Abstract: This article explores the transition of Muhammad Barkatullah (1864–1927), a Muslim Indian living under British colonial rule, from an intellectual demanding imperial reform to an anti-British revolutionary. Although much of the scholarly literature has analyzed Barkatullah’s revolutionary activities after the First World War, the focus of this article will be on the early period of his career from the 1880s until 1914. In examining his movements, writings, and connections with various networks in the context of major global events, this article argues, first, that his revolutionary turn took place in the context of a global conversation on race, empire, and religion from the 1880s until the lead-up to the Great War, and second, that his anti-colonial (inter)nationalism was coupled with his Pan-Islamism.

Keywords: Pan-Islamism, anti-colonialism, race, geopolitics, Caliphate, India, British Empire

Although the career of Muhammad Barkatullah “Bhopali” (1864–1927) has remained marginal to the Gandhian non-violence centered narrative of Indian independence, Barkatullah was a significant anti-colonial revolutionary, intellectual, and religious reformer of his era. Barkatullah’s biography provides an exemplary account of several intersecting internationalist movements between the 1880s and the 1920s. Barkatullah gave lectures to influential reformists in London, met with suffragists and African American anti-racist leaders in New York, and worked closely with German, Ottoman, and Bolshevik leaders during his career. Yet, his beginnings were humble. Barkatullah was born sometime between 1859 and 1864 in the princely state of Bhopal in British India. His father is said to have worked as a Bhopal State servant but died while Barkatullah was still young in 1876. There is little known about his mother, but she is said to have died shortly afterwards. Fortunately for Barkatullah, he was able to continue his education; he attended the Madrasa-e-Sulemania where he was trained in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian languages as well as in Islamic philosophy, with the goal of becoming an
Islamic scholar, or *alim*. From these beginnings, Barkatullah would go on to have a remarkable career as a devoted Pan-Islamist and Indian anti-colonial figure, spending most of his life outside of British India.

Despite being committed to imperial reform and anti-racist activism in the early part of his career, Barkatullah worked alongside the Germans and the Ottomans as a significant member of Ghadar—a global Indian revolutionary movement established in 1913—during the Great War, and then the Bolsheviks after the war ended, in order to rid India of British rule. This article explores Barkatullah’s career leading up to his revolutionary turn, bringing to light the significance of his intellectual production while he advocated for imperial reform, as well as the evolution in his thought that led to his decision to become an enemy of the British state during the First World War.

The existing literature on Barkatullah is largely split between exploring his anti-colonial nationalism and his religious activism. Most of the scholarship on his career has centered on his involvement in the radical Indian Ghadar movement in the lead-up to and during the First World War as well as his turn towards the Bolsheviks after the war ended (Ansari 1986; Rammath 2011; Sareen 1979; Sohi 2014). The work on Barkatullah’s Pan-Islamism and religious activism, on the other hand, has largely looked at Barkatullah’s work in Britain and the United States—from the 1880s until 1909—where he was developing cosmopolitan alliances, arguing back against anti-Muslim bigotry, and pursuing an imperial form of Pan-Islamism that argued for an Ottoman-British alliance against the Russians (Bowen 2015; Geaves 2010; Hassan 2017; Singleton 2017).

This article departs from this historiographical tendency to read these two traditions in Barkatullah’s thought separately and instead shows how they were interconnected projects, illustrated through his life as a *networked* intellectual; that is, as someone whose revolutionary praxis was substantiated and transformed by his travels in various circles of both imperial reformers and anti-colonial revolutionaries. Moreover, with the historiographical focus on Barkatullah’s anti-colonial (inter)nationalism there is a tendency to discuss his Pan-Islamism in instrumentalist terms, eliding the significance of both his Muslim identity and Islamicate history, symbols, and concepts in his life and career (Rammath 2011; Sareen 1979; Stolte 2013).

Although Humayun Ansari’s (2014) article on Barkatullah—the most significant work on Barkatullah to-date—attempts to bridge this gap, the focus has remained on Barkatullah’s activities after 1914. Mohammed Ayub Khan’s (2014: 66) rather brief article, meanwhile, is the earliest attempt at trying to think about how Barkatullah intellectually reconciled various ideological commitments in his fight against European imperialism. However, even Khan’s work does not
explore Barkatullah’s writing before World War One in detail and nor does he show the depth of Barkatullah’s religious internationalist projects that paralleled his anti-colonialism.

Building on Ansari and Khan’s work, I argue that although the outbreak of the First World War provided the opening for Barkatullah and his fellow revolutionary comrades to strike, Barkatullah’s commitment to ending British rule in India first took root during his time in the United States (while he was working alongside Irish Fenians and radical Indian emigres) but was only cemented during his time in Japan in the context of the Ottoman military defeats between 1911 and 1913. In the years leading up to the First World War, Barkatullah’s revolutionary turn came from two sources: first, the empowerment he took from his involvement in an increasingly radicalized global network, and second, his increasing disillusionment with Britain’s ability to offer justice and equality.

Moreover, I argue that Barkatullah’s anti-colonial nationalism was coupled with his Pan-Islamism, both of which turned violent and anti-British in the lead-up to the Great War. For Barkatullah, British actions in India and in the non-Indian territories of the “Muslim World” were interconnected, and they were both at the forefront of his mind. Focusing on either his religious internationalism or his anti-colonial nationalism alone misses out on how Barkatullah was experimenting with a number of parallel, complementary strategies that involved a constellation of, often overlapping, networks simultaneously.

Although Erez Manela (2007: 7) is right to argue that the “Wilsonian Moment” in 1919 was important in that it brought the idea of “self-determination” to “much broader publics” outside of just political and intellectual elites, this article suggests that anti-colonial ideas and politics had deep roots that developed in a global conversation about race, religion, and empire in the decades preceding the Great War. Critically examining the significance of the First World War through the life and career of Muhammad Barkatullah allows for a focus on the precise moments and places where momentous changes occur in the lives of revolutionaries who were part of these larger, complex movements. While local and geopolitical events and environments significantly shape these experiences, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that these individual journeys are, in the end, also personal ones.

