When the hope for a victorious end of the war, which had upheld the people, finally was shattered, a great sadness, a hopelessness and despair took hold of the masses. Before my eyes I can still see the people standing in groups in front of the posters proclaiming the conditions of the armistice. They cried out, ‘Wir sind kaputt!’ (We are finished).\(^1\)

Shortly after making this observation in Berlin, Emmy Arnold left to create the Bruderhof, the Christian youth movement that tried to live according to the Sermon on the Mount.\(^2\) In their desperation, Germans embraced religious alternatives – from visionary Christian youth movements like the Bruderhof to theosophy, astrology, metaphysics, yoga, magnetism, Bo Yin Ra, healing, monism, the Germanic Faith Community, Wotan cults, and other mystical völkische movements that harked back to real or imagined pre-Christian religious origins.\(^3\)

Besides, every wisdom and religion the east could muster had a representative in Berlin or Germany.\(^4\) By the time of the Parliament of Religions, held during the World Fair in Chicago in 1893, Buddhists, Brahmans and Hindus, many of whom were also members of the Indian Theosophical Society, had already conquered the international stage. Missionaries from the Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the Buddhist Propagation Society, the Baha’i movement and universal Sufism had all made their presence felt in London and on the European continent.\(^5\)

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2 For a more detailed account, see Chapter 1. Emmy was married to Eberhard Arnold and they started the Bruderhof together.
presented themselves in Berlin, a dense net of theosophist and anthroposophist lodges covered the inner-city boroughs, while to the north of the metropolis the Buddhist House was already in the making.6

This chapter and the next address Germans who during these turbulent years chose to become Muslims. Starting in 1922, when the first Muslim mission commenced, it ends at the moment Germany entered the next war and the last missionary left the country. Within these limits, the chapters map the different responses to the Muslim missionary activities. Our assumption is that the missionary field and that of modernity created various interfaces in the religious domain in which experimenting with religion played a decisive role. In other words, the interaction of the missionary effort and the energies of modernity created a domain of religious experimentation. Among Muslims in Berlin, this taste for experiment challenged traditional notions to a breaking point.

Mansur Rifat’s observation that Ahmadis appealed to both Christians and Jews points to a central feature of the chapters ahead. Not only the Ahmadiyya and their Deutsch–Moslemische Gesellschaft, but also the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin dealt with a range of Jewish and a range of Christian converts, and Muslim émigrés in Berlin carefully registered the difference. As for the converts themselves, during the Weimar years, distinctions between their different ethnic and religious roots were of little importance. German intellectuals and artists had been intermarrying for two generations, and many Jews converted to Christianity. The postwar generation was largely the product of interethnic mixtures. What counted for them was contempt of the European traditions and the freedom to choose one’s religion, if religion was an option at all. When the Nazis took over and started to ‘cleanse’ family roots, many Germans were confronted with an unknown ‘Jewish grandmother’ for the first time in their lives. Others identified with Judaism only after they had been reconfigured a Jew by the Nazi bureaucracy.

For the writing of the chapters ahead, this posed a conceptual difficulty. Some converts composed a conversion narrative that was clearly and explicitly

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