

Just ‘a Strange Polish Muslim’? Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt, the 1905 Global Moment and Biography in Global Intellectual History

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In his work¹ *La Pologne et l’Islam* (‘Poland and Islam’), Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt (1881–1936), the travelling activist of Polish origin, sketched an intriguing plan for the independence of the country of his ancestors:

A free Poland, with a federation of Slavic people rallied around it, will emerge from the smouldering ruins of this empire of blood and ice. Delivered by the intimate union of the Polish and Muslim armies, it [Poland] will become the most loyal ally of Turkey. We can already see this future come to life thanks to the Polish patriots’ intransigence and the Japanese army’s victory!²

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth disappeared from the map of Europe in the last quarter of the eighteenth century following a series of partitions at the hands of the neighbouring states: the Russian and Austrian Empires and the Kingdom of Prussia.³ For Gasztowtt and many of his compatriots, the issue of Poland’s independence was central to their political activism. During his lifetime, Gasztowtt became a roving activist for this cause.

In metaphorical language, Gasztowtt puts forward a scenario in which Poland would regain sovereignty from the Russian Empire thanks to an Ottoman military intervention resulting from Polish-Muslim political cooperation. As an independent state, Poland would become the Ottoman Empire’s closest ally. The timing of this statement was not coincidental. Gasztowtt points to Japan’s victory in the 1904–1905 war against Russia. He also refers to the events of the 1905 Russian Revolution, which also encompassed the lands of Russian-controlled Poland and marked a watershed moment in the history of post-partition Poland-Lithuania.

¹ I am grateful to my former colleagues from the *Graduate School Global Intellectual History* of the Freie Universität Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Daniel Kolland, Sébastien Tremblay, Leonie Wolters and Luc Wodzicki as well as to Alekos Lamprou, Nazan Maksudyan, Esther Möller, Deirdre Moore, Noring Neuve, Inger Marie Okkenhaug, Abel Solans, Anna Laura Turiano and Yair Wallach for their feedback on various drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their comments on this paper and the Max Weber Programme of the European University Institute for its institutional support.

² THADÉE GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l’Islam: notes historiques* (Paris: Société française d’imprimerie et de librairie, 1907), 211.

³ I refer interchangeably to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or by its shorter version Poland-Lithuania when I speak of the geographical location. When I speak of ‘Poland’ as a hypothetical idea, while discussing geopolitical projects, I simply use the word ‘Poland.’

The research agenda of the *Graduate School Global Intellectual History* of the Freie Universität Berlin and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin points to a simple yet crucial premise for the burgeoning field of global intellectual history: ‘No ideas without people—taking this simple insight seriously means that we will have to interrogate biographies, social backgrounds and personal interests [...] to gain a differentiated understanding of intellectual exchange.’⁴ The authors of this research agenda emphasise the role of historical actors and their agency in better understanding transregional and cross-cultural transfers of concepts and ideas.

Taking these basic tenets as a starting point, the following pages discuss the opportunities offered by a biographical approach to global intellectual history. To illustrate my ideas, I concentrate on the case study of Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt. Colonial and ministerial archives are full of accounts of roaming Muslims who circulated across the southern coasts of the Mediterranean and, at one time or another, aroused the interest of colonial authorities. The case of Gasztowtt, a third-generation Polish émigré born and raised in Paris, is nonetheless remarkable. In the light of European colonial expansion in the first two decades of the twentieth century, he tied the issue of Poland’s independence to the Ottoman Empire and, more broadly, to the Muslim and non-Western world. He acted as a travelling transcultural mediator in the territories of today’s Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Turkey.

In this paper, I first reflect on biography as an approach to global history. I then engage with the notion of a global moment. Finally, I focus on Gasztowtt’s case and his activism in the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire in North Africa in the wake of Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905.

My chief contention is that focusing on mobile individuals who crossed national, imperial, or regional boundaries, and operated in transcultural settings helps when examining so-called global moments. Thanks to the biographical approach, we can better grasp the key dialectic of how historical actors were shaped by such watershed events and were, at the same time, productive in them. Focusing on individual life stories can help us understand how major turning points in international history become global moments. These moments gain global significance only by virtue of activists like Gasztowtt seizing them and employing them in the service of their respective causes.

Global History and Biography

The field of global history increasingly recognises that biography can be a useful approach for interpreting border-crossing processes and examining the dynamics of the past. Over a decade ago, Tonio Andrade encouraged scholars of global history to use a biographical approach. He advocated for global history to be populated by ‘real people’ who ‘inhabited’ and ‘lived through’ the structures and large-scale processes that

⁴ ‘Research Agenda: Actors and their strategies,’ *Graduate School Global Intellectual History*, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://www.gih.global-history.de/research-agenda/actors/index.html>.

were the main point of interest of global historians.⁵ Sebastian Conrad has argued that following individual lives leads to 'fascinating insights into processes of global change and how they frame the space for individual agency. Not least, micro-perspectives are able to reveal the heterogeneity of the past and the stubbornness of historical actors.'⁶ Recently, there has been an increased interest in mobile individuals, whose lives and trajectories have been alternately described as 'global ways of life' (*Globale Lebensläufe*), 'transnational lives,' or 'lives beyond borders.'⁷ The recent volume *Global Biographies: Lived History as Method* engages with methodological discussions involving the ability of biographies to open up questions of time, space, and self in global history.⁸ 'Lives beyond borders' is an analytical perspective that guides historical research about the global past by acknowledging that historical actors are an interface between global, national, and local frames of reference.⁹ Biography offers an opportunity to illuminate, nuance, and complicate narratives that evolve on different scales of analysis. This genre also allows for the inclusion of a greater range of geographical spaces.

This paper contends that placing mobile historical actors in the foreground elucidates cross-cultural intellectual transfer and entanglement processes. Biography allows us to track historical actors' intellectual trajectories and identify the key factors responsible for major shifts in their directions. Following individual life stories gives us insight into historical actors' ideas and the strategies they used to pursue their agendas. Biographies of exiles and migrants are particularly useful in this regard. The biographical approach provides a unique perspective to explore the ongoing interplay between individual agency and the impact of the surrounding structures.

Global Moments and Mobile Biographies

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a global consciousness emerged throughout much of the rapidly globalising imperial world. The development of information and communications technologies since the mid-nineteenth century aided

⁵ TONIO ANDRADE, 'A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory,' *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 573–91 (574, 591).

⁶ SEBASTIAN CONRAD, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 131.