By charting the trajectory of Barkatullah’s radicalism, this article aims to highlight how, for many Indians (both inside and outside of British India), the revolutionary ethos was present before sentiments for “self-determination” were articulated and became widespread for the majority of Indians after 1918. In turning down the volume on the importance of European and American imperial competition or the impact of calls for self-determination by the likes of Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin, this article tunes in to hearing Barkatullah (and Ghadar’s)
“echo for mutiny” reverberating around the world as the Great War began. This article illustrates how the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905, the “terrorism” in Bengal in the early twentieth century, the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the Chinese Revolution and the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911, the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, and, crucially, his interactions with anti-colonial revolutionaries like the Irish Fenians, played a significant role in convincing Barkatullah and others that the British Raj in India had to be ended by any means, including violence.

Barkatullah’s career, and the Ghadar network as a whole, is best conceptualized in terms of movement and space. After all, it was his flight from British India in the late 1880s that allowed Barkatullah to develop relationships with revolutionaries, both Indian and non-Indian, in Britain, New York, and Tokyo. Only by relocating to the colonial metropole was Barkatullah exposed, first-hand, to the vitriolic racism the Muslim community faced in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Barkatullah’s move to the United States, in 1903, meanwhile, not only brought him into close proximity to radical Indian nationalists, Irish Fenians, socialists, and African American intellectuals, but, by virtue of living outside British jurisdiction, also helped him find a less oppressive environment to publish commentaries on British foreign policy with relative freedom. It was also in the United States, however, due to racist immigration policies and increasing British surveillance, where Barkatullah would have seen the globality of white supremacy and the strength of British imperial reach (Lake and Reynolds 2008). In short, Barkatullah’s self-imposed exile helped him recognize the intersections of his anti-British and Pan-Islamic political struggle. As Michael Goebel argues regarding nationalism in interwar Paris, migration “rendered injustices, inequalities, and the juridical pitfalls of colonialism much more palpable.” For Barkatullah (Goebel 2015: 4), “there was something inherent in the very process of migration that piqued new ways of seeing the imperial order.”

Barkatullah’s career also helps to illustrate that nationalism and internationalism are by no means inherently incompatible. While Barkatullah had begun to work towards attaining political sovereignty for Indians, in terms of his mode, inspiration, and ambition, Barkatullah’s career as an anti-racist intellectual turned anti-British revolutionary was remarkably internationalist. Furthermore, Barkatullah did not just become a revolutionary anti-colonial nationalist, he was also an influential Pan-Islamist figure. In the face of western discourses on Islam’s fanaticism and backwardness, Barkatullah believed in the importance of the Ottoman Empire as a sovereign Muslim empire and in the position of Caliph as the symbolic, spiritual figurehead of a politically united Muslim World.

This article takes Barkatullah’s religious identity, training, and activism to be central components of his worldview and projects. Barkatullah was trained
as an Islamic scholar in India and Islam had an enduring presence throughout most of his writing. Barkatullah had a deep commitment to his Muslim identity and his desire for transnational Muslim solidarity remained consistent throughout his career. Aside from his Pan-Islamic activism, Barkatullah was also involved in “world religioning” projects that attempted to convince European intellectuals and religious figures that Islam was a modern, global, and universal religion, on par with Protestant Christianity (Masuzawa 2005). Islam was not just a strategic tool, but rather formed a significant framework of his worldview. It is important, however, to not reduce Barkatullah’s ideas, motivations, and actions to an essentialist understanding of Islam or his Muslimness and to note the diversity of intellectual, experiential, and geopolitical influences that informed him.

The following will focus on the early part of Barkatullah’s career after he left British India, spending time in Britain (1887–1903), the United States (1903–9), and Japan (1909–14).

**Barkatullah in Victorian Britain: The Imperial Pan-Islamist**

Barkatullah’s first move away from British India came when he left for London around 1887. In the colonial metropole, Barkatullah not only developed the foundations for his strategy of complex, cosmopolitan alliance-building, but crucially, it was here that Barkatullah’s nationalism and Pan-Islamism became coupled projects. Pan-Islamism and nationalism for Barkatullah were not just compatible with each other, they became interlinked. The British Empire ruled over India and was also the “greatest Mohammedan power” (Devji 2014). Barkatullah at this time was arguing for *both* imperial reform in India as well as an Anglo-Ottoman Imperial Alliance. For Barkatullah, British actions in India and the non-Indian territories of the Muslim World were intertwined.

Not long after arriving in Britain, he soon became directly implicated in the imperial project as he worked as the principal of the Oriental Academy training students from Oxford and Cambridge Universities planning to take the Indian Civil Service exams (Patterson 1897: 494). The move to the colonial metropole exposed Barkatullah to the “soft heart” of the British Empire where policing and censorship were more liberal than in British India (Owen 2007). And, Barkatullah had arrived at an interesting moment in the history of metropolitan Britain. The late nineteenth century saw the earliest institutionalization of Islam in Britain, with the establishment of the first Mosque and Islamic institute in Liverpool under the leadership of Abdullah Quilliam in 1887. Barkatullah would go on to become its first *imam*. It was in Liverpool, working in a cosmopolitan environment under Quilliam’s wing, that Barkatullah would begin to establish himself as a Muslim leader and intellectual.
Quilliam, a solicitor born in a Methodist family, officially converted to Islam in 1888 and became an unlikely international Pan-Islamic figure. Quilliam’s publications provided him and the burgeoning community with both a voice to educate fellow Muslims and the wider British public about Islam, and a space for discussion on both local and global issues. This community was establishing itself, however, in a period marked by anti-Muslim bigotry, from negative articles in newspapers, to hatred directed towards new converts, to desecration of mosques and Islamic institutes, to physical attacks (Geaves 2010).

