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Dialectics between transnationalism and diaspora

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community

Katrin Langewiesche

Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to draw attention to the complementarity of the concepts of diaspora and transnationalization by analyzing certain religious movements, using the example of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The concept of diaspora can be used as a framework for studying particular social formations that arise within processes of transnational mobilization. The transnational perspective highlights the importance of individual mobility, religious media, and educational and health institutions in conveying religious ideas across large geographical distances. The example of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community emphasizes the importance of religion and religious actors as brokers and outcomes of global exchange.

The Ahmadiyya was founded in British India in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, an Indian Muslim scholar (1835–1908). The movement holds a unique place within contemporary Islam because, although its members consider themselves Muslim, they are not recognized as such by the majority of Muslims. Since the 1974 Islamic Conference in Mecca, the Ahmadiyya has been excluded from the Islamic community by fatwa (legal opinion given by a recognized authority). Within the Ahmadiyya, there were theological differences and disagreements regarding the founder’s successor prompting the splitting of the movement into two groups as early as 1914: the Lahore Ahmadiyya (Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i Isha’at-i Islami—AAII) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at—AMJ).

The missionaries of the Lahore Ahmadiyya were the first to reach Europe and those who were met with greatest success among Europeans from World War I onward, until World War II transformed the situation entirely. Jonker (2016) explains these transformations by adapting missionary ideas to changing political and intellectual contexts. While, on one side, the progressive Islam of the Lahore Ahmadis and their rational approach fitted well in the period of experimentation and intellectual awakening between the two world wars, the millenarian Islam of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at, on the other side, with its promise of redemption through charism settled in a post-war, then Cold War atmosphere and began to conquer one European capital after another.
The vast majority of Ahmadis in Europe and in the world today belong to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at, whose administrative headquarters have been in London since 1984 because the Ahmadis are persecuted in their home country, Pakistan. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at is represented in over 200 countries around the world. Although the group is attracting many converts, especially in Africa, a very large proportion of its members are still Pakistani or of Pakistani origin.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at sees itself as a reform movement within Islam. Indeed, the traditional tenets of Muslim Reformism—personal interpretation of the Quran and the purge of Islam from local traditions—are present in Ahmadi Islam. An important characteristic of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at is that it is missionary-oriented, with a special emphasis on peaceful proselytizing aimed at Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Travelling from the periphery to the center of the European empires the Ahmadiyya movement was the first Muslim migrant community from the Indian subcontinent who engaged in a ‘reversed’ mission flux (Gaborieau 2001).

In its writings, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at refers to the sources of Islam. The Quran is considered to be an infallible book revealed by God. Furthermore, the sunna (practice of the Prophet Muhammad), as well as his traditions (hadith), are considered to be fundamental as long as they do not contradict the Quran. Ghulam Ahmad refers to the Hanafite school of law and to the independent interpretation of the legal sources (ijtihad) by scholars of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at (Ahmed 2012, pp. 13, 49).

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at links the demand for a return to true Islam with active faith spreading, which is in line with some Wahhabi-Salafi currents. This ethos resembles US evangelical media campaigns. It also calls for the veneration of their spiritual leader (like in some Sufi brotherhoods) and manages its international communities centrally (which resembles the clerical structure of the Catholic Church). The Ahmadiyya can be described as the outcome of cultural interactions in a colonial environment and long-term transnational exchanges combining diverse threads into one religious movement that adopted its own way.

Ahmadiyya studies, methods, and concepts

Although the Ahmadiyya movement has received scholarly attention both on the Indian subcontinent where the movement was founded (Lavan 1974; Friedmann 1989; Gaborieau 1994; Khan 2015; Qasmi 2015) and in the diaspora (Beyler et al. 2008; Ross-Valentine 2008; Curtis 2009; Lathan 2010; Skinner 2010; Green 2014; Jonker 2016), the level of research in Africa is not sufficient. The only transnational study for the African continent dates back to the 1960s (Fisher 1963). In addition, there are several national studies on Benin (Bregand 2006), Burkina Faso (Cissé and Langewiesche 2019), the Ivory Coast (Yacoob 1986), and most recently a historical study on the Gold Coast, today’s Ghana (Hanson 2017). Recent transnational studies are largely lacking, even though the outstanding pieces of research by Green (2014), Hanson (2017), and Jonker (2016) have identified precisely these global connections. The few studies on the Ahmadiyya deserve to be placed in a larger theoretical context, namely that of transnational religious research. Thus, the empirical example of the Ahmadiyya movement is nourished by the theoretical discussion about the complex relationship between religion and globalization.

