

California State University, San Bernardino

**CSUSB ScholarWorks**

---

Library Faculty Publications

John M. Pfau Library

---

2017

## Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam's International Influence: America, West Africa, and Beyond

Brent D. Singleton

California State University, San Bernardino, bsinglet@csusb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/library-publications>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Islamic Studies Commons](#), and the [Islamic World and Near East History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Singleton, Brent D., "Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam's International Influence: America, West Africa, and Beyond" (2017). *Library Faculty Publications*. 41.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/library-publications/41>

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

## **Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam's International Influence: America, West Africa, and Beyond**

**Brent D. Singleton**

Originally published in *Victorian Muslim: Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West*. London: Hurst Publishers, 2017, pp. 113-131.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, news concerning Abdullah Quilliam and the establishment of a community of British Muslim converts in Liverpool spread across the world, particularly among Muslims. As a well-placed Victorian convert to Islam in the heart of British Empire, Quilliam symbolized many things to Muslim communities worldwide, each group perceiving him in whatever light they needed to see him. For some Muslim converts in America he was a model, a mentor, and a mediator. For many Muslims in the British Empire, particularly West Africa, Quilliam provided a morale boost, a legitimatization for holding on to their religion and culture in the face of colonialism as well as a supporter—materially, emotionally, and spiritually. This chapter will discuss the relationship between Quilliam and the American converts; West African Muslims; and case studies of two Muslims from the wider British Empire who joined the Liverpool band of converts.

### **The Americans**

Quilliam's reputation and resulting status among his contemporary American Muslim colleagues was complex and ever shifting—case in point, Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb (1846-1916). By design, Webb and his Indian backers wove the model of Quilliam and the Liverpool Muslim Institute (LMI) into the “DNA” of the American Islamic Propaganda (AIP) movement. While U.S. Consul at Manila, Webb had been in correspondence for several years with Budruddin Abdullah Kur, a member of the Bombay Municipal Council, concerning Islam. In 1892, Kur introduced Webb to other Indian Muslims

interested in starting an Islamic mission to the United States.<sup>1</sup> The Indians fervently wanted to leave British-ruled India and immigrate to America, but they were reluctant to make the move without the establishment of Islamic institutions in the United States. Immediately, Quilliam's name was invoked to gain support for a proposal to send Webb to America to begin the process. Kur wrote in *The Times of India*, "About two years ago Mr. Quilliam, of Liverpool, appealed to the Indian Mussulmans to assist him to place the Liverpool Moslem Institute on a substantial basis. As I understand, within this period not more than forty thousand rupees have been remitted to England from different Mahomedan centres in India, with the result that we have now more than two hundred converts in England, and branch societies have been opened in Manchester and London."<sup>2</sup> Whether or not Kur's account is entirely accurate, the article illustrates how Muslims in Bombay were keenly aware of the Liverpoolian achievements when they set their eyes on America. Reflecting on this period, Webb wrote that, "Because of the success of the Liverpool movement[,] Hajee Abdullah Arab, a wealthy merchant of Jeddah, Arabia, suggested the idea of propagating the faith in America."<sup>3</sup> From that point forward, for better or worse, Webb's AIP movement and its offshoots – and offshoots of offshoots – would be inexorably linked to Quilliam.

After the agreement between Webb and the Indians had been reached, it was decided that Webb should travel across India as well as to Egypt, Turkey, and Liverpool to gain further support for his mission among Muslims. Soon after Webb's arrival in India, Kur published a letter in *The Times of India*, stating, "I should like to say a few words about my enthusiasm for the promotion of this American scheme. In order to emphasize my reason in support of this scheme, I shall place before your readers

---

<sup>1</sup> Howard MacQueary, 'American Mohammedanism', *Unitarian*, 8 (1893), p.104.

<sup>2</sup> *Times of India*, 25 November 1892, p.7. Geaves also mentions donations for printing works from an Indian source in 1892: Ron Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2010), p.71.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Russell Webb, 'Preaching Islam in America', *Providence Journal*, 14 (1893), p.469.

the results of the Liverpool Mission.”<sup>4</sup> Quilliam was regarded as key to American prospects for success; the thought being that, if a group of Muslim converts could establish itself in the heart of the British Empire, success in America was assured. As such, in India, Webb and Quilliam were often mentioned in the same breath. For instance, transcripts of Webb’s speeches in India were published as *Lectures on Islam: Delivered at Different Places in India*, which was introduced by a quote from Quilliam.<sup>5</sup> During interviews, Webb also used the LMI to bolster his credentials in trying to explain the potential for success in the U.S., a tactic he likely later regretted when he no longer wanted to be in the shadow of the LMI and its relative success, while his own group splintered and the propaganda scheme sank.<sup>6</sup>

In the absence of travel journals from the second half of Webb’s journey, it is unclear how much time he spent at the other proposed destinations outside of India, but he certainly passed through the Suez Canal and stopped in Liverpool. Despite this and the intentions of the Indian Muslims, there are no accounts of Webb visiting the LMI. In fact, Quilliam specifically noted that he had never met Webb.<sup>7</sup> This is further substantiated by the lack of any mention of Webb in the *Crescent*, which published its first issue nearly simultaneous to Webb’s arrival in Liverpool. One could hardly think of a better way to kick off the publication than with news of a mission modelled after the LMI spreading to another part of the world. However, it would be several more months before the *Crescent* first mentioned Webb, only in passing, in April 1893, followed up a few weeks later with a brief announcement of his arrival in America.<sup>8</sup> It seems illogical that Webb would travel the world, arrive in Liverpool, and not seek out the community largely responsible for his new-found position; that is, unless Webb had already tired of his forced entwinement with Quilliam. Commenting on the two men, Webb’s biographer, Umar F. Abd-

---

<sup>4</sup> *Times of India*, 25 November 1892, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, *Lectures on Islam: Delivered at Different Places in India* (Lahore: Islamia Press, 1893), Preface.

