

Global Histories

A Student Journal

Beyond Propaganda: Reimagining the *Hindustan* Newspaper (1915-17) as a Theatre of the First World War

Amen Imran

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2025.662>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 2025), pp. 59-79
ISSN: 2366-780X

Copyright © 2025 Amen Imran



License URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Publisher information:

Global Histories: A Student Journal is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. *Global Histories* is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin
Global Histories: A Student Journal
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut
Koserstraße 20
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website www.globalhistories.com or contact the editor at: admin@globalhistories.com.



Beyond Propaganda: Reimagining the *Hindustan* Newspaper (1915–17) as a Theatre of the First World War

ABSTRACT

Despite significant scholarship on prisoner of war (POW) camps across Europe, camps for colonial POWs are relatively under-researched within the scope of First World War history. This paper evaluates the production and dissemination of the newspaper *Hindustan*, printed in Urdu and Hindi, and distributed in POW camps for British Indian soldiers in the contemporary German state of Brandenburg. A major part of the German wartime propaganda strategy to regulate war-related news, publications like *Hindustan* (inspired by Orientalist writings) were disseminated to incite anti-colonial rebellions in British colonies like India and weaken the Empires of Britain and France. This research locates *Hindustan's* development within the wider context of German Orientalism and propaganda strategies, Indian anti-colonial activity in Berlin, and the socio-cultural lives of Indians connected to internment camps, producing a holistic understanding of Berlin's wartime landscape. The *Hindustan's* 67 issues published between 1915 and 1917, were not merely a medium of German propaganda and Indian reception. *Hindustan* reflects how POWs and various Indian and European actors positioned and repositioned themselves in a warscape where meanings of colonists and the colonised, home and periphery, and allies and enemies were constantly contested. Exploring the historical, linguistic, and thematic intricacies of *Hindustan's* Urdu editions, this research reveals how a multitude of actors played significant roles in the creation and reception of *Hindustan*. This shows how the propaganda war was a site of negotiation and contestation, thereby becoming a dynamic theatre of the Great War.

BY

Amen Imran

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amen Imran is a Master's student in Global History at Freie Universität and Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, Germany. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Political Science with distinction from the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Her research interests center on cultural and literary history, with a special focus on South Asia and the Indian Subcontinent.

Introduction

Scholarship on South Asian participation in the First World War has mostly produced studies on anti-imperial revolutionary networks and Indian nationalism in the wake of the British Empire.¹ Although there has been a considerable amount of scholarship on prisoner of war (POW) camps across Europe, camps for colonial POWs are relatively under researched within the scope of First World War history. Recent scholarly interest in Indian POW experiences has drawn attention to newspapers written in South Asian languages and disseminated amongst prisoners in German POW camps from 1915-1918. This essay evaluates the camp newspaper *Hindostan*, a rare historical source printed in Urdu and Hindi and distributed exclusively in the Zossen (Weinberglager) and Wünsdorf (Halfmoon Camp) camps in the contemporary German state of Brandenburg, where many Indian POWs were held. The dissemination of the newspaper was part of the German wartime propaganda strategy that aimed at regulating war-related news, uplifting the German fighting spirit, and dispiriting the Entente troops. The German propaganda strategy was based on Orientalist Max Von Oppenheim's writings on using pan-Islamic rhetoric to destabilise Islamic territories by inciting mass anti-colonial rebellions in British colonies, such as India, and weakening the empires of the Entente.²

This paper aims to assess the process of *Hindostan's* production in a rapidly changing war climate where Indian nationalism was on the rise and anti-colonial revolutionary networks operated across Europe. How did the German propaganda machine, in conjunction with the *Indisches Unabhängigkeitskomitee* (the Indian Independence Committee or the IIC), influence the creation of *Hindostan*, both of which were involved in its production? By exploring the historical, linguistic, and thematic intricacies of *Hindostan's* Urdu editions, this research shows how the newspaper was not just a medium of German propaganda.

A reconstruction of Indian lives in connection with POWs' camp spaces and German wartime administration focuses on blurring boundaries between the identities, spaces, and ideas that they engaged with. Despite being subject to stringent German control and management of information, the camps

1 For the purposes of this paper, Indian nationalism refers to the collective efforts and discourses surrounding the movement for Indian independence from the British Empire. Here, "Indian" encompasses individuals from the regions that constitute modern-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

2 Heike Liebau, "The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the 'Sepoys,'" in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Roy Ahuja (Social Science Press, 2011), 100-101.

housed prisoners in an environment where political news and intercultural interaction provided an impetus for discussion within and outside them. POWs and South Asian collaborators to the German propaganda machine navigated through their surrounding social networks, “positioning” and “repositioning” themselves according to rival claims to their loyalty by British and German authorities.³ German propaganda strategists, their Indian collaborators, and their targeted audiences “reconstructed” the war as it was waged by playing a role in *Hindustan’s* production and reception. This illustrates how the “propaganda war” evolved into a dynamic theatre of the First World War, where narratives, perceptions, and ideologies were actively shaped and contested amidst the backdrop of a global conflict.⁴ This is not only a valuable contribution to global histories of the First World War, but also to South Asian literature.

Literature Review

Santanu Das has made an extensive contribution to recently emerging social histories of Indian soldiers during the Great War, which looks at soldiers as, “social actors in contexts other than acts of warfare.”⁵ Drawing on soldier memoirs, images, and songs, the bulk of his scholarship recovers alternatives to Eurocentric war memories and stresses the need to expand the frame of studies on soldier experiences in terms of sources and methodology. Hence, the camp newspaper *Hindustan*, as a relatively under-researched source, is a valuable addition to understanding the complex nature of war experiences when situated within the wider context of the German propaganda machine, Indian anti-colonial activity in Berlin, and the socio-cultural lives of Indians connected to wartime internment camps.