⁷ BERND HAUSBERGER, ed., *Globale Lebensläufe: Menschen als Akteure im weltgeschichtlichen Geschehen* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2006); DESLEY DEACON, PENNY RUSSELL, and ANGELA WOOLLACOTT, eds, *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700–Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); MADELEINE HERREN and ISABELLA LÖHR, eds, *Lives Beyond Borders: A Social History, 1880–1950, Comparativ* 23, no. 6 (2013). See also: ELLEN FLEISCHMANN, "'I only wish I had a home on this globe": Transnational Biography and Dr. Mary Eddy,' *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 108–30; JOHN-PAUL A. GHOBRIAL, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,' *Past & Present* 222 (2014): 51–93. The most notable contribution to the biographies of mobile actors who operated in various trans-imperial contexts has so far come from early modern historians. See NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS, *Trickster Travel: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); EMMA ROTHSCHILD, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); MILES OGBORN, *Global Lives. Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁸ LAURA ALMAGOR, HAAKON A. IKONOMOU, and GUNVOR SIMONSEN, eds, *Global Biographies: Lived history as method* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

⁹ ISABELLA LÖHR, 'Lives Beyond Borders, or: How to Trace Global Biographies?' in *Lives Beyond Borders*, eds HERREN and LÖHR, 6–20 (18).

the faster circulation of information and ideas through increased flows of people and new media in the form of telegraphs, newspapers, periodicals, and postal services.¹⁰ These developments contributed to and allowed for the emergence of specific and global forms of challenge and resistance to the status quo.¹¹

The period of globalisation between the 1880s and 1930s incited a reimagination of social and political structures. One of the characteristics of these changes was the rise of oppositional political movements and the establishment of networks whose goal was to undermine the imperial world order. This was a period when multiple alternative visions of the global status quo were proposed and typically discussed and negotiated between networks extending beyond the boundaries of nation-states and cultural spheres.¹²

Conrad and Sachsenmeier suggest that a better understanding of the transnational character of these debates can be achieved by examining both the temporal and spatial dimensions of this conjecture: the global moment. Global moments are ‘specific events [...] that had at least some degree of impact on most societies in the world and the global movements connected to them.’¹³ They represent ‘the major turning points in international history that altered both the power configuration and legitimacy claims of the world order.’¹⁴ Characteristic during this phase of globalisation, they sparked international networking, and ‘allowed oppositional movements to connect with forces and political actors across a variety of social and cultural settings.’ As such, they represented ‘focal points for a whole set of different hopes and anxieties that coalesced around the notion of an interconnected future.’¹⁵

One archetypical global moment is the victory of Japan over Russia in the 1904–1905 war. As scholar Rotem Kowner asserts:

If the Russo-Japanese War carried any global significance, it lay not in its origins, in the actual warfare, in the diplomatic alliances, or in financial support obtained during the war, but in its repercussions. Although these were associated directly with the decline

¹⁰ SEBASTIAN CONRAD and DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER, ‘Introduction: Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s,’ in *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s*, eds CONRAD and SACHSENMAIER (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–25 (13); ILHAM KHURI-MAKDISI, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 16.

¹¹ KHURI-MAKDISI, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 16.

¹² CONRAD and SACHSENMEIER, ‘Introduction,’ 9.

¹³ CONRAD and SACHSENMEIER, ‘Introduction,’ 9.

¹⁴ CEMIL AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6.

¹⁵ CONRAD and SACHSENMEIER, ‘Introduction,’ 12–13. For examples of works which approach global history through an investigation of global moments, see CONRAD and SACHSENMAIER, eds, *Competing Visions of World Order*; AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*; EREZ MANELA, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

of Russia and the rise of Japan, they had a wide-ranging effect on numerous nations, regions, and spheres.¹⁶

Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 was interpreted throughout the non-Western world—from the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Iran to India and China—as the first victory of an Asian, 'yellow' race nation against a major 'white' and Christian European empire. In short, it symbolised a defeat of the 'West' by the 'East' and hence established a consciousness of the era as the 'awakening of the East.'¹⁷ Following the war, non-Western commentators wrote numerous articles that either hailed Japan's victory as belying Western claims of permanent racial and cultural superiority or debated the possible lessons their societies could draw from Japan's modernising reforms.¹⁸

The Japanese victory marked a major turning point in the history of anti-Western critiques.¹⁹ The outcome of the war called into question the legitimacy and sustainability of the Eurocentric imperialist world order. It gave a spur to anti-Western internationalisms like Pan-Islamism and Pan-Asianism, the notions of Muslim and Asian solidarity formulated as responses to European imperialism and Orientalist discourses on race used to justify colonial expansion. The moment of enthusiasm associated with Russia's defeat allowed Pan-Islamism and Pan-Asianism to gain geopolitical currency. It made them the focus of discussions as potential alternatives to the existing global status quo.²⁰

The 1905 global moment constituted a point of departure for various anti-imperialist trajectories. Focusing on Seyfeddin Thadée Gasztowtt's case study, the following sections demonstrate how concentrating on mobile individuals who were active in transcultural settings is a productive approach to such watershed moments.

¹⁶ ROTEM KOWNER, 'Between a Colonial Clash and World War Zero. The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War in a Global Perspective,' in *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, ed. ROTEM KOWNER (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–25 (4).

¹⁷ AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 91–92; AYDIN, 'A Global Anti-Western Moment? The Russo-Japanese War, Decolonization, and Asian Modernity,' in *Competing Visions of World Order*, eds CONRAD and SACHSENMAIER, 213–36 (229).

¹⁸ AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 71–92; AYDIN, 'A Global Anti-Western Moment?'. Pankaj Mishra has skilfully weaved together the reactions to the news of the Japanese victory from various figures across the non-Western world. In the following years, these individuals were to become spokesmen for national causes in their respective countries: from Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-Sen to the Indian pacifists Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore to the future founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal. See PANKAJ MISHRA, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 7–9. For a general overview of the reactions to the Japanese victory from various places on the globe, see KOWNER, 'Between a Colonial Clash and World War Zero,' 15–20. For the impact of the 1905 Japanese victory in the Muslim world, see KLAUS KREISER, 'Der japanische Sieg über Russland (1905) und sein Echo unter den Muslimen,' *Die Welt des Islam* 21, no. 1–4 (1981): 209–39. For the impact of the Japanese victory in the Ottoman context, see RENÉE WORRINGER, 'Rising Sun over Bear: The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War upon the Young Turks,' in *L'ivresse de la liberté. La révolution de 1908 dans l'Empire ottoman*, ed. FRANÇOIS GEORGEON, Collection Turcica 18 (Paris: Peeters, 2012), 455–84. For the impact of the Japanese victory on the rise of nationalism in British Egypt and India, see STEVEN G. MARKS, "'Bravo, Brave Tiger of the East!' The Russo-Japanese and the Rise of Nationalism in British Egypt and India,' in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, eds JOHN W. STEINBERG et al., vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 609–27.

¹⁹ See Chapter 4 of AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 71–92.

²⁰ AYDIN, 'A Global Anti-Western Moment?', 223.

Individual stories can serve as a lens through which to study the complexity of transregional entanglements during an era of high imperialism. Accordingly, I examine the impact of the 1905 moment on Gasztowtt's physical and intellectual trajectory and I shed light on how Gasztowtt sought to influence this moment and became one of its makers.

