according to Mahatma Gandhi was not possible in our country'.<sup>45</sup> Group photographs show the friends with other political activists of the day, such as Mrs Sarojinu Naidu, Dr Ansari, Barakat Ali, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Shavkat Ali, Lord Sinha, Tarachand Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, all testifying that they worked tirelessly towards widening their horizons to make themselves heard.<sup>46</sup>

It is not difficult to envision the role that Hamied and his little network must have played in this setting. The friends embodied a new generation of activists who, having been overwhelmed by the capacity of non-violent resistance, opposed the use of violence. Over the previous few years, non-cooperation had proved to be a more powerful instrument for influencing British colonial politics than the actions of bomb throwers, and they hoped to expand on that knowledge in the future. With the enthusiasm of the young, the students tirelessly defended their position against the old revolutionaries who still focused on violence as the king's road to liberation.

At the same time, they were widening their circle to encompass other societal spheres. Zakir Husain started to work with his landlord, the educational reformer Alfred Ehrentreich, with whom he translated 33 of Gandhi's speeches.<sup>47</sup> He supported Sadruddin, the Lahore-Ahmadiyya missionary, whom he recognized as another Muslim pacifist. When Egyptian radicals threatened to disrupt the first foundation laying ceremony for the mosque that Sadruddin intended to build, Husain wrote an open letter in defence of the Ahmadiyya.<sup>48</sup> Hamied then recited from the Quran at the opening of the mosque in April 1925.<sup>49</sup> The Ahmadiyya mission journal, the *Moslemische Revue*, featured a series of articles pairing Gandhi's theory of non-violence with various passages in the Quran that supported that position.<sup>50</sup> Judging from the photographs in

45 Interview with Dr K.A. Hamied by Mr Uma Shankar, on 13 January 1970; Archives, Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge University, UK. <http://karachi.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/audio/hamied.html>.

46 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*.

47 Zakir Husain and Alfred Ehrentreich (eds) *Die Botschaft des Mahatma Gandhi* (Berlin-Schlachtensee: Volkserzieher-Verlag, 1924).

48 Sadruddin, 'Unsere Moschee: Der 9. Oktober 1924', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1924) 112–8.

49 Following his recitation, Muslim diplomats and princes from Persia, India and Middle Asia spoke words of thanks in their mother language. Anon, 'Eröffnung der Moschee', *Moslemische Revue*, 2 (1925) 1–5.

50 Maulana Muhammad Ali, 'Die Lehre vom Verzicht auf Gewalt und der Qu'ran', *Moslemische Revue*, 1 (1926) 2–5 et passim; Anon, 'Mahatma Gandhi über den Islam', *Moslemische Revue*, 3 (1924) 118–20.

his private album, for as long as he remained in Berlin Hamied untiringly championed a rapprochement between the Indian Bureau and the Ahmadiyya mosque (Chapter 2).

His involvement in the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, which took place in Brussels between 10 and 15 February 1927, was less straightforward than British Intelligence had believed. Indian participation at this major world event, which Münzenberg orchestrated and Chatto with a staff of collaborators organized, included no less than ten different Indian organizations. Jawaharlal Nehru, among others, represented the Indian National Congress, while Hamied was asked to represent the Hindustan Association of Central Europe. His name must have appeared on the lists because, some weeks in advance of the congress, the British asked the Germans to watch Hamied closely, which again sparked a small inter-departmental correspondence.<sup>51</sup> After the event, the British insisted that he had indeed been present, along with V. Chattopadhyaya, secretary A.C.N. Nambiar, and other Indians.<sup>52</sup> Yet, his name is absent from the official Congress report and his face does not appear in any of the numerous photographs accompanying the publication.<sup>53</sup>

The German inquiry established that Hamied was often seen in a certain student hostel in Berlin, where revolutionary Indians apparently held their meetings. The report even explicitly mentions the address, Agricolastrasse 7.<sup>54</sup> This is one of the streets on the bend of the river Spree around where Luba Derczanska lived, and where she moved from one Jewish landlady to another. It was also where she introduced Hamied to her Jewish circle, and where the Hindustan Association of Central Europe regularly met, not clandestinely but in the Café Köhler, which served the best cakes in Berlin (Chapter 6). While the police inquiry makes no mention of the cakes, it closes with the observation that Hamied was the son of well-to-do parents and not known to be active in any communist matters.<sup>55</sup>

Scant as it is, the report sits well with the observations that have been made above. The engagement of Hamied and the friends to whom he was introduced in Berlin with non-violent action was unfamiliar to the old guard, the Indian revolutionaries and British agents, and they were wholly unprepared for it. For

51 Polizei-Präsidium Berlin, Landesarchiv (1 March 1927).

52 'World League against Imperialism', List of Delegates (9 April 1927), L/PJ/12/266, British Library (London).

53 Louis Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont. Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen Koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus, Brüssel, 10–15. Februar 1927* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1927) 234 (list of Indian participants).

54 Polizei-Präsidium Berlin, Landesarchiv (1 March 1927).

55 Polizei-Präsidium Berlin, Landesarchiv (1 March 1927).

that reason, his movements eluded his observers, who expected him to operate differently and so failed to understand what they saw. We shall now turn to his friendship with Luba Derczanska, his entry into her Jewish circle, and the significance of the cross-cultural encounter that ensued.

### 3 Gateways to German society

In his biography of Zakir Husain, Muhammad Mujeeb remarks that most of Husain's women friends were Jewish, then goes on to explain how he got to know his longstanding friend and companion, Gerda Philipsborn.<sup>56</sup> They first met, he said, at one of the evening parties that Mrs Nambiar used to arrange. She was Chatto's youngest sister Surasini and had married his secretary and right-hand aid, A.C.N. Nambiar. These parties provided Indian students, adrift in an unfamiliar world, with an opportunity to meet Germans. It was something they appreciated greatly, so when she suddenly stopped hosting the parties, they were at a loss. 'Our social life became a blank', Mujeeb remembers.<sup>57</sup> The conversation between him and Zakir Husain that ensued from this remark is worth repeating: 'why should I not ring up Fräulein Philipsborn?' he asked me. 'Do you think we know her well enough?' I replied. 'We'll see', Husain said.