Barkatullah was clearly impressed by what Quilliam had established in Liverpool. Quilliam’s Liverpool community was cosmopolitan, with several English converts from elite backgrounds, and fought bigotry by engaging directly with the local and national press. Moreover, the institute in Liverpool became an intellectual and diplomatic hub for Muslims visiting Britain. Significantly, Quilliam had developed close relationships with powerful Muslim leaders like the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II and the Amir of Afghanistan. Quilliam was particularly loyal to the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph, who had become a significant donor for his work in Britain. It was this global, diplomatic aspect of Quilliam’s “Liverpool model” that appealed to Barkatullah as much as the symbolic importance of having a cosmopolitan mosque and Muslim organization in the heart of Imperial Britain.

Part of Barkatullah’s remit in Britain, as he saw it, was to try and address some of the misconceptions of the “Islamic civilization” in Euro-American discourses that deemed Islam to be incompatible with modern science and progress. In his writings, Barkatullah argued that the “Islamic Golden Age” existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, up until the time of the third Caliph, Uthman. His strategy was to reconstruct a global history of civilizations that had a place for Islam within it. In doing so, he made comparisons between social reform and institutions from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and contemporary Europe and North America (Barkatullah 1892).

That is not to say he did not account for the contemporary state of affairs in the Muslim World. While “European Civilization” had awoken from its slumber since the Reformation, Barkatullah argued, Muslims had rested on their laurels and their societies had stagnated. For him, European encroachment on Muslim lands and the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, illustrated this. However, despite the pessimistic outlook on the plight of the contemporary Islamic civilization, he argued that the solution was to combine useful European technology and ideas with what he saw as essential in Islam. Barkatullah was eager to emphasize the egalitarian potential in the Qur’an and the message of the Prophet Muhammad. He argued that the Prophet was a gradualist social reformer and the fault in Muslim societies was not that the Prophet’s message was defective, but rather that Muslim leaders had forgotten the egalitarian ethos inherent within Islam (Barkatullah 1892).
Despite Barkatullah’s admiration for the Liverpool model, he had diverged from Quilliam with regards to his loyalty to the Sultan. While Barkatullah wanted a strong Ottoman Empire, he did not believe the Sultan was an able leader. Barkatullah’s critical stance towards Abdulhamid remained consistent throughout his career and mirror the Young Turks’ position, with whom he became aligned. According to a Scotland Yard report, for instance, around 1890–91 he had become “involved in a conspiracy against” the Sultan and after the news reached Constantinople, had Barkatullah “ventured on Ottoman territory” during Sultan Abdulhamid’s reign, “he would have been arrested at once” (IOR/L/PJ/12/213). Whether he was actually involved in a conspiracy against the Sultan is unclear, however, he was most likely connected to the Young Turk journalist, activist and, later in life, politician, Mehmet Ubeydullah Effendi. Ubeydullah was exiled by Abdulhamid and spent several years in Britain, including six months in Liverpool. Ubeydullah and Barkatullah would be reunited in Kabul in the early years of the Great War, as a part of a secret mission from the Central Powers to convince Amir Habibullah of Afghanistan to side with them during the war.

At some point around the 1890s, Barkatullah moved back to London and established relationships with a network of British reformers in London. For instance, between 1895 and 1898, several lectures were given on Sundays at the South Place Institute in Finsbury, London, and were published as essays in several volumes entitled *The British Empire Series*. Barkatullah was one of the early speakers in this lecture series. South Place was a part of the English Ethical Movement of the late nineteenth century which attracted a constellation of radical thinkers and reformers that, at various moments, included: secularists, atheists, socialists, liberal thinkers, theosophists, and free-thinkers. This included individuals like Annie Besant, the international leader of the Theosophical Society, who had close relations with Indian nationalists and had given several lectures on Islam.

Barkatullah’s lecture, published as an essay in *The British Empire Series Volume I*, was focused on the position of women in Islam. This lecture illustrates not only Barkatullah’s connections with elite British liberals and socialists, it also serves to demonstrate his conviction in arguing back against a major Euro-American critique against Islam: how women were treated within Muslim societies. Crucially, this lecture highlights how Barkatullah and other Muslim modernists had to address Euro-American orientalist and missionary criticisms that were both scriptural and sociological in nature. For this liberal and predominantly non-Muslim audience, Barkatullah attempted to provide a counter-narrative to Western discourse on Muslim women that depicted them as exotic subjects of investigation, subjugated, and lacking agency in uncivilized societies. Barkatullah clearly recognized that the discourse over the status of women in India had political implications. As Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (2007: 141) explains, in “the nineteenth century, ‘the
women question’ emerged as one of the grounds on which British administrators and their Indian subjects debated the subcontinent’s fitness over self-rule with their position of women an indicator of a society’s development.” Barkatullah’s position in this lecture are similar to that of his compatriot residing in Britain, Syed Ameer Ali and other Indian Muslim modernist men of his generation arguing back against accusations that Islam reserved a low status for women.

Barkatullah argued that, while no one could claim with any credibility that “all Islamic institutions are perfect,” the European gaze lacked historical knowledge and cultural context. Images depicting Muslim women being “caged, like wild beasts, to toil and be tortured” were “fiction.” For Barkatullah, the “means of acquiring happiness in different countries may be different,” and women in Muslim societies had spaces where they joked, laughed, sang, and listened to music (Barkatullah 1899: 375). Not only that, women had power and authority in the domestic sphere and had begun to attain education at universities. To a very limited extent, some were even participating in contemporary politics. For instance, Shah Jahan Begum (1838–1901) was the contemporary leader of his home state of Bhopal, whose leadership he goes on to praise.