From Paris to North Africa: Gasztowtt's 1905 Global Moment and Transcultural Entanglements in the Making

Throughout the nineteenth century, Poles staged several uprisings to regain independence. None of these movements succeeded. Born and raised in Paris, Gasztowtt was a descendant of the wave of Polish political emigration whose representatives settled in France following the failure of one such armed rebellion against the Russian Empire, the 1830–1831 November Uprising.²¹ The idea of Poland's independence was kept alive within the Polish community in Paris. Members of this community regarded themselves as heirs to the nineteenth-century tradition of Polish Romantic nationalism.²² Romantic nationalists advocated for an active fight towards the liberation of all oppressed peoples and promoted the idea of the brotherhood of all nations.²³

This ideological background was passed on to Gasztowtt during his upbringing in the Parisian Polish community. These ideas were a key source of inspiration for his intellectual stance. However, as he laid hold of this legacy, he readjusted previous ideas to contemporary circumstances. Confronted with the realities of the colonial expansion shaping the world order at the turn of the twentieth century, Gasztowtt did not see the issue of Poland's independence as separate from the developments of the age of high imperialism. Instead, he regarded it as an integral part of a larger cause that he hailed as the struggle for 'the liberation of the oppressed nations.'²⁴ Gasztowtt's first political manifesto challenged the existing imperialist world order. He initially published it on the pages of his youth monthly *A l'Assaut!* ('Attack!') in 1901–1902; his text envisioned the creation of a league of oppressed nations. This was to be a political alliance of various nationalist movements around the globe, basing their cooperation on common disenfranchisement and shared aspirations for national independence.²⁵ With the League of Oppressed Nations, Gasztowtt sought to inspire a movement to

²¹ On the nineteenth-century Polish political emigration, see SŁAWOMIR KALEMBKA, *Wielka Emigracja: Polskie Wychodźstwo Polityczne w Latach 1831–1862* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971); JERZY BOREJSZA, *Emigracja Polska po Powstaniu Styczniowym* (Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966).

²² IWONA H. PUGACEWICZ, 'Budowanie identyfikacji narodowej w Szkole Polskiej w Paryżu u schyłku XIX wieku,' in *Poza paradygmaty. Pedagogika Międzykulturowa, Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana prof. T. Lewonickiemu*, eds ALINA SZCZUREK-BORUTA and EWA GRODZKA-MAZUR, 2 vols, vol. 2 (Toruń: Wyd. Adam Marszałek, 2012), 277–97 (281–83).

²³ For Polish Romantic nationalism, see ANDRZEJ WALICKI, 'The Three Traditions in Polish Patriotism and Their Contemporary Relevance,' in *Polish Paradoxes*, eds ANTONY POLONSKY and STANISŁAW GOMUŁKA (London: Routledge, 1990), 21–39; BRIAN PORTER, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15–37.

²⁴ GABRIEL DAUCHOT and THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'Manifeste,' *A l'Assaut!* 1 (July 1901), 2.

²⁵ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'Vers l'indépendance,' *A l'Assaut!* 2 (August 1901), 17–18.

work towards undermining the imperialist global status quo and replacing it with a world of nation-states. Although Gasztowtt's league never succeeded, this project was the first expression of his opposition to the imperialist world order.

To realise his mission, Gasztowtt sought to establish relations with members of various political émigré groups present in Paris. At the turn of the twentieth century, Paris was a space where the paths of Polish and Ottoman emigrations crossed and mutual sympathies and support were openly expressed. This was not a coincidence. The Ottoman Empire was—alongside France and Britain—a chief destination for nineteenth-century Polish political émigrés. These stateless Poles fled to Istanbul, hoping to secure Ottoman support for regaining national independence. Despite the absence of a sovereign state, Polish-Ottoman relations in that period were characterised by far-reaching political cooperation; Polish and Ottoman interests converged against a common Russian danger. Istanbul became a key centre of Polish political emigration in the four decades from the early 1840s until the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War because of the welcoming attitude of Ottoman statesmen.²⁶ Throughout that period, Polish émigrés also participated in enterprises connected to the nineteenth-century Ottoman modernising reforms of the Tanzimat Era (1839–1876).²⁷

The Polish and Ottoman communities in Paris remembered this recent history of cooperation. Inspired by this, Gasztowtt developed relations with the exiled members of the Young Turk opposition against the authoritarian rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), most notably with the group's leader Ahmed Rıza (1858–1930).²⁸ These contacts, along with his discovery of the history of the Polish presence in the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Ottoman cooperation against Russian expansionism in Eastern Europe, were crucial in the development of his activism and his intellectual stance.

While Gasztowtt took his first steps as a political activist and advocate for Poland's independence in Paris in 1901, Japan's 1905 victory over Russia and the 1905 revolution in Russian-controlled Poland represented a major turning point in his physical and intellectual trajectory. The repercussions of these events were equally important for the so-called Polish question: the issue in international politics of whether Poland should be reinstated as a state. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese

²⁶ On Istanbul as a space for political activism for the nineteenth-century Polish emigration, see PAULINA DOMINIK, 'From the Polish Times of Pera: Late Ottoman Istanbul through the Lens of Polish Emigration,' in *History Takes Place: Istanbul. Dynamics of Urban Change*, eds ANNA HOFMANN and AYŞE ÖNCÜ (Berlin: Jovis, 2016), 92–103.

²⁷ On the activities of the Polish emigration in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, see ADAM LEWAK, *Dzieje Emigracji Polskiej w Turcji 1831-1878* (Warsaw: Instytut Wschodni, 1935); KAZIMIERZ DOPIERAŁA, *Emigracja Polska w Turcji w XIX i XX wieku* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Polonia, 1988); MUSA GÜMÜŞ, *Osmanlı Modernleşmesinde Yabancılar: Leh ve Macar Mülteciler* (Istanbul: Libra, 2019).

²⁸ For the Young Turk movement before the 1908 revolution, see ŞÜKRÜ M. HANIOĞLU, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); HANIOĞLU, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). On Ahmed Rıza, see ERDAL KAYNAR, *L'héroïsme de la vie moderne: Ahmed Rıza (1858-1930) en son temps* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021).

War stirred up excitement in the lands of former Poland-Lithuania, especially in the Russian partition. Polish independence circles at home and in exile saw Japan (Russia's foe) as a potential ally for their cause; they took various initiatives in the hope of turning the conflict to the advantage of the issue of Poland's independence.²⁹ Japan's victory exposed Russia's military weakness, and the 1905 revolution, which broke out amid the conflict with Japan, reawakened hopes for liberation among Poles. The events of 1905 in Russian-ruled Poland were simultaneously part of the democratic revolution in the Russian Empire and driven by aspirations for national independence. Given the intensity of the socially and nationally oriented struggle, the issue of Poland's independence returned to the international arena and it became an object of interest for the European Powers and their public opinion.³⁰

A constellation of global and local developments conditioned fundamental changes in Gasztowtt's discourse. These events prompted him to redefine his political agenda, which until then had been focused on the issue of Poland's independence and a broadly defined anti-imperialist cause. They inspired him to tie Poland's independence to a concrete geopolitical project. The atmosphere of enthusiasm connected to the 1905 moment, which marked the strengthening of anti-colonial movements and energised visions of an alternative world order among non-Western societies, represented a moment of opportunity that Gasztowtt seized to achieve his political goals.

During this period, Gasztowtt travelled extensively. This was the beginning of a self-imposed exile in the Muslim Mediterranean, which was to last until he died in Istanbul in 1936. His travels in North Africa included an extended stay in Tunisia in 1905–1908, several trips to Algeria in 1906 and a 1908 trip across North Africa—southwards to the Ottoman province of Tripolitania and on to Egypt—with Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, as his destination. He arrived in Istanbul on the eve of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.