Zakir Husain, who was after all only a foreign student, was bold enough to call up an upper-class Jewish woman whom he had met only fleetingly to ask her whether she would arrange for him and his friends to meet some German people. As Mujeeb notes, Gerda Philipsborn was well placed for such a task. As a member of a well-to-do Jewish family in Berlin, she possessed both wealth and status, and felt at home in a range of different social settings. She had graduated from the musical academy in Munich as a singer, but later became involved in educational reform and, around the time she met Husain, was busy helping to create a centre for Jewish orphans from central Europe.<sup>58</sup> With her wide range of life experiences and as a regular attender of cultural events, Gerda Philipsborn began to take Zakir Husain with her on such occasions and he was thus able to gain a foothold in the inner circles of German high culture.

The episode reveals much about the manner in which Indian students (and not only they) found access to German culture. Unlike in England, in the 1920s

56 Muhammad Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain: National Biography* (India: National Book Trust 1972) 36–8. Mujeeb continues to mention Lucie Hecht, who worked as a translator for the Indian Bureau. The names of the other women were not recorded.

57 Mujeeb, *Dr Zakir Husain*, 36.

58 Gene Dannen, 'A physicist's lost love: Leo Szilard and Gerda Philipsborn'. [www.dannen.com/lostlove](http://www.dannen.com/lostlove), 26 January 2015.

people from the colonies found easy acceptance in Germany. They were eyed with curiosity and were often thought to possess 'Eastern wisdom', which well-educated Germans seeking to reform their lives were keen to capture for themselves.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the Indian independence struggle attracted the sympathy of the German public. Gandhi's politics of non-violence was admired.<sup>60</sup>

It is equally true that Jews played a special role in making the connection. For a hundred years, German Jews had worked hard to become accepted in German society. For three generations, parents had urged their children to excel in the classroom. Fathers set up innovative businesses; mothers embraced German Romantic culture and experimented with new interior designs and the life reform movement. Their sons and daughters often converted to Christianity to give further proof of their loyalty. By the 1920s, although less than 1 per cent of the population, German Jews had gained high visibility in many sections of society, especially in the arts, sciences, music and literature.<sup>61</sup> This was much to the annoyance of their non-Jewish compatriots, who would conceal their jealousy behind their anti-Semitism, which would ignite a widely shared hatred of Jews. As a consequence, Jews became Germans but remained excluded from German society. They were the insiders–outsiders who shaped the society and were familiar with its inner workings, yet remained on its outer fringe.<sup>62</sup> Bitter as that was, it left them in a good position to strike up friendships with foreigners, to act as a bridge and to find ways of helping them to associate with the inner core.

Many of the Indians discussed in this book found entries into German society that way. Zakir Husain formed a friendship with Gerda Philipsborn; Imam Sheikh Abdullah befriended Emilia Oettinger (Chapter 3); Azeez Ur-Rahman Mirza took Emilia's daughter Lisa Oettinger as his wife (Chapter 4); and the

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59 Susanne Marchand, 'Eastern wisdom in an era of Western despair: Orientalism in 1920s central Europe', in Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (eds) *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 341–61.

60 Dietmar Rothermund, *Gandhi und Nehru: Zwei Gesichter Indiens* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2010).

61 Max Aschkewitz, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Westpreußen* (Marburg: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge, 1967); W. Michael Blumenthal, *Die unsichtbare Mauer: Die dreihundertjährige Geschichte einer deutsch-jüdischen Familie* (Munich: DTV, 2000); Amos Elon, *Zu einer anderen Zeit: Porträt der jüdisch-deutschen Epoche 1743–1933* (Munich: Deutscher-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2006); Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001).

62 Juri Slezkine, 'Swann's nose: the Jews and other modern', in Juri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 40–105.

Ahmadis Abdul Majid and M.T. Ahmad found a German teacher and entrée to German culture in Hugo Marcus, and formed lifelong friendships with him (Chapter 5). They were not the only ones. Vikram Seth lovingly describes his great-uncle Shanti's encounter with the Caro family.<sup>63</sup> The eminent sexual reformer, Magnus Hirschfeld, took a great interest in the Indian visitors who came and went from the flat of his neighbour, the aforementioned Willi Münzenberg, and in 1932 repaid the friendships with a lecture tour through India.<sup>64</sup> In 1938, the year the Nazi regime clamped down on German Jews, more than four thousand found refuge in India through one or other of the Indian–German networks that had been formed, not only in Berlin but in 13 German university cities. Margit Franz describes the dense web of familial, professional, artistic, religious and spiritual networks that made their rescue possible.<sup>65</sup>

In Hamied's network, religion was just not part of the discourse and, in neither his memoirs nor letters is it ever mentioned as a topic. Hamied and his friends supported the mosque and, as a matter of course, took part in the Muslim celebrations. His landladies will have visited their local synagogue. The mosque offered debates on a 'religion of the future' in which Islam, Judaism and Christianity would merge.<sup>66</sup> Judging from the invitations the imam received, some of the more liberal synagogues were toying with a similar idea.<sup>67</sup> This was the religious equivalent of the young people's vision of becoming true citizens of the world, cosmopolitans able to seize the similarities that linked them and to shed the old constraints.<sup>68</sup> At home, they saw each other as Germans and Indians curious about and eager to engage with one another.

63 Vikram Seth, *Two Lives: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

64 Münzenberg and Hirschfeld lived in facing apartments at Unter den Zelten 9a. See Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg: Eine politische Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1967), 201. Babette's sister Margarethe Buber-Neumann notes that Willi and Babette shared their apartment with M.N. Roy and his girlfriend Lu, and offers a lively description of the visiting Indians. See Margarethe Buber-Neuman, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrweges* (Berlin: Edition Maschke, 1981) 87–105. See also Magnus Hirschfeld, *Weltreise eines Sexualforschers im Jahre 1931/32* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 2006), 231–329 on his travels to India and visits to Indians he had met in Berlin.

65 Margit Franz, *Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil in Indien zwischen britischer Kolonialherrschaft, Maharadschas und Gandhi* (Vienna: Clio, 2015) 66–99.

66 Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest*, 79–85.

67 Imam Abdullah's name, among others, appeared in the Jewish Reform Community's programme on several occasions as a speaker on the future of religions. The Ahmadiyya Mosque archive, *Jüdische Reform Gemeinde/Programme* March 1932.

68 Madeleine Herren, 'Between territoriality, performance, and transcultural entanglement, 1920–1939: a typology of transboundary lives', *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*, 23 (2014), 100–25.