<sup>6</sup> Webb, ‘Preaching Islam’, p.469.

<sup>7</sup> Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, John A. Lant Papers [hereafter Lant Papers]: Abdullah W. H. Quilliam to John A. Lant, 26 September 1894.

<sup>8</sup> *TC*, 1 April 1893, p.85; *TC*, 29 April 1893, p.115.

Allah, notes that, “Their relationship does not appear to have been especially warm. Indeed, there are indications of an element of rivalry between the two.”<sup>9</sup> If a rivalry existed, it would seem a rather one-way affair with Webb under pressure to meet or exceed Quilliam’s success, but perhaps no longer being the singular Western representative of Islam was a blow to Quilliam as well.

Rivalry or not, the AIP mirrored the LMI on several fronts. For instance, it planned to publish two newspapers similar in approach to the LMI’s *Crescent* and *Islamic World*. The *Crescent* was a weekly paper mostly concerned with local affairs of the Liverpool Muslims and their disparate interests, while the *Islamic World* was a monthly focused on the global world of Islam.<sup>10</sup> Webb’s papers were to be the *Moslem World* and *Voice of Islam*. Although the publication schedule and actual papers never met his expectations, Webb had intended the *Moslem World* to be a monthly with wide distribution nationally and internationally, and the *Voice of Islam* a weekly newsletter.<sup>11</sup> Abd-Allah also contends that Webb’s initial publicised plans followed Quilliam’s model rather closely, as did his event scheduling, both in type of events and when they were held.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, Webb did not fully follow the LMI’s example with regard to introducing Islamic rituals into his meetings, which, as we will see below, would later lead to a schism.

Neither Webb nor Quilliam devoted much space to the other’s organisation in their respective papers, although Webb did advertise Quilliam’s books *The Religion of the Sword* and *Faith of Islam* in various issues.<sup>13</sup> Webb was in correspondence with members and former members of the LMI, in

---

<sup>9</sup> Umar F. Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.72.

<sup>10</sup> For a full analysis of *The Islamic World*, see Amjad Muhsen S. Dajani (Al-Daoudi), ‘The Islamic World, 1893-1908’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 47 (2014), pp.454-75.

<sup>11</sup> For a full analysis of *The Moslem World* and *Voice of Islam*, see Brent D. Singleton, ‘The Moslem World: a history of America’s earliest Islamic newspaper and its successors’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 27 (2007), pp.297-307.

<sup>12</sup> Abd-Allah, *Muslim in Victorian America*, p.164.

<sup>13</sup> *The Moslem World* [hereafter *MW*], October 1893, p.6.

particular Hajee Abdullah Browne who had been sub-editor of the *Crescent* just prior to Webb publishing the first issue of the *Moslem World* in May 1893. In fact, he became Webb's agent in London for the paper.<sup>14</sup> Both Quilliam and Browne were featured in the *Moslem World's* premiere issue; specifically, there was Quilliam's poem "Moslem Morning Hymn" and an article discussing a lecture by Hajee Browne in Liverpool.<sup>15</sup> Browne had broken ties with the LMI and left for London the month before Webb's paper was published, and had an excerpt of his book published in the *Moslem World* for November 1893. In that issue, there also appeared an announcement of the formation of the 'Anjuman Angrezi' (English Society) in London with Browne as the president, an organisation, "To promote the study, and propagate the knowledge of Islam [...] as a religious social and political system."<sup>16</sup> In the midst of the later American Muslim turmoil, Webb described Browne as, "One of the most earnest and devout of English Moslems," and "One of the most intelligent and well-informed of English Moslems."<sup>17</sup> Browne and Quilliam seem to have had a falling out as the former was never again mentioned in LMI news sources after leaving the LMI, this despite Browne's continued work in promoting Islam in London with the Anjuman Angrezi and in Egypt with his *Egyptian Herald*. Thus, Webb's characterization of Browne may have been a dig at Quilliam as he extolled Browne's virtues without ever mentioning the British standard bearer of Islam in his paper. Other LMI members also had items published in the *Moslem World*, including two poems by William Obeid-Ullah Cunliffe as well as advertisements for his book *The Disintegration of Christianity* (1893), and a lecture on India by Moulvie Mahomed Barakat-Ullah.<sup>18</sup>

In the *Crescent*, the most descriptive note published about Webb came in April 1893, and read: "Mr. Mohammed Webb has arrived in America, and is about to commence the propaganda of our Holy

---

<sup>14</sup> *MW*, October 1893, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> *MW*, May 1893, p.7; *MW*, May 1893, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> *MW*, November 1893, p.1 and front matter.

<sup>17</sup> *Moslem World and Voice of Islam* [hereafter *MWVI*], May 1895, p.3; *MWVI*, November 1895, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> *MW*, August 1893, p.16; *MW*, November 1893, p.11; *MW*, November 1893, front matter; *MW*, October 1893, p.6.

faith in that continent. We cordially wish him every success.”<sup>19</sup> A similarly terse notice appeared upon the publication of the first issue of the *Moslem World*.<sup>20</sup> There would be only a handful of other brief notices concerning Webb that year, but nothing substantive compared to the *Crescent’s* later coverage of the AIP’s offshoots.