Further research on regimental censorship and its role in shaping primary sources on soldier war experiences can be found in David Omissi’s research, which explores the distortions produced by layers of mediation and censorship processes in soldier letters.⁶ However, Omissi does not situate his analysis of soldier letters within a wider context of the colonial enterprise

3 Franziska Roy and Heike Liebau, “Introduction,” in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Roy Ahuja (Social Science Press, 2011), 2.

4 *Ibid.*, 8.

5 Santanu Das, “Reframing life/war ‘writing’: objects, letters and songs of Indian soldiers, 1914–1918,” *Textual Practice* 29, no. 7 (2015): 1265.

6 David Omissi ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914–18* (Springer, 2016); see also David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Springer, 2016).

and its sociocultural impact on ordinary Indians.⁷ Nevertheless, Omissi's understanding of the multiple and intricate ways censorship affected soldier letters is a valuable part of social histories attempting to approach a more complete understanding of wartime experiences. His research points to the inherent complexities involved in interpreting wartime literary sources.⁸

Gajendra Singh has also made valuable contributions to recovering authentic social histories of soldiers during the Great War, showing how linguistic and thematic interpretation of wartime sources can help decipher content despite censorship. Although Singh's primary focus is also personal letters of Indian soldiers, her research is significant to analyses of wartime sources like *Hindustan*. It highlights how linguistic details can point toward static yet changing meanings, signifying complex thought processes, and circumventing censors.⁹ A soldier's readings of their environment and the war news that reached them were shaped by contending colonial narratives, which resulted in a process of, "social, cultural, and religious identities under fluid de- and re-construction."¹⁰ Even though the *sipahis'* (soldiers') language was deeply conditioned, it was precisely "those conditions in which letters were written" that fostered multiple meanings within their writings.¹¹

Heike Liebau is one of the few scholars who has done extensive archival research on South Asian POWs in German camps. Utilising sources and documentation from the German Foreign Office, Heike's analysis of the Hindi and Urdu versions of *Hindustan* is situated within an extensive study of German Orientalism, propaganda goals, and Indian anti-colonial activities in wartime Berlin. She evaluates German strategies to monitor and control Indian revolutionary or nationalist forces to weaken the British Empire amidst a network of loosely organised Indian independence committees making political manoeuvres for their own goals.¹² Her study thus considers the global context of both Germany and India's war strategies to understand how Berlin acted as a warscape for an intricate, complex, and mutating matrix of actors. It also includes a linguistic and sociocultural analysis of the newspaper series. This makes her recent examination of *Hindustan* a holistic and authentic

7 David Omissi, "Europe Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918," *The English Historical Review* 122, no. 496 (2007): 371–96.

8 Ibid.

9 Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (A&C Black, 2014), 3.

10 Gajendra Singh, "India and the Great War: Colonial Fantasies, Anxieties and Discontent," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 2 (2014): 351.

11 Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, 3.

12 Heike Liebau, "Undertakings and Instigations: The Berlin Indian Independence Committee in the Files of the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (1914–1920)," (2020).

contribution to First World War history, opening the relatively under-researched source and topic for further study.

Liebau's work is a valuable source to better understand the context of the Berlin warscape where the newspapers were developed and read. Its collection of thematic essays explores how the complexity of camp environments placed POWs within obscure "interstices" of war and empire, where ideas of colonists and the colonised, home and periphery, and allies and enemies were continuously being contested.¹³ Evaluating the rigidity of propagandist endeavours and the fluidity of wartime networks with each other, it reconstructs POWs' experiences and reveals identities beyond just propagandists and their audiences. Its holistic approach forms the basis for this study, which aims to expand Liebau's research on Indian POW's and *Hindustan* by situating it within the developing context of German Orientalism and its ideological impact on wartime policy. My research interprets the linguistic, thematic, and stylistic features of *Hindustan's* Urdu language issues that show the complex and, "mutually affecting" nature of European contact with the colonial world.¹⁴ It reveals *Hindustan* as a valuable site where social and political multi-directionality of German and Indian, "lived encounters" are made visible through the fog of a propaganda war.

For this purpose, this paper will first analyse the historical evolution of German Orientalist traditions, which forms an essential background to understanding the propaganda policies of *Hindustan* and the chosen content. It will then delve into understanding how the German propaganda strategy evolved alongside academic and political Orientalist traditions in the years leading up to the war. This analysis will be supplemented by a study on how the war atmosphere shaped German perceptions of the "Orient" and ideas of Islamic warfare.¹⁵ The paper will then illustrate a contextual analysis of *Hindustan's* content and structure to show how these perceptions formed a dynamic process of propaganda creation and dissemination. The final chapter

13 Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers*, 1066.

14 Kris Manjapra, "The Illusions of Encounter: Muslim 'Minds' and Hindu Revolutionaries in First World War Germany and After," *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 3 (2006): 364.

15 In this research, the term "Orient" refers to both the imaginary and real territories as constructed by German Orientalist traditions, including its academic and political dimensions. Most scholarship on German Orientalism during the First World War explores the specifics of German interaction with the "Orient" but fails to clearly define it. Within the context of this paper, the "Orient" is defined as the territories studied and represented in German Orientalist research and state strategies, with a particular focus on the "Orient" as understood by the German propaganda machine during World War I. See Gottfried Hagen, "German Heralds of Holy War: Orientalists and Applied Oriental Studies," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 145-62; Langbehn von Volker and Mohammad Salama, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

will show how *Hindostan's* production was situated within a wider political context characterised by a complex interplay of multiple actors including the Indian Independence Committee, the German Foreign Office, and Orientalist intellectuals amidst the First World War.

