

# The illusions of encounter: Muslim ‘minds’ and Hindu revolutionaries in First World War Germany and after

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## Abstract

*German political Orientalists in the era of the First World War thought that new ethnographic methods and insights would allow them to coax Muslim populations throughout the Middle East and South Asia into violent revolt against the British. The European imperial mindset insisted that non-Western peoples could be mastered and masterminded at whim. In fact, German pursuit of absolute control of Asian populations led to their loss of control, as their misrecognitions of the facts on the ground placed them in relationships of mutually-affecting lived encounter with Indian revolutionaries. While these interactions remained largely limited to the realm of military operations during the war, they opened up into ideological encounters on the radical fringes of Weimar society in the war's aftermath. Yet far from a study of humanistic exchange or understanding, this essay seeks to historicize the meetings of Germans and Indian émigrés and show how misrepresentations and power asymmetries were endemic to the encounter between these groups.*

## Introduction

Ideas about ‘Oriental peoples’ produced by German politically-engaged Orientalists at the turn of the century set the stage for an unprecedented level of lived encounter with Indian anti-colonial revolutionaries during the First World War. These ideas, however, also generated a severe and ultimately disastrous misrecognition of the Indian population that emigrated to Berlin at the behest of the Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*). Upheaval in India, I show, preoccupied German planners of *Weltpolitik* from at least 1907 onwards, and persisted as a war aim until the summer of 1915. While the interactions between Germans and Indians remained largely limited to the realm of military operations during the war, unexpected spaces of social and ideological encounter between Germans and the Indian émigré

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population opened up in the war's aftermath, particularly on the radical fringes of German society. Instead of focusing solely on the projections and tropes of German Orientalism, this paper is concerned with the consequences created by its application, as well as with the process by which embodied encounter between once-distant German and Asian populations began to occur. As we shall see, a study of lived encounter challenges the notion of a unilinear relationship of domination of the 'West' against the rest. Instead, power was multi-directional, as Germans became implicated in an international network of Hindu anti-colonial activists. The war was a fateful moment in which Europeans and Asians were clearly making each other's history as never before, through mutual contact and mutual manipulation. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria have recently pointed out the necessity of attending to the 'mutually-affecting' nature of European contact with the colonial world.<sup>1</sup> This essay adopts such an approach; and yet, to stress the mutuality of lived encounter is *not* to assert that these meetings were characterized by reciprocity, humanistic exchange or increased understanding. As the historical processes of once-distant peoples became increasingly intertwined over the course of the First World War and in its aftermath, power asymmetries, wilful misrecognition and endemic miscommunication remained. And despite this, what Hans-Georg Gadamer termed the 'historically effected consciousness' of the parties involved, their way of making sense of the world within a historically-specific horizon, had been changed irrevocably through the sharing of physical space, social spheres and ideas.<sup>2</sup>

## German political Orientalism and revolution in the East

In July 1914, the eve of the First World War, the Kaiser wrote in the marginalia of a diplomatic report: 'Our consuls in Turkey and India ... must inflame the whole Mohammedan world to wild revolt ... for if we are to be bled to death, at least England shall lose India.'<sup>3</sup> On 4 September, after receiving unmistakable evidence of Britain's intention to remain in the war, and that there would be no swift victory, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg reiterated the Kaiser's view: 'One of our chief tasks', he stressed to the Foreign Office, 'is to soften up Britain gradually by harassment in India and Egypt, which can only be possible from there.'<sup>4</sup> By the end of the month, one of the Orient experts of the Foreign Office, Max von

1 See introduction to Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, eds., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt: Campus, 2002, pp. 9–49.

2 See Gadamer's discussion of the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* in *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990, pp. 305–12.

3 This marginal note by the Kaiser on a telegram from the German ambassador in St Petersburg is quoted in Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914–18*, Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002 (orig. pub. 1962), p. 110.

4 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (henceforth AA) R21070-1, 80, Bethmann Hollweg to Foreign Office, 10 August 1914. Compare Donald McKale, *War by revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the era of World War I*, Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998, p. 54; Fischer, *Griff*, p. 114; Martin Kroeger, 'Revolution als Programm. Ziele und Realität deutscher Orientpolitik im ersten Weltkrieg', in Wolfgang Michalka, ed., *Der Erste Weltkrieg: Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse*, Munich: Piper, 1994, p. 374.

Oppenheim, circulated an influential memorandum that prophesied ‘the exhaustion of England’ when ‘Turkey invades Egypt and India rises in rebellion’.<sup>5</sup> India had a spectral presence in German war aims by the beginning of the war and was linked in the official imagination with notions of a massive revolt of the ‘Muslim world’ through ‘jihad’. In order to understand why India became a focus of German war planning in this way in 1914, however, we must return to the turn-of-the-century context, to the moment when the Kaiser embarked on *Weltpolitik*, and study the conceptual framework in which India began to appear in the German official mind.

Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, the just-appointed viceroy of India, wrote to a friend in 1900, ‘Germany, to my mind, draws harder bargains than any continental power ... In international politics never take your eye off the German Emperor.’<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Kaiser Wilhelm II had recently been behaving badly. In November 1898 he travelled for the second time in nine years to the Ottoman empire, where he demonstrated an ‘excessive enthusiasm and exaggerated zeal for everything Turkish and Mohammedan’.<sup>7</sup> He declared himself ‘friend’ to the ‘300 million Moslems of the world’ at Damascus, and encouraged rumours in the Turkish press that he would convert to Islam.<sup>8</sup> The diplomatic gaffes of the Kaiser, far from unusual for his character, registered German imperial interest in the Middle East at the turn of the century. The Baghdad railway, originally planned as the final link in a land route from Berlin through the Ottoman territories to the Persian Gulf, was the pet project of Marschall von Bieberstein, who became ambassador to Constantinople in 1897.<sup>9</sup> The Baghdad railway formed an important feature of the Kaiser’s *Weltpolitik*, his desire to place Germany definitively on the map of the great European imperialist powers. Scholars of German imperialism have pointed out that the Ottoman empire, China and Africa became the main ‘spaces’ in which the endgame of German world policy played out.<sup>10</sup> However, Curzon’s anxiety about Germany upon his assumption of the Indian viceroyship points to a ghostly preoccupation of German imperialists. India, seen by Germans as the ‘glacis’ of the British empire and also as its Achilles’ heel, preoccupied German planners of *Weltpolitik* especially from 1907 onwards. That year saw the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian agreement over Persia, a *de facto* reassertion of the integrity of British-India’s frontiers. The agreement was seen by Germans as an expression of British and Russian imperial clout, and as an act of encirclement.<sup>11</sup> In the same period, the

5 AA R20938, 8, Oppenheim, ‘Die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde’, September 1914.

6 Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London (henceforth OIOC) F/111/159, Curzon to Hamilton, 11 January 1900.

7 Bernhard Prince von Bülow, *Memoirs of Prince von Bülow*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, vol. 1, p. 292.

8 Letter of ‘Willy’ to ‘Dearest Nicky’, 9 November 1898, in Isaac Don Levine, ed., *Letters from the Kaiser to the Czar*, New York: F. A. Stokes, 2000, p. 61. Compare McKale, *Revolution*, x; Jan Stefan Richter, *Die Orientreise Kaiser Wilhelms II. 1898*, Hamburg: Kovac, 1996, pp. 4–10.

9 Arnim Kössler, *Aktionsfeld Osmanisches Reich*, New York: Arno Press, 1981, p. 244; Rathmann, *Berlin-Bagdad*, Berlin: Dietz, 1962, pp. 21–46.

10 Konrad Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik: Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1890–1902*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997, pp. 339, 355.