Multilocal fieldwork

My interest in the activities of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community began in 2009 with a series of interviews with employees and the doctor of the Ahmadi hospital in Ouagadougou,
the capital of Burkina Faso. They allowed me to participate in many medical outreaches and cataract operations in villages around the capital and distributions of medicines in the prison. In 2014 and 2015, I conducted systematic research in France, Germany, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Benin, following the activities of various Ahmadi communities and participating in their events, in particular the *Jalsa Salana*, an annual meeting of days of prayer organized in every country hosting an Ahmadi community.¹

### Concepts: transnationalism and diaspora

In the context of the debates surrounding globalization, researchers introduced the idea of transnationalism to analyze complex links between migrants, their countries of origin, and their host society (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Vertovec 1999). Faist (2000) stressed that transnational phenomena do not develop solely through migration but also through the exchange of goods and ideas among NGOs, business connections, associations, religious movements, and churches (Lauser and Weissköppel 2008). Two characteristics must be highlighted when outlining this idea of transnationalism: one is in the area of religion or other sectors: this term refers to crossing borders in the sense that links are created and sustained between persons of the same national background but in different places. Second, the term indicates the possibility of crossing borders in the sense of an exchange of political, religious, and social ideas and interests. This indicates the mobilizing forces that transnational groups or networks can exercise within states or any given society. The first characteristic is obvious: the exchange of goods and information, and people’s mobility, clearly establish connections. In contrast, rather than assuming eventual effects in advance, the second characteristic—the mobilizing force of transnational links—remains to be proved empirically for each case (Weissköppel 2005a).

Transnationalism is an analytical and descriptive concept associated with such subjects as mobility and the formation of networks. It refers to processes that extend beyond national borders. The traditional definition of diaspora as religious or national groups who live outside their country of origin is rooted in concepts of ‘community’ and ‘dispersal,’ which are frequently associated with persecution (Cohen 2008). The term diaspora is not solely an analytical category used to describe social phenomena in the academic context; it is used equally commonly in political debates in the defense of individual interests. In contrast to the concept of transnationalism, which remains an academic term, diaspora can be envisaged as a political project, which serves in the defense of interests and ideologies (Bauböck 2010, p. 315).

When the practices and discourses of a group and the ways in which they are maintained and respected in a transnational community across generations are considered from an empirical perspective, the concept of diaspora quickly emerges. This concept alludes to cultural idiosyncrasies and identity markers such as language, food, clothes, and their importance for delineating the borders of the religious community. For historical reasons, the Ahmadiyya movement is strongly linked with the Pakistani diaspora but gradually includes new converts of different nationalities and cultures. As a result, its identity markers and boundaries are changing and shifting. This movement offers a good example for the study of a Muslim diaspora which is increasingly displaying its transnational character.

Three dimensions deserve attention if we wish to compare the ideas of transnationalism and diaspora with a view to deploying them for the analysis of a specific case (Bauböck and Faist 2010):
1. The phenomenon of transnationalism encompasses all kinds of social formations (for example, scientific networks and social movements alike). This concept is broader than that of diaspora, which is associated with groups and territories (Levitt 2001).

2. The dimension of identity and mobility. While transnationalism stresses individual mobility across borders thanks to the constitution of networks, the concept of diaspora is focused on collective identities.

3. Finally, the third difference between the two concepts concerns their inscriptions in time (Cohen 2008). The studies on diasporas are more suited to the long-term perspective and integrated into the historical context than transnational analyses which focus on recent migratory flows. The interest in combining these two concepts lies in recording the recent changes within the Ahmadiyya movement and understanding its adaptation and resistance to different contexts.