Khwaja Abdul Hamied fell in love with Luba Derczanska. He moved into her neighbourhood, shared his money with her and, through her, was introduced to different Jewish circles – her doctors, landladies and circle of women friends and Luba's aunt Bertha welcomed him as a family friend (Chapter 6). Since many of his university teachers – Dr Pinsker and Professors Rosenheim, Sundermeyer, Haber and Freundlich – were also Jewish, almost all the Germans he knew were Jewish. Not that religion mattered. What he shared with his Jewish friends were plans and visions for the future and what he shared with his Jewish teachers was a deep interest in chemistry.

#### 4 The Journey Home

In September 1927 Hamied returned to Aligarh. He wanted to sound out the possibilities of starting his own research institute in chemical technology. When still in Germany, he undertook internships in a number of technical chemistry plants, where he learned about the manufacture of soap, edible oils and other products that could prove useful for the industrial development of his country. 'In Europe', he wrote, 'laboratories are the bulwark of the nation'.<sup>69</sup> His plan to erect one in India would, he thought, contribute to its growth as a modern nation.

The institute was also meant to solve another problem, namely that of his financial independence, which he needed if he was to marry Luba. So long as his parents were supporting him, they were still entitled to interfere in his private life, or so Hamied felt, especially in such matters as finding a suitable wife. These feelings must have deepened when, upon his return, his two brothers married a couple of sisters from a small town who still observed strict purdah.<sup>70</sup> Hamied was abhorred. Here was a cultural difference that had never arisen in their conversations in Europe. During the ceremony people asked if he were going to be next and with whom.<sup>71</sup> He was careful not to mention that he had already found a European woman who had no idea of what purdah might imply. Only when he had his institute, would he tell his parents, not beforehand.

While still in Germany, Hamied thought that raising the necessary funds would pose no difficulty at all. This was typical of Hamied's optimistic outlook,

69 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 60.

70 Literally 'curtain, cover'. Purdah is the Muslim tradition of screening women in Indian society from men and strangers. A woman who follows that tradition usually wears a wide garment covering the body and a veil to conceal her face. Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India* (California: University of California Press, 2000).

71 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 66–7.

but the fundraising proved more difficult than he had envisioned. When he left India, there had still been a feeling of solidarity and of a new beginning. When he returned, however, he found that people were more pessimistic. His uncle Abdul Hamied Khwaja, for instance, an ardent supporter of the Jamia Millia Islamia, advised him either to start a small factory and slowly make his way upwards, or else accept a job in the colonial government.<sup>72</sup> Hamied's needs were, however, different. He wanted to establish the institute quickly so that he could marry his beloved – he was clearly sitting on a bed of hot coals. To Luba he wrote:

I have not spoken a word about you. It is the best I could do. From morning to evening I scold my people on matters of cleanliness, purdah and the situation our women are in. I scold so much that nobody dares to tell me that I should marry an Indian woman.<sup>73</sup>

Hamied kept his mouth shut simply because he thought that he did not yet have the right to his own decisions. Luba seems to have foreseen that situation. When they parted, she had asked Hamied to relay the exact wording of any conversations he had on the topic of marriage, and this he did. His careful observations give us some insight into how he was received. They tell us that, whereas his mother kept trying to draw him out of himself and his sister continually mocked him, he had come to realize that his own feelings about Muslim traditions had changed while he had been in Europe. He noted down his conversations with them in faulty German, intermingled with literal translations of his Urdu mother tongue and even a bit of Yiddish. Yet, she would have understood what he meant to say. This is what he wrote:

*Hamied:* Mother, you see, this is not clean here!  
*Mother:* You should bring a European woman here to fix everything in my house.  
*Hamied:* *Nu!* By God, Mother. If I had brought a woman, you would not have let her into your house.  
*Sister:* Why? I really want to see a European woman in the house. You should have written to me and I would have told father and mother!  
*Mother:* Is it my business who Hamied marries? He has written often enough that he wants to do the choosing himself.

<sup>72</sup> Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-108.

<sup>73</sup> Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-108.



- Hamied:* How could I bring a wife without earning money? As soon as I am independent, I will do what I want. If I like a European woman and she is well educated, I will surely marry her. But now I don't know.
- Sister:* Good! Do what you want. There is nothing we can do here.<sup>74</sup>

A European or a non-European woman, a wife he himself chose or one his mother selected, the position of women in India, the dirt, the underdevelopment, the funds for the technical institute, the general leaning towards government dependence, these were the topics that Hamied discussed at home and about which he wrote to Luba. His letters show that these issues were all intimately interrelated and that his relatives were willing to speak about his problems and to introduce him to important people, but apart from that nothing much happened.

Eventually, Hamied managed to annoy his mother. Some women in Aligarh were wearing their hair in a bob and, on hearing this, Hamied tried to talk his nieces into doing the same. In fact, he even told his mother that his future wife would also have a bob and this finally provoked a response in her: 'when your wife has her hair in a bob she'd better not come here', she snapped.<sup>75</sup> Her comment seems to have shocked him into confiding in his brother Ishaq that his future wife in fact had long hair, but that, yes, he did intend to marry her. On 9 February, Ishaq and his recently married purdah-observing wife passed this information on to Hamied's parents. Hamied then told his friend Shahidi, who was in India at the time looking for a job and likewise waiting to marry a European woman, who then in turn wrote to Hilde, his German fiancée in Berlin, who passed the good news on to Luba. Luba was not pleased about the roundabout way in which all this had come about, but nonetheless sent a photograph of herself with her siblings in Vilna.<sup>76</sup>

74 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-114. '*Hamied:* Mutter, siehst du, hier ist etwa nicht sauber. *Mutter:* Du müsstest eine europäische Frau mitbringen, die hier in meinem Haus alles in Ordnung bringen sollte. *Hamied:* *Nanu*, mein Gott, wenn ich eine Frau mitgebracht hätte, hättest du Mutter mich nicht ins Haus gelassen. *Schwester:* Warum? Ich will sehr gerne eine europäische Frau im Haus sehen. Du solltest mir schreiben und ich hätte Vater und Mutter gesagt. *Mutter:* Was geht mich an, wen Hamied heiratet. Er hat schon oft geschrieben, er will selbst eine Frau für sich auswählen. *Hamied:* Wie könnte ich eine Frau bringen und heiraten wenn ich bis jetzt kein Geld verdiene? Wenn ich selbständig bin, werde ich tun wie es mir passt, wenn eine europäische Frau mich gefällt und gut gebildet ist, werde ich bestimmt heiraten. Bis jetzt weiß ich nicht. *Schwester:* Gut, was du willst, wirst du tun. Wir können darin nichts sagen'.