11 Fischer, *Griff*, p. 23.

conclusion of violent campaigns (1904–7) by German colonial officers against the Herero in Southwest Africa proved that expenditures of vast military resources were incommensurate with the economic benefit, resulting in the loss of support for the Kaiser's colonial policy within the Reichstag in December 1906. The following year, however, liberals and conservatives, sensing they were losing the imperial game, restated their commitment to a new 'rationalized' approach.<sup>12</sup>

Given this backdrop, official Germany grew increasingly interested in India. Rising anti-colonial nationalist activity in the British colonies in 1907, and particularly in India, caused reverberations at the Foreign Office. As Germans renewed their goal of attaining colonial prowess, the actions of Indian revolutionaries against the British seemed felicitous. The Kaiser, in 1908, made full use of the Indian bogey. 'The British should be aware that war with Germany would mean the loss of India and thus the loss of their world position',<sup>13</sup> he said, words re-echoed in the months before the First World War.

Despite regard for France, Russia, and the United States of America as imperial powers at the turn of the century, the German planetary imagination was informed most by British world hegemony. The period between 1840 and 1900 formed the pinnacle of British imperialism.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Great Britain ruled over 10 million square miles of territory and counted roughly 400 million subjects in its colonies.<sup>15</sup> And many British officials, Lord Curzon chief among them, saw India as the fulcrum of this world order. 'Towards her, or into her orbit, a centripetal force, which none appears able to resist, draws every wandering star', Curzon remarked.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the route to India was viewed as the 'main street' of the British empire.<sup>17</sup> This is what made India of growing interest in the German imperialist imagination during the high tide of imperial competition. In 1908 Germany had the second-largest shipping traffic with India, after Great Britain.<sup>18</sup> A British newspaper article from that year remarked that the

12 Dirk van Laak, *Über alles in der Welt: Deutscher Imperialismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005, pp. 84–5.

13 The Kaiser's comments to Bülow, 11 August 1908, quoted in Nirode Barooah, *India and the official Germany, 1886–1914*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1977, p. 59.

14 This period can further be divided into 1840–1870, during which time London became the financial centre of the world-economy, followed by the period of 'hegemonic maturity', 1870–1890, when other nations acquiesced to the British world-system, and finally the phase 1890–1914, when aggressive battles for imperial hegemony broke out between European powers. See Peter Taylor, *Political geography: world-economy, nation-state and locality*, Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 64. The golden age of British naval ascendancy occurred between 1865 and 1890, after which a period of competition began, especially with Germany. See Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at sea*, Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2004, p. 27.

15 Timothy Parsons, *The British imperial century, 1815–1914: a world history perspective*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, p. 3.

16 Geoffrey Nash, *From empire to orient: travellers to the Middle East 1830–1926*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 117.

17 Taylor, *Geography*, p. 116.

18 Of course the gap between Great Britain and Germany was enormous. The British had 4,949 ships in Indian waters, while the Germans had 437. Nevertheless, the growth of trade between Germany and India was enough to rile the British into passing the Indian Steamship Law Amendment of 1909 that made it more difficult for non-British vessels to obtain legal access to Indian waters. See Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R1501/103911, report by Lehman, 28 August 1909.

‘growth of [Indian] exports to foreign countries is especially marked in the case of the United States and Germany’.<sup>19</sup>

The Kaiser’s confidence about Germany’s ability to cause the ‘loss of India’ in 1908, then, was not mere hot air, but was a means of phrasing his challenge to British imperial hegemony in the strongest terms. Furthermore, it was a view grounded in the learned opinions of Foreign Office Orient experts, and derived from a long inheritance of Orientalist projections, as well as from the new science of ethnology, the handmaiden of European imperialism. India became increasingly salient in German foreign planning with the development of ideas about the Muslim ‘mind’ and excitement about prospects to incite Muslim populations of the Middle East, Central Asia and India to upheaval against the British.

As we shall see presently, German nineteenth-century ethnology inflected German Orientalism in a political direction by the turn of the century. But first, let us briefly consider the *idées fixes* of the German (and European) view of Islam that formed the basis of these later developments. Ever since the fall of the Byzantine empire to the Ottomans in the fourteenth century, Islam represented a looming threat to Christianity. Political theorists from Machiavelli to Bodin associated Islam with despotism and warfare, calling it ‘fanatical’, ‘gruesome’, and ‘barbarous’. The most famous and influential expression of such views came in Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des Lois* (1748) where Islam became the foil of the European enlightenment itself. In the university culture of nineteenth-century Germany, highly influenced by French scholarly modes, Islam came first to be studied within the philological tradition – through the textual analysis of foundational writings such as the Qur’an. Philology provided a new lens through which to filter old tropes about Islam.<sup>20</sup> While the titans of German Islamic studies at mid-century, figures such as Alfred Kremer and Theodor Nöldecke, remained within the philological tradition, a new wave of scholars at the dawn of Germany’s imperialist age in the 1880s, especially Martin Hartmann and, later, Carl Becker, placed emphasis on studying modern Islam. These scholars actively campaigned for a new, politically salient form of Orientalist study, one informed by ethnographic methods.<sup>21</sup> Especially after the high cost of military operations in Southwest and East Africa, the Foreign Office was looking for more efficient, ‘rationalized’, ways to manage indigenous populations.<sup>22</sup> German *Kultur* was one alternative, with German-medium schools and cultural diplomacy organizations springing up throughout the tattered empire.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the Foreign Office became interested in the

19 *The Times* (London), ‘Indian imperial preference’, 9 November 1908.

20 The Austrian Orientalist scholar Alfred Kremer, for example, in his *Mittelsyrien und Damascus* (1849), spoke of the ‘fanaticism’ of the Muslim religion, and the special ‘conquering capacity of barbarous [rohen] Muslim peoples [Stämme]’.

21 Sabine Mangold’s account, as with that of the older work by Martin Plessner, *Die Geschichte der Wissenschaften im Islam*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1931, remains internal to the discipline, and thus misses the larger imperialist backdrop. See Sabine Mangold, *Eine ‘weltbürgerliche Wissenschaft’ – Die deutsche Orientalistik im 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004, p. 257.

22 On excessive violence in German colonies see Isabel Hull, *Absolute destruction: military culture and the practices of war*, Ithaca: Cornell, 2005, pp. 5–90.

23 See Jürgen Kloosterhuis, *‘Friedliche Imperialisten’: Deutsche Auslandsvereine und auswärtige Kulturpolitik, 1906–1908*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994, pp. 15–33.

ethnographic prognostication of the mental attitudes of Muslim populations in the Middle East and East Africa as a means of control.

German ethnology of the late nineteenth century provided tools to negotiate new imperial contacts with the non-western world. One of the main features of German *Völkerkunde* (ethnology) as it developed between 1880 and 1905 was the idea that all cultures develop simultaneously but at different speeds.<sup>24</sup> The German diffusionist school drew on the notion of cultures as organic wholes propounded by Vico and Herder. The application of psychology to ethnological science took its most influential form in Wilhelm Wundt's seminal *Völkerpsychologie* of 1900, although the field had long been established by figures such as Moritz von Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Wundt's 'psychical ethnology' (*psychische Ethnologie*), which was disseminated far beyond the walls of the university, taught that racio-cultural groups (*Völker*) each had their own unique mental composition.<sup>26</sup> A host of Islamologists, both the professionals working at academic institutions, such as Hartmann and Becker, as well as extra-academic experts in the employ of the Foreign Office, such as Max von Oppenheim, Paul Rohrbach and Friedrich Naumann, transformed these psychological ethnographic notions into the stuff of Orientalist *Weltpolitik*.<sup>27</sup>

To specifically illustrate how ethnographic methods created a fateful vision of the 'Orient' that set the stage for lived contact with Asian revolutionaries in the lead-up to the war, I consider the role of Max von Oppenheim, (1860–1946), son of a Jewish banking family, amateur Orientalist scholar and antique collector, as a transmission belt between ethnology and the decision-making circles of the Foreign Office.<sup>28</sup> He began serving as the German general consul in Cairo in 1896.<sup>29</sup> By that time he had completed a study of Bedouin groups, in which, writing in an ethnological vein, he catalogued their rustic commitment to 'duty and hospitality', as well as their 'virility and resilience'.<sup>30</sup> And in 1902 he published a biography of the nineteenth-century Sudanese Muslim ruler Rabeh

24 Markus Joch, 'Deutsche Anti-Evolutionisten: Konzeptionen der Kulturkreislehre um 1900', in Alexander Honold and Klaus Scherpe, eds., *Das Fremde: Reiseerfahrungen, Schreibformen und Kulturelles Wissen*, Bern: P. Lang, 2003, pp. 77–96.