German Orientalism

Edward Said professed that German Orientalist culture involved a more professional study of texts rather than a focus on drastic or systematic expansion of the German Empire, and therefore possessed, “a kind of intellectual authority” over the Orient.¹⁶ Scholarship on Said's work has overwhelmingly focused on Orientalism's connection to British and French imperialism, leaving the role of the German Empire relatively overlooked in this conceptual framework. Thus, understanding German Orientalism requires interrogating this definition and German imperial practices together. Jennifer Jenkins posits that German Orientalism goes beyond Saidian traditions and is shaped by Indo-European philology and the romantics' search for Germany's, “ancient, but national Aryan past.”¹⁷ Consequently, studies that rethink the conceptual categories of Orientalism, nationalism, and imperialism are significant to understanding German Orientalism and how academic traditions surrounding it went beyond scholarly interests, impacting national and imperial visions. The development of German Orientalist scholarship and practices forms an essential backdrop to understanding sources like *Hindostan*. It illustrates how the Orient was perceived within the German Empire and its significance for the wartime formulation of national and imperial policy.

Suzanne L. Marchand posits that modern German cultural institutions and scholarly disciplines like *Orientalistik* (Orientalism) emerged amidst ideas surrounding cultural relativism and Christian humanism in the post-romantic period.¹⁸ Marchand illustrates how German Orientalist traditions before the Imperial Age emerged amidst domestic political contexts and were not utilitarian. Rather, their development from 1820-40 was largely

16 Jennifer Jenkins, “German Orientalism: Introduction,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 97.

17 Jenkins, “German Orientalism,” 98. Jenkins posits that the scholarship of German Romantics forms early roots of Germany's nationalist search for its cultural identity.

18 Christian humanism, which flourished in Protestant territories, emphasises that all peoples and nations are equally near to God and capable of obtaining virtue and wisdom via reason and faith. According to Marchand, this idea, “made possible the career of Christian humanists/ism and with it the long-subordinate career of Orientalists/ism.” Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 341.

within the context of the Humboldtian academy's dedication to *Wissenschaft* (scientific study), not *Nutzbarkeit* (utility).¹⁹ Ideas of understanding the Orient and training oneself in its language and cultures were largely geared towards enriching cultural output and advancing research. Though beyond the scope of this study, German Orientalist traditions were also shaped by a long history of church-state relations and discourses surrounding Jewish emancipation and liberal nationalism.²⁰ Marchand's research illustrates that the meaning of the Orient was thus heavily contested. Knowledge of the Orient was not only expressed through scholarly norms, but also came from missionaries, diplomats, and journalists who travelled through the region. German Orientalist traditions were neither solely geared towards empire building nor entirely objective and free from political or cultural commitments.²¹

German Orientalist traditions further developed in the Age of Imperialism and when Germany had an empire between 1884 and 1914. As Marchand shows, after 1884, a powerful pro-colonial lobby influenced the *Kaiser* and bureaucracy to establish soft power in regions where Germans could acquire profits without ruling them directly.²² A number of pro-colonial institutions devoted to researching the Orient and cultural exchange began to emerge in Germany. Marchand shows that Germany's interactions with "Oriental" empires were not marked with oceanic commerce and territorial control but was rather based on establishing relationships with, "powerful nations on one's own unstable borders."²³ Additionally, Germans had been integral to European and imperial knowledge production of the Orient in the late 17th century with their involvement in the global spice trade with the Dutch and British East India Companies. Thus, the imperial experience further nuanced the figure of the "Orientalist," making academic and non-academic experts central to a diverse set of discourses around the Orient. The imperial context created a "cacophony of voices" on the Orient.²⁴ As German Orientalist traditions began to take the utilitarian nature of knowledge production into account, it was not always clear which organisations could acquire funding from the German state and claim Oriental expertise.

Orientalist expertise was geared towards propaganda activities during the First World War. Although the total number of Orientalists involved in the war effort is not known, it had a "sub-academic economy," with full

19 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 333.

20 Ibid.

21 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 336.

22 Ibid.

23 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 28.

24 Ibid., 340.

employment for all speakers of Oriental languages.²⁵ Between 1914 and mid-1916, the German War Ministry sent 352 private individuals seeking employment as prison camp translators to the *Seminar Für Orientalische Sprachen* (Seminar for Oriental Languages, SOS) for training. Orientalist experts were further encouraged to write brochures and articles for the German public, emphasising Germany's friendly and harmonious relationship with the Turks, and the compatibility between Islam and German *kultur* (culture). Experts like Friedrich Delitzsch and Enno Littmann specifically wrote appraising pieces on Muslim theology, peace, and the Ottoman Turks.²⁶ Carl Becker produced a large collection of pro-Turkish propaganda and even argued that the "German-Turkish brotherhood was worth not only the sweat, but even the blood of noble men."²⁷ Significantly, not only did the number of German-Turkish friendship societies increase exponentially during wartime, but many of them were also transparently devoted to producing propagandist content and training military officers and civilians in the languages of the Orient.

The war effort was a catalyst to the formalisation of German Orientalist institutions and networks. This ultimately culminated in the creation of the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (Intelligence Agency for the Orient, NfO) under the leadership of Orientalist Max Freiherr von Oppenheim,²⁸ which served as the official German body responsible for the coordination and regulation of all propaganda activities directed towards the Orient, including the production of propagandist newspapers like *Hindostan*.

The NfO formalised the use of Islam and *jihad* (Holy War) as a propagandist tool in Orientalist and wartime discourses. Even before the First World War, Wilhelm II had professed Muslims and the Islamic Caliphate as "friends"

25 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 447.

26 Friedrich Delitzsch, an Assyriologist, published *Die Welt des Islam* (The World of Islam), praising the Turks, the probity of Islamic theology, and the genius of the Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly, Delitzsch had never shown an interest in the modern Orient before the war. Additionally, Enno Littmann, a philological Orientalist, wrote *Der Krieg und Der Islamische Orient* (The War and the Islamic Orient), further defending the Turk ruling classes and assigning blame to non-Turks for the Ottoman Empire's shortcomings.

27 qtd. in Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 449. Carl Becker composed an essay: *Islamopolitik* (Islamic politics), encouraging deep ties with the Ottoman Empire. He also went as far as to say that the Asiatic people deserve self determination and the right to rule themselves. However, it is interesting to note that he did not denounce colonialism entirely. He defended German colonies in Africa, citing racial superiority over the African people.