Transnational spaces bridging transnational movement and diaspora

Some of the Ahmadiyya’s global and local practices highlight this dialectic between transnationalism and diaspora. During the annual assemblies of the Ahmadiyya, the Jalsa Salana, a yearly event taking place in each country where the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at is settled, the transnational practices are physically concentrated and updated. These meetings are not only days of prayer for spiritual fulfillment but also an occasion to meet relatives and friends from all over the world, and to present the multiple professional and educational Ahmadi networks, the humanitarian association linked to the religious organization (Humanity First), the matrimonial agency of the Movement (Rishta Nata), and its wide-reaching media activities. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at conveys their message through a highly developed media network. Nowadays, its international television plays an important role for the growing number of converts and to counter the accusations of heterodoxy (Scholz et al. 2008; Sevea 2009). In Africa, radio broadcasts are just as important in order to reach out large sections of the population as well as all Muslims who would never take part in their meetings because of the Ahmadiyya’s outsider position.

There are several reasons accounting for this outsider position. The main reason is that the Ahmadis believe their founder is not only a reformer of Islam but also the promised Messiah and Imam Mahdi. Other Muslims see this belief as a contradiction to the dogma that Mohammed is the ‘Seal of the Prophet.’ This led to controversies over the interpretation of the Quranic term ‘Seal of the Prophet’ (khatam-al-Nabiyyin). Ghulam Ahmad understands khatam not as the ‘last’ but as the ‘best’ and ‘greatest’ of the prophets. Ghulam Ahmad and other thinkers of Islamic mysticism before him (Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi, 1165–1240) make their case by emphasizing the difference between legislative prophets (anbiya tashri’) and non-legislative prophets (anbiya la tashri’ a lahum) (Friedmann 2003, pp. 73–75). Ghulam Ahmad sees himself as a non-legislative prophet who has come to revitalize the teaching of the Quran as the last scripture, and who acknowledges Muhammad as the last prophet.

The Ahmadiyya’s commitment in the fields of education, health, and development has a clearly missionary purpose even if they carefully keep mission and humanitarian work apart (Langewiesche 2020). The movement funds both its missionary activities and its social projects through its members’ contributions. Members must donate between 6–10% of their net income to the community. These internal contributions do not exempt Ahmadi Muslims from the standard zakat. Mission activities combined with the strong veneration of their
charismatic leader and a centralized organization are the main elements which allow the spreading of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at all over the world. Every country has a national president (the Amir) and a chief missionary. The Amir, a position comparable to that of an ambassador, is the direct representative of the khalifa. Every Amir is advised by an elected executive office including several departments. Inside the Ahmadiyya movement, there are sub-communities for boys (7–15), for men under 40 (Khuddam), for men over 40 (Ansar), for girls (7–15) and for women (Lajna). The women’s organizations are organized independently and are under the sole authority of the khalifa. The local, regional, and national department heads are in close contact with the international headquarters in London. Local and national departments together organize major events, such as the Jalsa Salana, which would otherwise overburden local communities financially.

The Jalsa Salana can be analyzed as transnational spaces connecting the global Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and its Pakistani diaspora. I use the concept of transnational spaces with respect to Marcus (1995). In his programmatic text he suggests tracking ‘communication spaces’ like crossover points in a network.

**Professional and educational associations**

Each country publicly rewards its academic graduates during the annual Jalsa Salana. In Germany, where the biggest European assembly of Ahmadis takes place (and in 2016, 33,000 Ahmadis gathered to pray and undergo spiritual training), the khalifa himself presided over the ceremony for awarding medals to the new graduates. The community claims ‘tens of millions’ of faithful. However, independent sources variously estimate the community at between 10 and 20 million members worldwide, thereby representing around 1% of the world’s Muslim population.

In some countries, like Pakistan, the members cannot proclaim they are Ahmadis because of the persecutions. For this reason, any estimation of the exact number of Ahmadis is difficult to establish for the organization itself and research institutions alike. However, even in western countries, the Ahmadiyya rarely discloses its exact numbers of faithful. This tendency to remain discreet regarding the number of members in the community is part of a narrative of a religious truth situated beyond history and the commensurable. The realistic demography is of lesser importance than the vision of an increasing and ever expanding religious movement.

Within the movement, great emphasis is placed on the education of all members, from childhood to adulthood, and for both men and women. The Ahmadis’ understanding of education covers both religious and scientific instruction. Particular attention is paid to the education of girls and women. As a result, it is possible to encounter numerous Ahmadi women in both Africa and Europe, who exercise socially prestigious professions requiring extensive university studies. This promotion of the education and professionalization of women on the part of the Ahmadiyya does not, however, rule out the requirement for the strict separation of the sexes within the community, within families as soon as strangers are visiting them and, as much as possible, within public spaces. The professional involvement of women into society is encouraged by the community under the condition that the woman is able to respect the purdah (i.e. the correct behaviour/clothing) and that her professional activity does not prevent her from taking care of her children’s education and doing the housework.