As a site of imperial rivalry among the Ottomans and the Great Powers, North Africa was an interconnected space where cross-border migrations and intellectual transfers both frustrated and assisted imperial projects while enabling the envisioning of new types of solidarities that surpassed national and imperial categorisations.³¹ One of these attempted solidarities was Pan-Islamism, a vision of Muslim unity around the Ottoman sultan-caliph and an expression of the struggle against European imperialism.

²⁹ EWA PAŁASZ-RUTKOWSKA, 'Polish-Japanese Co-operation during the Russo-Japanese War: The Role of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski,' *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 52, no. 1 (1999): 5–14.

³⁰ On the 1905 Revolution in Russian-controlled Poland, see most notably ROBERT E. BLOBAUM, *Revolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); WIKTOR MARZEC, *Rising Subjects: The 1905 Revolution and the Origins of Modern Polish Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

³¹ For works that support this claim, see KHURI-MAKDISI, *The Eastern Mediterranean*; JULIA A. CLANCY-SMITH, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); GAVIN MURRAY-MILLER, 'Empire and Trans-Imperial Subjects in the Nineteenth Century Muslim Mediterranean,' *The Historical Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 958–79; MURRAY-MILLER, *Empire Unbound: France and the Muslim Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

In light of European colonial expansion in the non-Western world, Pan-Islamism grew as a movement and gained currency among Muslims both within and outside of the Ottoman Empire.³² After the French conquest of the Maghreb (Algeria in 1830 and Tunisia in 1881) and the British invasion of Egypt in 1882, the populations of Algeria, Tunisia, Tripolitania, and Egypt reversed their earlier trend of weakening their ties to the Ottoman Empire for more autonomy. The Ottoman state began to be seen by many local observers as the only protector from European colonial expansion. Meanwhile, Sultan Abdülhamid II sought to enhance loyalty towards the Ottoman state as the centre of the Caliphate. By posing as the caliph of all Muslims, he intended to overcome his diplomatic isolation among the European Powers and curb the aggressive Western imperialism that threatened the very existence of the Ottoman state.³³ The 1905 Japanese victory gave a boost to transnational ideologies, such as Pan-Islamism.

Gasztowtt's presence in Tunisia coincided with a growing discontent among the local Muslim elites with the protectorate's practices, which legally favoured French settlers (*colons*). The five years between 1906 and 1910 saw the development of a patriotic movement in Tunisia centred around a Pan-Islamic and pro-Ottoman outlook.³⁴ These sentiments were on the rise among the circles attached to the Zaytuna Great Mosque—one of the first universities in the history of Islam—and among those Tunisians who received a Western-style education, who formed the Young Tunisian movement.³⁵

By 1905, Tunis had become Gasztowtt's new base. Seeing representatives of the circles grouped around the Zaytuna Mosque and the Young Tunisians as fellow companions in the struggle against European imperialism, Gasztowtt developed relations with both.³⁶ Among them, contacts with Shaykh Šāliḥ al-Sharīf (al-Tūnisī, 1869–1920) had a major impact on Gasztowtt's trajectory. Descendant of an '*ulamā*' (religious scholar) family from Kabylia in Algeria and Pan-Islamist, he was a professor at the Zaytuna university-mosque in Tunis when he and Gasztowtt met in September 1905.³⁷ Gasztowtt called him one of his 'wisest and best friends.'³⁸ In the fall of 1906,

³² On Pan-Islamism, see most notably AYDIN, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, AYDIN, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017); NIKKI R. KEDDIE, 'Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism,' *The Journal of Modern History* 41, no. 1 (1969): 17–28; JACOB LANDAU, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

³³ KEDDIE, 'Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism,' 19; LANDAU, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, 36–69.

³⁴ MAHMOUD ABDELMOULA, *Le mouvement patriotique de libération en Tunisie et le panislamisme (1906–1920)* (Tunis: Éditions MTM, 1999), 10, 37, 77–81; TAOUFIK AYADI, *Mouvement réformiste et mouvements populaires à Tunis (1906–1912)* (Tunis: Imprimerie officielle de la République tunisienne, 1986), 37, 142.

³⁵ For the Young Tunisian movement, see: AYADI, *Mouvement réformiste*, NICOLA A. ZIADEH, *Origins of Nationalism in Tunisia* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1969).

³⁶ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'En Pays d'Islam (Correspondance),' *Bulletin Polonais littéraire, scientifique et artistique (BPLSA)* 235 (15 February 1908), 48; Paris, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [The Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France] (AMAE) 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: Annex to the telegram from Tunis – No 13 – About Mr Gasztowt (Thadée Arthur) (07.04.1908).

³⁷ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'Correspondance de Tunis,' *BPLSA* 222 (15 January 1907), 12–13.

³⁸ GASZTOWTT, 'Correspondance de Tunis,' 12–13.

Şāliḥ al-Sharīf set off on self-imposed exile to the Ottoman lands as a protest against French rule in Tunisia.³⁹ If we are to believe Gasztowtt, Şāliḥ al-Sharīf was ‘a friend of Poland,’ who was knowledgeable of the Polish plight and informed of the Polish-Ottoman historical contacts.⁴⁰ Gasztowtt would later collaborate with Şāliḥ al-Sharīf and another self-exiled shaykh and former Hanafī *qāḍī* (judge) of Tunis Ismā‘īl al-Şafā’ihī (1856–1918) in Istanbul after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.⁴¹ During the First World War, Şāliḥ al-Sharīf and Ismā‘īl al-Şafā’ihī were to play a leading role in the Ottoman-German Pan-Islamic propaganda efforts and became spokesmen for Maghrebi independence.

Gasztowtt’s experiences in North Africa and the connections he developed there were critical to reformulating his anti-imperialist agenda. He grasped the existing trends in the region and mobilised them to pursue his political agenda, while he searched for alternative, non-European alliances for Poland’s independence. This outreach was motivated on the one hand by his growing disillusionment with Europe’s inertia—especially that of France—towards Poland’s independence, and on the other by his first-hand experience of the realities of French rule in Tunisia and Algeria.

During his stay in Tunisia and travelling activism across the Muslim Mediterranean, Gasztowtt acted as a spokesman for Poland’s independence. He sought to establish relations with representatives of local movements opposed to European rule and Ottoman statesmen present in the region, sounding out attitudes towards the Polish question and verifying the potential for political cooperation. Gasztowtt aimed to form a transregional political entanglement between the Polish question and the Muslim world. To achieve this, he advocated a joint Polish-Muslim cause (*la cause polono-islamique*⁴²) against European imperialism and acted as a Pan-Islamic agitator.

Unexpected Alliances: Muslims and Poles against European Imperialism

Gasztowtt’s experiences in North Africa after the 1905 Japanese victory led him to reposition Poland geopolitically and culturally towards the Muslim world. In May 1906, he launched his flagship campaign for the common Polish-Muslim cause against West European and Russian imperialism.⁴³ This campaign remained central to his rhetoric throughout the following decade. While the recent history of nineteenth-century Polish-Ottoman cooperation against Russia was an essential point of reference for

³⁹ GASZTOWTT, ‘Correspondance de Tunis,’ 13–14. ABDELMOULA, *Le mouvement patriotique*, 96; ARNOLD H. GREEN, *The Tunisian Ulama 1873-1915: Social Structure and Response to Ideological Currents* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 235; JAMES MCDUGALL, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 81.