28 Max Freiherr von Oppenheim (born in 1860) was a German lawyer, archaeologist, Orientalist, and diplomat. During World War I, Oppenheim famously devised the German wartime policy of using ideas of *jihad* and pan-Islamism to incite rebellions within the Muslim populations of Entente controlled territories.

of the German emperor in 1898.²⁹ However, the development of Orientalist traditions during wartime produced an organised effort led by Oppenheim to use Islam to incite rebellion in British colonies and weaken the Entente. In a 136-page memorandum in October 1914, Oppenheim detailed how the Reich could utilise Islam and the Caliphate as one of its most important “weapons” to defeat Britain.³⁰ The draft laid out plans of how Germany could practically achieve this objective by encouraging, directing, and controlling Turkish pan-Islamist propaganda. His plans included instructions on how to incite revolutions in vast territories with Muslim populations ranging from Egypt to India and Afghanistan.³¹ As Marchand shows, Oppenheim’s real significance for German *Orientpolitik* (Oriental politics) lay in organising pre-war discourses surrounding the Orient and Islam into a coordinated program and institution. Producing the propaganda newspaper *El Dschihad* (The Holy War) for Muslim POWs in 1915 and the Hindi and Urdu editions of *Hindostan*, the NfO became one of the driving forces of the German propaganda machine’s activities aimed at India and the countries of the Orient during the war.³²

Hindi and Urdu were partly chosen to reach specifically British Indian subjects and partly because of the language expertise within the NfO. Liebau asserts that from the beginning of April 1915 till August 1918, a total of 67 issues of *Hindostan* appeared in both these languages.³³ Although camp newspapers were common during wartime in Europe, they were often produced by POWs themselves, containing content about camp life, reports of cultural events, and advertisements of local goods sold in camps. However, such content was absent from the issues of *Hindostan*, which was produced outside the camp under complete NfO supervision. As Liebau posits, the rules for the distribution of *Hindostan* were very restrictive. Printed editions were scarce as they were to be exclusively distributed within the *Inderlager* (Indian Camp) which was in a separate area within the Halfmoon Camp at Wünsdorf. Although scholarship on *Hindostan*’s readership does not specify the number of soldiers who received copies, it mentions that printed copies of Urdu

29 After Otto von Bismarck’s death in 1898, Wilhelm II left on a 6 week *Orientreise* (Orient Trip) and toured the Ottoman Empire. He assured the Ottoman Muslim population of the German Empire’s friendship. This event was covered heavily by European and Muslim newspapers.

30 Max von Oppenheim, *Denkschrift betreffend die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde* (1914).

31 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 438.

32 *El Dschihad*, meaning *Al-Jihad* or the Holy War, was to be printed in Arabic, Russian, Turko-Tatarian, Georgian, Hindi, and Urdu to reach prisoners from these regions. Oppenheim initiated the production process of printing camp newspapers in January 1915, which were to be distributed in the Halfmoon camp in Wünsdorf and the Weinberg camp in Zossen.

33 Heike Liebau, “Hindostan (newspaper),” ed. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson (1914).

editions were reduced over time from 700 to 200 prints per issue and that POWs often read it aloud in groups.³⁴

German Orientalists, Indologists, and propagandists within the NfO not only chose texts to be printed in the newspapers, but also wrote texts in the respective languages, and supervised the work of appointed Indian translators and writers.³⁵ Indian collaboration was heavily based on translation work for specific content which German officials engaged with on a regular basis. Consequently, an intertwined Orientalist and propagandist effort played a key role in *Hindostan's* production.³⁶ Its printed texts, rooted in using discourses surrounding Indian nationalism and *jihad*, elaborated on propagandist arguments that were regularly presented in the talks given in the camps. As the next section shows, Orientalist traditions impacted German perceptions of South Asian societies and more specifically, Islamic warfare. This did not only play a major part in the formation and execution of German propaganda for the Orient but situated *Hindostan* in a wider and dynamic historical war time context.

German Propaganda and Jihad

Rising anti-British and French attitudes within the war context increased the relevance of debates on religion. Political discussions surrounding Muslim societies overlapped themes of pan-Islamism and *jihad* or holy war within the context of World War I. The Ottoman entry into the war on October 31st, 1914, and the Sultan's declaration of holy war the following month officially brought Islam into the fold of the Central Power's war strategy. German endorsement of using Islam to mobilise Muslims against the Entente is evident from how an Urdu translation of the Ottoman Sultan's *jihad* declaration in 1914 served as the titular story for *Hindostan* Nr. 4, issued in April 1915.³⁷ The translation was followed by a call to action for Indian Muslim prisoners. This was a profound reinforcement of the terminology used in issue Nr. 1,³⁸ which had categorised

34 Not all POWs in the *Inderlager* could read. Although the literacy rate is not known among them, academic and anthropological research on the POWs in camps shows many of them attended elementary or regimental schools. See Britta Lange, "South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, linguistic and musicological field studies in prison camps," in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, & Roy Ahuja, (Social Science Press, 2011), 147-184.

35 Liebau, "Hindostan (newspaper)."

36 Rebekka Habermas, "Islam debates around 1900: Colonies in Africa, Muslims in Berlin, and the role of missionaries and orientalists," in *Migration and Religion*, (Brill, 2012), 123-154.

37 *Hindostan*. 1915-17. Issue 1-67. Newspaper. Rare Books Collection. State Library of Berlin.

38 *Hindostan*, Nr. 1.

Germany and the Central Powers as *Musalmanon ke sachay dost* (true friends to the Muslims) and the Entente as *Islam ke dushman* (enemies of Islam).