During the Jalsa Salana, members of the various professional associations can meet directly or be informed about the activities of the respective associations. There exist international associations according to professions for Ahmadi lawyers, professors, interpreters, and
engineers, who offer support and internships to young Ahmadis at the beginning of their careers. In every country there are also national student associations to provide tutorials and counsel about professional or academic careers. The movement requests all members to offer their services to the community for free for at least three months each year. For example, young Ahmadi Burkinabéés completing their agronomy studies come to provide their help in Nigerian villages during their vacation. This system of religious service creates a permanent circulation between villagers and people who have a cosmopolitan habitus and are connected to the globalized world. This system encourages young, well-educated Ahmadis to regularly visit a village and not to sever links with rural life as is often the case for young people who have studied and who do not return to the village either because they do not wish to do so or because they lack professional prospects in rural areas.

**Humanity First: a humanitarian and development association**

During the annual prayer days, the activities of the Ahmadiyya-initiated non-government organization (NGO), *Humanity First*, are presented to the public. In 1995, the Ahmadiyya religious movement set up a humanitarian organization. *Humanity First* is devoted exclusively to humanitarian aims, whose activities benefit the entire population of a country and are explicitly not associated with proselytizing. *Humanity First* offers a wide range of social and charitable services in over 43 countries across 6 continents. Like many Islamic NGOs, it concentrates its actions on Muslim countries or those with a substantial Muslim minority population. In Africa, *Humanity First* funds hospitals, schools, orphanages, and different kinds of infrastructure for villagers. They organize medical camps and emergency aid in crisis situations. In Europe, *Humanity First* organizes blood donations, actions of cleaning of public spaces, or support to the homeless. By building schools and respecting the public curriculum, by integrating their healthcare centers into national schemes, *Humanity First* is one of the transnational Islamic NGOs aligning their activities with the public policy of the countries where it works and within the legal framework of its host countries. The case of *Humanity First* illustrates that an Islamic missionary movement like the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama‘at, whose emphasis is on mosque building and da‘wa, can launch a humanitarian NGO that strictly separates mission from aid and focuses on poverty alleviation. Yet both organizations are based on the same values and religious norms. For Ahmadi Members of *Humanity First* the bridging of religious activism and development cooperation emerges as an ideal way of pursuing religious social activities in a global society that requires professionalism and economic performances (Langewiesche 2020).

**Ristha Nata: an international matrimonial agency**

The encouragement to acquire advanced scientific education and to engage in the local civil society via development cooperation goes hand in hand with the practice of arranged marriages. Be it in Germany, the UK, or Burkina Faso, it is recommended that parents choose a partner for their children. They are supported in this endeavor by a department, the *Ristha Nata*, which operates as an international matrimonial agency for and among Ahmadis, and organizes national seminars, often during the *Jalsa Salana*, which enables mothers to establish contact with other mothers who are looking for spouses for their children. During these seminars, the mother of a boy, who is identified as such by a blue ribbon, can approach a woman wearing a red ribbon indicating that she has a daughter to marry off, with a view to exchanging information. Strict endogamy is recommended within
the community. An Ahmadi girl is allowed to marry only an Ahmadi husband; if she does otherwise, she will be obliged to leave the jama'at. An Ahmadi man may wed a non-Ahmadi woman as her conversion is hoped for. These endogamic rules are adapted according to regional customs particularly in order to integrate the new converts. Endogamy facilitates the maintenance of transnational connections of the global community, allows the development of new networks, and helps to expand the community (Balzani 2006). Nonetheless, in Africa strict endogamy is practiced between Ahmadis of Pakistani origin, which gives the impression of a cultural segregation between Ahmadis of Pakistani and African origin.