⁴⁰ GASZTOWTT, ‘Correspondance de Tunis,’ 13.

⁴¹ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: On Ismā‘īl al-Şafā’ihī and Şāliḥ al-Sharīf (22.02.1907). See also ABDELMOULA, *Le mouvement patriotique*, 90–91; GREEN, *The Tunisian ulama*, 179–80, 223, 281.

⁴² GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l’Islam*, 139.

⁴³ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, ‘La presse arabe et l’opinion musulmane sur la Pologne,’ *BPLSA* 214 (15 May 1906), 129–33.

Gasztowtt's ideological outlook, he reworked this legacy in accordance with the geopolitical conditions of the era, the heyday of imperialism. Blurring the intellectual boundaries between Eastern Europe and the Middle East, he advocated for a joint Muslim-Slav alliance under Ottoman and Polish leadership and proposed this in his *La Pologne et l'Islam*:

Who knows, perhaps the alliance of Turkey, the head of the Muslim world, with Poland, who is soon to become the moral leader of the Slavs, and with the Hungarians and the confederated Scandinavians, which in the past was advocated by our Polish statesmen, will soon be revived⁴⁴

La Pologne et l'Islam allows us to trace the geopolitical and cultural repositioning of Poland in Gasztowtt's vision of a world order. The text was published in 1907 and inspired by his stay in North Africa. It is a comprehensive work on the historical contacts from the fourteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century between Poland (the Kingdom of Poland, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Polish political emigration after the demise of a sovereign state) and the Muslim world, which for Gasztowtt was essentially synonymous with the Ottoman Empire. To account for Poland's long-standing ties with the Muslim world, Gasztowtt dedicated a separate chapter to the presence of the Tatar minority in the lands of former Poland-Lithuania since the fourteenth century. By examining the history of contacts, he sought to demonstrate that the Poles and the Muslims had been united for centuries by a long-standing friendship and through their shared interests.⁴⁵ *La Pologne et l'Islam* was addressed above all to a Muslim audience. Gasztowtt sought to shape an image of Poland as a country friendly to the Muslim world, promote Polish-Muslim political cooperation, and demonstrate that the Polish nation was a viable ally in the joint struggle against European imperialism. He offered copies of *La Pologne et l'Islam* to the members of the local movements opposed to European rule and to the Ottoman statesmen he met during his stay in Tunisia and his subsequent tour of North Africa.⁴⁶

Gasztowtt's disillusionment with what he assessed as European inaction towards, or even European betrayal of, the Polish question was at the core of his advocacy of a joint Polish-Muslim cause. He expressed similar ideas in *La Pologne et l'Islam* and the Paris-based émigré monthly *Bulletin Polonais* ('The Polish Bulletin'), directed primarily at a Polish audience. He wrote about the 'hatred, treason, ingratitude and guilty indifference of the European Powers.'⁴⁷ His advocacy for political cooperation was based on his conviction that the Poles and Muslims shared common interests vis-à-vis European colonial expansion.⁴⁸ Drawing parallels between the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, on the one hand, and the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman war (as a result of which the Ottoman Empire lost most of its possessions in the

⁴⁴ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 347.

⁴⁵ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 7.

⁴⁶ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: Report of the consul general of France in Tripoli Alric to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Pichon – About Mr Gachtoft, a Pan-Islamist (04.05.1908).

⁴⁷ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'Correspondance de Tunis,' *BPLSA* 232 (15 November 1907), 310.

⁴⁸ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 319.

Balkans), the 1881 French occupation of Tunisia, and the 1882 British invasion of Egypt on the other, Gasztowtt asserted that ‘the chief European governments had always plotted against Turkey and the Muslim nations, just as they had crushed Poland or allowed for it to be crushed.’⁴⁹

Gasztowtt’s project of a Muslim-Polish, and by extension a Muslim-Slav, alliance was a protest at what he regarded as unequal treatment by the Great Powers towards Polish independence and the Ottoman Empire, which had been increasingly becoming a target of European colonial aspirations. The realisation of the alliance would both ensure a balance of powers in the region directly exposed to Russian territorial expansion and form a viable counterweight to European colonialism. Gasztowtt’s stay in North Africa was fundamental in bridging the Eastern European and Muslim experiences of imperialism: the stateless Poles, the Muslims who lived under European rule, and the Ottoman state were, in his eyes, victims of the same imperialism. Thus, he called for their cooperation on both the diplomatic and military levels.⁵⁰

Gasztowtt eagerly juxtaposed the alleged inertia of Western European statesmen and public opinion towards Poland’s independence with the expressions of sympathy and solidarity he encountered first in Paris among the exiled Young Turks and subsequently during his travels in North Africa.⁵¹ During his travels across North Africa he reported on various instances of sympathy for Poland’s independence. He maintained, however, that he encountered the greatest familiarity with the Polish question among the Ottoman state dignitaries he met in Tripolitania.⁵² For him, the interests of both Poland and the Ottoman Empire were interconnected thanks to the Ottoman statesmen’s earlier support of Poland’s independence and the sympathetic attitudes towards Poles on the part of the Young Turks in exile and other Ottoman dignitaries.

The Young Turk leader Ahmed Rıza’s stance best illustrates this point. Ahmed Rıza highlighted the commonality of Polish and Ottoman political interests on the pages of his Parisian fortnightly *Mechveret. Supplément Français* (‘Consultation. A Supplement in French’) by describing the Poles and the Ottomans as ‘two brave peoples who were warmed up by the same sacred fire and who often showed solidarity to defend the same cause of justice.’⁵³ Although Ahmed Rıza recognised that Poland’s independence could not be achieved in the immediate future, he asserted that, as an Ottoman, he wished it not only as an act of justice but also as a development that was in the best interests of his country.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l’Islam*, 341.

⁵⁰ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, ‘Correspondance de Tunis,’ *BPLSA* 222 (15 January 1907), 16; GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l’Islam*, 7.

⁵¹ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, ‘La presse arabe et l’opinion musulmane sur la Pologne,’ 132.

⁵² THADÉE GASZTOWTT, ‘En Pays d’Islam IV (Correspondance),’ *BPLSA* 238 (15 May 1908), 126. I examine the engagement of Gasztowtt’s interlocutors in North Africa with the issue of Poland’s independence in my monograph that is currently in preparation.

⁵³ A[HMED]. R[IZA], ‘Manifestation déplacée,’ *Mechveret* 107 (1 December 1900), 3.

⁵⁴ A. R., ‘Manifestation déplacée,’ 3.

