

# 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).



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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<sup>28</sup> 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.