The terminology used in *Hindustan's* first few issues redefined conceptions of allies and enemies for the POWs from a German perspective, with its language encouraging armed action against, “the enemies of Islam.”³⁹ Early issues of the *Hindustan* cite the Ottoman Sultan’s activities extensively, detailing how the Turkish army had joined forces with the Germans and Austrians for *jihad*, and how their victories on the battlefield were divinely ordained.⁴⁰ Furthermore, by characterising the figure of the Sultan as a righteous *ghazi* (Muslim warrior), *Hindustan's* literary voice used Ottoman efforts to legitimise its own endorsement of *jihad*.⁴¹ As Marchand suggests, it is debatable whether the idea of using *jihad* for propaganda was entirely a German invention. The Ottoman use of *jihad* to advance their own political agenda shows how the tactic had never been exclusive to the Germans. The use of *jihad* as a political policy was a significant element within the broader context of pre-war and wartime politics.

These published references to *jihad* originated from and furthered German academic discussion on its contested meaning in 1914. The declaration of *jihad* by the Ottoman Sultan with the full endorsement of the Germans invoked a strong response from the Western European powers. Marchand writes that fear of, “‘the East set aflame’ had already been simmering before the war” and the Entente newspapers were quick to report on how the German “barbarians” had raised the Muslim East against European Christians.⁴² On the other hand, German Orientalist Carl Becker insisted that the *jihad* that the Germans and Ottomans encouraged was a “modern one, a political and tactical call to arms by a state that just happens to be Islamic.”⁴³ Becker asserted how one had to view this new form of *jihad* not through the lens of, “obsolete volumes of the *Shari'a*,” but by understanding it as a product of “awakened nationalities.”⁴⁴ The call to *jihad* in the First World War showed that the Eastern nations were not, as Western ones had so often assumed, incapable of modern forms of behaviour, including *realpolitik* (practical politics) pursuits of self-interest. To Becker, the “tactical use of religion” during the Great War was evidence of Eastern modernity.⁴⁵

39 *Hindustan*, Nr. 1.

40 *Hindustan*, Nr. 1, and Nr. 6.

41 *Hindustan*, Nr. 8.

42 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 437.

43 qtd. in Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 444.

44 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 444.

45 *Ibid.*

At the same time, German propaganda efforts aimed towards the Muslim world portrayed *jihad* as fighting the designated enemies of Islam. Even early issues of the *Hindustan* made extensive references to pan-Islamic activities and sentiments, publishing sensational headlines from other war theatres that displayed Muslim regions of modern day Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan at war with the Entente.⁴⁶ Such excerpts were then reinforced with content that used linguistic terms like *fatwa sharif* (religious ruling under Islamic law) and speeches by figures like *molvis* (Islamic religious leaders), which were specifically part of South Asian religious cultures.⁴⁷ *Hindustan's* production was thus situated in a war climate where two concurrent realities were constructed: on the one hand, *jihad* was portrayed as evidence of Eastern modernity, while on the other, it sanctioned a holy war against the British purely for the sake of German interests.

The endorsement of *jihad* in the *Hindustan* newspaper was not simply the result of German policy but emerged from the simultaneous navigation of Germans and Ottomans in a mutating warscape. There is considerable research that shows that the Ottomans were initially critical of a *jihad* declaration during the war.⁴⁸ Although doubtful of the declaration as the empire had European Christian allies in 1914, the Ottomans went along with the unrealistic German expectations to incite uprisings in British colonies. However, they also promoted *jihad* to achieve Ottoman policy objectives, signing an alliance with Germany that extracted a wide range of assurances, such as the abolishment of capitulations, protection of Ottoman territorial integrity, and annexations in case of victory.⁴⁹ Isabel Hull's research shows that the Ottomans had to be bribed with a considerable amount of material benefits and debt relief to join the Central Powers and prioritised their own diplomatic interests during the war.

Although the Germans were determined to utilise *jihad* in their propaganda and war strategy, the Ottoman Empire concurrently formed its own *jihad* policy during the conflict amidst rising Arab nationalism. Consequently, discourses surrounding the concept of Holy War in Islam illustrate how the wartime meaning of *jihad* was also contested. As the next sections illustrate, a contextual analysis of *Hindustan's* content shows that it was not only a propagandist production but was also shaped by a complex wartime environment amidst conflicting discourses surrounding German Orientalism, *jihad*, and the agendas of Indian actors central to its production.

46 *Hindustan*, Nr. 1, and Nr. 24.

47 *Hindustan*, Nr. 8.

48 Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 439-40. See also: Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute destruction: Military culture and the practices of war in imperial Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

49 Habermas, "Islam Debates around 1900."

***Hindustan*: A Contextual Analysis**

Although *Hindustan's* content alternates between familiar themes, there are visible discrepancies in the newspaper that reflect the various individualistic elements at play in its production. Time spans between earlier issues fluctuated between a few days and sometimes even two weeks, which shows that production patterns were dependent on writing, printing, and organising staff.⁵⁰ This disorder in printing is further reinforced by an inconsistency in the structure and language of the newspaper content; translations were done by different people for every issue.⁵¹ Additionally, as Germans found it difficult to compose the newspaper using the official printing press, most of the issues were written by hand and then mass produced.⁵² While issues from 1915-1916 were shorter in length with considerable spacing in between words, issues from 1917 were generally more lengthy and with a different written script. The handwriting visibly changes from issue to issue (Nr. 3 - Nr. 4; Nr. 18 - Nr. 19; Nr. 44 - Nr. 45),⁵³ reinforcing Liebau's observation that different Indian collaborators assisted production for each issue.