Besides a mounting financial crisis faced by the AIP, the determining factor in the group’s split was the arrival in New York of former LMI member, Emin Nabakoff, and his juxtaposition of the AIP’s utter lack of basic Islamic practices and his more orthodox experience in Liverpool. Nabakoff’s vision of Western Islam came directly from his tutelage under Quilliam. Nabakoff convinced John A. Lant and other confederates to form an organisation more in the mould of the LMI.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Jamie Gilham hypothesises that Quilliam may have had similar complaints that his own “diluted, syncretic Islam” presented in public did not adequately prepare British converts for orthodox practices once they joined the fold.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the LMI and Quilliam’s indirect influence both gave rise to the American Islamic Propaganda and eventually tore it apart, all without Quilliam ever directly intervening. Henceforth, every time a dispute arose among the American Muslims, one party or another used Quilliam as an example to bolster their cause, called upon him to settle the issue, or asked for his support.

In December 1893, Lant and Nabakoff formed the First Society for the Study of Islam in America in Union Square, New York City. They introduced the *adhan* (call to prayer) to their proceedings and openly challenged Christianity, both practices in which Webb refused to engage and panned as non-Islamic for the manner that Lant and Nabakoff carried them out. During the dispute, Webb said he took

---

<sup>19</sup> *The Crescent* [hereafter *TC*], 29 April 1893, p.115.

<sup>20</sup> *TC*, 3 June 1893, p.160.

<sup>21</sup> For a full review of the schism among the American Muslims, see Brent D. Singleton, ‘Brothers at odds: rival Islamic movements in late nineteenth century New York city’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 27 (2007), pp.473-86.

<sup>22</sup> Jamie Gilham, “‘Upholding the banner of Islam’: British converts to Islam and the Liverpool Muslim Institute, c. 1887-1908’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 33 (2015), pp.9-10.

Nabakoff into his fold based upon the strength of his acquaintance with Quilliam, even though Webb later claimed to hold letters questioning Nabakoff's character.<sup>23</sup> Webb then became angry with Quilliam for corresponding with Lant's associate, Hamid Snow, a Muslim convert and missionary in India. Quilliam wrote to Lant about the situation:

During the time that Bro. Nabakoff was a member of our institution, he earned the respect, friendship, and fraternal regard of every member of our institution [...] he was so far as I knew, [a] tradesman not in a very large way of business, but still conducted it honestly and fairly and that if he returned to Liverpool tomorrow he would be welcomed back with open arms by the members of our society, as we believe him to be a thorough Muslim in heart, action and thought [...] [Webb] seems to have taken great umbrage and consequently I understand, he has delivered himself of sundry diatribes against myself. This I regard not, as I only pity the person who has uttered them.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Quilliam's words contradicted Webb's public description of Nabakoff as an offensive street peddler of questionable character with little knowledge of Islam. In response, Webb excoriated Quilliam while defending his own mission, stating, "I have positive proof that the man Quilliam, who has established a mosque in Liverpool, and who now defends the character of Nabakoff, is a charlatan of the worst possible character. He publishes an obscene paper called "The Liver", and succeeds in obtaining large sums of money from India on the strength of absolutely false reports concerning the progress which the Mahometan religion is making in Liverpool under his missionary work."<sup>25</sup> Webb later backtracked from these criticisms, going so far as to deny ever uttering them.<sup>26</sup> Earlier, Snow intimated that Quilliam had warned him about the untrustworthiness of Webb. Snow wrote to Lant that, "Quilliam

---

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Sun*, 11 December 1893, p.1.

<sup>24</sup> Lant Papers, Quilliam to Lant, 26 September 1894.

<sup>25</sup> *New York World* [hereafter NYW], 17 May 1894, p.8. The *Liver* was a satirical magazine edited by Quilliam.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p.156.

writes me clearly that Webb is not to be trusted & gives good reasons.”<sup>27</sup> Snow went on to relate that Quilliam understood that, despite Webb being in America for six months, only Lant and Nabakoff took steps to give the call to prayer and offer congregational prayers. In the end, Quilliam was none too pleased to be dragged into the imbroglio, lamenting “I have been brought into this American business without any desire on my part.”<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to note that the First Society published a newspaper, *The American Moslem*, in early 1894 and the issues never mentioned Quilliam or the Liverpool Muslims. Although they were not formerly associated with one another at that time, it seems a bit of a mystery why Quilliam and his community was overlooked.

In July 1894, Webb had another falling out with a key member of his organisation, Nafeesa Keep. The latter had made charges of financial improprieties against Webb and locked him out of the Moslem World Publishing Company’s offices for several days. After much ballyhoo in the New York papers, Webb regained control of the premises and removed its contents, but Keep remained firm in her mission as the editor of *Voice of Islam*.<sup>29</sup> Throughout 1894, Lant and Nabakoff’s group was under fire from Webb, the press, and anti-Islamic protests at their meetings. In August 1894, Lant wrote to Quilliam about the ongoing troubles and must have asked for advice. With all of the American Muslim movements in some stage of disarray, Quilliam tried to straighten out the principal players with whom he was on friendly terms, obviously excluding Webb at this juncture. It is unclear exactly at what point Keep entered into correspondence with Quilliam, but she is mentioned in Quilliam’s September 1894 letter to Lant. Quilliam wrote, “I regret to hear of the unfortunate disputes and misunderstandings between those in America who have accepted the faith [...]. Is there no possible way of your getting together with the assistance of Mrs. Keep and Mr. Nabakoff enough Muslims to form a society in

---

<sup>27</sup> Lant Papers, Hamid Snow to Lant, 16 March 1894.

<sup>28</sup> Lant Papers, Quilliam to Lant, 26 September 1894.

<sup>29</sup> *NYW*, 2 August 1894, p.9.

America or in New York and then you could formally write and ask to be affiliated with our institutions.”<sup>30</sup> Quilliam had transitioned from symbol and model to active participant in the American venture. It was not a one-way street; Quilliam clearly felt enhanced by the interactions with the Americans, publishing many of their correspondences and republishing articles about them from American newspapers. The letters from America were often quite reverential towards Quilliam, once again helpful to his image as a world figure.