In this lecture, Barkatullah took possession of the anthropological lens focused on Muslim women, except he did so as an Islamic scholar having grown up as a Muslim man in India. Despite trying to highlight Muslim women’s agency, for all the images of them singing and laughing, he failed to give them a real voice. His writing does not suggest any Muslim women were consulted. While he argued that complete isolation from men did not exist during the time of Prophet Muhammad, they were “free” to enter public spaces with the condition of being “decently dressed.” The fact that public spaces were male spaces did not receive a critique. For Barkatullah, seemingly echoing gender expectations of Victorian women, a woman was the “queen of her home,” who could have the tendency of being too enamored with “costly dresses and precious jewels” (Barkatullah 1899: 377). Instead of recognizing feminist activism or challenging the structural impediments for women to enter male-dominated spheres in industry or politics, he bemoaned their lack of ambition. However, as Ayesha Hidayatullah (2014: 34–5) points out, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, Muslim women intellectuals and activists had begun calling for precisely those things Barkatullah found them passive regarding: “women’s equal rights in the public sphere, particularly in the areas of education, work, politics, and nationalist movements.”

Although he offered a male-centered perspective on the topic of women in Islam, Barkatullah’s article provided some important critiques of ethnocentrism in Western literature of the time. For Western intellectuals looking to give a more nuanced perspective on women’s place in Islam, Barkatullah’s positions proved a useful resource.

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Despite his connections with prominent London-based Indian nationalist leaders like Shyami Krishnavarma and his interest in the tactics deployed by the Irish Home Rule movement, Barkatullah’s attitude towards the British Empire during his time in Liverpool and London was ambivalent. While he was critical of bigoted depictions of Islam and Muslims, as well as British policies in India, he was interested in imperial reform. At South Place, for instance, Barkatullah is said to have wanted India to “eventually receive [a] share of local autonomy and equal treatment” (South Place Magazine, 1900, 5 (8): 126). And, as Barkatullah, Quilliam and other Pan-Islamic activists viewed the Ottoman Empire as an important symbolic representation of Muslim modernity, the inheritors of the position of the Caliph, and a crucial source of funding and legitimacy, their activism were directed towards convincing the British, as the “greatest Mohammedan power,” that a robust alliance with the Ottoman Empire was important.

During his time in Britain, Barkatullah was clearly on the radar of British authorities and had been put under surveillance. Most likely due to British paranoia over the dangers of Pan-Islamism in engendering Muslim disloyalty, along with the possibility of disrupting “linked-up agitation” between British liberals and Indian activists, Barkatullah was seen as someone who needed to be monitored (Owen 2007).

Perhaps because he may have begun to feel suffocated under the watchful eye of British authorities, and due to the lure of more freedom across the Atlantic, he decided to move to the United States. Despite his anti-racist activism and his interests in Irish nationalist tactics, at this stage, Barkatullah was not yet a revolutionary. As the “soft heart” of the British Empire was increasingly hardened by British surveillance and policing, Barkatullah was on the move once again, this time exploring a cosmopolitan environment outside British territorial jurisdiction.

**Barkatullah in the United States: The Radical Pan-Islamist and Anti-Colonial Activist**

While Barkatullah was in touch with Webb and American “Islamophilic Theosophists” like Albert L. Rawson and John A. Lant as early as 1895 about the possibility of moving to the United States, he finally moved to New York City in 1903 (Bowen 2015: 180, letter from Rawson to Lant). In many ways, it was in the United States where Barkatullah came into his own as a public intellectual. Considering the surveillance and constraints in the colonial metropole, moving to the United States must have felt liberating to Barkatullah and he began publishing in various journals almost immediately after arriving at his new home. While he continued to educate non-Muslim audiences about Islam and fighting back against arguments of Muslim backwardness, Barkatullah also began
to enter some of the important foreign policy debates of the time. He wrote in New Thought magazines like *Arena* and *Mind*, both published by Charles Brodie Patterson, as well as in more mainstream publications like the influential literary journal, *North American Review*. This suggests a clear departure from his time in Britain, where he generally limited himself to writing about Islam or regarding the Ottoman Empire. Most likely due to the freedom afforded to him, particularly during his early years in the United States, he ventured into the arena of international politics, one he would enter even more directly, as a significant player, later in his career.

In these writings, Barkatullah was highly critical of British actions around the world. From the British invasion of Tibet, to the rise of Japan as a global power, to nationalist troubles in the Balkans, Barkatullah highlighted what he saw as British hypocrisy and deceit in their political dealings. In many ways, Barkatullah’s openly critical perspective on imperial racism and British actions in the non-white world during his time in the United States is reflective more generally of the turn-of-the-century anti-colonial radicalization around the world (Khuri-Makdisi 2010). In that regard, for Barkatullah, events in Japan and Bengal were particularly significant.

Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 was widely seen as representing the victory of the “yellow race” over the “white race” in global military conflict. In the context of European hegemony buttressed by racist civilizational discourses, this military success represented an important moment for South Asian leaders, intellectuals, revolutionaries, reformers, and students alike. While, in British India, the proposed partition by the British authorities of the state of Bengal in 1905 was met with widespread protest. It gave rise to both the non-violent *swadeshi* movement as well as radical revolutionaries who attempted to assassinate British authorities with the intention of both shocking and disrupting the colonial administration and inspiring revolutionary spirit throughout the colonized population of British India. As Joseph Mcquade writes, while these “terrorist” organizations were “first developed in Bengal, they quickly spread to other parts of India, and soon became transnational in their ambitions and areas of operations” (Mcquade 2016: 645).