The language selection for *Hindustan's* editions was based on the ethnic, religious, and linguistic composition of the prisoners in the POW camps.⁵⁴ Hindi and Urdu editions often differed in their content, the former publishing stronger and more frequent pieces on secular nationalism and the latter on pan-Islamism, *jihad*, and the Ottoman caliphate.⁵⁵ German supervisors picked texts for translation to Hindi and Urdu from other papers and controlled writing processes, thematically separating the two South Asian languages. However, traces of the Punjabi language in between Urdu columns draw attention to an inconsistency in this stark separation, offering glances at an individualistic linguistic character from within the propagandist voice. The masthead of *Hindustan's* Hindi edition featured the phrase *Vande Mataram* (I salute you, O Mother), which had historically resonated with Hindu nationalism through its personification of the Indian land as the "Mother Goddess."⁵⁶ This phrase was notably missing in the Urdu edition. Interestingly, the phrase appears at the end of the Urdu issue Nr. 42, almost as an afterthought, thereby

50 The first issue was disseminated on March 5, 1915, while the second issue was published on April 20, 1915.

51 Liebau, "Hindustan (newspaper)."

52 Ibid.

53 *Hindustan*, Nr. 3, Nr. 4, Nr. 18, Nr. 19, Nr. 44, and Nr. 45.

54 Liebau, "Hindustan (newspaper)."

55 Ibid.

56 A.G. Noorani, "Vande Mataram: A Historical Lesson," *Economic and Political Weekly* 8, no. 23 (1973): 1039-1043.

illustrating a nuanced interplay of individualism and writer anonymity visible through German regulation.⁵⁷

The anonymity and inconsistency of South Asian personnel offered rare glimpses into different literary styles and a subtle sense of individualism between the lines. Many of the issues featured *hub-ul-watni ki nazam* (patriotic poems) with different poetic metres, content, themes, and vocabulary that has not been explored in First World War archives.⁵⁸ Interestingly, poetic verses in the Urdu edition illustrate ideas closer to secular patriotism and the figure of an Indian or *Hindustani* rather than a Muslim. A poem from *Hindustan* Nr. 17 describes the land of *hind* (India) as the *qibla* (the direction of prayer in Islam). Using this analogy, the poem reflects a prioritisation of nationalistic thought over religious motivations. Moreover, some verses from *Hindustan* Nr. 42 encouraged Hindu and Muslims to rise above rank and monetary gain to unite under the singular mission of a free India. Therefore, despite appearing as a strictly governed propagandist paper, a closer look at *Hindustan's* composition hints at the diverse ideas that emerged from dynamic political and cross-cultural interactions in the backdrop of the First World War.

This dynamism is also reflected by the interaction between South Asian collaborators and German authorities, who often negotiated through the propaganda process rather than just disseminating and receiving propagandist instructions. The specific tasks and roles of Indian collaborators were not known, and two of the notable translators, Tarachand Roy and Todar Mal, were not even members of the Berlin Indian Independence Committee (IIC).⁵⁹ Todar Mal had even refused to collaborate initially, but then translated Gurmukhi texts for the Germans.⁶⁰ Liebau notes that Reinhard Kaundinya, a German Christian of Indian origin was directly involved with text production, and paid through the IIC even though he was not a member.⁶¹ Not all individuals involved in writing and translating pieces for the newspaper worked towards the same goals. *Hindustan's* linguistic and thematic composition shows that it was, “not just a source of German propaganda for the POWs but was also a result of a conflicting process of negotiations between South Asian (Muslim

57 *Hindustan*, Nr. 42.

58 *Hindustan*, Nr. 17, Nr. 42, Nr. 59, and Nr. 60.

59 Liebau, “Hindustan (Newspaper),” 238. Liebau notes that Mansur Ahmed, a member of the IIC and propagandist in the Halfmoon Camp had initially written many texts in the Urdu edition of *Hindustan*.

60 *Gurmukhi* is an Indic script used in present-day Punjab, India. It is predominantly used by Sikhs to write the *Punjabi* language.

61 Liebau, “Hindustan (Newspaper),” 240.

and Hindu) intellectuals in Germany, German missionaries, scholars, and politicians acting from various backgrounds with different agendas.”⁶²

Furthermore, early issues of *Hindustan* drew extensive historical parallels between the Indian War of Independence of 1857 and the First World War, describing the British as *khoonkhar* (bloodthirsty) and vindictive. For instance, Issue Nr. 5 begins by establishing a comparison between the brutal retribution that the Indians had faced after their loss in 1857 and forced conscription in the First World War.⁶³ Its headline invokes both a remembrance of British callousness and the need to act against them in the present. It reads *angraizon ka zulm mat bhoolo, ab uthnay ka waqt aa gaya hai* (do not forget the barbarity of the British, it is time to rise up against them).⁶⁴ Further issues also encouraged patriotic sentiments in Indian readers, emboldening them to revolt against the British as their forefathers had done in 1857.⁶⁵ However, later issues of the newspaper illustrate a gradual departure from ideas relating to Indian independence and patriotism, instead focusing on German military expeditions and successes in the war.⁶⁶

Interestingly, some South Asian propagandists were not even Muslim, but used Muslim aliases to engage in pan-Islamic rhetoric and encourage anti-British sentiments.⁶⁷ Simultaneously, some South Asian revolutionaries and members like Hindu nationalist Har Dayal and pan-Islamist Mohamed Barakatullah expressed reservations about being involved in *Hindustan's* production, citing clandestine publications and anti-colonial activity as a more strategic path to independence than waging *jihad*.⁶⁸ Multiple Indian ideologies and thoughts are well reflected in the *Hindustan*, which oscillates between themes of Indian patriotism, pan-Islamic ideology, and *jihad*.⁶⁹ The 8th issue of the paper evokes multiple images of a dishonoured and enslaved Indian nation, posing rhetorical questions for its readers about India being a nation *jo ek zamanay mein tamaam dunya ke mulkoun mein sarr buland*

62 Ibid., 249.

63 *Hindustan*, Nr. 5.

64 Ibid.

65 *Hindustan*, Nr. 10.

66 *Hindustan*, Nr. 37, Nr. 42, and Nr. 43.

67 Heike Liebau, “Hindustan: A Camp Newspaper for South-Asian Prisoners of World War One in Germany,” in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, & Roy Ahuja, (Social Science Press, 2011), 234.