75 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-05.

76 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02 (03, 11, 12, 19, 22). 'I am not angry with Hilde', she noted, 'but one should not confide in a woman who is in love', 22.

Apart from breaking the news and observing his parents' guarded reaction, the deadlock continued. Gradually, Hamied began to see his surroundings in a different light:

Believe me Luba, I do not want to stay here one day longer. India is not my country any more. I hope to be able to return to Europe as soon as possible. I find that there is nobody in the whole country who still interests me, and there is no opportunity to develop myself. Everybody thinks of himself and nobody seems to have a national feeling anymore. The idea of one people is cold and dead.<sup>77</sup>

How his visit to India came to an end is a short story. In mid-February, Hamied's letters began to bear the address of 'Raja Sahib, Naupara Palace, Lucknow'. This was because, ever on the trail for money, he had asked the raja to fund a laboratory in return for a technical institute in his home state. The raja turned down his suggestion, but because he would soon be travelling to Europe, he offered Hamied the job as his private secretary, with the promise of a generous salary and, more importantly, the prospect of returning to Berlin. His new employer, however, soon proved unpredictable. Hamied described him as a gambler, somebody who abused women and was often drunk in the daytime. Nonetheless, his optimism was on the rise again and, after some time, he was even convinced that the raja would help him open the laboratory after all.

Luba was more wary and felt that he had thrown himself at the mercy of an unpredictable man who thought that money could buy whatever he wanted. However, when she learned that Hamied was already on his way to Bombay from where he would depart for Europe, she asked in some disbelief, 'can it be that this is the last time I write to India?'<sup>78</sup> Once he was on the boat to Marseille, Hamied put on his tuxedo, got out his deck of cards and, 'as in old times', performed card tricks.<sup>79</sup> Telegrams detail the immeasurable joy that greeted his safe arrival in France. Hamied started to send Luba large cheques. He wanted her to come to Paris, but she declined because of a forthcoming exam in the polytechnic where she was studying. In Paris, after the raja had made another drunken spectacle of himself, Hamied decided to leave in secret. The last telegram reads, 'gave up my position – on my way to Berlin – Hamied!'<sup>80</sup> Shortly thereafter, they married in the Ahmadiyya mosque and went off for a long holiday at the seaside. The decision to inform their parents was put on hold.

77 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-108.

78 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-28.

79 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-34.

80 Private Archive, Hamied DO2015-11-02-72.

## 5 Forging the Connection

What we have seen unfolding in this and the previous chapter are the micro strategies of two young people from opposite ends of the globe trying to realize their vision of cosmopolitanism in the day-to-day fabric of their lives. They had come of age at a time when the world was in turmoil and when universal ideologies were being promoted as possible solutions to its problems. Luba toyed with communism, which she took very seriously, and Hamied devoted his energies to confronting the British colonial regime. In Berlin, as part of the international student movement, they wove their way in and out of the radical scene, which included the Indian Bureau, the Russian embassy, the 'Red Club', of which Luba was a member, as well as preparing for the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism and its aftermath.

All these issues were surely discussed within their circle and it is remarkable that, in the midst of all the violence that ensued, the friends continued to advocate peace. For the first time in history, globalization had brought the different 'civilizations' of the world into close proximity. Their circle, comprised of Muslims from India and Jewish women from central Europe, not only believed in 'the equality of civilizations' (see Introduction) but also built their own miniature version of civilized coexistence. Falling in love with one another was their way of bridging the gaps between geographies, political systems, national traditions, religions and family mores.

Their story unravels in Chapters 6 and 7 by juxtaposing the perspectives of Khwaja Abdul Hamied and Luba Derzcanska. The former presents a male view informed by Muslim Modernism, the latter a female one shaped by a Yiddish upbringing in beleaguered Vilna. Should other archives resurface in the future, scholars might perhaps be able to address the encounters between Nizamuddin Ahmad and Estusia Tenenbaum, Ishaq Shahidi and Hildegard Scharf, Zakir Husain and Gerda Philipsborn. Not all those relationships ended happily, but that too is part of the story. These couples ventured into unknown territory, territory their parents and grandparents could never have imagined, and this in turn brought new and daunting problems.

The problems that Luba and Hamied faced, and which are enumerated above, were a lot to do with their cultural baggage, namely Luba's Jewish background and Hamied's Muslim one. However, despite their many differences, both sides valued education, tradition, respect for and loyalty to one's parents and the expectation of financial independence. For that reason, despite the modern context in which they settled in Berlin, in which the realization of the impossible always seemed one step away, Hamied and Luba travelled home to

take stock of their situation. As they soon discovered, the situation was not good. Luba's mother deplored the idea of a non-European, non-Jewish son-in-law. When Hamied wrote home shortly before their marriage that he was going to marry 'a Polish girl', his mother, sisters and brothers all sent letters warning him against his decision.<sup>81</sup> That was the first drawback.

Another bone of contention in both families was the not insignificant matter of creating financial independence as the basis on which to form a family. Father Derczanski suggested that his daughter should take a conservative job as a teacher of religion in a Manchester synagogue. Hamied's uncle, Abdul Majeed Khwaja thought that his nephew should go slowly and accept a mundane government job. What the couple then grappled with, was the decision to go against their parents' wishes and to create a place for themselves instead, not in Aligarh and not in Vilna, but somewhere in between, with their own financial means, and in a language that was foreign to them both.

It is possible that the desolate situation in which they found their hometowns propelled them forwards. On returning to Vilna, Luba saw hers in a bleak state: 90 per cent of the population was impoverished and there were many suicides.<sup>82</sup> Other visitors noted the shocking poverty in the Jewish town centre, the undernourished children and aggressive bands of beggars.<sup>83</sup> With the entry of the Polish government, acute anti-Semitism pervaded the city. The university introduced a quota for Jewish students, and those who were admitted were marginalized. The atmosphere was poisonous.<sup>84</sup>

Hamied viewed his family through Luba's eyes. 'Their cultural backwardness and primitive manners force me to live in Europe', he noted.<sup>85</sup> He was ashamed of the dirt and their traditional ways. His family's acceptance of purdah, which had just been reinforced with the entry of two sisters-in-law, made him realize that this was not the place to bring his bride. In the letters that flew back and forth between Vilna and Aligarh, 'the women question' became a fixed topic. Besides, he was angry about the lethargic state that the country was in. Like Luba in Vilna, he realized that the revolutionary spirit had evaporated.