Barkatullah’s first major foray into writing about contemporary international politics came in November 1903 in the *North American Review*. Publishing in the oldest literary journal in the United States is illustrative of his stature as an intellectual and the strength of his connections. Barkatullah, in his punchy, direct style, describes the Great Game European powers—namely France, Britain and Russia—were playing with the “crumbling edifice” of the Ottoman Empire (which he argued was “hated” by European empires because it was a Muslim empire). The situation in Macedonia, the subject of his article, was similar to what had been happening in Crete and the
Balkans since the early nineteenth century. Christian subjects had been “imbued with seditious sentiments through the influence of missionaries” and had brought “the question of the Cross versus the Crescent” back into prominence (Barkatullah 1903: 741). The diplomatic game France, Britain, and Russia were engaged in was imperialism in the guise of humanitarianism. Barkatullah argued that while these European empires portrayed themselves to be the protectors of Christians in the East, their interests were really geopolitical in nature.

However, Barkatullah’s criticism was not limited to European empires. He was incisive in skewering capitalists as well as the Ottoman Sultan. In a fascinating section, Barkatullah’s criticisms of capitalists during revolutions have echoes of Naomi Klein’s idea of “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007). Barkatullah argued that capitalists held a great deal of influence and power in the affairs of states around the world. They not only exploited the laboring class, they also saw revolutions as an opportunity for profiteering. As Barkatullah writes, revolutions are “harvest time for the capitalists,” (Barkatullah 1903: 742) when they strike favorable deals and take control of state finances. It is important to note here that although Barkatullah declared himself to not be a socialist, he developed connections with a variety of socialist reformers in Britain and the United States before working closely with the Bolsheviks after the end of the First World War. These relationships helped Barkatullah develop a critique of capitalism and its connections with European imperialism that remained a consistent feature in his writings. Barkatullah also admonished Sultan Abdulhamid II for centralizing power and surrounding himself with “dishonest men.” Clearly, Barkatullah’s loyalties in Constantinople did not lie with the Sultan or his inner circle.

The expanding scope of Barkatullah’s foreign policy and his internationalism are illustrated most clearly by his critical analysis of the British invasion of Lhasa, Tibet in 1904 in the journal Forum. Barkatullah attempted to expose the “real” reasons for British interests in Tibet. While the two main reasons given by the British for their actions were, first, that the Tibetan government had rejected a letter from the Viceroy of India and was, instead, developing closer relations with Russia, and second, that the Tibetan authorities had not followed through with their commitments in accordance with commercial conventions made in 1890 and 1893. Barkatullah argues that this was just the pretense. The real reason was greed as the British were interested in the discovery of substantial mineral wealth found in south-west Tibet.

While exposing British greed and militarism was the main agenda of this article, Barkatullah had another concern to highlight: the importance of religious tradition to Asia and the “East.” Barkatullah described Lhasa as a “Buddhistic capital” that was to East Asian Buddhists “what Mecca [was] to Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan” (Barkatullah 1905: 136). By invading Lhasa, the British had
violated the sacredness of this holy Buddhist space. He argued that religion and spirituality was important for the East and warned that “those who violate the sanctity of religion doubtless tread upon thin ice” (Barkatullah 1905: 137). The latter critique hints at Barkatullah’s early connections with Japanese Pan-Asian Buddhists, for whom the British invasion of Tibet was a traumatic event. It was in the US, I argue, through his close connections with the Irish Fenians and his developing interest in Japanese Pan-Asianism, where Barkatullah adopted the idea of the “white peril” popular in Japanese Pan-Asianist literature and the Fenian trope of the “untrustworthy Anglo-Saxon.”

Aside from his public writings, Barkatullah also deepened his connections with the increasingly radical Indian nationalist network abroad, along with a close working relationship with US-based Irish Fenians. Barkatullah’s closest Irish partners were John Devoy and George Freeman. It was under Devoy’s leadership that the radical Fenian organization Clan na Gael had become the most powerful Irish republican organization. Devoy’s *Gaelic American* newspaper would consistently attack British colonialism in and outside Ireland, with events in India registered high on their radar. They also reprinted articles from Indian newspapers and supported Indians in order to publish in the US. For instance, one of Barkatullah’s associates in Ghadar, Taraknath Das, began publishing his anti-British newspaper *Free Hindustan* using the *Gaelic American* press (Silvestri 2009: 29). In October 1906, Barkatullah and his fellow Indian nationalist Samuel Lucas Joshi established the Pan-Aryan Association with the help of Freeman and Devoy. The official aim of the organization was to “bring India and America into closer contact and to be helpful to students from India . . . the association started their anti-British propaganda,” alongside calling for Hindu-Muslim unity. The Pan-Aryan Association also called for the “formation of a league between the peoples of Ireland and India for the overthrow of British rule” (Sareen 1979: 55).

While these connections with Irish nationalists served Barkatullah and Ghadar well during the First World War, their impact during his time in the United States may have gone further than just being crucial collaborators. The Fenians had a much longer, established record of using violent means against the British. Devoy himself was jailed for his involvement in the failed Rebellion of 1867 by the Fenian Brotherhood, the precursor to Clan na Gael, that had come off the back of failed attempts by them to invade Canada in an attempt to put pressure on the British to leave Ireland. Working in close proximity with Devoy and Freeman in the United States must have played a part in convincing Barkatullah and other Indian nationalists from Ghadar that using violence to achieve political sovereignty was a realistic option.

While the United States had been a safe haven for many revolutionary nationalists, Indian nationalists were to come under increased scrutiny. As Seema Sohi
(2014: 83) points out, by the beginning of 1906, a “British surveillance apparatus” emerged, following “Indian radicals as they moved across the globe, settling intermittently in cities like Paris and Tokyo in search for safe havens to organize outside imperial reach.” This surveillance apparatus had “extended its reach in North America with the cooperation of US and Canadian immigration officials.” British officials began to disrupt the North American network of Indian radicals by using American and Canadian immigration laws to deport those residing there or rejecting entry to those suspected of harboring anti-British tendencies.