25 See Carl Michaëlis, 'Völkerpsychologie', in *Kirchner's Wörterbuch der philosophischen Grundbegriffe*, Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1911. Berthold Oelze, *Wilhelm Wundt: die Konzeption der Völkerpsychologie*, New York: Waxmann, 1991, pp. 140–55; Eno Beuchelt, *Ideengeschichte der Völkerpsychologie*, Meisenheim: Hain, 1974, pp. 20–8.

26 See Wundt, *Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*, Leipzig: W. Englemann, vol. 1, p. 488.

27 On Naumann and Rohrbach see Gottfried Hagen, 'German heralds of holy war: orientalists and applied oriental studies', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24, 2, 2004, pp. 145–62.

28 Fritz Fischer, in *Griff*, portrays Oppenheim as the mastermind of German foreign policy in the East. Wilhelm Treue, in 'Max Freiherr von Oppenheim – Der Archäologe und die Politik', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 209, 1969, pp. 37–74, challenges Fischer's account, but tends to exaggeration himself by painting Oppenheim as superfluous. Clearly a host of consultants, and no one person, was responsible for the development of policies in the East. For the purpose of this essay, I use Oppenheim as an illustrative example. I thank Suzanne Marchand for pointing me to the Treue essay.

29 Gabriele Teichmann and Gisela Völger, eds., *Faszination Orient: Max von Oppenheim, Forscher, Sammler, Diplomat*, Cologne: Dumont, 2001, p. 29.

30 Max von Oppenheim, *Bericht über seine Reise durch die Syrische Wüste nach Mosul*, Berlin: Pormetter, 1894, p. 15.

Fadl Allah, aiming to uncover the secret of Rabeh's ability to stir up Muslim 'fanaticism' in war.<sup>31</sup> His double-dealing as amateur ethnologist and Foreign Office agent was not unique. Military official Moritz Merker, for example, wrote a substantial book on the Masai in 1904.<sup>32</sup> Files on the Orient kept by the German Foreign Office from the late 1890s until the First World War are filled with records penned by Oppenheim, the diplomat-cum-Orientalist.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see, he, along with a battery of other Orient experts inspired by the ethnological approach, propagated a monolithic notion of Islam as fanatical, manly, valorous and warlike in Foreign Office circles, and viewed Indian Muslims as a particularly volatile group within the Islamic world.

Oppenheim's imagination about India as a zone of revolution took off in 1907 with the rising extremist anti-colonial activity taking place in major Indian cities in that year. In January 1906, Calcutta police began reporting the rise of Hindu extremism. This was the beginning of a radical phase of the Swadeshi (self-sufficiency) movement, spurred by Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal by fiat in 1905. The movement corresponded with unrest elsewhere in India, as violent revolutionary activity picked up in Lahore and Bombay during the same time. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal reached extremist heights in 1907–08 with thirteen assaults and murders of government officials or bystanders, nineteen attempted murders and eleven robberies in the Calcutta region alone. Between 1908 and 1910 a slew of repressive measures were instituted on the All-India level: The Arms Act, the Explosive Substances Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Conspiracy Law and the Press Act. Furthermore, many of the prime Indian revolutionaries, most of them Hindu, were deported from India or sent to the dreaded penal colony on the Andaman Islands.<sup>34</sup>

This unrest in India was communicated back to the German Foreign Office by consuls in South Asia and the Far East, and Oppenheim interpreted the reports as evidence of rising Muslim fanaticism, even though extremist Hindu activity was really at issue. Here is a clear case of an overwrought Orientalist conceptual framework skewing the ability to apprehend the actual facts on the ground. While Hindu extremism did not fit into Oppenheim's Orientalist perception of the East, Muslim fanaticism did, and thus the facts were altered to fit with fantasy. Oppenheim, informed by German cultural science, saw the whole Orient stretching from Egypt through the Ottoman empire and Persia to India, as a single, monolithic cultural and psychic whole. He conflated the rise of pan-Islamism throughout the Middle East during these same years with the outbreak of Hindu-led nationalism in

31 Oppenheim, *Rabeh und das Tschadseegebiet*, Berlin: Reimer, p. v.

32 Andre Gingrich, 'From the late imperial era to the end of the republican interlude', in Fredrick Barth *et al.*, *One discipline, four ways*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005, p. 97. Of course, ethnologists not directly employed by the Foreign Office were also extremely active in expedition work in these years. The list is long, but some of the most eminent were Leo Frobenius, Adolf Bastian, Albert Grünwedel, Albert von le Coq, and the Austrian Alois Musil.

33 AA, R14539-R14552, these records comprise the nine volumes of the *Orientalia Generalia* files.

34 In May 1907, Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh of the Punjab were deported from India to London on sedition charges. See J. C. Ker, *Political trouble in India 1907–17*, Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1917, p. 23.

In July 1908, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, revolutionary leader in Bombay, was sent to prison in Burma, where he remained until 1914. Following his sentencing, a number of prominent Indian agitators departed for London to avoid sedition charges, including Bipin Pal, Ram Bhaj Dutt, Hardayal and G. S. Khaparda.

India.<sup>35</sup> In May 1908, he wrote to Chancellor Bülow, ‘with the swelling of Egyptian nationalism, along with the entry of Indian Muslims into the political ferment of the Hindus, Islam is fulfilling its role’. In the same month, Oppenheim reported the development of an ‘Islamic Congress’ in Cairo with supporters from ‘all lands with Muslim populations’. The consul predicted ‘a common uprising of the Muslims in the British colonies’, which could be ‘counted on in case of a great European war’.<sup>36</sup>

In 1910, Heinrich Becker, at the Hamburg *Kolonialinstitut*, founded his journal, *Islam*, which would become a chief organ for scholarship on the Muslim mind, and on jihad by 1914. His colleague, Martin Hartmann, at the *Seminar für orientalische Sprachen* in Berlin, argued that Germany must ‘direct the cultural and economic status of the Islamic lands to her own national interest’.<sup>37</sup> Political Orientalists were responsible for developing a notion of the fanatical Muslim mind that emboldened the German Foreign Office to enter into contact with nationalist groups in the East in the years preceding the First World War.<sup>38</sup>

## Misrecognition and lived encounter

By September 1914, discourse about the Muslim mind coalesced into war planning thanks to the work of the ethnologically-inspired Orientalists associated with the Foreign Office, such as Oppenheim, Becker and Hartmann. In that month, Oppenheim submitted his memorandum, ‘The revolutionizing of the Islamic territories of our enemy’, and asserted that ‘in terms of the lands that must be revolutionized with a view to the effect it will have on the war, India is by far the most important’.<sup>39</sup> In fact, ‘the creation of an alliance and cooperation between Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan is desirable because an overland path is the only sure connection to India’.<sup>40</sup> ‘Mohammedans’, said Oppenheim, ‘constitute the most war-like and temperamental element [in India].’<sup>41</sup> And apart from the Indian Muslims, there were the ‘warlike Bedouins’<sup>42</sup> in Egypt and the Middle East, whose ‘way of life ... [was]

35 Pan-Islamism had been a growing force throughout the Middle East and India since the late nineteenth century. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), a scholar and publicist from Persia, was one of main exponents of ‘Hamidian’ pan-Islamism focused on the supremacy of the Ottoman sultan. See Jacob Landau, *Politics of pan-Islam*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990, pp. 15, 19. Indian Muslim leaders, while supporting pan-Islamism, generally remained loyal to the British around the turn of the century. See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat movement*, New York: Columbia, 1982, pp. 56ff.; Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877–1924*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 183.