81 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 73.

82 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-01-109.

83 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *From that Place and Time: A Memoir, 1938-1947* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Alfred Döblin, 'Wilno', in Alfred Döblin (ed.) *Reise durch Polen 1924* (Munich: DTV, 1984) 113-55.

84 Theodore R. Weeks, *From Russian to Polish: Vilna-Wilno 1900-1924*, Working paper. Washington: NCEEER, 2006.

85 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-11.

When they eventually married, it was more or less in secret. The step towards informing their parents was still on hold, but during their honeymoon, they drafted a plan for the future. Modern as they were, they did not launch into the adventure on their own. A couple of postcards at the back of one of the albums testify that Luba and Hamied shared their 'recreational travel' (as it was bleakly called) with Estusia and Nizamuddin. That was surely a way of sharing and objectifying the many hurdles ahead.

## 6 Solidarity on the Margins

On 20 August, Hamied and Nizam returned to Berlin to set their plans in motion, while Luba and Estusia remained at the seaside for another few days. Hamied's first visit was to the civil registry office to validate their Sharia marriage.<sup>86</sup> However, this proved more difficult than anticipated, as Luba's *Ehefähigkeitszeugnis*, a German requirement for marriage that confirmed a woman's ability to conceive children, was missing. The Polish bureaucracy was slow in cooperating with German officials and the latter took that as an excuse not to validate 'undesirable' marriages, as intercultural marriages were sometimes called (Chapter 1).<sup>87</sup> Besides, the city was scaldingly hot and many officials were still out of town. Thus, Hamied failed to get the marriage validated in Berlin and their civil marriage could only be registered in London the following year.

After the registry office, Hamied's next port of call was to Aunt Bertha where he informed her of the plans of the two couples and enlisted her help to bring them to fruition.<sup>88</sup> The plan foresaw that Hamied was to start a 'Bombay–Berlin Trading Bureau' with Nizamuddin. When they had generated enough business Hamied would go to Bombay while Nizam would stay behind as custodian and do the bookkeeping. At this point in the narrative, Luba and Estusia returned to Berlin and the correspondence unfortunately breaks off. Nonetheless, some months later, when Luba had gone to London to learn English, we learn that Hamied's new business venture had very limited success. True, Aunt Bertha furnished him with a little capital, while Professor Rosenheim, his teacher of

86 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-80.

87 Christoph Lorke, 'Challenging authorities through "undesired" marriages: administrative logics of handling cross-border couples in Germany, 1880–1930', *Journal of Migration History* (2018) 54–78.

88 Hamied Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-02-82.

technical chemistry, provided him with his first commercial contact, the Okasa laboratory in Berlin. Okasa provided him with 3000 potency pills, which had to be paid for in advance and marketed in India at Hamied's own risk.

The first Okasa contract, however, was also to be his last, although he tried every possible inroad to garner more business. Hamied wrote to the laboratories where he had served his internships; Aunt Bertha's husband tried to use his influence at Borsig, the giant iron plant in Berlin that produced trains and rails; and Hamied even wrote to his father-in-law, whom he had not yet met, to ask whether he could represent his business in India.<sup>89</sup> However, the times were not propitious for setting up an import–export business, or, for that matter, any business at all. The year 1929 would bring the Wall Street crash, which signalled the beginning of the Great Depression and was later judged to be the largest financial crisis of the twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> Despite the earlier reception of Indian students as future door openers, Germans no longer took seriously the prospect of expanding into India.

The only businessman who dared to offer Hamied a contract despite the coming storm was Charles Haimoff, president of the Okasa laboratory and himself Jewish.<sup>91</sup> Although a narrow basis on which to found a family, Hamied went ahead and, in his autobiography recounts how, in their early Bombay years, the agency kept them alive, but only just. In 1929, his mother sold some property to provide Hamied with fresh capital and, in 1931, Luba ran the office while Hamied travelled to the Far East in search of more business. In 1933, Luba's brother Zorach came to Bombay to take the advertising side of the firm under his wing and, in 1936, they felt strong enough to float a company of their own on the side – the Chemical, Industrial & Pharmaceutical Industries. It carried on as a small enterprise until 1939 when, with a new war looming, imports from Europe, particularly medicines, were suddenly curtailed. At this point, on 4 July 1939, Gandhi came to Bombay to ask Hamied to fill the gap. It was thus that his firm came to produce affordable medicines for the war effort, which after the war expanded to include the 'third world' as well.<sup>92</sup>

The modest beginnings of the Hamieds in Bombay have been related here in some detail to illustrate that, to become citizens of the world and play a pivotal role in creating a Hindu–Muslim society, they first had to take a leap

89 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-03-13.

90 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wall\\_Street\\_Crash\\_of\\_1929](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wall_Street_Crash_of_1929).

91 Hamied private archive, DO2015-11-03 (03-06); <https://www.pycnogenol.com/company/history/>.

92 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 86, 93, 100, 103, 108, 113, 129.

into the unknown. Their journey through the advantages and hazards of globalization was a most unlikely one, for they had no precedents to follow and, to achieve their goal, they each looked in different directions. Luba had left her place of origin, learned new languages and immersed herself in her Indian adventure, which was to reshape Bombay society through hosting receptions and dinner parties.<sup>93</sup> Hamied, eager to cultivate his personal network, travelled back and forth between Europe and India as often as he could afford. Most of the friends he met during his student days, as well as the colleagues who helped him to his feet, happened to be Jews. For a long time, that was an unimportant factor in their communications, but once the crisis hit, he returned their support when-ever he could.