Surveillance was not the only concern for Indian immigrants living in the US at this moment. There were growing anti-Indian immigration conversations taking place across North America. As officials began to limit Indian immigration, there was also a rise in “anti-Hindoo” racism. The organized manifestation of this hostility came in the shape of white labor groups who saw Asian migrants—initially the Japanese and Chinese, followed by the most recent immigrant group, the Indians—as a threat to their livelihood. On September 5, 1907, the first outbreak of mob violence against Indians broke out in Bellingham, Washington, where Indian mill workers were beaten by white mobs. The combination of the racist discourse, riots, and exclusionary immigration policies by the governments of Canada and the United States “politicized thousands of Indians on the Pacific Coast, who began drawing explicit links between racial discrimination in North America and colonial subjugation in India” (Sohi 2014: 29). Barkatullah was no exception in this regard.

In 1909, according to secret British intelligence reports, “reliable information” alleged that “Freeman, S.L. Joshi and Barkatullah used to meet twice a week at Barakatullah’s house to discuss” anti-British activities (Ker 1917: 202). These connections and reports suggest that Barkatullah seemed to have become more anti-British. His shift from being interested in the work of the Irish Home Rule movement in Britain, to being closely associated with Irish Fenians in the United States illustrates his turn towards an interest in a more radical form of politics.

While the radicalization in his politics seems clear, it is important to note that these interactions with Irish Fenians did not mean Barkatullah had abandoned his project to portray Islam as a universal, “world religion” to theosophists, Unitarians, and liberal Christians. For instance, Barkatullah, considered one of the most influential and erudite Muslim thinkers residing in the United States, was invited to the “Fourth International Congress of Religious Liberals” held in Boston between September 22 and 27, 1907, to give a lecture entitled “Liberal Mohammedanism in India.” Barkatullah argues in this lecture that Islam was a peaceful, spiritual religion that believes in brotherly harmony with all other faiths of the world (Barkatullah 1907). By 1907, he had also been briefly involved with an upper-class interracial, socialist group known as the Cosmopolitan Society
of New York, an organization established in 1906 by the famous American suffragist and activist, Mary White Ovington (Hunton 1907). It included important African American figures like Owen M. Waller who, like Ovington, would go on to become one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. As these examples illustrate, Barkatullah was experimenting with a number strategies for the cause of freedom and equality of Indians and the Muslim World in a Eurocentric and racialized world order. His experimentations with building intersectional alliances would continue during his time in Japan.

**Barkatullah in Tokyo: The Pan-Asianist and Anti-British Propagandist**

The Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 was a moment of global historical significance. The rise of Japan as a non-white global superpower was a development followed closely by colonized reformers and activists across the political spectrum throughout Asia and Africa. Not long after the Japanese military success, various South Asian students, reformers, and intellectuals began to visit and move to Japan. The Japanese victory not only represented a symbolic rebuttal of white supremacy to many colonized subjects around the world, it also emboldened anti-colonial activists who came to see Japan as another venue for anti-British agitation. Crucially, to figures like Barkatullah, Japan exemplified an alternative model of modernity, one that demonstrated that non-Western religions, languages, and cultures were not inherent obstacles to progress and civilization.

Barkatullah was interested not only connecting with sympathetic intellectuals, Buddhist reformers, and military strategists in Japanese Pan-Asian circles, he was also interested in institutionalizing Islam in Japan as well as expanding the Indian revolutionary network. In fact, it was his colleagues from the Pan-Aryan Association, Freeman and Joshi, and the Indian nationalist network in Paris, who encouraged him to apply for an academic post in Japan. Paris-based Madame Cama and Shyamji Krishnavarma are said to have pulled “some strings” by asking R. D. Tata from the prominent Tata family to “secure the appointment” for Barkatullah to teach Hindustani at the University of Tokyo’s School of Foreign Languages (Ramnath 2011: 223; Bose 2002: 111).

Japan was firmly on Barkatullah’s radar as early as 1904 and he had begun making overtures to Japanese officials and Pan-Asianists prior to seeking employment in Tokyo. For instance, in the euphoria in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese victory over Russia, with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth which formally ended the war in September 1905, Barkatullah and others from the Hindustani
Progressive Association of New York City (HPA) congratulated Baron Kaneko Kentaro, the Japanese government’s special envoy tasked with enlisting President Theodore Roosevelt’s help in brokering a peace deal with Russia. An address by the HPA (New York Tribune, 1905), signed by their President Barkatullah among others, stated their admiration for the Meiji Emperor Mikado Mutsuhito in securing the East from the villainous West, by claiming:

Through his majesty’s goodness of heart Buddhism triumphs over Christianity, and through his majesty’s wisdom the Orient has become secure in the future from perennial wanton incursions of the free-booters of the West, the wagging of evil tongues and the murmuring of evil minds notwithstanding.

After moving to Japan, the British colonial government in India became increasingly concerned with an English-language monthly journal he began publishing in 1910 called Islamic Fraternity. It was described by James Campbell Ker (1917: 120), a colonial civil servant in India who served as the personal assistant to the director of British criminal intelligence, as an “anti-British” newspaper “published by a Mohamedan for Mohamedans.” While the tone of the journal was considered “objectionable” from the outset, it was not until 1912 that British officials deemed it necessary to prohibit its importation into British India under the Sea Customs Act of 1878. The recommendation to suppress Islamic Fraternity was given by the Secretary to the Government of Bombay based on articles deemed to be a concerted attempt to “stir up religious feeling and to excite hatred and disaffection” towards the British government in India (IOR/L/PS/11/28).