Furthermore, Ahmed Rıza regularly called for Polish-Ottoman cooperation against Russia's expansionism. In 1903, he asserted the need for a political alliance between the Ottomans, Poles, and Hungarians.⁵⁵ He reiterated this idea at the outbreak of the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese war when he dubbed the Russian Empire the common enemy of the Ottomans, Poles, and Hungarians. He regarded their cooperation as the *sine qua non* condition for maintaining regional security, which was the critical sphere of Russia's territorial expansion in the West.⁵⁶ Ahmed Rıza's attitude was pivotal in Gasztowtt's advocacy for the aforementioned political alliance at this particular moment.⁵⁷ In turn, his activism favouring a Polish-Muslim rapprochement and his commitment to the Ottoman Empire prompted Ahmed Rıza to endorse Gasztowtt's political projects. In a 1907 article, he agreed with Gasztowtt that the Poles and the Ottomans shared interests and enemies.⁵⁸ In the same article, Ahmed Rıza called for a political union of the Ottoman Empire, 'Scandinavia, Poland, and Hungary,' and expressed his satisfaction that Gasztowtt had championed the exact same cause.⁵⁹ The Young Turk leader's stance demonstrates that Gasztowtt's ideas fell on fertile ground. Ahmed Rıza's outlook must, in turn, be read against the backdrop of the more general disillusionment of the Young Turks with the West and the Great Powers' international politics at the turn of the century.⁶⁰

In his drive to advocate for a joint Polish-Muslim cause, Gasztowtt went as far as to reinvent the image of Poland and Poles as a country and society culturally attached to the Muslim world. In one of his correspondences, he concluded his account of a stroll through the bazaars of Tunis with a reference to Poland-Lithuania's cultural heritage, writing: 'Poland is truly a country of the Near East!'⁶¹ His arguments ranged from the 'Ottomanisation' of the fashions worn by the Polish-Lithuanian nobility through the centuries-long presence of Tatar Muslims in the country of his ancestors to finding contemporary cultural affinities.⁶²

During his travels in North Africa, Gasztowtt acted as a transcultural mediator who translated between different social, political and cultural contexts. He sought to connect the Muslims of these territories and his Polish compatriots in favour of a common struggle against the Eurocentric imperialist global status quo, which he had deemed unjust since the earliest years of his activism in Paris. Gasztowtt's writings represent examples of cross-cultural communication, in which he sought to demonstrate to his target audiences—Muslims and Poles—that both groups were culturally close, shared a common predicament, and should take joint political action.

⁵⁵ A.R., 'Magyars et Arméniens,' *Mechveret* 136 (15 February 1903), 4.

⁵⁶ A.R., 'Légitimes souhaits,' *Mechveret* 150 (1 April 1904), 3.

⁵⁷ GASZTOWTT, 'La presse arabe et l'opinion musulmane sur la Pologne,' 133.

⁵⁸ A.R., 'Les Polonais et les Turcs,' *Mechveret* 194 (1 December 1907), 3–4.

⁵⁹ A.R., 'Les Polonais et les Turcs,' 3–4.

⁶⁰ ERDAL KAYNAR, 'Les Jeunes Turcs et l'Occident, histoire d'une déception programmée,' in *«L'ivresse de la liberté»*, ed. GEORGEON, 27–64.

⁶¹ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'En Pays d'Islam II (Correspondance),' *BPLSA* 236 (15 March 1908), 72.

⁶² GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 320–28, 336–40.

A Pan-Islamic Agitator

Parallel to the championing of Polish-Muslim political cooperation, Gasztowtt's travels in North Africa marked the beginning of his advocacy for Pan-Islamism. His writings reported on a strong pro-Ottoman sentiment prevalent in North Africa. While in Algeria in 1906, Gasztowtt assessed the emergence of a shared Algerian identity as the chief outcome of French colonial rule. He highlighted a growing loyalty to the Ottoman sultan despite earlier animosities between Ottoman authorities and Algerians, reflected in Algerian efforts to gain more autonomy before the French occupation. Similarly, when sharing his experiences in Tunisia, Gasztowtt asserted that the 'Tunisian people placed their only hope in the Ottoman sultan and his army.'⁶³ His visit to Egypt in the summer of 1908 made him conclude that although the colonial system in Egypt was less oppressive, the Egyptians were 'partisans of a federation with the Ottoman Empire.'⁶⁴ Gasztowtt seized on pro-Ottoman sentiments, which expressed opposition to European rule, and a budding national movement. He sought to use these Pan-Islamic sympathies in the region to develop his political agenda.

The relations he forged with the advocates of Muslim-Ottoman solidarity in North Africa were crucial for his intellectual embrace of Pan-Islamism as an integral element of his political discourse. French colonial reports stress that during his stays in Tunisia and Algeria, Gasztowtt maintained contacts mainly with 'the local circles.'⁶⁵ A 1906 French report on foreign suspects and Pan-Islamic propaganda in Tunisia quotes Gasztowtt's name in relation to a Pan-Islamic agitator of Algerian origin, Khoualdia Salah (1880–after 1914).⁶⁶ After working for the Ministry of Colonies in Algiers (1901) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tunis (1903), Khoualdia Salah moved between Tunis, Tripoli, Malta, Cairo, Istanbul, and the Hejaz and had been under the observation of French agents on the basis of his Pan-Islamic activism since 1904.⁶⁷ Khoualdia Salah drew closer attention from the French authorities in 1906 after he published a series of Pan-Islamic pamphlets in French and Arabic distributed across North and Sub-Saharan Africa. He signed them as 'Salah Ben Essaid Omar el Khalidi el Hossaini' and used the important-sounding title 'President of the Central Committee of the Islamic Union in Istanbul.' Khoualdia Salah claimed that the goal of European governments was to subjugate the Muslim peoples and to put an end to Islam by weakening believers and creating divisions among them. He urged his coreligionists to

⁶³ Nantes, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes [The Centre of Diplomatic Archives in Nantes] (CADN) Tunisie 1TU/1/V 989: Review of the Muslim press – Ministry of Colonies – Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Resident General of France in Tunis (01.07.1908): Algeria-Tunisia, 11–14.

⁶⁴ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'En Égypte et chez nos amis les Turcs,' *BPLSA* 243 (15 October 1908), 275.

⁶⁵ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: Annex to the telegram from Tunis – No 13 – About Mr Gasztowt (Thadée Arthur) (07.04.1908).

⁶⁶ AMAE 26 Tunisie – 1 X 1906 – 15 III 1907: Political Affairs: Report on the foreign suspects and Pan-Islamic propaganda in the Regency of Tunis (September 1906), 45.

⁶⁷ On Khoualdia Salah see MOSTEFA HADDAD, 'Un pionnier du mouvement national algérien oublié: Khoualdia Salah ou la difficulté de l'intelligentsia "indigène" à s'exprimer au début du siècle,' *Revue d'histoire maghrébine* 61–62 (1991): 67–75; ARTHUR ASSERAF, *Electric News in Colonial Algeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 85–88.

unite their forces around the Ottoman sultan-caliph Abdülhamid II.⁶⁸ Khoualdia Salah's brochures were printed in Paris and brought to Tunisia by Gasztowtt, he also helped with their distribution.⁶⁹ The manifesto alarmed the colonial authorities, who arrested Khoualdia Salah after catching him circulating the brochures in Tangier. He was accused of collaborating with the Ottomans against the French authorities and expelled from Algeria and Tunisia.⁷⁰

Khoualdia Salah influenced Gasztowtt's Pan-Islamic discourse and he drew inspiration from his manifesto.⁷¹ In the conclusion of *La Pologne et l'Islam*, Gasztowtt urged his readers, echoing the former's manifesto:

Muslims, [...] it is your turn to brace together around the Ottoman dynasty—the founder of the only great Muslim power who has victoriously resisted the attacks of your common adversaries; unite around the Sultan of Turkey, Caliph of Islam, and those of you who find yourselves under the European yoke are going to enjoy a bright future. [...] Unite and do not listen to the agents of the division who are sent among you under thousands of pretexts but with a sole goal: to dominate you and crush you more easily by separating you from Turkey and the Sultan, your Caliph.⁷²

Gasztowtt sought to enhance the status of the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman sultan-caliph through his writings, just like his itinerant activism. The external threat—European colonial expansion—defined his key argument for promoting Muslim unity.⁷³ By embracing Pan-Islamic rhetoric, Gasztowtt sought to shape popular notions of Muslim-Ottoman solidarity as part of his commitment to the liberation of oppressed nations he had advocated since the first years of his political activism in Paris. The notion of Muslim solidarity provided him with a chance to put his anti-imperialist grievances into concrete geopolitical terms.