68 Ibid. Indian revolutionaries and participants also faced censorship in their own communication at times; letters written to and from Har Dayal were controlled, opened, and sometimes even translated by Josef Horovitz, a German expert in Islamic and Oriental studies.

69 *Hindustan*, Nr. 4, Nr. 6, and Nr. 24.

raha hai (a nation that was once one of the proudest in the world).⁷⁰ On the other hand, its 11th edition extensively reports on *jihad* in Afghanistan and refers to the Entente soldiers as *Muhammad (s) sahab ke dushman* (enemies of the Prophet Muhammad).⁷¹ Some editions declare Muslims as deeply loving of Islam and the Prophet, and the Entente powers as the enemies of their religion, respect, and progress.⁷² Hence, it is interesting to note that the editions regularly cite both Muslims and Indians to be the victims of the Entente powers simultaneously and often without connection to each other. The issues do not follow any structure for content or present detailed evidence for the claims made in them. This suggests a deliberate strategy to provoke unrest without a coherent narrative, blending the grievances of distinct groups to fuel discontent across multiple fronts.

Although the Hindi versions of the paper mostly focus on utilising anti-colonial and nationalist rhetoric without the mention of *jihad*, *Hindostan's* Urdu papers illustrate how various conflicting ideas were simultaneously used to incite anti-British sentiment in readership. Although the Urdu and Hindi editions were separated in language and content, the singular title *Hindostan* invokes a complex confluence of religious and ethnic nationalism. An analysis of the contextual complexities surrounding German propaganda requires a redefinition of the actors in and around it. As German propaganda activities were conducted in a war atmosphere where multiple ideas were communicated, it can be understood as a “process involving mutable official strategies” by which actors tried to influence specific audiences and were also affected by them.⁷³ The next section studies how *Hindostan's* production was an inherent part of a dynamic, interactive, and multifaceted process of propaganda creation and dissemination.

Producing *Hindostan*: The IIC and the NfO

The study of intellectual dynamism in wartime Berlin necessitates a more nuanced understanding of the actors involved in and surrounding the German propaganda process. A separate bureau, the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (Intelligence Agency for the Orient, NfO) was created to manage propaganda for, “Oriental countries” and their, “special conditions.”⁷⁴ Although working in close cooperation with the Central Office for Foreign

70 *Hindostan*, Nr. 4, Nr. 6, Nr. 8, Nr. 24, and Nr. 30.

71 *Hindostan*, Nr. 1, and Nr. 8.

72 *Hindostan*, Nr. 4.

73 Liebau, “German Foreign Office,” 97.

74 *Ibid.*, 100.

Services, the specialised NfO functioned independently, basing its activities on Max von Oppenheim's strategy of revolutionising the enemy's colonies and the "Muslim World."⁷⁵ Although South Asian POWs were major targets of German propaganda organised by the NfO, they were also surrounded by Indian emigrants organised in the Berlin Indian Independence Committee (IIC), and many other Indian networks with diverse aims. Hence, as Liebau suggests, discerning a dualism of an "active, propaganda-producing group" and an "inactive, propaganda-consuming or receiving group" is problematic.⁷⁶ Despite asymmetrical power dynamics, the actors can be differentiated by a wide array of interests, instead of being perceived as, "homogenous and anonymous entities."⁷⁷

Although German propaganda for Indian POWs had specific aims, it originated from a wider culture of wartime propaganda activity centred around the strategy of psychological warfare. Heike Liebau draws attention to how facts and arguments in German publications not only often differed from the truth, but were arranged in ways that turned them into a driving force for public opinion and even policies.⁷⁸ This is illustrated by *Hindustan's* regular column about *Hindustan mein bechaini* (unrest and mutiny in India) which is featured in numerous issues. The literary style used for this column is vague and sensational, repeating the term *bechaini* (unrest), and detailing uncorroborated and incomplete news of discontent.⁷⁹ The propaganda machine curated information to form new streams of thought for its target audience.

South Asian anti-colonial activity in Germany was not limited to collaboration with the Germans. The Foreign Office reached out to many emigrants to participate in the propaganda process, offering financial and logistical support for their anti-colonial efforts. As Liebau posits, participation may also have been a means for many Indians living in Germany to avoid internment during the war. However, South Asian intellectuals, students, and emigrants partaking in various anti-colonial activities had already developed independent networks extending across Europe and the United States. Indian students from Halle, Abhinash Chandra Bhattacharya and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya approached the German foreign ministry as early as 1914, expressing their faith in Germany to defeat the British, and thus free colonised

75 Liebau, "German Foreign Office," 100.

76 Ibid., 97.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., 98. See more: Brigitte Hamann, *Der Erste Weltkrieg: Wahrheit und Lüge in Bildern und Texten* (Piper, 2004).

79 *Hindustan*, Nr. 9, Nr. 14, and Nr. 16.

nations from “slavery and oppression.”⁸⁰ Hence, a loose union of Indian emigrants and exile communities formed the Berlin Indian Independence Committee (IIC) in 1915 to organise their anti-colonial activity and collaborate with the NfO during the war.

Although South Asians could only assist in translations and highly regulated writing in *Hindustan’s* Hindi and Urdu editions, their participation showed that the propaganda process produced “collaborators,” an impermanent and mutating category of actors that were neither strictly propagandists nor its audience.⁸¹ As Oppenheim explained, *Hindustan’s* purpose was to instigate anti-British sentiments amongst Indian POWs, inspire them to travel to the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, convince Indian troops to mutiny, and wage *jihad* against the British. Although it was often referred to as “Oppenheim’s Indian Committee” in its early days, the IIC’s chief objective was not German military success, but India’s eventual freedom from colonial subjugation. Hence, despite the NfO’s extensive control over *Hindustan’s* production and reception, the newspaper stems from academic and political collaboration that not only had an impermanent and unclear structure, but subtly oscillated between a multitude of interests.