36 AA, R14547, Oppenheim to Bülow, 26 May 1908.

37 Martin Hartmann, ‘Deutschland und der Islam’, in *Islam*, 1910, 1, p. 75.

38 Other ethnographically-inspired expert reports from 1914 that encouraged the German incitement of ‘jihad’ include R. Tschudi, *Der Islam un der Krieg*; H. Grimme, *Islam und Weltkrieg*; H. Grothe, *Deutschland, die Türkei und der Islam*; G. Diercks, *Hie Allah! Das Erwachen des Islam*; E. Jäckh, *Die deutsch-türkische Waffenbruderschaft*; R. Schaefer, *Islam und Weltkrieg*; R. Schaefer, *Der deutsche Krieg, die Türkei, Islam und Christentum*; J. Froberger, *Weltkrieg und Islam*; G. Galli, *Wesen, Wandel und Wirken des heiligen Krieges des Islams*; Eugen Mittwoch, *Deutschland, die Türkei und der heilige Krieg*.

39 Oppenheim, *Revolutionierung*, p. 85.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 27.



extremely simple<sup>43</sup> and whose culture was marked by ‘virility and resilience’.<sup>44</sup> By coordinating an uprising among these two groups – Indian Muslims and Bedouins – the British empire in India and Egypt would be shaken.

But the ‘Orient’ that Oppenheim and his colleagues sought to manipulate was not, to their chagrin, so easily malleable. Indian Hindu anti-colonial activists had already established infrastructures of resistance that began to conflict with the Foreign Office’s plans. Apart from the Calcutta-based nationalist upsurge mentioned above, other well-organized nodes of Indian anti-colonialism were soon established abroad, in London in 1905, and in Paris in 1908. Shyamaji Krishnavarma, a wealthy Indian lawyer, arrived in London from India in 1897, and started the ‘India House’ eight years later, a residence for radical Indian students studying in the city. He also started the anti-British journal, *The Indian Socialist*. Famous revolutionaries, such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Hardayal, had their introduction to diasporic conspiratorial work under Krishnavarma’s guidance. The group organized the shipment of weapons and anti-colonial propaganda back to India, and recruited Indian students in London to their cause. By 1908, Bhikaji Cama, a wealthy Indian woman, established the rudiments of an anti-colonial circle in Paris. Supported by the Parisian Socialist Party, she and her colleagues participated in the 1907 Socialist International Congress to great acclaim.<sup>45</sup> When in 1909, an official of the British India Office was assassinated in London by an Indian student associated with the India House, the anti-colonial circle quickly relocated to Paris.<sup>46</sup> One of the most charismatic and effective members of this group, Hardayal, soon left for the United States of America, and made his way to Stanford University, where he briefly taught courses on Indian philosophy. Hardayal, a prolific writer whose articles appeared in the widest-read Indian journals,<sup>47</sup> started the Ghadr Party in San Francisco in 1911. The group would become one of the most important nodes of the international Indian anti-colonial movement, as it organized the passage of weapons, propaganda literature, and revolutionaries over the Pacific Ocean to the coast of Bengal.<sup>48</sup> The Ghadr Party also established contacts with Indian anti-colonial activists in other North American cities, especially Vancouver, Chicago and New York. By 1912, a veritable intercontinental network of revolutionary Indians was in operation. The leaders of this group, however, were largely Hindu, and many of them, such as Hardayal, harboured rabid anti-Muslim sentiment. The international infrastructure of

43 Oppenheim, p. 14.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

45 Dadabhai Naoroji, a well-known nationalist figure, also spoke. See Peter Grohmann, *et al.*, eds., *Der Internationale Sozialistenkongress, Stuttgart 1907: Protokoll*, Stuttgart: Selbstverlag der Studiengruppe, 1977, pp. 36ff.

46 Sir William Curzon Wylie, an aide-de-camp at the London India Office, was assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra, a student in London. See J. C. Ker, *Political trouble*, pp. 180–1.

47 Hardayal’s essays focused on the need for Indians to study abroad, especially in America, Germany and France, but not in England. See ‘India and the world movement’, *Modern Review*, Calcutta, February, 1913, pp. 185ff.

48 Kalyan Kumar Banerjee, *Indian freedom movement: revolutionaries in America*, Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1969, p. 2. See also Tilak Raj Sareen, *Indian revolutionary movement abroad: 1905–1921*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1979; Arun Coomer Bose, *Indian revolutionaries abroad, 1905–1922*, Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971.

Hindu nationalism points to the social dominance of Hindu elites in India in this period in comparison to the Muslim population, and their ability to perpetuate their social status abroad.

The German Foreign Office, eager to spur India to revolution due to theories about Muslim fanaticism, was thus confronted with an international economy of *Hindu* revolutionaries. Politicized Orientalism about the Muslim mind was leading to encounters with Hindu revolutionaries. When General Bernhardt, German ambassador to Washington, instructed his San Francisco attaché in November 1913 to pay a visit to Hardayal in order to invite him to Berlin, a heightened phase of entwinement between German and Indian international networks was about to begin.<sup>49</sup> Hardayal took up the German offer in May 1914, after a brief stint in jail on sedition charges. He left his deputy Ram Chandra in command of the San Francisco Ghadr and travelled through New York and Geneva to Berlin.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, Oppenheim was recruiting other high-profile Indian Hindu revolutionaries from Paris. A group including Vivendranath Chattopadhyaya and Bhupendranath Datta collected in Charlottenburg by August 1914.<sup>51</sup> A Committee for Indian Independence was constituted as part of the newly established *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (Information Office for the Orient), under Oppenheim's direction.<sup>52</sup> One of the main tasks of the *Nachrichtenstelle* was the production of anti-British propaganda in Middle Eastern and Asian languages: Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Arabic and Chinese. However the propagandistic work was only one aspect of a multi-pronged operation.

Until the autumn of 1915, the two most important roles of the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* involved attempts to provide massive amounts of weapons to revolutionaries on India's east coast via Hardayal's Ghadr network based in San Francisco, and a simultaneous campaign to raise revolution throughout the Middle East that would spill into India from the West. By the expenditure of vast amounts of money and the fashioning of intricate conspiratorial strategies, the Foreign Office and an international network of Indian (mostly Hindu) nationalists, attempted to revolutionize India from the East and the West simultaneously.

Germans repeatedly orchestrated major attempts to ship weapons to India via the American Ghadr network. In April 1914, the ship *Komagata Maru* sailed with German arms and 376 men from San Francisco, but was seized by British authorities once it reached Calcutta. A similar failed attempt was made the following month with the *Tosa Maru*. The Germans tried again in January 1915, this time with two ships, the *Annie Larson* and the *S.S. Maverick*, in a tag-team attempt to transport 'eleven carloads' of arms at a cost of US\$140,000 from the coast of Mexico. The *Maverick* finally entered Indian waters in September after months lost at sea, but was subsequently captured by Dutch authorities

49 AA: R21088-1, 35, clipping from *The Times* (London) of 1915, 'German inspiration of Indian anarchy'.

50 See Suprakash Roy, *Bharatera baiplabika sangramera itihasa*, Kolkata: Bharati Buka Stala, 1955, vol. 1, p. 340.

51 On Abinashchandra Bhattacharyya's previous career as a revolutionary terrorist in Bengal see Samaren Roy, *The restless Brahmin: early life of M. N. Roy*, Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1970, p. 19. See AA: R21070-1, 28–30, letter of Abinashchandra Bhattacharyya to Clemens Delbrück, 11 August 1914.