What followed is a good example of the solidarity that was at the root of the Muslim–Jewish network. As early as 1933, Haimoff had to flee from Berlin and, as a matter of course, Hamied came over to Europe to help him resettle in London.<sup>94</sup> In the same year, he and his wife invited Luba's brother Zorach to live with them in Bombay. In 1936, Hamied personally experienced vicious anti-Semitism on a visit to Berlin, when, on several occasions, he was mistaken for a Jew and even attacked in the street.<sup>95</sup> However, that did not stop him helping Dr Weinberg, a friend of his old friend Dr Meyer, to flee from Germany and resettle in Bombay.<sup>96</sup> Three years later, the Hamieds welcomed Aunt Bertha into their Bombay home for as long as the war lasted. That two of the refugees were living in the household in which Luba would soon be giving birth to her third child does not seem to have bothered anybody. Zorach busied himself in the family firm; and Aunt Bertha untiringly made ties, which she sold privately as a contribution to the household income.<sup>97</sup>

A handful of letters in Russian and Yiddish bear witness to Hamied's many attempts to send his in-laws a visa for India and enough money to buy their passage. Unfortunately, the visa only arrived a couple of days after the Germans occupied Vilna. Luba's father and mother were murdered in Ponary along with the rest of the Jewish population.<sup>98</sup> In 1945, he travelled to Europe as head of a chemical delegation. While there, Hamied tried to take stock of the situation and find out if any of the Derczanskis had survived. In 1958, the couple finally travelled to Warsaw to see the ghetto and lay flowers at the

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93 Hamied private archive, Luba's guest book.

94 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 110–1.

95 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 120.

96 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 120.

97 Yusuf Hamied in an interview on 29 October 2018.

98 Ponary (Ponar) was the 'wild' killing site near Vilna, where almost all of its Jewish population was murdered.

Jewish monument. When, in the postwar years, a rift opened up between Jews and Muslims over Israel, he unerringly defended the excellent relations between Muslims and Jews in the past. In fact, in a letter to President Nasser dated 1967, the year Israel defeated the Arab armies, he wrote: ‘the God of Israel is the same as the God of Muslims. Many rites, customs, rituals in Islam are the same as those of the Jewish religion. Jews are nearer to Islam than to the communists. Why then are you seeking help from the communists?’<sup>99</sup>

The solidarity with which Hamied supported his Jewish friends echoes that which Bombay families offered refugees from the Holocaust. Bombay firms took in the friends and relatives of their Jewish employees. Muslim–Jewish couples left no stone unturned to rescue and house Jewish families.<sup>100</sup> When Nehru made an appeal to the Chamber of Commerce in 1938 to invite Jewish specialists from Germany, the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay stepped in to create uncounted entries for European Jews. The majority of them will have left after the war and, consequently, most of the names and stories have been lost, but 22 graves at the Chinchpokli cemetery in Bombay, which was given to the Jewish community for Holocaust survivors, still keep some of that memory alive.<sup>101</sup>



The Irish poet Seamus Heaney once said that he had begun to think of life as ‘a series of ripples widening out from the original centre’.<sup>102</sup> The ripples that Hamied caused can be traced to the Indian nation-state founded on equal rights that came into being after the war. As a young man, he had been part of the Indian student movement that strove to build the future of their nation through peaceful protest. After he finished university, he envisaged building a technical institute to manufacture useful products, such as soap, pills and edible oils, as a contribution to India’s growth as a modern nation. In the end, he built a pharmaceutical industry that is today among the world’s largest.

99 Hamied, *A Life to Remember*, 335. Hamied summarizes his letter. The original text has gone missing.

100 Margit Franzt mentions at least one other German–Indian/Muslim–Jewish couple. Lilly Geduldig and Ali (?) met at Vienna University. After the Germans marched into Austria, Ali married Lilly in Vienna and brought her to Bombay, where he set up an ophthalmology practice. He also managed to rescue her mother and three brothers. Franz, *Gateway India*, 67; cf. <http://www.centropa.org.de/photo/Lily-und-Ali>.

101 Franz, *Gateway India*, 375–6.

102 Seamus Heaney, *100 poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), Introduction, x.



Through all those steps, loyalty to his friends, partners and countrymen mattered far more to him than religious or cultural differences. Hamied was ready to share his space. His lifelong defence of Muslim–Jewish relations must be considered part of that.

## Summary and Conclusion

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a number of competing colonial players occupying large swathes of the globe. Around 1900, the Russian empire included the northern part of the Asian continent, or one-sixth of the world. Reaching its largest spread in 1922, the British Empire laid claim to the southern part of the Asian continent among other dominions, or one-quarter of the world. The year 1933 saw the rise of the Nazi empire in Germany, gobbling up land and resources to the east and reaching deeply into the Asian continent.

All the colonial powers used their claim to ‘civilization’ to establish their legitimacy and to justify emptying the colonies of their riches and treating the large groups of minorities over whom they ruled as inferior. The Russians suppressed and impoverished numerous ethnic minorities on the Asian continent; they placed the Jews on the lowest rung of the civilizational ladder, forcing them to live in the Western borderlands, the so-called Pale of Settlement, and treating them as outlaws. The British, with their divide-and-rule policy, turned the former Muslim ruling elite of India into a minority of inferior civilizational status and suppressed India’s economic independence as a whole. The Germans, outdoing the empires that preceded theirs in atrocity, employed racism as the measure with which to fashion their civilizational ladder. With the members of the so-called master race in possession of a superior culture at the top, they justified a politics of racial downgrading, which again placed Jews on the bottom rung.

The time scale with which these ‘civilizational’ measures were executed was compressed. The year 1905 signalled the start of large pogroms in Russia. In 1919, the British opened fire on peaceful protesters in Amritsar. In 1933, German Jews who for the past 100 years had striven for acceptance as Germans, found themselves excluded from society. Only ten years later, almost the whole of European Jewry had been extinguished.



In this already short period, the interlude in Berlin in which Jews and Muslims explored shared interests lasted no more than a few fleeting moments. Over-shadowed by the catastrophes that both preceded and succeeded their encounters, one has to look hard to find their imprint at all. Uncovering those traces is the main value of this study.

It is no coincidence that this research is located mainly in private archives. The people who engaged in these encounters felt strongly that they were part of a significant movement, one that could well prove to be *the* turning point in world history. For that reason, they started to collect any documents, letters, newspaper articles, objects or photographs that bore witness to the *impetus* of those days, even if only to be able to tell their children about them. Lisa Oettinger carefully curated her own private collection and urged her son never to forget its significance. S.M. Abdullah recorded his memories in a series of photograph albums; Khwaja Abdul Hamied wrote an autobiography; Luba Derczanska protected her letters from the elements; and Hugo Marcus deliberately assigned his writings to posterity. Lucie Hecht, with the benefit of hindsight, wrote a summary of her experiences along with numerous illustrations. The mainstream society, however, as represented by diplomats, registrars and the police, very seldom took any notice of their activities.