Although there was a clear change in Barkatullah’s editorial policy from 1911, the reality is that Islamic Fraternity was not published for a purely Muslim audience, and the subject matter was primarily concerned with arguing back against Muslim backwardness, highlighting Islam’s globality, and discussing what he thought Muslims could learn from Japan. For instance, it seems clear that Barkatullah had a positive outlook towards the Japanese religious landscape. He argued (Barkatullah 1910: 5) that “Japanese latitudinarianism” in the religious realm meant that Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism “all have equal hold on the sentiments of the people and enjoy equal respect” in Japan. Perhaps Barkatullah was reflecting on what he thought should be the case in India where he could see signs of religious tension and conflict. This can be seen in some of his articles in Islamic Fraternity where he argued for Hindu-Muslim unity, warned against the consequences of British reforms that introduced separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims, and criticized the All-India Muslim League for “insulting” their Hindu brothers and needlessly meddling in politics.
Aside from working on the *Islamic Fraternity*, Barkatullah was in dialogue with Japanese Pan-Asian Buddhist figures—like Shaku Soen and Tachibana Shundo as well as the influential Sinhalese Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala—about the “world religion” status of their respective religions. These conversations not only serve to further illustrate Barkatullah’s continuing commitments to his religious internationalist projects, it also hints at the dialogical nature of Asian “world religion” projects like Pan-Islamism and Pan-Buddhism between the 1880s and the 1920s.

Despite the suppression of *Islamic Fraternity* into India, Barkatullah continued to be a concern from his base in Japan, where he was successful in “winning over some high-profile Japanese politicians” and had become friends with influential Pan-Asianists like Okawa Shumei (Fischer-Tine 2007: 338). Hasan Hatano, a Pan-Asianist Japanese convert to Islam and Barkatullah’s protégé based in Tokyo, began to publish another newspaper called *El-Islam* in 1911. Soon after the suppression of *The Islamic Fraternity* in July 1912, *El Islam*, originally published exclusively in Japanese, began an English language section. Copies of *El-Islam* began to make their way into India in 1912 and 1913 and was considered to be a continuation of Barkatullah’s “anti-British campaign” (IOR/L/PS/11/58). Utilizing the now elaborate radical global network, other seditious pamphlets like “An Nazir-ul-Uryan,” published in Urdu, allegedly written by Barkatullah, made their way into India through Shanghai.

Although Tokyo became an important base to spread anti-British literature and establishing connections in Pan-Asianist circles, he was by no means disconnected from the rest of the network. After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, Barkatullah probably felt more comfortable in Ottoman jurisdiction and in 1911 he travelled to Constantinople and Cairo. The trip was crucial, Ramnath (2011: 224) argues, not only because he was able to reconnect with Europe-based revolutionaries like Krishnavarma, but also because it “marked an intensification of Barakatullah’s focus on national liberation.”

Barkatullah’s “intensification” towards national liberation was deeply influenced by global events from 1911 leading up to the First World War as well. Italy had invaded Ottoman Libya in 1911 and the French would officially establish a protectorate over Morocco in 1912. In a notice to the *Islamic Fraternity*’s subscribers in September 1912, a few months after the journal’s suppression, Barkatullah laid out his justification for the shift in its editorial policy:

> The original object of the journal, no doubt, was to enlighten the non-Muslim public on the true principles of Islam and bring to the Muslim view some of the beauties of other religions, with a view to advance the cause of human fellowship. The sudden invasion, however, of Tripoli by Italy, the treacherous
occupation of Morocco by France and the cruel march through desolation and bloodshed into Persia by Russia, accompanied by a campaign of lies in the European Press to justify their dark designs of aggression, compelled us to take up the defense of the truth and to expose the tricks in trade of European diplomacy. (Barkatullah 1912: 1)

The news would only get worse for Barkatullah as the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 would further weaken the Ottomans as they were forced to cede most of their European territory. This period, I argue, was crucial in cementing Barkatullah’s conviction that the British Empire had to be defeated militarily once an opportune moment presented itself. In this regard, the thinking of Young Turk leadership was significant. As Mustafa Aksakal (2009) has convincingly argued, the anger and sense of insecurity resulting from the trauma military defeats in the Balkan Wars coupled with Enver Pasha’s victory recapturing Edirne, resulted in demonstrating to many Young Turk leaders and intellectuals that war with European powers like Britain and Russia was not only inescapable but that war was the only way to save the empire. This included Barkatullah’s colleague from his Liverpool days, Ubeydullah Effendi.

While the nationalist struggles from inside the Ottoman Empire were seen as a blow by Barkatullah, the Chinese revolution of November 1911, led in part by the Chinese nationalist and Pan-Asianist Sun Yat-Sen, was viewed with optimism. Especially after the success of the revolution, Sun’s organizational structure became an important model for revolutionaries across Asia, including Indians. According to B. R. Deepak (2001: 48), after the revolution Sun “became even more popular among the revolutionaries” based in Japan from across Asia. During Barkatullah’s time in Tokyo, he and other Japan-based Indian activists “maintained close contacts” with Sun and would often “seek his advice.”

By the end of Barkatullah’s time in Tokyo in 1914, he had helped establish Tokyo as an important node in the network. Tokyo, during his brief time there, became an important hub through which both revolutionaries and revolutionary literature would pass. This expanding network gave the revolutionaries more options, and scared the British further. Barkatullah himself had become more open and virulent in his anti-British writings and activities. While he had not joined violent revolutionary activities thus far, British officials in India were in no doubt that he presented a clear threat. After increasing pressure from the British government, Barkatullah’s contract was not renewed at the University of Tokyo and he returned to the United States in 1914, on the eve of the First World War. Ghadar-di-Gunj, or “echo of mutiny,” was about to be heard around the world.

It was the trauma of the Ottoman defeats between 1911 and 1913, and the empowerment that came from Barkatullah’s involvement in a global radical network.
with powerful allies in the form of the Ottomans and the Germans, that cemented Barkatullah’s conviction to overthrow British rule from India. The Great War presented the opportune moment for Barkatullah and Ghadar to make their move.