According to Hamid Snow, Quilliam had first actively inserted himself into the American mess as early as the spring of 1894 by communicating to the Indian Division of Religious Endowments beseeching them to stop funding Webb.<sup>31</sup> The timing of the request seems to fall soon after Webb attacked Quilliam in the press. The Indians had already questioned the entire American mission and were in open disagreement about whether to continue funding any Americans. They had stopped the contracted funding to Webb long before, although individuals were still sending him money. In the September letter to Lant asking that the Americans affiliate with the LMI, Quilliam offered: “I could then lay the proposal before those in India who originally found the funds for the work in America and I feel sure they would consent to such a course and then you would be put on a proper recognized basis. You would then be greatly assisted in your work.”<sup>32</sup> This suggests that Snow was correct in his assertion that Quilliam had more than passing familiarity with the Indian backers of the American venture. Later, in a letter to Lant, Snow references an article in the *Crescent* concerning Webb: “Who believes him? No one. Glad to see in “Crescent” of Liverpool of 24<sup>th</sup> Nov that Bro Q[uilliam] has now come to appreciate you & understand Webb.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Lant Papers, Quilliam to Lant, 26 September 1894. Also, the *New York Herald* (9 December 1894, p.12) confirms that Keep and Quilliam had entered into correspondence soon after she broke from Webb.

<sup>31</sup> Lant Papers, Snow to Lant, 18 June 1894.

<sup>32</sup> Lant Papers, Quilliam to Lant, 26 September 1894.

<sup>33</sup> Lant Papers, Snow to Lant, 17 December 1894.

On the same day that Snow wrote to Lant, New York papers noted the first meeting of the American Moslem Institute (AMI), “the Western branch of the English society.” Lant was named AMI president and Keep its secretary. It was also mentioned that Quilliam followed through with the Indian backers, who agreed to back the group if they could prove unity and staying power.<sup>34</sup> During the proceedings, Quilliam was selected as an honorary president and another LMI member, H. Haschem Wilde, as honorary secretary.<sup>35</sup> However, the desired unity within the AMI did not survive the week. At the first Executive Committee meeting, Lant resigned as president because he was upset that Keep, without consulting him, had called the police to protect the earlier gathering from a feared disturbance by Webb’s associates, which never occurred. After several other committee members also resigned, Nabakoff was elected president.<sup>36</sup> Lant moved on to form the International Moslem Union, which some contend was affiliated with Turkish interests.<sup>37</sup>

At about this time, Quilliam began identifying himself as “Sheikh of the United Societies of English-speaking Muslims of England and America,” or alternately “Sheikh-ul-Islam of the United English and American Moslem Societies,” and referred to the AMI as “Our American branch.”<sup>38</sup> In January 1895, Nabakoff informed Quilliam that Webb was hinting at financial impropriety in Liverpool, as paraphrased by Nabakoff: “Certain account books of the Institute were kept by you, my dear Brother [Quilliam], under lock and key.”<sup>39</sup> At this same time, a letter to Lant from C.L.M. Abdul Jebbar in Colombo, expressed satisfaction with the Americans allying with the LMI.<sup>40</sup> The next month, after being absolutely displeased by the entire body of American Muslim converts, Nafeesa Keep moved to Liverpool and

---

<sup>34</sup> NYW, 17 December 1894, p.8 and also 2 August 1894, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> NYW, 11 December 1894, p.16.

<sup>36</sup> NYW, 16 December 1894, p.16.

<sup>37</sup> Bowen, *History of Conversion*, p.157.

<sup>38</sup> TC, 2 January 1895, p.5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Lant Papers, C. L. M. Abdul Jebbar to Lant, 17 January 1895.

quickly integrated herself into the LMI.<sup>41</sup> Quilliam wrote to Lant regarding this and the latter's squabbles with his colleagues:

I was sorry to hear of the little breeze [with] Bro N[abakoff], which I trust will soon pass over & peace again reign supreme [...]. Sister Nafeesa lectured for us on Sunday evening last, & really spoke excellently, she made quite a good impression. She has been so be-fooled by Webb, that she became I feel convinced, suspicious of everyone in American Islamic circles [...] here she is a representative of American Islam. In the meanwhile you have an open sea before you, at first you will only get the "cranks" of all phases of thought, & your rooms will be a regular Cave of Adullam, but as time rolls on, you will be able to sift the grain from chaff & form a permanent society of real Muslims.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, Quilliam was the person each party ran to for support and influence.

After March 1895, the AMI no longer appeared in the press. Meanwhile, Lant and Nabakoff rejoined forces under the International Moslem Union and First Society for the Study of Islam, which was frequently mentioned in the *Crescent*.<sup>43</sup> However, this was short lived; the organisation had run its course by the end of 1895 as far as Lant and Nabakoff were concerned. Patrick D. Bowen argues that the American branch continued until at least 1899 through Lant's associate Dr. Charles F. Elsner from Chicago, who was named an honorary president of the LMI in 1898.<sup>44</sup> However, there is no evidence of meetings or other trappings of an organisation led by Elsner. Lant and Nabakoff remained in correspondence with Quilliam for a short while longer, but the letters were less frequent, ending altogether in 1897 and 1898 respectively.<sup>45</sup> In the end, the American converts separated, the organisations disappeared and only smatterings of news about them appeared in the *Crescent*. Webb

---

<sup>41</sup> *TC*, 13 February 1895, p.49.

<sup>42</sup> Lant Papers, Quilliam to Lant, 21 February 1895.

<sup>43</sup> *TC*, 20 March 1895, p.89 and 6 February 1895, p.41.

<sup>44</sup> Bowen, *History of Conversion*, p.163.