Nonetheless, we are reliant on those private collections for our understanding of that rare moment in history when a group of people on the margins of the society started to create a space in which to pursue their interests. These writings, letters and photographs provide us with visual and emotional evidence of how their owners were involved and of the different circles and activities they established. Although the thrust of the various source materials differs substantially, depending on what the creators of the archives considered worthy of saving for posterity, it at least set the switches for the way in which the chapters were composed.

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Throughout the nineteenth century, subaltern peoples everywhere were calling for the civilizations to which they belonged to be accorded equal status among the other civilizations of the world. These colonized people wanted their own histories acknowledged and, in both the East and West, their quest assumed the shape of religious reform – Muslim Modernism in India and the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, in Europe. At the same time, to meet the colonial administrators' requirements, Western education and languages were being introduced to these societies and this in turn was creating the new middle class required to help administer these territories. In the interwar period, part of that class, in this case colonial visitors from the Muslim world, Jewish refugees from the Russian Revolution and a group of open-minded secular German Jews, met by chance in Berlin and discovered how much they had in common. Living on the margins of German society, this little band of people congregated around the western reaches of town to explore the longings and

visions that discrimination and colonial disdain had created in their respective minority populations.



In Berlin, a small breathing space materialized in the newly built borough of Wilmersdorf, where upwardly-mobile Jews were settling and Egyptians were establishing jazz bars, liquor dens and Oriental cafés. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the place made for easy communication between the different groups and when the Muslim Indians arrived with their ideas about freedom and civilizational equality, their Jewish neighbours were quick to take them into their hearts. Communism, life reform and Theosophy flourished in this setting, as did the curious brand of Germans known as *Berliners*. Between Wilmersdorf and Charlottenburg, in an area of no more than two square kilometres, a dense cluster of Jewish and Muslim businesses sprung into existence, enabling students, neighbours, shopkeepers and missionaries to interact.

As we saw in greater detail in Chapter 1, Germany had declared its 'friendship' to the Muslim people of the world. Consequently, when after the First World War subaltern hopes of a quick release from colonial rule were dashed, numerous Egyptians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Persians, Tatars and Indians streamed into Berlin. In the transnational setting this created, the Muslims from India stood out in two respects. First, by displaying solidarity for and engaging with Hindus, they showed that Islam was not the only feature of their group identity. Second, by inviting local people to join the missions that they were setting up in Berlin, they were showing themselves to be open to both people and ideas. In these ways, the Indians were different from many other people. In addition, their support for equality between civilizations and their fight for freedom appealed to other subjugated people and, in Germany, these happened to be the Jews.

Treating the cultural and religious traditions of India (in this case Hinduism and Islam) and of Europe (Christianity and Judaism) as equal to one another was key to creating a communicative space. Envisioning a future in which justice prevails, in which the colonial subjects of British India achieve independence and recognition of their civilization on a par with that of Europe's, in which the two world regions even share a 'religion of the future': all that set the switches for a good many individual journeys, some of which we have seen summarized in the case studies.

Whereas the Egyptians provided the places of amusement and leisure, the Indian missions helped their supporters develop visions of a future that took interconnectedness really seriously. Starting with cross-cultural friendships

and marriages, then moving on to articulating common aims and visions of a better world, the interactions between these people connected India to Germany on a number of different levels – families, localities, goods, people, knowledge, ideas and religious traditions.

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Determined mainly by the availability of sources, the focus of this study has been on two points in the emerging network – the Ahmadiyya mosque community and the Indian Bureau, around which men and women of the early twentieth century engaged in lively exchanges. Because they kept their borders deliberately fuzzy, the members of the Indian Bureau treated each other as equals as they strove to create a shared secular space in which Hindus and Muslims could together shape the future of India. As Lucie Hecht observed, the show of unity between Hindus and Muslims was part of the quotidian exercise, and it was what Khwaja Abdul Hamied spent the rest of his life fighting to achieve.

The Ahmadiyya missionaries, however, were quite different, for they focused on personal refinement through religious progress. Merging Sufism with Theosophy and Aryan speculation, the shared space they inhabited centred on the discovery of the soul as the place where Eastern and Western civilizations fused. The debate in the weekly mosque lecture series on ‘future man’, captured that vision. As the case studies of S.M. Abdullah, Lisa Oettinger, and Hugo Marcus illustrate, participants tried to realize that religious vision in their personal lives.

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When bearers of different traditions mix, questions of origin, loyalty and inter-generational transmittance rise to the surface. Historians of religion have addressed the many tensions that surround religious traditions, and it is clear that the desire to free oneself of one’s religious tradition can be as strong as one’s wish to honour it. The letters of Luba Derczanska and Khwaja Abdul Hamied beautifully exemplify the simple fact that parents and their children have different ideas about their choice of partners.

It has often been said that the generation born around 1900 had freedoms and opportunities as never before. Born into a rapidly globalizing world, it was they who seemed to succeed, provided that their families belonged to the rising global middle class. German and European men and women enthusiastically

embraced what the Indian missions offered, and took the liberty to choose Muslim partners. Profiting from the religious and educational reforms that their fathers had introduced, Muslim students in Germany felt free to make their own choices and to bring home a wife whom they themselves had chosen. The sources covering the 1920s resound with the voices of intercultural and interreligious partners.



Is it possible to establish the approximate number of people involved? The index of names serves as a first indicator here. Reading through those names one realizes that the Oettinger women, S. M Abdullah and Azeez Mirza, Hugo Marcus and his Indian pupils, Lucie Hecht, Luba Derczanska, and Khwaja Abdul Hamied, were by no means the only people who participated. Their letters, texts and photographs indicate that, among their colleagues, family, friends and neighbours, there were others looking for a vehicle through which to leave their old moorings behind them. Yet, outside the private collections and memoirs that their families still treasured, it is difficult to find traces of this attachment in the public archives. The lists of those who participated in the missions that are housed in the registry office reveal a good many names. Egyptian membership lists in the Foreign Office help us to identify a large spread of mixed marriages. However, for as long as the Weimar Republic lasted, diplomats and administrators never showed any special interest in Jewish–Muslim engagements. It was only when the Nazis entered government in 1933, that the question of Jewish participation became acute.

In 1936, the Nazi secret police started to look into the rumour that some members of the mosque community were Jewish. However, because by now most of them had already left Germany, their investigation was not very conclusive and, by the time it was concluded in 1938, the mosque was judged ‘harmless’.