**Wide-reaching media activities**

The Ahmadiyya has several publishing houses and printing centers in each sub-region to publish the international magazine *Review of Religions* and all the Ahmadi literature. Green emphasizes how important, in view of reaching out to new regions of the world, the publishing of newspaper articles, making speeches, and founding magazines were as early as the 1920s, when the first Punjabi missionary arrived in the American Midwest (Green 2014). The often free distribution of this literature is part of a method for gaining new members, just like Quran translations in all languages, radio broadcasts, and the Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA). The global satellite TV MTA consists of four international channels. Since 2006, it has been possible to watch the Friday Sermons live on MTA simultaneously translated into eight languages. Within a few days, they were made available through smartphone apps (on the website al.islam, in 18 languages or via PowerPoint presentations). The Ahmadiyya has an important online presence with their official page al.islam (but also the pages of each national community and innumerable personal blogs). During the annual prayer days, the Ahmadi literature is given away or sold in all languages and exhibitions of Quran translations are made accessible. At the *Jalsa Salana* in Germany a translation service in more than 15 languages ensures that all members receive simultaneous translation of the sermons and of the lectures held in Urdu or German. All technical tools, such as simultaneous interpretation or the iconography of the movement rolled out in the various media channels, help to create coherence and cohesion in a context of exclusion from the ummah in order to establish a collective harmony where members understand each other and are morally united by faith in the power of the caliphate (Langewiesche 2021).

During the *Jalsa Salana*, today’s Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’s challenge of maintaining the coherence of a transnational discourse without falling into the particularism of a Pakistani diaspora is particularly visible. Some requirements, which formerly served to maintain the Pakistani identity, have been relaxed to facilitate the acceptance and integration of new converts. For example, learning the Urdu language is no longer mandatory even if learning this language is encouraged so that all members may read the basic scriptures. The Imams give their Friday speeches in the respective national language or have them translated if necessary. Another example of this flexibility is food. At the annual meetings, special meals are proposed for guests and new converts, much less spicy, and fat-free, than Pakistani dishes. The wearing of the veil is also adapted to the customary dress of different countries. It is not mandatory to wear a veil covering the nose and the mouth, a type of veil still largely worn by Pakistani women. Many Ahmadi women wear a scarf loosely draped around their heads, like Mauritian women, or a simple cap or hat in keeping with the current fashion. Strict endogamous marriage rules are gradually loosened due to local customs. Traditional almsgiving is translated into a humanitarian narrative.
In contrast, one important element of the Ahmadi-Pakistani diaspora identity is maintained: the commemoration of the persecution and the celebration of the martyrs. Although the Ahmadiyya is no longer a diaspora whose members share the same migratory history and traumatic experience of persecution, the reference to the martyrs functions as a symbol of the unity of all Ahmadis. In local parishes and during the national *Jalsa Salana’s* exhibitions in honor of the Martyrs are set up again and again, and numerous Ahmadi publications deal with the political, sociological, legal, or theological aspects of their persecution (Gualtieri 1989; Ahmed 2012; Arif 2014; Qasmi 2015). This culture of remembrance is ‘iconographic,’ whose social capital makes it possible to bridge the wide geographical areas that separate the individual communities and to maintain a common framework of experience (Bruneau 2004). Khan (2015, chapter 6, 7) examines in detail how persecution has influenced the Ahmadi identity by altering the movement’s theological worldview.

**Conclusion**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community reminds us that a transnational organization does not only open up new horizons. It is also about withdrawing into the community, and thus drawing up new borders. It exemplifies what Peter Geschiere and Birgit Meyer describe as the paradox between ‘global flows’ and ‘cultural closure.’ The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is one of many empirical examples of the fact ‘that people’s awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames, as well as determined efforts to affirm old and construct new boundaries’ (1998, p. 602). Cohen (2008) advances the proposition that in the face of the insecurity of our global age, many social groups want to reach in and to reach out, to be simultaneously ethnic and transnational, local and cosmopolitan. They combine the ‘comfort zone’ provided by the community of a diaspora by sharing the intimacy of the same religion and way of life with ‘questing impulses’ from transnational connections. Within the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community such tensions become visible, the analysis of which makes it a particularly exciting research subject. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is in constant tension between globalization and identity, transnationalism and diaspora. Not only does the researcher struggle with the global and the local, but it is also the case for the Ahmadis who have to overcome the vision of an authentic (Pakistani) culture to integrate their movement in the globalized world. Through its history, the Ahmadiyya is closely linked to Pakistan, but the cornerstone of the community is not a national origin, but a specific religious faith and its practices. The Khalifa and his entourage accepts the relaxing of certain requirements which formerly served to maintain the Pakistani identity. This flexibility facilitates the acceptance and integration of new converts. Further research is needed to verify the assumption that how the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Lahore Ahmadiyya deal with converts is one of the key differences between these two branches of Ahmadiyya. Beside their ideological divergent this contrasting integration of converts may well account for the more successful expansion of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community compared with that of the Lahore Ahmadiyya.