52 AA: R1502, 13643, Karl Emil Schabinger's report on 'Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient', includes a description of the twenty-three room office at Tauentzenerstrasse 19a. III, 21 September 1915.

and the five Indians on board arrested and sentenced to death.<sup>53</sup> Two more attempts occurred with the Holland-American steamship *Djemmer* in June 1915 carrying 7,300 rifles (captured by the British), and the similarly well-stocked *Henry S.*, captured the following month en route to Manila.<sup>54</sup>

As the Germans purveyed Indian revolutionaries on the California coast, they also attempted the same strategy in East Asia. Arrangements were made to provide funds to particular individuals already in Japan and China to purchase weapons on a smaller scale and send them to India.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, Jatendra Nath Lahiri, an Indian envoy sent from Berlin, arrived in Bombay and made his way to Calcutta in March 1915, where he informed the Calcutta underground revolutionaries under Jatindra Nath Mukherjee that German arms were on their way. In April, a lieutenant of the Calcutta group, Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, unaware of the shipment fiascos, travelled to Batavia to obtain arms. Returning to Calcutta empty-handed in June, but with optimistic news from the German consul in Jakarta about expected shipments, Bhattacharya and the revolutionary terrorist circle began plans for insurrection in Bengal. He travelled again to Batavia in August 1915 to determine why weapons had not arrived, returning again empty-handed. Later that month Jatindra Nath Mukherjee, the leader of the Calcutta circle, was shot dead by government officials.<sup>56</sup> Soon afterwards, Bhattacharya left India for a third time, again in search of arms, but was instructed on this occasion by the German consul in Peking to travel directly to Berlin to sort matters out with the Foreign Office.<sup>57</sup> The stalling and excuses on the part of German officials point to a general shift away from interest in India in German war strategy by the autumn of 1915.

With a series of international high-profile gaffes attributable to the Foreign Office, German representatives in the United States of America were on the defensive. In July 1915, Germans contemplated how best to smooth over the diplomatic tension with America caused by the *Annie Larson*, *Maverick*, *Djemmer* and *Henry S.* incidents.<sup>58</sup> In response to evidence of German support for the San Francisco Ghadr, the British Indian government promulgated the Defense of the Realm Act in March 1915, and opened the Lahore Conspiracy Case in which eighty-one Ghadr members were indicted, eighteen convicted and six executed.<sup>59</sup> The trial highlighted German conspiratorial activities in India. One of the ten 'salient features' of Indian conspiracy, remarked the judge as he gave his ruling, was the 'sympathy and admiration for Germans' on the part of Ghadr members and the

53 AA: R21088-2, 114, clipping from *Nieuws van den Dag* reported to Nadolny, 3 September 1915.

54 AA:21084-2, 94-5, Papen to Foreign Office, 31 May 1916.

55 Narajenawai Marathay, Dhirendranath Sarkar, Herambalal Gupta and the Dutch subject Douwes Dekker were involved in this plot. See AA: R21076-2, 172-3, report of Oppenheim to Foreign Office, 9 January 1915.

56 Sibnarayan Ray, *In freedom's quest: a study of the life and works of M. N. Roy*, Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1998, p. 44.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 57

58 AA: R21087-2, 121, Papen to Foreign Office, 'The Anne Larsen weapons shipping incident', 23 July 1915.

59 AA: R21084-1, 16, 5 June 1915. On the number convicted and executed see AA: R21107-1, 42 'Lahore Conspiracy case', 1917.

fact that Ghadr propaganda ‘exhorted [Indians] to assist Germany’ for ‘they have a common enemy [the British]’.<sup>60</sup>

While the approach to India was attempted via Hindu anti-colonial networks stretching over the Pacific, the German Foreign Office also simultaneously organized an effort through the overland path to India via the Middle East and Central Asia. As it was already deeply implicated in plots with Hindu revolutionaries, the Foreign Office began to shuttle Indian Hindus to the Middle East to take up the work of stirring up Muslim jihad. In a comical and desperate episode of Orientalism gone wrong, Germans sought to incite fanatical religious fervour in the Muslim ‘mind’ by the use of Indian Hindu agents.

Whereas there was certainly some degree of collaboration between Indian Muslims and Hindus in the independence struggle of the pre-war years,<sup>61</sup> tensions between these socio-political communities were straining the nationalist movement since the very beginning of Swadeshi from 1905 onwards. Riots broke out in Mymensingh in East Bengal in 1907, for example, as Muslim separatists condemned the economic exploitation of the predominantly Hindu landholders and protested against Hindu cultural arrogance. Hindu nationalist discourse from these years, on the other hand, largely generated by the urban Hindu elites, was marked by anti-Muslim rhetoric, with Muslims often associated with the ‘ignorant’ agrarian masses. And even where nationalists were not actively anti-Muslim, they tended to phrase their struggle in the language of orthodox Hindu religiosity.<sup>62</sup> The German Orientalists’ fixation on the Muslim mind, and their desire to portray Muslims as the leaders of revolution in India, caused them to overlook the significance of these tensions.

The Foreign Office envisioned multiple bands of political missionaries, composed of German, Turkish and Indian members, which would infiltrate the Arab territories, Persia and Afghanistan in order to stir up anti-British sentiment and jihad.<sup>63</sup> Three of the most celebrated and high-profile German expeditions during the war years, those of Werner Otto von Hentig, Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer and Wilhelm Wassmuss,<sup>64</sup> all focused on revolutionizing India from the Afghan border. There were a number of other missions active throughout the region, however.<sup>65</sup> While Wassmuss, known as the German ‘Lawrence of Arabia’, was waylaid by British troops before reaching Persia, Niedermayer and Hentig progressed separately to Kabul, arriving around the same time in October 1915. Raja Kumar Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah also travelled to Kabul

60 Public Records Office, London, FO/228/2700, 23, transcript of Lahore Conspiracy trial judgment.

61 Two of the chief Muslim leaders were Barkatullah and Obeidullah. See S. Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim struggle for independence, 1857–1947*, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1997.

62 Nimal Sadhan Bose, *Racism, struggle and equality and Indian nationalism*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1981, p. 57. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi movement*, New Delhi: People’s Pub. House, 1973, pp. 77–82. Sarkar points out that some eminent Bengali Hindu intellectuals, such as Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranth Tagore, attempted to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims, but with little effect.

63 Fischer, *Griff*, pp. 109–16.

64 AA: R21076-2, 189–90, Wassmuss to Foreign Office, 11 January 1915.

65 Plans for the expeditions began in September 1914. In that month, the Foreign Office had already recruited twenty-eight Germans for the mission work in Turkey, Mesopotamia, and Persia. See AA: R21030-1, 63–9, ‘Expedition Teilnehmer’, 3 September 1914.

with Hentig before going onwards to Afghanistan, trying in vain to realize the German vision of jihad.<sup>66</sup>

In November 1914, large numbers of British Indian troops from Bombay occupied Fao on the Persian Gulf to establish the bulwark for British defences in the Middle East.<sup>67</sup> Aware that the British military was heavily dependent on its Indian army in the eastern sector (as it would later also become dependent on it for help on the western front),<sup>68</sup> these German expeditions aimed to propagandize the Indian infantry and bring about mutiny. Hardayal arrived in Constantinople in early September 1914.<sup>69</sup> The arrival of ‘the best among the Indians’, as the Foreign Office called him, marked the beginning of a swarm of activity organized through Constantinople. Hardayal delegated Indians to various missions in collaboration with consul Wangenheim and the German mission leaders, such as Hentig and Wassmuss.<sup>70</sup>

Hindus were asked by German officials to assume Muslim names as they began their work. So B. N. Dasgupta became ‘Ali Haidar’, L. P. Varma became ‘Hussein Ali’, M. T. P. Acharya became ‘Muhammed Akbar’, and Tarak Nath Das became ‘Behadur Khan’.<sup>71</sup> But Hindu–Muslim tensions could not be so easily papered over. In May 1915, Hardayal recommended that the pan-Islamic magazine, *Jihad-Islam*, published by Indian Muslims and funded by the German government, be preserved in name but changed in content to reflect Hindu views. This caused an uproar among Muslim co-workers, but Hardayal tried to assuage Berlin that ‘we are all working in harmony here for the good of the Vaterland (*sic*)’.<sup>72</sup> In September 1915, he ended his mission work citing personal differences with his Muslim colleagues. Indian Muslims in Constantinople used this opportunity to sue for more control of propaganda activities.