More than numbers, however, one gets a better idea of the complexity and breadth of the group by identifying the different circles within its network. Four of these are worthy of attention. These are:

## 1 The Revolutionaries

Their meeting place was the Indian Bureau but some of them also communicated with the mosque. This group, which endeavoured to build bridges

between communism, Indian nationalism and ideas about the future of an independent India, consisted of Muslim and Hindu Indians, Russian Jews who had acquired Polish passports, and a number of secular German Jews.

## 2        **The Life Reformers**

They met at the mosque and some of them also befriended the Indian revolutionaries. Apart from building bridges between Islam, Theosophy, and ideas about the future of an independent India, the mosque also facilitated mixed marriages in both circles. The life reformers were essentially German Jewish women who felt especially at home in the mosque because the missionaries helped to launch them into marriages in which they could live as emancipated women in a Muslim world.

## 3        **The Soul Seekers**

Originally concentrated in Inayat Khan's Sufi Lodge and guided by a Persian Sufi master who also learned the languages of Theosophy and life reform, this little crowd joined the mosque after it closed its doors in 1933 on account of the many Jews in its ranks. Quite by accident, these soul seekers provided the grounds for the secret police deciding to search for 'Kurfürstendamm Juden' in the mosque some years later.

## 4        **The Male Homosexuals**

The archives are surprisingly silent on the subject of Hugo Marcus's circle of Indian students in the mosque, but his correspondence shows that he did indeed introduce his homosexual Berlin friends into it. Two theorists on Weimar society, the publicist Kurt Hiller and the pacifist Arnim Wegner, were praising of Marcus's pupils and claim that they regularly took part in the sessions. From observing Muslim Indian society, it seems that homosexuality was accepted so long as people did not speak about it. Nonetheless, in their letters to Marcus, the Ahmadiyya missionaries alluded to his sexual preference with friendly jokes.

The year 1933 saw the Nazis smashing the Indian Bureau and throwing its archives into the street. The mosque, however, which represented part of Germany's alternative religious landscape, was left alone for some time yet. As repeatedly mentioned, that landscape embraced every possible spiritual nuance within the life reform movement, including Theosophy, Buddhism, Mazdaznan, spiritualism, yoga, vegetarianism, back-to-nature movements, biodynamic vegetable growing, body cults and alternative medical cures. Because this amalgam provided the subject matter for the lecture series in the mosque, and publications on these issues can still be found in the mosque library, it must be concluded that the Lahore-Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin formed a small but pertinent part of it all. Because the Nazis also experimented with alternative religions, such organizations were regulated but not forbidden. In fact, it was only when their protector, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, fled to England in 1942 that they were all closed down. While the ministry of propaganda appropriated the mosque for its own purposes, the keys were handed to Amin El Husseini, who for some years served as the Friday preacher.

Again in 1933, Moscow-oriented couples, communists, socialists and their sympathizers left the country overnight and, in due course, couples of which one part was Jewish followed. Conversely, hundreds of Turkish–German, Iranian–German, Tatar–German and Egyptian–German couples saw new career opportunities and good future prospects for their children in Nazi Germany, and for that reason collaborated with the regime. However, in doing so, they were throwing themselves at the mercy of a regime that had set itself the megalomaniac task of rendering Germany 'racially pure', to be followed by the 'unmixing' of Europe in its entirety.



The solidarity that those same Egyptians, Persians, Afghans and Indians extended towards threatened Jews, and the help that Muslim families and firms in India offered to European refugees from the Holocaust amply illustrates that not everybody supported Nazi policies. In Berlin, two Egyptian jazz musicians and an Egyptian doctor, a Persian and an Afghan diplomat, and three business-minded sisters each in their own way helped to rescue Jews earmarked for deportation. Even the Islamic Central Institute, which after all was an offshoot of the ministry of propaganda, got involved, in that two of its board members, Kamal Elgin Galal and Abdel Halim Al-Naggar, acted as witnesses at the nighttime marriage of Abdel-Aziz Helmi-Hammad and Anna Boros, while President



Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, paved the way for Hosein and Laura to acquire permission for their marriage.

In Lahore, the Ur-Rahman family graciously supported Lisa Oettinger in her endeavour to live as an independent woman in Muslim surroundings. S.M. Abdullah kept in touch with the Oettingers in wartime Berlin and with Hugo Marcus in Basel. He sent them packages, money and support and, as soon as the war was over, sent out a search party to establish if they were still alive. When the Oettinger women were found, Abdullah travelled to Berlin to bail them out of the Russian occupation zone. Meanwhile, his organization supported Hugo Marcus financially until 1957, by which time his first restitution payments had arrived. In Aligarh, Luba Derczanska was received with open arms. Bombay society mirrored the prudence with which Abdul Khwaja Hamied had helped to rescue his Jewish family and friends by opening its doors to European Jews. These were not the great gestures of people whose names have been collected in Yad Vashem, who risked their lives to save others, but rather the small gestures of people who put themselves out for their neighbours or family members in distress, but when all is said and done, may have been as important as the former.

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By the end of the Second World War, the enthusiasm in interwar Berlin with which Jews and Muslims had embraced mixed marriages and speculated about the future of the globe had evaporated into thin air. Europe was in a shambles. As the enormity of the Holocaust slowly sank in, the survivors of the atrocities counted their losses and its perpetrators sought refuge in denial. The Middle East saw the creation of Israel and, one by one, secular nation-states with a Muslim outlook wresting their independence from their former colonial masters. This was no longer the time or place in which to think of uniting Muslims and Jews. The days when Eastern missions flourished in Western cities, when Muslims were highly cultured and Islam a rational, democratic religion, when Jews and Muslims intermarried and fused their cultural traditions – had been forgotten.

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This study has confirmed the observations of Robert Park, the scholar who noticed that ‘it is in the mind of the marginal man that conflicting cultures meet and fuse, [and in which] the process of civilization is visibly going on’. It has also taken heed of the fact that Park placed these conflicting cultures in a catastrophic theory of progress. Oppression and war preceded the peaceful

encounter narrated on these pages, and war and the Holocaust brought it to an end. A series of favourable conditions opened up a space in which actors on the margins found the courage with which to envision a common future over and above the reigning ideologies of their time. The archives they left behind remind us that there is indeed a space in which creativity, whenever people feel the need for it, may make a fresh start.



# Archival Materials, Websites, Copyrights of Images

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