Gasztowtt's advocacy of Muslim unity was appealing to some of the North African Pan-Islamists. His position as a European who supported their cause added leverage to their grievances. In the spring of 1907, while in Cairo, Gasztowtt's series of articles in which he criticised the French administration in Algeria and Tunisia and called for Muslim unity were published by the leading Pan-Islamic newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad* ('The Supporter'). Gasztowtt's activism in North Africa alarmed the French colonial authorities and diplomats; articles in *al-Mu'ayyad* made the French *chargé d'affaires* in Egypt caution against the dangers of Europeans involving themselves in

⁶⁸ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: Subfolder Khoualdia Salah 1905–1906: Manifesto of the Central Committee of the Islamic Union (collected on the 28 February 1906); AMAE 433 Turquie – Panislamisme 1912–1918: Minister of Interior Affairs to the Minister of Foreign Affairs – No 27 – On the Central Committee of the Islamic Union (06.03.1914) – Manifesto of the Central Committee of the Islamic Union (24.09.1905).

⁶⁹ AMAE 433 Turquie – Panislamisme 1912–1918: Minister of Interior Affairs to the Minister of Foreign Affairs – No 27 – On the Central Committee of the Islamic Union (06.03.1914).

⁷⁰ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: About Khoualdia Salah, a Pan-Islamist – Consul General in Cairo to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (10.06.1908).

⁷¹ THADÉE GASZTOWTT, 'Correspondance de Tunis,' *BPLSA* 222 (15 January 1907), 15–17.

⁷² GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 344–45.

⁷³ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 344.

Pan-Islamic propaganda. European criticism of the French administration and endorsement of Ottoman hegemony over the Muslim lands in North Africa could easily be used by the Ottoman state propaganda and Muslim activists to add prestige to their cause vis-à-vis the colonial administration.⁷⁴

Gasztowtt's advocacy of Muslim unity was a strategic political move. His embrace of Pan-Islamism demonstrates the growing appeal of the Ottoman Caliphate and the notion of Muslim solidarity as an expression of opposition to European domination in North Africa. He seized the existing trends and used them to pursue his political agenda. He promoted the notion of a united Muslim front. This, in turn, was crucial for his advocacy of a Muslim-Polish/Slav political alliance that was to bring independence to Poland and become a counterweight to European imperialism. The enthusiasm surrounding the 1905 moment in the Muslim Mediterranean had a formative influence on Gasztowtt's intellectual trajectory. It incited him to tie together the Eastern European and Muslim experiences of imperial oppression. By taking up the Pan-Islamic discourse as an expression of his anti-imperialist critique, Gasztowtt took advantage of this moment.

Throughout his activism, Gasztowtt relentlessly fashioned himself as an 'international nationalist,' advocating for a world order of nation-states. However, by embracing Pan-Islamism and championing a Muslim-Slav alliance as a response to European colonial expansion following Japan's victory over Russia, Gasztowtt tied the issue of Poland's independence to the Ottoman imperial project and practised 'an anti-imperialist imperialism'⁷⁵ of sorts. His case demonstrates the complex relationship between nationalism, anti-imperialism, and imperialism in this period.⁷⁶

Thadée Becomes Seyfeddin

Gasztowtt's travels across post-1905 North Africa not only influenced his political agenda, they also had a lasting impact on his private trajectory. Movement across and within cultural and political systems opens spaces to reimagine the self. During his travels, Gasztowtt reinvented his persona. He converted to Islam and adopted a Muslim name: Seyfeddin, which translates as 'the sword of religion' [i.e., Islam] or 'religion's soldier.'⁷⁷ We first learn of this in an interview for the *Tanin* ('The Resonance') newspaper in the summer of 1908. Gasztowtt gave the interview a few weeks after his arrival in Istanbul. He was introduced as follows: 'The author of the book "Poland and Islam," Mr. Gaştöft, is a Pole who converted to Islam.'⁷⁸ Since this

⁷⁴ AMAE 432 Turquie – Panislamisme 1904–1911: The French chargé d'affaires in Cairo Le Vicomte Dejean to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Stephen Pichon – No 224 – About Mr Gasztowftt, a Pan-Islamic agitator (17.06.1908). I examine Gasztowtt's connections with North African advocates of Pan-Islamism extensively in my monograph that is currently in preparation.

⁷⁵ CEMIL AYDIN et al., 'Rethinking nationalism,' *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 1 (2022): 311–71 (331).

⁷⁶ For an insightful analysis of this topic, see Sebastian Conrad's contribution 'Empire and Nationalism' in AYDIN et al., 'Rethinking nationalism,' 327–32.

⁷⁷ *Redhouse Turkish/Ottoman-English Dictionary* (Istanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1968), 1008.

⁷⁸ İZZET MELİH, 'Lehistan ve İslamiyet,' *Tanin* 10 (28 Temmuz 1324/10 August 1908), 4.

was one of the first pieces of information that Gasztowtt gave, we can surmise that he was eager to disclose this new element of his identity while in the Ottoman Empire. However, he was more reserved about announcing his religious conversion to his Polish compatriots. Gasztowtt never mentioned becoming Muslim in any of his writings. In addition, although he signed his articles for the Ottoman press as Seyfeddin, he would only use the initial for this name (S. Thadée) in his publications addressed to Polish audiences.

Gasztowtt's conversion to Islam was not an exceptional case. During this period, one finds other European converts who were ardent defenders of the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Caliphate. The Englishmen Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932) and Marmaduke Pickthall (1875–1936) are notable examples of Turcophile converts. Quilliam was granted the title of the first Shaykh al-Islam of the British Isles by Sultan Abdülhamid II. Pickthall was, in turn, a partisan of the Young Turks and argued for Ottoman Turkish supremacy in the Muslim world.⁷⁹

Conversion to Islam was not a new phenomenon in the Polish context either. Gasztowtt was aware of the nineteenth-century émigré converts from former Poland-Lithuania. After the failure of the 1848–1849 Hungarian Revolution, a large group of Polish and Hungarian soldiers sought refuge within the Ottoman borders. Ottoman statesmen offered the newcomers the opportunity to convert to Islam to become Ottoman subjects and avoid extradition to Russia and Austria, respectively.⁸⁰ Most Poles dismissed this idea, claiming that a change of religion was tantamount to rejecting their Polishness. The leadership of Polish emigration in Paris protested at the proposal, arguing that the issue of faith could not be treated as a bargaining card in political matters. Eventually, a group of roughly thirty Poles—mostly of higher military rank—converted to Islam in the hope that this step would allow them to continue serving the cause of Polish independence in exile.⁸¹ Their decision was largely condemned by émigrés in France and the Ottoman Empire.⁸² Gasztowtt's attitude towards their step

⁷⁹ See for instance JAMIE GILHAM, *Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); GEOFFREY NASH, 'Abdullah Quilliam, Marmaduke Pickthall and the Politics of Christendom and the Ottoman Empire,' in *Victorian Muslim. Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West*, eds JAMIE GILHAM and RON GEAVES (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 79–96; RON GEAVES, 'Abdullah Quilliam (Henri de Léon) and Marmaduke Pickthall: Agreements and Disagreements between Two Prominent Muslims in the London and Woking Communities,' in *Marmaduke Pickthall: Islam and the Modern World*, ed. GEOFFREY P. NASH (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 72–88.