Hindu–Muslim tensions were rising in Berlin as well. The German government brought prisoners of war to camps around Berlin, especially Zossen and Ruhleben, and among them were a small number of Indians, mostly Muslim.<sup>73</sup> Hindus, who had established themselves as the kingpins of the Berlin Indian committee, were put in charge of converting these Muslim soldiers to the German cause. German ethnologists were also sent into the POW camps to further study the Muslim ‘mind’, and uncover ways of making it pro-German.<sup>74</sup> Among Indian agents, severe infighting soon arose across Hindu–Muslim lines, with Hindus

66 John Buchan’s fictional account in *Greenmantle*, London: George H. Doran, 1916, was based on Wassmuss’s intrigues.

67 Martin Gilbert, *First World War*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994, p. 105.

68 Shyam Narain Saxen quotes 1,302,394 Indian personnel participating in the war effort up to November 1918, in *Role of Indian army in the First World War*, Delhi: Bhavna Prakashan, 1987, p. 117.

69 AA: R21071, 54–8. Hardayal to AA, 2 November 1914.

70 AA: R21091-1, 25–7, Indian Committee to Foreign Office, ‘Programme of Work in Turkey’, 2 November 1915.

71 AA: R21082-2, 187, Wangenheim to Foreign Office, 2 May 1915.

72 AA: R21084-1, 111, Hardayal to Nadolny, 23 June 1915.

73 Gerhard Höpp, *Muslime in der Mark: als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914–1924*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1997, pp. 30–5.

74 Florian Mühlfried, ‘R. Bleichsteiner’s “Kaukasische Forschungen” – ein kritischer Beitrag zur Ethnologie des Kaukasus.’ Unpublished thesis, Hamburg, 2000.

hankering to maintain their monopoly over the contacts and funds flowing from the Foreign Office. Tense relations burst into open conflict in 1915. Heydayat Ahmed Khan complained to German officials that the Berlin Hindus were advancing a culture of promiscuity and worldliness that offended his religious sentiments.<sup>75</sup> Abdul Sattar Kheiri, one of the Indian Muslim leaders in the city, made continuing complaints against the Hindu leadership, and tried to start his own organization. Hindu leaders were successful in convincing the Germans that this would 'offend the unity' of the Indians.<sup>76</sup> Power worked in multiple directions in the tense collaboration between unequally positioned groups during the war.

While revolutionizing India had been eliminated as a German war aim by autumn 1915, the Middle East was still a zone of promise for the Foreign Office. Germans were heartened by the victory of the Ottomans over the British at Gallipoli, by the success of German agents in stirring up violent protests against the British in Abyssinia, and in 1916, by the success of the Turko-German military force against the British Indian army at Kut in Iraq. These signs, however, no longer pointed the way to the Punjab, nor signified the impending collapse of the British empire.

By late 1915, Indian agents no longer had the instrumental value they once did for the Foreign Office. And in July 1916, the German consul in Constantinople wrote to Berlin that he was 'against the expenditure of any more money on what is to be regarded as a fantastic utopian scheme'.<sup>77</sup> And Berlin agreed. The new head of the *Nachrichtenstelle*, Eugen Mittwoch, notified Bethmann Hollweg soon after that 'it seems wise to end the work in its current form'.<sup>78</sup> The *Nachrichtenstelle* was given the veneer of an area studies institute to cover up the history of its involvement in German war intrigue.<sup>79</sup>

By participating in the missions, it must be noted, Hindu nationalists were furthering their own anti-colonial ends. The actions of the German Foreign Office in the first years of the war provided Hindu nationalists with what seemed to be concrete evidence that their struggle could take on world-historical proportions. An article by the 'Indian National Party' in 1916, published from France, exclaimed that 'millions of Orientals to-day are praying for the success and victory of German arms more ardently than the devout Christians prayed for the delivery of Jerusalem'.<sup>80</sup> From New York in 1917, M. N. Roy (the erstwhile Narendra Nath Bhattacharya of Calcutta) wrote, 'the Indian people saw in Germany an ally whose interests were identical and in harmony with her own . . . Germany could be for India what France was for the American colonials'.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, during the course

75 AA: R21121, 109, Khan to Foreign Office, 16 June 1918.

76 AA: R21100-3, 234, Chattopadhyaya to Foreign Office, 8 August 1916.

77 AA: R21100-1, 46, Constantinople mission to Foreign Office, 8 July 1916.

78 AA: R21100-1, 61-7, Mittwoch to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 July 1916.

79 The *Deutsches Orient Institut*, founded under the leadership of Islamicist Eugen Mittwoch, was to focus on the 'economic, intellectual and legal' aspects of Eastern societies. The institute lasted till 1923. Apart from its scholarly pursuits, in the post-war years it was also responsible for the surveillance and care of decommissioned Asian agents who could not now return home. See Preussisches Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin (henceforth GStA), I. Rep76 Vc. Sekt. 1 Tit. XI. Teil 1. Nr. 58, 36, 30 January 1920.

80 'Why India is in revolt against British rule', brochure of the Indian Independence Committee, Amsterdam, 1915, p. 5. This was published by Chattopadhyaya's group.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

of the war, there was a widespread belief among the mass of ordinary Indians that, contrary to reports from the British, Germans would bring Indian independence on the coat-tails of victory. Underground leaflets circulating in Calcutta pronounced that England was covering up the evidence of its impending defeat.<sup>82</sup> And in Calcutta in 1915, studying German had become a fad among many university students.

Yet the denouement of German–Indian encounter after the First World War was as messy as the collaboration had been during it. Indians who had come to Berlin were now stranded. They were blacklisted by British intelligence and therefore could not travel either westward or back to India. And by 1920, many were still living on stipends provided by the Foreign Office.<sup>83</sup> Some gained employment in the newly founded *Deutsches Orient Institut*, and some took up advanced university study. Others, still, found work in service jobs, as cooks and waiters, and a few were given funds by the German government to start their own storefronts.<sup>84</sup>

The Indian diaspora clustered in Charlottenburg in West Berlin, near the offices of the defunct *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient*, and close to the Technical University. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, both Indian students and anti-colonial activists flowed from England into the city. The line distinguishing these two groups was blurred, however. Between 1920 and 1923, more than 300 Indians were living in Berlin.<sup>85</sup> The members of the erstwhile Indian Committee now assumed the lead of the émigré community in the early 1920s, organizing pro-nationalist meetings and searching for new sources of financial support.<sup>86</sup>

## Encounters in radical ideological milieus after the war

It remains for us to consider the unintended consequences associated with the establishment of a significant and politically active Indian émigré community in Berlin in the post-war years. While the interactions between Germans and Indians remained largely limited to the realm of military operations during the war, unexpected spaces of mutually-affecting ideological encounter opened up on the radical fringes of German society in the war's aftermath. Here I consider in schematic form the three major milieus of encounter. This is not to suggest that there was no overlap between these diverse arenas, or that they did not, at times, bleed into each other.