Around the same time, as the IIC focused on the long-term aim of Indian liberation, its political developments outgrew German interests. It was evident that the goal of the military establishment in Germany was to recruit *jihad*-ists and rebels from among the Indian prisoners of war to fight alongside the Turkish Army against the forces of the Entente. However, the IIC, while still in collaboration with the NfO, was following a more long-term aim of fostering anti-British sentiment among the Indian people, ultimately moving towards complete Indian independence.⁸² Ultimately, the IIC’s shifting membership and disregard for Germany’s short-term aims opened offices in neutral countries like Switzerland and Sweden to circumvent Berlin’s increased military intervention.⁸³

Although there was a certain amount of dual membership, members of the IIC were not always members of the NfO. The latter’s leadership, including Oppenheim in its early days, had considerable power in designating its Indian collaborators. Hierarchies between the two organisations were clearly defined by the Germans in terms of “members” and “coworkers.”⁸⁴ German personnel

80 Liebau, “German Foreign Office,” 103.

81 Ibid.

82 Liebau, “German Foreign Office,” 129.

83 Ibid., 107.

84 Ibid., 108.

were not only authorised to control the work done by natives but also to keep them under their surveillance. In 1915, the IIC was also charged with meeting standards prescribed by German authorities. Important decisions were to be approved by the Foreign Office or even military authorities and “German trustworthy people” were installed at each stage of the propaganda process.⁸⁵

The IIC’s loose internal structure and fluctuating membership meant that it had numerous differing interests. Most members were only associated with it for a certain period and in some cases, even the distinction between formal members and allies was not clear. The IIC reflected the complexities of the Indian Independence movement where personal conflicts between committee members, religious differences including attitudes towards pan-Islamism, and diverse political experiences caused a constant phenomenon of internal frictions in its shifting body. This is particularly reflected by the various references to enemies and victims in *Hindustan’s* issues. Its first edition mentions both *Hindustan ke dushman* (enemies of the Indian nation) and *Musalmanon ke dushman* (enemies of Muslims) at different points. Images of a pain-stricken *Hindustan*,⁸⁶ or Indian nation and evocative claims of the Entente nations’ intention to oppress all Muslims in the world are present in the same edition.⁸⁷ *Hindustan’s* text, therefore, constantly switches between categorising either Indians or Muslims as victims of the Entente, reflecting the co-existence of various interests and streams of thought.

Conclusion

By enjoining the German-Ottoman alliance with Muslim sympathies for the caliphate, German authorities assumed that Muslim POWs would be responsive towards pan-Islamic ideas. However, it is evident that *Hindustan’s* impact did not live up to German expectations. Although the war reports in the newspaper were read with great interest in the Indian camps, they did not seem to have any considerable effect in inciting rebellious attitudes against the British. Moreover, camp propagandists discovered that despite the newspaper’s dissemination, POWs did not find the ideas in the newspaper convincing unless visits from native collaborators legitimised its content.

85 Ibid.

86 *Hindustan rota hai. Iss ki awaaz sunno. Woh takleef ke samundar mein dooba hai. Iss ko bachao. Aur jab tum aisa karo ge toh tumhara naam attal rahe ga* (*Hindustan* is harkening for you, listen to her cry. She is in a sea of pain and only you can save her. And if you act today, your names will be decorated for centuries to come). *Hindustan*, Nr. 5.

87 *France, Inglistaan, aur Ruus chahtay hain ke musalmaanoun pe zulm kia jaavay aur sab musalmaan maar daalay jaavein* (France, England, and Russia desire to oppress Muslims around the world. They hope to annihilate Islam for their own gains). Ibid.

Even German commanders found the Indian emphasis on patriotic action and agitation as troublesome for German regulation and control within camps, which as Ravi Ahuja argues, was not the object of their propaganda.⁸⁸ Although Ferdinand Graetsch observed that POWs wanted more of the paper, the fact remains that only 49 out of a 1,000 POWs joined the *jihad* in Turkey and none incited mass revolts against the British in India. Consequently, it can be argued that reducing *Hindostan* to a mere source of German propaganda is far from forming authentic and holistic assessments of the complicated cross-cultural interactions that took place during the First World War.

As Heike Liebau mentions in her writings, although there is still considerable research to be done on *Hindostan*, it reflects conflictual, concurrent, and dynamic interests in its production process. As the content and production context of its Urdu editions illustrate, the newspaper hints at competing narratives of German propagandist control and Indian individualistic contributions. At the same time, much of its content also merges the two voices into a singular propagandist one. As this research shows, despite German regulation, *Hindostan's* production oscillates between the many thematic avenues amidst a changing war context, reflecting a fluidity in the political and socio-cultural positioning of the identities involved in it. The fact that these con-current, overlapping, and diverse ideas find their way into newspaper production and composition shows that *Hindostan* is not just a historical source of propaganda but can also be characterised as a rare theatre of the First World War. Further research on the pieces published in it and the personalities who wrote them could become a ground-breaking step in exploring the historical intricacies of this theatre.

Studies on *Hindostan's* production and reception amidst the context of the First World War are significant for the wider literature on colonial prisoners of war in Germany, which is a relatively under-researched topic in historical studies. This assessment is formed by observing how German Orientalist traditions evolved through the German academic and political context and impacted its propaganda strategy in the years leading up to and during the war. These traditions also played a pivotal role in forming German perceptions of Islamic warfare and its utilisation to incite rebellion in the Entente's global empire to weaken it. Simultaneously, this paper demonstrated how diverse political experiences and the shifting nature of Indian collaboration complicated the German propaganda process. It also assessed *Hindostan's* linguistic and thematic composition, illustrating the interplay of converging

88 Roy Ahuja, "Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asian Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915-1918," in *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, eds. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, & Roy Ahuja (Social Science Press, 2011), 17-53.

and diverging motivations in it. By situating *Hindustan* in a wider historical context it is evident that it is not just a source of German propaganda but embodies interactive and conflictual processes of production during the First World War.