By means of the Ahmadiyya movement it becomes clear how transnational religious organizations contribute to social dynamics that change local contexts as well as global ones. They engage in development cooperation, inter-Islamic or inter-religious dialogue, integration work, and media relations beyond the strictly religious sphere. The Ahmadiyya Movement was a highly politicized movement in the beginnings of its history in Pakistan, and is becoming politicized again today in its home country and the South Asian context, but it claims to strictly avoid interferences in the political agendas of the host countries. As a matter of fact, leaders and scholars of the Ahmadiyya interpret the specific
religious rights and duties in such a way that they can be brought into line with the legal and social principles of every host state. The international Ahmadiyya movement has no political agenda. But undoubtedly it can be qualified as a political actor in the broader sense. They participate in socio-political decision making and in the process of elaborating new rules. They participate in the organization of social life in the different countries where they settle. Nevertheless, the political consequences in the respective countries in which the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is active and its contributions to governmental politics remain to be investigated. In addition, there remains to be analyzed how the intra-Islamic dialogue and the acceptance of the Ahmadiyya has developed in secularly oriented states in Europe, Africa, and the United States in order to assess the repercussions of this tendency of recognition in secular states on the global movement. The dialectic between the local and the global means that local integration or rejection of the Ahmadiyya also has repercussions on the global movement. By getting entangled with temporal institutions, religious diasporas in general, not only the Ahmadiyya, have reoriented their spiritual mission. This process shows how local politics shape religious transnational identities.

Finally, the example of Ahmadiyya illustrates the theoretical assumption that religion is a key element for social cohesion in a phase of geographical dispersion or ethnic and national diversification of a diaspora. New transnational practices are linked to the diasporic phenomenon in complex ways. It is a plausible hypothesis that increasing intercultural opportunities should act as a catalyst to move local cultures first into diasporic space then, via conversion and integration of outsiders, to a more transnational or cosmopolitan arena (Cohen 2008). Conversion and integration are important elements for the transformation of a diaspora into a transnational group. The religious distinctiveness of such groups as the Ismailis, Alevi, and Rastafarians usually tends to set them apart as ethnic groups whereas Ahmadis can no longer be considered as an ethnic or national group because of their policy of conversion. Combining transnational and diaspora concepts helps to theorize the connection between religion and globalization in terms of changing frameworks entailed by migration or minority status and mission.

Notes

1 I am grateful to the family of Sameena Nasreen in Ghana, the Härtler and Zubair families in Germany and the families of Dr. Bhunoo, Khalid Mahmood and Mahmood Nasir Saqib in Burkina. I also appreciate the welcome of the family of Farooq Ahmad in Benin. In France, I am very grateful to Shafia Ishtiaq and her family, to the family of Naseer Ahmed and to Astou Dramé, Munirah Doboory, Ameenah Nabebaccus and Rokia for the time that they devoted to me and for their kindness in answering all my questions. The different field visits were generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

2 Beside the interpretation of the prophet’s doctrine, the Ahmadiyya differs from other Muslims mainly in the interpretations of the Jihad concept and of the doctrine on Jesus. For a detailed analysis of the reasons why Ahmadiyya is seen as a heterodox movement, see Lathan (2008).

3 www.alislam.org/library/ahmadiyya-muslim-community/.


5 In Germany the community has given an estimation of 50,000 in 2005 and 35,000 in 2013 (revised during the proceeding to join the corporation of public law (Körperschaftsverfahren)). http://remid.de/info_zahlen/islam/ [Accessed 12 March 2018]. In 2016, it was assumed that the number of Ahmadis in Germany was 45,000.

6 For example, the International Association of Ahmadi Architects & Engineers (IAAAE), the Ahmadiyya Muslim Teachers Association (AMTA), the Association of Ahmadi political scientist and lawyers.
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