<sup>45</sup> Last note of Lant's correspondence: *TC*, 15 December 1897, p.793; Nabakoff's last correspondence: *TC*, 26 January 1898, p.57.

had become intertwined with Turkish affairs in New York and thus somewhat rehabilitated his reputation with Quilliam. Webb's travels to Constantinople were mentioned in November 1900 under the name Mohamed Iskander Webb.<sup>46</sup> Lant was last mentioned in a letter from Hamid Snow to Quilliam in 1900 concerning his "Church of Islam," noting that J. Muhammed Lant had opened up an American branch of the group.<sup>47</sup> That same year, Nafeesa Keep, who had moved on to the London Temporary Mosque, came out with plans to return to America and begin another movement along with colonies of Muslims.<sup>48</sup> Neither of these ventures seem to have gone beyond the planning stage.

In the end, there would not have been the American Islamic Propaganda mission, The First Society for the Study of Islam in America, the American Moslem Institute, or the International Moslem Union American branch, without Quilliam. At every critical phase of development for these organisations, the spectre of Quilliam and LMI lingered over the proceedings. It is impossible to know if Webb's AIP, already on life support by the end of 1893, could have recovered and had some level of success if not for Nabakoff's juxtaposition of the American venture with the LMI and the resulting schism. What is clear is that Webb tried to keep Quilliam at arm's length and possibly vice versa: the two were culturally, philosophically, and religiously incompatible despite circumstances that thrust them together. Nonetheless, if not for Quilliam, Webb may have been forgotten to history with his name cropping up only in obscure references to his time as the American Consul to the Philippines.

### **Inside the British Empire**

Quilliam's influence on Muslims in the British Empire, particularly West Africa, was without the contentiousness of the American endeavour and based on the organic development of relationships and mutual respect, the latter of which was uncommon during the era. Referring to the late-Victorian and

---

<sup>46</sup> *TC*, 21 November 1900, p.329.

<sup>47</sup> *TC*, 16 December 1900, p.407.

<sup>48</sup> *Utica Sunday Journal*, 11 February 1900, p.15.

early Edwardian years, Gilham notes that, “Discrimination against Muslim immigrants in this period was indeed framed in terms of ‘race’ and ethnicity and a belief in the moral and even biological superiority of the British as imperial rulers.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, writing specifically about Africa, Kenneth Dike Nworah breaks the majority of British society in two camps with regard to colonial subjects and lands, the first being the racist school whereby the people were to be subjugated and the land utilized to further enrich the Empire; the second being those forces unleashed to “civilize” the colonies through Christianity and Europeanization.<sup>50</sup> The LMI and a few other fringe organisations formed a third front, seeking to meet the Africans in the middle through engagement and promoting the retention of their African identity.<sup>51</sup> In this milieu, Quilliam and the LMI’s open mind about race, colonial subjects and of course Islam resonated with many Muslims in the British Empire, especially West Africans who were subjected to the harshest racist attitudes and religious discrimination of the time.

Africans were aware of Quilliam and the Liverpool Muslims from at least 1891 when reports of his writings were published in African newspapers. Quilliam himself had long held a fascination with Africa and often wrote and spoke about that continent. The LMI’s first substantive contact with Africans came in the person of Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden the pan-Africanist Liberian government minister whose sympathy for Islam is well documented.<sup>52</sup> Hardly a better association could have presented itself for Quilliam’s entre into African affairs, and so began one of the longest and deepest correspondences Quilliam published in the *Crescent*, lasting nearly the entirety of the paper’s existence. The British converts offered genuine friendship when Blyden travelled to Liverpool. Taken aback by the gesture, he responded by getting to the heart of the matter, enlisting the LMI to enhance educational opportunities

---

<sup>49</sup> Gilham, “‘Upholding the banner of Islam’”, p.7.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Dike Nworah, ‘The Liverpool “sect” and British West African policy 1895-1915’, *African Affairs*, 70 (1971), p.350.

<sup>51</sup> Brent D. Singleton, “‘That ye may know each other’: late Victorian interactions between British and West African Muslims’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29 (2009), p.371.

<sup>52</sup> For example, his 1887 treatise *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* extolled the virtues of Islam as a unifying African religion whereas he described Christianity as foreign, a mark of subjugation.

for West African Muslims. Many West African Muslims wanted their children to have a liberal Western education, but not be exposed to Christianity and other undesirable influences of Western culture. With the LMI there was an opportunity for educational advancement in Britain as well as at home with materials supplied in English that were palatable to Muslims.<sup>53</sup>

The second major African contact with the LMI came when Alhaji Harun-ar-Rashid of Foulah Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone travelled to Liverpool with the expressed desire to be among the English converts. Accounts of Ar-Rashid's full integration into the LMI's community were widely covered in the *Crescent*. He was known to have been an Arabic interpreter, an examiner for the Arabic classes at the LMI 'Moslem College', an Imam, and a lecturer. The brotherhood offered by the British converts in counterpoint to the British colonial structure in Africa was striking and endeared Quilliam to the Africans even further. This emerging bond was strengthened by Ar-Rashid hand-delivering a letter to West African Muslim leaders inviting them to send boys to the LMI Moslem College.<sup>54</sup> At about this time, Muslim leader Alimami Mohammed Gheirawani of Sierra Leone wrote in the *Islamic World* that, "We were often told [...] that Islam was the religion only of inferior races—that it could be received only by the black man. Ah! What will they say now when great Englishmen are bowing down under the rays of the Crescent?"<sup>55</sup> A couple of months later, Ar-Rashid's visit to England was mentioned in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, which noted that, "The existence of Islam in Liverpool seems to have inspired the West African Mohammedans with new life."<sup>56</sup>

In June 1894, Quilliam travelled down the west coast of Africa on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, to bestow the Ottoman Order of Medjidie third class, and title of Bey, to Mohammed

---

<sup>53</sup> Singleton, "That ye may know each other", p.372.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.373.