**Conclusion**

This article has charted Barkatullah’s trajectory from being an Indian-Muslim intellectual arguing against imperial bigotry and discrimination to someone “embracing the program of springing the imperial lock by forging transnational alliances and cultural diplomatic ties in the diaspora” only when the First World War was on the horizon (Manjapra 2014: 92).

While his views of empire changed during his lifetime, his commitment to working for equality and justice remained consistent throughout his career. Barkatullah’s mode for achieving his goals remained consistent too: internationalism. The transnational nature of the British Empire compelled colonized figures like Barkatullah to combat imperial racism by forming alliances with a dizzying array of cosmopolitan networks and individuals.

Barkatullah recognized that Britain and the “West” were not homogeneous. From his earliest days in Britain, alongside becoming a central figure in the diasporic Indian and Pan-Islamic networks, Barkatullah’s initial strategy was to develop relationships with British socialists, theosophists, and liberals for “linked-up agitation” against British injustices and discrimination. It was precisely the fissures within and between Western powers that he and others were trying to exploit. Moreover, although Barkatullah’s vision for an independent and sovereign India are not entirely fleshed out in his writings, his ambitions for India were always connected with his Pan-Islamic activism advocating for the need for the spiritual sovereignty of the office of the Caliphate.

Before Barkatullah became a revolutionary, in both the United States and Britain, he not only cultivated allies but he also tried to counter bigoted depictions of Islam, Muslim societies, and the Ottoman Empire by giving lectures and writing in newspapers and magazines. Barkatullah understood how deeply intertwined colonial geopolitics were with western narratives relating to race, culture, and religion. He could see, for instance, how the supposed tyranny and backwardness of the “terrible Turk” could be used as a justification for supporting nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire like the ones in Crete and the Balkans. Or, how arguments about cultural inferiority of Indians and others around the world could be used to deny equality.

Barkatullah’s decision to become an anti-British revolutionary when the Great War began meant that it was Britain’s conflicts and diverging interests with other empires and states that became the focus for him. Even then, however, Barkatullah
never lost sight of the importance of staying engaged in the public sphere, nor did he lose sight over what he saw as the necessity of global Muslim solidarity in the face of European imperialism.

In 1924, after the abolishment of the office of the Caliphate, Barkatullah wrote his most cited publication, *The Khilafat*. This booklet was written primarily for a global Muslim audience as Barkatullah tried to make his intervention into the debate surrounding the future of the Muslim World in a time of uncertainty for Muslims invested in a Pan-Islamic project (Aydin 2017: 137; Hassan 2017: 195). Barkatullah argued that the role of the Caliph had to be limited to being a spiritual leader, similar to the reformulation of the papacy in Rome. Without a powerful Muslim empire like the Ottoman Empire, and with Muslim polities either being under direct or indirect domination by European powers, Barkatullah suggested it would be best for the new Caliph to not be a contemporary political head-of-state. Despite who might be elected as Caliph, however, Barkatullah was clear on the importance of Muslims sticking together as he warned Muslims that “we must hang together, otherwise we may be hanged separately” (Barkatullah 1970 [1924]: 83).

While there were intense discussions on the future of the Caliphate through tracts by Muslim intellectuals like Barkatullah and through international conferences held in cities like Cairo and Mecca, Cemil Aydin has argued that the Caliphate had lost its political and strategic importance outside of the South Asian context. Aydin writes that the demise “of the Ottoman Empire, coupled with the model of the new Turkish nation-state, encouraged nationalist versions of globalized Muslim identity, and soon Muslim publics gave up on the idea of reconstituting the caliphate” (Aydin 2017: 140). Barkatullah’s vision, therefore, of a global Pan-Islamic solidarity centered around the hope that a reformulated and depoliticized office of the Caliphate would not come to fruition during his lifetime.

Barkatullah also died before he was able to see a post-colonial South Asia, although he also missed out on experiencing the trauma of partition that accompanied it. Having worked closely alongside Hindu, Sikh, and Parsi Indian revolutionary brothers and sisters and arguing for the importance of Hindu–Muslim unity, Barkatullah may not be able to recognize South Asia today where Hindus and Muslims are often spoken about from the right-wing edges as being natural enemies. His cosmopolitan, inclusive, and egalitarian form of Pan-Islamism—the most enduring part of his ideological identity—does not square with the iteration of Pan-Islamism that came back into global consciousness in the 1980s, now widely perceived as prone to fanatical, sectarian, and absolutist tendencies marked by globalist visions of a world-wide Caliphate to counter Euro-American machinations. Barkatullah’s Pan-Islamism, however, attempted to unite rather than divide, was coupled with his anti-colonialism, and intersected with variety of global intellectual and political currents.
Notes

1. This article comes out of my MA dissertation on Muhammad Barkatullah and I would like to thank my committee members: Cemil Aydin, Susan Pennybacker, and Iqbal Sevea. Moreover, I am grateful to Cemil Aydin, Micah Hughes, and Mark Reeves for reviewing several drafts of this article and offering detailed feedback and edits. Finally, I am appreciative of the detailed comments given to me by the blind reviewers which helped me clarify my arguments.

2. In this paper, by religious internationalism I am referring to two connected yet distinct projects: first, his Pan-Islamic activism emphasizing global Muslim solidarity and significance of the Ottoman Caliphate, and second, his interventions in Euro-American discourses about Islam in which he argued back against Islam’s supposed backwardness, fanaticism, and illiberalism within the newly emerging “world religions paradigm.”

3. It is important to note here that, according to Cemil Aydin’s new monograph, The Idea of the Muslim World, the first iteration of the Pan-Islamic movement and the idea of the Muslim World as a global geopolitical identity, were products of the late nineteenth century. Pan-Islamism emerges around the 1880s in context of discourses racializing Muslims and increased interconnectivity resulting from European imperial transport and communication networks during the era of high imperialism.

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