⁸⁰ The event was a turning point for the Polish presence in the Ottoman Empire. It caused a short-term international crisis between the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia, and Habsburg Austria. Russia and Austria insisted on the extradition of the Polish and Hungarian refugees, respectively, and the Sublime Porte refused to comply with this demand. Because of the Revolution's failure, nearly 900 Polish refugees settled in the Ottoman Empire. They were soldiers of all ranks and professions, who pursued careers in various fields after settling down in the Ottoman borders. See for instance BAYRAM NAZIR, *Osmanlı'ya Sığınanlar – Macar ve Polonyalı Mültteciler* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2006).

⁸¹ SELIM DERİNGİL, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 159–175; JERZY ZDANOWSKI, 'From Religious Conversion to Cultural Assimilation: Some Remarks on the Fates of Polish Immigrants in the Ottoman Empire (1831-1849),' in *Conversions islamiques: identités religieuses en Islam méditerranéen / Islamic Conversions: Religious Identities in Mediterranean Islam*, ed. MERCEDES GARCÍA-ARENAL (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), 444–55.

⁸² ZDANOWSKI, 'From Religious Conversion,' 449–50.

is revealing. In *La Pologne et l'Islam*, he praised these men's services to Poland and the Ottoman state. He referred to them as 'Muslim Poles' and argued for their sincerity in converting to Islam.⁸³ This former generation of Polish converts may have inspired his own choice later.

Gasztowtt's decision to convert to Islam can be read as an act of cultural transgression resulting from emigration and consequent cultural contact.⁸⁴ In his case, we can speak of a double emigration. He belonged to a third generation of Polish émigrés in France. The Polish community in Paris was an important centre of Polish culture where a specific type of émigré identity was cultivated among its members. However, Gasztowtt's travels in North Africa marked the beginning of his lifelong self-imposed exile. While his activism in the Muslim Mediterranean was primarily motivated by political reasons, his sojourn in the Maghreb and, subsequently, the Ottoman capital, can be read as an expression of his search for identity and place in a fragmented world. The Poland of Gasztowtt's ancestors cherished in his family home was no more than an idea. In this respect, his conversion can be seen as an attempt to forge a sense of belonging. In this reading, Islam was the cement for Gasztowtt's fragmented identity and an expression of his search to fill gaps in his background.

Gasztowtt's conversion to Islam can also be read as a political step. Given that the advocacy of Pan-Islamism was at the centre of his discourse, embracing Islam may have been a strategy to gain standing and credibility among the Muslims he intended to influence to realise his political agenda. As Seyfeddin Gasztowtt, he was no longer a Frenchman of Polish origin and a friend of Muslims or a Westerner who supported a Pan-Islamic cause. Instead, he became both a Pole and a Muslim, a former outsider who, by embracing Islam, was determined to become an insider. Both motivations are equally possible and by no means mutually exclusive. Gasztowtt continued to be known as Seyfeddin for the whole period that he lived in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey.

Istanbul was the last stop of Gasztowtt's travels in the Muslim Mediterranean. He arrived in the Ottoman capital shortly before the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, which overthrew Sultan Abdülhamid II's authoritarian regime and marked the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution. Given his earlier connections to the exiled Young Turks, Gasztowtt cooperated with the new political regime and sought to become its virtual spokesman while pursuing his political objectives. Once the overarching goal of his activism was fulfilled and Poland regained independence in 1918, his contacts and knowledge of the political realities in the region proved indispensable for the

⁸³ GASZTOWTT, *La Pologne et l'Islam*, 184–185, 196, 269–270.

⁸⁴ On cultural transgression, see HOMI K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), 55; TADEUSZ PALECZNY, 'Transgression as a Result of Cultural Contact,' *Politeja* 44 (2016): 231–50 (232, 234–35); LAILA ABU-ER-RUB et al., 'Introduction: Engaging Transculturality,' in *Engaging Transculturality. Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, eds LAILA ABU-ER-RUB et al. (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), xxiii–xliv (xxiv). On cultural transgression in the Polish context, see AGNIESZKA AYŞEN KAİM, *Ludzie dwóch kultur: Wybrane przypadki transgresji kulturowej Polaków w Imperium Osmańskim w XVII, XVIII i XIX wieku* (Warsaw: Instytut Sławistyki PAN, 2020).

diplomatic service of a newly established Polish state, and he was appointed as the First Secretary of the Polish Delegation of the Sublime Porte.⁸⁵

Conclusion

There are as many ways to interpret a transboundary life as there are ways to live one. Just as historical actors know more about their own lives than historians ever can, historians often grasp more about the context of those lives than the actors themselves. In this paper, I share my reflections on how biography can benefit the writing of global intellectual history. This is not to say that the only or most productive way to approach global moments is through stories of individuals. Neither will all individual stories work equally well for this endeavour. However, focusing on individuals helps us better understand how global moments come into being. This approach gives us insight into how historical actors were both produced by and, at the same time, actively involved in these watershed events. Admittedly, the project of a Muslim-Slav-Hungarian-Scandinavian alliance put forward by Gasztowtt in 1906 did not materialise. However, the events surrounding the 1905 moment prompted him to imagine such a political alliance and were the driving force of his activism.

The micro-level analysis offered by biography allows for a fuller comprehension of cross-cultural connections and the transfer of concepts and ideas. More broadly, we see the role played by individuals in the process of globalisation. The biographical approach is a way to apprehend the different ways in which global change reveals itself in local contexts. It allows the complexities of individual agency and strategies employed by actors to come to light. It underscores that ideas and practices cannot be dissociated in our study of the past.

In an era politically and intellectually defined largely by the East-West dichotomy and the discourse of Eastern inferiority, Gasztowtt's advocacy of Poland as geopolitically and culturally tied to the Muslim world and the emphasis he placed on what he regarded as the shared cultural heritage of Poles and Muslims complicates our understanding of the European gaze towards the East in the period under scrutiny.

Finally, focusing on individuals shows that watershed events impacted not only the public lives of historical actors but also had the potential to influence and change their private lives. This personal aspect can only be examined through a biographical approach and should not be seen as less important. Both public and private were strongly interconnected and are equally significant for our understanding of the past.

⁸⁵ I examine these subsequent stations of Gasztowtt's life in my monograph that is currently in preparation.