82 Ray, *Freedom's quest*, p. 67.

83 GStA: I. Rep76 Vc. Sekt. 1. Tit. XI. Teil 1. Nr. 58, 36, 30 January 1920.

84 *Ibid.*, some Indians received monthly allowances for study, others were granted positions as translators, and still others given funds to start 'tobacco and sweet shops'.

85 In 1923, British Intelligence reported more than 200 politically active students in Berlin. See OIOC: L/PJ/12/102, 9, 10, 'Orientals in Berlin', 13 January 1923.

86 Vivendranath Chattopadhyaya's house on George Wilhelm Strasse served as the social epicentre of the Indian émigré community. See OIOC: L/P&J/12/102, 3 September 1923.

The first milieu, and the one often studied to the exclusion of all others, was that of neo-romanticism and cultural escapism.<sup>87</sup> Groups within German bourgeois society, exasperated with the war, were looking for ‘light from the East’. Graf Hermann von Keyserling started his *School of Wisdom* in Darmstadt for the dissemination of Hindu philosophy in 1920. Heinrich Heine’s *Siddartha* was a bestseller in 1921, and so too was Oswald Spengler’s strange meditation on the decline of Western culture and the rise of the East.<sup>88</sup> Rudolf Otto, the Protestant theologian who served as a consultant to the Foreign Office during the war, published *Die Heilige* in 1920, with long sections devoted to the analysis of the ‘holy’ in Hinduism. Otto also started a museum of Buddhist and Hindu religious artifacts at the University of Marburg to give his students the ‘experience’ of Eastern religiosity. Fascination with Hindu spirituality also permeated early Weimar film, in such works as *Das Indische Grabmal* (1921), and *Das Geheimnis von Bombay* (1921). These films, made at Babelsberg outside Berlin, as well as the proliferation of books and travel literature about India, did not develop in a vacuum, but resulted from and reflected neo-romantic ways of making sense of increased lived contact with Asians in German society.

When Mahendra Pratap Mehta returned to Berlin from his Kabul expedition in 1918, he took out advertisements in newspapers offering his services as a spiritual guru to the despairing German bourgeoisie.<sup>89</sup> His diletantism was soon overshadowed by the virtuoso of spiritual India, the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who toured Germany in 1921, spending much of his time in Berlin. Tagore gave German audiences what they wanted. He preached the gospel of an old, wise East ministering to a young, materialist, and spiritually-bereft West. His visit inspired scholars of Indian mysticism such as Josef Hauer and Heinrich Zimmer, and the Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp, in their search for the deep core of Indian thought.<sup>90</sup> Historians have pointed to the connections between this milieu of cultural escapism and the rise of the National Socialist worldview,<sup>91</sup> although we must be careful here. Figures such as Rudolf Otto and Heinrich Zimmer (who had a Jewish wife) were staunchly opposed to the Nazis, while Josef Hauer, whose scholarship focused on the ancient Aryan spiritual brotherhood between Germany and India, became the head of the Nazi *Glaubensbewegung* in the 1930s.<sup>92</sup>

Accounts of German engagement with Asia usually stop here. Yet a highly charged milieu of post-war encounter between Germans and Indian émigrés opened up inside

87 A large body of work has addressed the affinity for Eastern philosophy in German culture due to the crisis of modernity. See Ulrich Linse, ‘Asien als Alternative’, in Hans G. Kippenberg, ed., *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturpolitik*, Marburg: Diagonal, 1991, pp. 325–64; as well as the historically contemporary work by Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen*, Gotha: Klotz, 1925.

88 Keyserling’s *Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen* (1919) about his spiritual journey to the East, was also a wild success, reaching its seventh edition within four years.

89 AA: R21115-1, 73.

90 Natorp organized a reading group of Tagore’s poetry among his students in Marburg. See his *Stunden mit Rabindranath Thakkur*, Jena: E. Dietrichs, 1921.

91 See, for example, Jürgen Lütt, ‘Indische Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus?’, in *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, 37, 1987, pp. 468–79, and Nicholas Goodricke-Clarke, *The occult roots of Nazism*, Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1985.

92 See Sheldon Pollock, ‘Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and power beyond the Raj’, in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the postcolonial predicament*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p. 83.



communism as well. In fact, many of the Indians in Berlin associated themselves with the Communist International in the years after the war's end. The communist world had its own conceptual framework to make sense of modern Asia, a framework that developed from Marx's insistence on the Orient's lack of history with a big 'H' – history towards material 'progress'. As opposed to the neo-romantic realm in which the East was 'guru', within the communist milieu – replicating the claims of Eurocentric nineteenth-century social theory from Hegel to Marx and from Mill to Maine – Asia was pictured in a relationship of tutelage to Europe's experience of modernity. Political events occurring throughout Asia in the early 1920s, particularly in India and China, were covered assiduously by news journals on the left.<sup>93</sup> Communist philosophers were interested in how to train the 'Eastern mind' in the logic of historical materialism.<sup>94</sup> And the Comintern invested extravagantly in institutions meant to build ties with Asian revolutionaries.<sup>95</sup>

As the communist world became increasingly interested in the East given the demise of realistic prospects for revolution in Europe after the failure of the final German attempt in 1923, anti-colonial Indians were using the increased receptivity of European communism to their own ends. M. N. Roy, who arrived in Berlin in December 1919, insisted in his book *India in transition* (1922) that India was not a land of spiritual genius, but one of brewing class consciousness. Immediately attracted to the German-Jewish Luxemburgist communist circle, which distinguished itself from the heavy-handed policies of Bolshevism, Roy preached the potential of 'spontaneous revolution' in India – that the workers and peasants there would become a class-for-itself on their own, without Europe's tutelage.<sup>96</sup> As Roy, in conversation with anti-Bolshevik communist thinkers such as August Thalheimer and Karl Korsch, sought to translate Marxist thought so as to preserve its philosophical integrity, while also cleansing it of its Eurocentrism, other Indian leaders proceeded in a different direction. They sought to mould and alter the tenets of Marxist thought to the political imperatives of the Indian nationalist struggle.<sup>97</sup> These debates of 1920s Berlin set the stage for left-wing politics in India in the 1930s. [Intellectuals of the Indian Communist Party, such as Gangadhar Adhikari and Clemens Dutt, who had lived in Berlin and who kept contact with the Comintern, insisted that Marxism should serve the purposes of anti-colonial

93 The flurry of writing about 'world revolution' in the East within communist circles in the 1920s, along with the explosion of communist rapportage and travel literature to the East can be seen in the pages of the left political journals, such as *Weltbühne*, *Vorwärts* and the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*. Many films from the Russian movie house *Mezrapom*, such as *Sturm über Asien* (1926), also focused on the theme.

94 August Thalheimer wrote a textbook aimed at training Asians in the logic of historical materialism. *Einführung in den dialektischen materialismus; eine moderne Weltanschauung*, Wien: Verlag für Literatur und Politik, 1928. Lukács and Bucharin also concerned themselves with this question.

95 The League against Imperialism (which held conferences in 1927 and 1929) and the International Red Help are examples. Willi Münzenberg, the 'red millionaire', organized these programmes. See *Solidarität: Zehn Jahre Arbeiterhilfe*, Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1931.

96 See Roy's editorials in his newspaper, *The Vanguard*, published from the presses of the national German communist newspaper, the *Rote Fahne*, for example, 'The use of mass strikes as a political weapon', 2, 8, 1 June 1923.