<sup>55</sup> *The Islamic World*, December 1893, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 3 February 1894, p.5.

Shitta for funding the construction of a mosque in Lagos.<sup>57</sup> His stops in Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gold Coast, and Lagos were critical in solidifying Quilliam's role as a Muslim leader. He could boast of being both a representative of loyal British Muslims as well as the Sultan. Quilliam's relationship with the Africans had gained the attention of the Sultan who sought a foothold in the historically overlooked but fast growing Muslim population of Sub-Saharan Africa, especially as his influence was waning in his own dominions and neighbouring lands. Conversely, Quilliam's relationship with the Sultan gave him more credibility among the Muslims of West Africa, who relished the Sultan's attention. Case in point, a couple of years after Quilliam's visit, Mohammed Sanussi of Sierra Leone went so far as to call on all Muslims to unite and defend the Caliphate.<sup>58</sup>

Quilliam's role as gatekeeper between the West African Muslims and the Sultan raised his profile among the parties as he served as the go-between for all communications. Reports of African conversions were sent to Quilliam in order to inform the Sultan, and the Sultan had Quilliam deliver messages to the Africans, such as when Dr. Blyden was to receive the Imperial Order of Medjidie.<sup>59</sup> Quilliam's position provided a vehicle to push his pan-Islamic philosophy and support for the Sultan and the Ottoman Empire while also promoting loyalty to the British crown. Although often hostile to the British Empire's military and colonial apparatuses, Quilliam took pains to spare the monarchy of any criticism and was outward in his reverence for the Queen. For instance, in 1899 Quilliam led special birthday prayers for the queen as he and visiting Muslims had done similarly a few years earlier for her Diamond Jubilee. The West African Muslims may have been keen to be seen as loyal with or without Quilliam's intervention, however, their reverence for him and his words of loyalty to the crown certainly created a climate of goodwill toward the British sovereign. Over the years, Quilliam became so widely

---

<sup>57</sup> Singleton, "That ye may know", p.374.

<sup>58</sup> *TC*, 22 April 1896, pp.681-2.

<sup>59</sup> Singleton, "That ye may know", p.381.

known in the region that, in 1903, Dr. Blyden quipped that Quilliam and shipping magnate Sir Alfred Jones were the two best known English names in West and Central Africa.<sup>60</sup>

Outside of West Africa, Quilliam and the Liverpool Muslims were a beacon to some educated, politically minded, English speaking Muslims in the Empire looking for better prospects than the colonies had to offer. Although life in Britain held many challenges for Muslims emigrating from the colonies, it seems there were educational, business and political opportunities unavailable outside of the British Isles. Two examples of Muslims associated with Quilliam who came to Liverpool looking for better opportunities were Hajji Mohamed Dollie of South Africa and Moulvie Mahomed Barakat-Ullah of India. Dollie was an active member of the Cape Town Malay Muslim community when a wave of political activism spread through in the late 1880s. At the time, the local paper described him as, "A most intelligent irrepressible Hadje."<sup>61</sup> Earlier that decade, Dollie and a colleague were responsible for establishing the Cape Town Hanafee Mosque in Long Street after a dispute with the Shafee community led to a split among Muslims along doctrinal lines.<sup>62</sup> For Dollie, the education of his son, Omar, was the driving force for him to seek out Quilliam and the LMI. As with the West Africans, an opportunity to send his child to England for education was only possible with the assurance that there was a Muslim community to support him.

Dollie enrolled Omar in the LMI Moslem College in March of 1893 after inspecting the school and finding it suitably British and Islamic.<sup>63</sup> Dollie moved the rest of his family to Liverpool around October 1893.<sup>64</sup> Omar was an active member of the LMI's youth programmes and his father also quickly

---

<sup>60</sup> TC, 24 June 1903, p.389.

<sup>61</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.195.

<sup>62</sup> Achmat Davids, *The Mosques of Bo-Kaap: A Social History of Islam at the Cape* (Athlone: South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980), p.183.

<sup>63</sup> TC, 25 March 1893, p.75.

<sup>64</sup> TC, 4 November 1893, p.331.

integrated himself into the British Muslim community in Liverpool and beyond. At about the time Dollie set up residence in Liverpool, it was publicised that he had planned with former LMI member Hajee Browne to establish the aforementioned Anjuman Angrezi to which Dollie was named one of three vice-presidents.<sup>65</sup> Dollie soon moved to London where he was active in the Muslim community, joining the leadership of the Anjuman-i-Islam, as well as remaining a frequent correspondent to the *Crescent*. In December 1895, Dollie offered a portion of his home at Albert Street, Regent's Park, as the London Temporary Mosque until a suitable and permanent structure could be found or built. In his opening remarks dedicating the prayer space, it appears his time with the LMI influenced him deeply as he made it clear that he wanted proselytization done in a way that would make sense to the British, including possibly employing prayer and hymn books in English and even providing pews in the mosque.<sup>66</sup> The mosque hosted members from many parts of the world including Arabia, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey, Egypt, and India, and was able to attract converts.<sup>67</sup> Near its fourth anniversary, in October 1898, the London Temporary Mosque moved to a more central London location at 189 Euston Road, but was still not yet a permanent mosque.<sup>68</sup>

Beginning in 1895, Dollie wrote extensively in the *Crescent* supporting the Sultan and Turkey. He openly criticized statements from British officials concerning the treatment of Armenians under Ottoman rule.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, he accused the British government of the greatest hypocrisy in denying advancement of Muslims in their colonial governments while advocating for Christians to take local control in Armenia. Further, he found British outrage dubious in response to a Turkish crackdown after a police official's assassination in Armenia and subsequent street disturbances, noting that the British reacted similarly in India when disturbances broke out there. He stated: "The People of England seem to

---

<sup>65</sup> *MW*, November 1893, front matter.