97 On Roy and Korsch see Henry Pachter, *Weimar Etudes*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 54. Roy's close connection with Thalheimer culminated in their co-editorship of the *Internationale Nachrichten der kommunistischen Opposition* from 1929–30 before Roy's return to India. Roy was affiliated with the Frankfurt School of Social Research in 1929, when he wrote his book *Revolution and counter-revolution in China*.

nationalism. The followers of M.N. Roy, on the other hand, resonating with contemporaneous developments in Western Marxism, asserted that political praxis was not sufficient for liberation, but that cultural critique of Indian society itself was also necessary.]

A final space of intense contact between Germans and Indians in the post-war years, and one even more neglected in current scholarship, was the milieu of pan-Germanism. The reasons for pan-Germanists' support of Indian nationalism after the war were threefold: first, as we have already seen, pro-Indian sentiment was a radical expression of Anglophobia; second, and more nuanced, pan-Germanists saw themselves suddenly and dishonourably transposed into the position of a people colonized by Western powers, and this produced a degree of self-identification with colonial struggles; and third, they believed that their ties with Asian peoples constituted a vindicating programme of cultural imperialism, whereby 'German' ideas and *Kultur* could be spread to the Asiatic world.<sup>98</sup> Conservative journals such as *Deutsches Volkstum* published anti-colonial articles.<sup>99</sup> Oppenheim, whom we encountered earlier, and Ernst Graf von Reventlow (1869–1943), an anti-republic publicist and early supporter of Hitler, attended the anti-colonial meetings of Indian, Egyptian and Syrian nationalists, just as Hitler himself attended such a meeting in Munich in December 1922.<sup>100</sup> Reventlow was one of the sponsors of the Indian National Party of Berlin, founded by Champakarmann Pillai, a South Indian who had served the Foreign Office during the war.<sup>101</sup> Pillai even attended the meetings of the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*) as an honorary member.<sup>102</sup>

Karl Haushofer, the intellectual progenitor of the Nazi concept of *Lebensraum*, proffers another example. After serving in the German military in Japan from 1908–12, he returned to Germany to write his dissertation in geopolitics. By 1921, his research interests included the study of India and British imperialism, and he adopted students associated with the Indian émigré community in Berlin.<sup>103</sup> Haushofer forged a strong and long-lasting collaboration with the eminent pro-Hindu Bengali economist Benoy Kumar Sarkar during the latter's stays in Berlin between 1920 and 1925. Sarkar visited Haushofer, gave lectures at his institute, the *Deutsche Akademie*, and published in his journal well into the 1930s.<sup>104</sup>

98 Conservative newspapers, such as the *Preussische Kreuzzeitung*, were filled with articles about anti-colonial movements of Irish, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, and Syrian activists. A common trope was that of Germans as a people of 'poets and thinkers' now subjected to the materialistic forces of British and French imperialism. See for example, Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, 'Versailles, Spa und die Zeitrichtung', *Preussische Kreuzzeitung*, 351, 23 July 1920, p. 1.

99 For example, 'Indisches Volkstum', in *Deutsches Volkstum*, 2, 1926, pp. 491–7.

100 On Reventlow and Oppenheim see Gerhard Höpp, 'Araber in Berlin', unpublished essay in the Horst Krüger Archive, *Zentrum Moderner Orient*, Berlin, n.d. British intelligence reported the attendance of Adolf Hitler at an anti-colonial meeting of Egyptian, Turkish, Indian and Irish revolutionaries on 22 December 1922, approximately one year before the Munich Putsch. See OIOC: L/PJ/12/102, 'Orientalist in Berlin', 1 August 1923.

101 Bundesarchiv: R43 I/2696, Fiche 2, 'Die aussenpolitische Orientierung der Rechtsverbände', 1926, pp. 37–8.

102 M. N. Roy, *Memoirs*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1984, p. 292.

103 See Agnes Smedley, *Battle hymn of China*, New York: Knopf, 1943, p. 19. Smedley, an American woman and political activist, was heavily involved with the Berlin Indian émigré community.

104 See, for example, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'Strukturelle Erneuerung in der indischen Industrie und Wirtschaft', in *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, 8, 4, April 1931, pp. 298–304. At least four other articles by Sarkar appeared in German economic journals in 1931.

And whereas Haushofer developed the notion of *Lebensraum* as an expansionist calling of the German *Volk*, Sarkar propounded the cognate anti-colonialist notion of Greater India, in which India's Hindu culture would propel it beyond the sub-continent, beyond British colonial domination, into cultural hegemony over Southeast Asia.<sup>105</sup>

Evidence of the development of compatible political languages between pan-Germanists and Indian nationalists can also be glimpsed in Werner Sombart's encounters with the Indian émigrés. A conservative German social thinker of great stature, he was known at Berlin University for his special interest in Indian and Turkish students.<sup>106</sup> Two of his students in particular, Zakir Hussain and Ram Manohar Lohia, went on to become leading intellectuals on the All-India stage in the years leading to independence. Sombart's 1927 *Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft* was an ode to German Ur-economy, which had supposedly united land and *Volk*. He contrasted the organic nature of the older German economy with the abstract, lifeless financial capitalism supposedly introduced by British traders. Similar themes were raised in an Indian context by Zakir Husain in his dissertation completed under Sombart just one year earlier, in which an old Indian organic connection to the land was said to be interrupted both by the introduction of land taxes during Mughal rule and by the expropriating capitalism of British imperialists.<sup>107</sup> Just as the language of spiritual redemption bridged the gap between Germans and Indians in the neo-romantic milieu, and as 'class struggle' did this same work among the communists, the pan-Germanist terminology of *Kultur* and *Volk* created compatibility on the far-right. Yet, a cautionary note is needed: while the pro-Indian sentiment of pan-Germanists should not be construed as beneficent anti-colonialism, so too Indian affinities for the language of the German radical right should also not be equated with bald proto-fascism. The horizons within which these various languages were employed were markedly different for Indian anti-colonial activists versus their German war-cowed counterparts. As we have seen throughout this article, misrepresentations and asymmetries were endemic to the encounter of Germans and Indian émigrés. Shared words and shared physical and social spaces certainly did not guarantee the creation of shared meanings.

Encounters between once-distant peoples, as we have seen, are often encounters with illusions. But perhaps more interesting than the exclusive study of the intellectual and institutional inheritances that produce illusions – the traditional ambit of scholarship on Orientalism – is an investigation into the historically-specific role played by political, economic and social forces, as well as attendant ideological constructs, in engendering the meeting and enmeshing of people on a global scale. The nexus of Germans and Indians over the course of the First World War and into the Weimar period evinces the mutually-affecting, yet asymmetric, nature of lived contact. Notions about the Muslim mind inadvertently led Germans into contact with Hindu bodies, and the shared physical and social spaces of Germans and the Indian émigré community eventually opened into unexpected ideological

105 See Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'Empire development and world-economy: a study in the New Foundations of National Economy for India', in *Journal of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce*, 1927, pp. 1–9.

106 See Ziyaettin Fahri, 'Mes Souvenirs autour de W. Sombart', in *Revue de la Faculté des Sciences Economique de l'Université d'Istanbul*, 2, 1942, p. 68.

107 Husain, *Agrarverfassung Britisch-Indiens*, Berlin: Humboldt University Archive, 1926, p. 11.

encounters within the radical milieu of the crisis-ridden Weimar Republic. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in one of his last published writings, remarked that

... the word 'ecumene' is a Greek expression for the 'inhabited world'. ... The 'inhabited world' now stretches over the whole planet with the expansion of world travel and the perfection of information technology, and all peoples and cultures have been brought closer together. Given this, we must also inquire into how the centers of gravity within the realm of ideas have shifted. Is that not a philosophical question for our day?<sup>108</sup>

Indeed, to speak with Gadamer, an ecumenical approach to the history and function of ideas is certainly of importance today – a mode of investigation that places thought in its lived, 'historically effected', global context.

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108 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Europa und die Oikomene' (1993), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995, p. 265.