<sup>66</sup> *TC*, 18 December 1895, p.387.

<sup>67</sup> *TC*, 16 December 1896, p.1128; *TC*, 13 January 1897, p.25.

<sup>68</sup> *TC*, 19 October 1898, pp.233-4.

<sup>69</sup> *TC*, 18 September 1895, pp.181-2.

fancy that the world would stop and the sun cease to shine if by any chance she should disappear suddenly by some sort of evolution. But the loss of England would not be felt, except with feeling of mixed thankfulness and satisfaction that we had one landgrabber the less to reckon with.”<sup>70</sup> Dollie later criticised the British government, which claimed it could not intercede on behalf of Indian rights in the Transvaal, yet somehow felt compelled to involve itself in Turkish affairs.<sup>71</sup>

A year later, exasperated at the calls for an Armenian uprising and British covert support for such actions, Dollie stated that, “One trembles to think what the result would be should the green flag be hoisted (*Jehad* declared). Then the question would not be confined to Turkey, but would extend to England, and wherever Moslems exist [...] It is high time for us all to rally round the Ottoman Empire and do our duty as Moslems.”<sup>72</sup> The following month, he wrote that, “I have been abused right and left, but so long as this insane crusade continues [...] I shall feel it my duty to condemn those guilty of such conduct [...] it is high time for all Moslems throughout the world to take as an example England’s treatment towards the caliph and the religion of Islam.”<sup>73</sup> After several years of Dollie writing to the *Crescent* and prodding a wider response from the Muslim world, Quilliam responded with a similarly worded call to the *umma* concerning Turkish military gains in Greece and calls from European powers for the Turks to withdraw. He wrote a proclamation which in part read, “‘All Muslims are brethren.’ The triumph of the Ottoman Muslim is your, is my, triumph, an undeserved insult to one Muslim is an insult to every Muslim in the World.”<sup>74</sup> Then he called for calm, loyalty, and redress through petitioning the Queen and Parliament. It seems that the rhetoric used by Dollie and other Muslims in the Empire

---

<sup>70</sup> *TC*, 16 October 1895, p.246; *TC*, 23 October 1895, p.262.

<sup>71</sup> *TC*, 27 November 1895, p.347.

<sup>72</sup> *TC*, 7 October 1896, p.1070.

<sup>73</sup> *TC*, 11 November 1896, pp.1149-50.

<sup>74</sup> *TC*, 14 July 1897, pp.441-2.

inspired Quilliam to strengthen his language, but to also reiterate his eternal message that Muslims were “peaceful and lawful” loyal citizens of the empire.

Although Dollie had an activist streak long before immigrating to England, his brief time with the LMI community and the very fact of its existence seems to have emboldened his rhetoric in criticising British imperialism and interference in Turkish affairs. A colonial subject could hardly feel the need to indulge in the idea of British exceptionalism when his English Muslim brethren so clearly rejected the core imperial concept of Christianity as a “civilizing” force. On the other hand, Quilliam fed off the boldness of the outspoken Muslims unwilling to flinch in their support of the Sultan. It seems that the increased defence of Turkey and the strong language employed was directly connected to Quilliam and the colonial Muslims feeding off one another’s rhetoric, although Quilliam almost always explained his criticism in terms of justice and even handedness for an old British ally, Turkey.

Unlike Dollie, Moulvie Mahomed Barakat-Ullah did not initially come to Britain to be part of the budding Muslim community in Liverpool. Although Barakat-Ullah’s timeline is a bit sketchy and open to debate, according to Khan he arrived in London around 1887 and worked as a private language tutor.<sup>75</sup> His first reported association with the LMI was his attendance at the mosque for a wedding in April 1891.<sup>76</sup> In February 1893, Quilliam passed through London on his way to catch a steamer to Morocco and was met by Muslims including Barakat-Ullah.<sup>77</sup> One of his associates on that day was William Obeidullah Cunliffe, the stalwart LMI member in London. It is likely that Quilliam or other members of the Liverpool community were in correspondence with Barakat-Ullah because, by May 1893, he had moved to Liverpool and was appointed professor of Arabic, Persian and Urdu at the Moslem College.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Mohammed Ayub Khan, ‘Universal Islam: the faith and political ideologies of Maulana Barakatullah “Bhopali”’, *Sikh Formations*, 10 (2014), p.58. Several other sources note his arrival in London as between 1897 and 1890.

<sup>76</sup> *The Times*, 21 April 1891, p.4.

<sup>77</sup> *TC*, 25 February 1893, p.44.

<sup>78</sup> *TC*, 20 May 1893, p.139.

Soon, he was one of the more prominent and active members of the Institute, delivering lectures about once per month, writing articles for the *Crescent and Islamic World*, officiating as imam at funerals, weddings, and *eid* celebrations, chairing meetings, and eventually being appointed vice-principal of the Moslem College.<sup>79</sup>

Barakat-Ullah never wrote about it specifically, but being among a thriving community of Muslims from all over the world, including a preponderance of British converts, must have had an influence on his pan-Islamic, anti-imperialist activism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A few months after arriving at the LMI, Barakat-Ullah mentioned that the Muslim world was in crisis and argued that true Islam would emerge from the West: “It is time now that the sun of Islam should rise from the West—as it was prophesied by Mohammed himself—and illuminate every corner of the globe. The Moslem Institute in Liverpool and the other one at New York promise to turn out the pioneers of civilization in future. The reason why we look at them as the fountain head of good is simply because the Moslems in the West are Moslems by reason, not by birth.”<sup>80</sup>

Most research offers very little analysis of his time at the LMI, essentially viewing it as an extension of his earlier teaching work in London. There is no evidence that Barakat-Ullah was openly political prior to his time in Liverpool, although Ansari asserts that Barakat-Ullah was inspired to travel to England to learn “Western verities” after meeting with noted pan-Islamist Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani in India.<sup>81</sup> Most of Barakat-Ullah’s biographers ignore his Liverpool years in favor of his subsequent time in London and beyond.<sup>82</sup> Ansari is an exception, he acknowledges that Barakat-Ullah’s activism was

---

<sup>79</sup> *TC*, 2 January 1895, back matter. The lectures, articles and other activities of Barakat-Ullah are drawn from articles in *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*.

<sup>80</sup> *MW*, November 1893, p.13.

<sup>81</sup>: Humayun Ansari, “Maulana Barakatullah Bhopali’s Transnationalism, Pan-Islamism, Colonialism, and Radical Politics,” IN *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers*. eds. Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.182-183.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Khan breezes over Barakat-Ullah’s time in Liverpool, providing only a brief mention that Barakat-Ullah came under surveillance while with Quilliam, supplying no further explanation: Khan, ‘Universal Islam’, p.58.

greatly affected by his time in Liverpool, describing the LMI as a “pan-Islamic network” and his increasing politicisation due to hostility towards Islam and the Sultan in the press as well as witnessing mob attacks against the LMI facilities during his three year stay.<sup>83</sup> The London encounters undoubtedly broadened his consciousness, shaped his budding philosophical outlook, and bolstered his open political dialog, however, to overlook his experiences in the increasingly political milieu in which he was operating in Liverpool misses the point entirely. He was living in a community of Muslims of all stripes, including white men who claimed allegiance to the Sultan. This was undoubtedly the genesis of his pan-Islamic worldview, at least from a practical standpoint.

The circumstances for the departure of Barakat-Ullah from Liverpool back to London in late August 1896 are unclear, but he joined Dollie, the London Temporary Mosque, and Anjuman-i-Islam where, on 22 August, he chaired a banquet celebrating the Prophet’s birthday.<sup>84</sup> According to Shafqat Razvi, this event thrust Barakat-Ullah into his first open political discourse. Apparently, his call for loyalty to the Caliph was later criticized by British politicians and set off a series of pro- and anti-Turkish events, the former led by Barakat-Ullah.<sup>85</sup> A few days after the birthday celebration, a London paper argued that:

It might not be inopportune to warn the *Anjuman-i-Islam* that it will be wise to keep itself entirely distinct from associations which are in overt or surreptitious connection with political intrigues of a highly dangerous character [...]. The *Anjuman-i-Islam* in London must show, not only by formal professions of loyalty to the temporal power, but also by its actual conduct, that it has no traffic with conspirators and revolutionaries.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ansari, “Maulana Barakatullah,” p.184-185.

<sup>84</sup> *TC*, 9 September 1896, p.1004. Barakat-Ullah presided over a banquet with Dollie.

<sup>85</sup> Shafqat Razvi, ‘Mawli Barkatullah Bhopali: a revolutionary freedom fighter of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century’, *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, 37 (1989), pp.141-2.

<sup>86</sup> *TC*, 26 August 1896, p.967.

If Razvi is correct, this proves that Barakat-Ullah had already been politicized in Liverpool, as he had left the LMI only a week or two prior to chairing the celebration in question. Therefore, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's pre-eminent Indian revolutionaries and proponent of pan-Islamic and pan-Asiatic unity was directly influenced and politicized during his time with Quilliam and the LMI.

A Scotland Yard report some nearly three decades after his departure from the LMI suggested that Barakat-Ullah was under surveillance as an agent of Amir Abdul-Rahman Khan of Afghanistan between 1896 and 1898.<sup>87</sup> Barakat-Ullah had spent eleven weeks in London during the state visit of the Amir's eldest son, Prince Nasrullah Khan, in 1895, and was an indispensable member of the LMI during this time. Barakat-Ullah was the conduit for Quilliam's continued relationship with the Shazada of Afghanistan. Pragma Chopra and P. N. Chopra note that Barakat-Ullah wrote weekly newsletters to the Shazada's agent in Karachi from 1896-1898, confirming his role for which he was apparently surveilled.<sup>88</sup> Despite all of Barakat-Ullah's continued activities in pan-Islamic circles for the remainder of the *Crescent's* publication, his name was never mentioned again after September 1896. It stands to reason that, if Barakat-Ullah was increasingly at odds with the British government and under surveillance, Quilliam may have come to know this and been alarmed; even more so considering he took great pains to maintain a balancing act between support for the Sultan and fierce loyalty to the Crown.

## **Conclusion**

It must be noted that Quilliam had contacts and influence well beyond what was covered in this chapter. His influence on the communities and individuals covered here could be categorized as "hit and

---

<sup>87</sup> Max Everest-Philips, 'Colin Davidson's British Indian intelligence operations in Japan 1915–23 and the demise of the Anglo-Japanese alliance', *Intelligence and National Security*, 24 (2009), p.677.

<sup>88</sup> Pragma Chopra and P.N. Chopra, *Indian Freedom Fighters Abroad: Secret British Intelligence Report* (New Delhi: Criterion, 1988), p.15.

miss". In West Africa, his influence was extensive, personal, and stood the test of time. In America, his influence, albeit often indirect, was all-encompassing among the small group of Muslim converts and their associates. Elsewhere, his name cropped up in news reports, generating some level of curiosity, but only a few Muslims sought out his counsel and company of the LMI. Quilliam was a man of his time and the face of Western Islam during a critical period in history – the end of the Victorian era, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and rumblings of anti-colonialism. Nonetheless, it is difficult to quantify his lasting influence, if any, on the Muslim communities covered here. If the argument holds that Barakat-Ullah was indeed politicized in Liverpool, it would seem that that was Quilliam's longest lasting and most historically significant legacy of his influence on the subjects covered.