

Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad and the Establishment of the Aḥmadiyya Jamā'at from a Market Theory Perspective

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Terrains of Exchange

In *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (2014), historian Nile Green suggests a theoretical framework that could be employed to analyse Muslim responses to colonialism. Especially he analyses how individual Muslims as well as Islamic organisations transformed themselves or developed as they struggled with each other in order to stake claims on an increasingly connected world. One such development was the ideology of Pan-Islamism, which strives to unite Muslims of all creeds in an effort to meet the challenges posed by colonialism and modernity. The Pan-Islamic current was, however, merely one of many Islamic ideologies that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and rather than being a time of Muslim unity, the period in question witnessed the emergence of a multitude of Islamic factions. One of these was the Aḥmadiyya Jamā'at which will be in focus in the current article.

In his study, Green turns the spotlight on such processes and attempts to “look beyond the discursive surface similarities of Muslim ‘beliefs’ to probe instead the multifarious – and indeed competing – social producers of religion.”¹ A further objective of his study is to suggest a terminology that will, in contrast to using emic vocabulary, better allow us to analyse Islam as an “internally competitive field of social actors and organizations.”² The aim of this article is to make use of Green’s conceptualisations and terminology in order to analyse the evolution of the Aḥmadiyya Jamā'at as it transformed from being a Sunnī reform movement into the world’s largest Islamic new religious organisation. The Aḥmadiyya Jamā'at is to be understood here as an Islamic new religious movement based upon the fact that it was founded by a charismatic leader, Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad (1835-1908), who emerged as a preacher

¹ Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 2.

² Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 10.

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connected to Islamic reformist currents in nineteenth-century India but who later increasingly developed a theology rejected by other Muslims.³

In his framework, Green directs our attention to what he labels “firms” and “entrepreneurs” as “producers” of religious goods through “adaptations” and “innovations” used to attract “consumers” on a developing religious “market”. “Adaption,” in Green’s usage, is employed to signify how such Muslim entrepreneurs might use and modify the techniques of their competitors in order to suit their own purposes while “innovation” refers to forms of religious strategies that go beyond adaptation so that new (often hybridised) religious forms may be generated.⁴

As in other economies, religious entrepreneurs and firms are dependent upon consumers for their success and therefore might need to adapt their products so that they become more attractive and desirable than the goods offered by their competitors. This might be done by making use of new forms of technology; novel and more effective organisational structures; or various interpretations of religious sources or practices, some of which may be more creative than others. In regard to such new markets, Muslim entrepreneurs having educational backgrounds other than the traditional *madrasah* education became more common, and they also increasingly disseminated their teachings through novel forms.⁵ The growing popularity of such preachers gradually undermined the authority of the ‘ulamā’ in regard to a market where “any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad could claim to speak for Islam.”⁶ Let us now take a closer look at the market context in which Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad emerged.

The Market

By 1834, when the American Presbyterian Mission was established in Ludhiana near Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad’s hometown of Qāḍiān, British missionary churches had already been active in India for some twenty years, and they were then bustling with activity.⁷ Missionary stations were built, and through them new forms of religious organisations were introduced alongside

³ For a discussion of the concept of new religious movements, see David, G. Bromley, “The Sociology of New Religious Movements”, in Hammer, Olav & Rothstein, Mikael (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 13-28. For a discussion of the Aḥmadiyya Jamā'at as an Islamic new religious movement, see Brian Arly Jacobsen; Göran Larsson & Simon Sorgenfrei, “The Ahmadiyya Mission to the Nordic Countries”, in James R. Lewis & Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen (ed.), *Handbook of Nordic New Religions*, (Brill: Leiden, 2015): 359-373.

⁴ Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 9-10. A subordinate aim of Green’s book is to develop an analytical terminology and we must therefore not confuse the analytical term “innovation” with the emic use of the term, i.e., as a translation of the Arabic *bid'a*.

⁵ Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print”, in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (1993): 229-251; Göran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media: Historical and Contemporary Debates*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011).

⁶ Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print”, in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (1993): 245. Mattias Dahlqvist, *The Politics of Islam, Non-Violence, and Peace: the Thought of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in Context*. Diss. (Umeå: Umeå University, 2019): 54.

⁷ Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyyah Movement: A History and Perspective*. (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1974): 44.

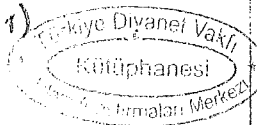
Deconstruction of religious thought in Islam: Iqbal and the Ahmadiyya

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Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1875 to 1938 CE) stood at the cusp of modernity in British India. As the “poet visionary” and “spiritual father” of Pakistan, his role as an anti-colonial intellectual who “dreamed” of carving out an independent Muslim homeland from British India is thoroughly ingrained in the popular imagination, state institutions, and political rhetoric. Other than Jinnah, the political “founder” of Pakistan, no other figure enjoys such heroic, mythic status. Scholars of Islam and modernity have treated and cited him as a preeminent Muslim modernist globally. His role as a leading Pan-Islamist with Jamal-ud-din Afghani and Syed Qutub is unquestioned and his prominence as Indian Muslim political modernist is unrivalled. Indeed, “few people have ever disputed his power”¹ and Iqbal’s name is invoked as a moral authority² to this day.

In addition to his 12,000 verses of Urdu and Persian poetry, Iqbal famously published six English language lectures under the title “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” in 1930 (a seventh was added in editions since 1934). These lectures have stood as a testament to his significance for those invoking “liberal” Islam.³ The lectures have influenced Muslim intellectuals around the world, from Dr. Ali Shariati (ideologue of the Iranian revolution) to Dr. Fazlur Rahman in Pakistan to Dr. Tariq Ramadan (the noted European Islamic reformer) today. They remain a persistent reference point in the modern academic study of Islam⁴ and, indeed, South Asian Islam.⁵

¹ M. Dorraj, “The intellectual dilemmas of a Muslim modernist: Politics and poetics of Iqbal,” *The Muslim World* 85 (1995), 266–79: 266.

² E. Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*. Translated by D.F. Pocock, trans. D. F. Pocock, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010 [1924]).

³ R. Hassan, “Introduction,” in *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*, ed. H. C. Hillier and B. B. Koshul (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). See also M. Q. Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton University Press, 2018: Ch. 2).

⁴ F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); H. C. Hillier and B. B. Koshul, eds., *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

⁵ M. Q. Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*.

However, less discussed is the fact that four years after publishing *Reconstruction*, Iqbal wrote an essay in a newspaper entitled *Qadianis and Orthodox Muslims* denouncing the community of the Ahmadiyya as heretics, a charge he reiterated a year later in a written exchange with the Hindu, Indian nationalist, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Iqbal used the term “heretic” to describe the Ahmadiyya 30 times in these two English-language essays, leaving no doubt as to his views on the matter. Now, the Ahmadiyya were considered heterodox virtually since the community was established by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1880 in the town of Qadian in British Indian Punjab. A decade or so later, Ahmad’s claim of receiving revelation as a “prophet” was roundly condemned by Muslims worldwide. Although Ahmad used this term in a particular sense of Islamic tradition, he and his followers were quickly declared “heretics”.⁶ Iqbal’s essays consolidated this charge. Numerous studies have mapped the discrimination and violence experienced by Ahmadi since 1899 in Qadian, then in Pakistan where the community moved in 1947, and now worldwide.⁷ In Pakistan, the community was officially declared heretical by constitutional amendment in 1974.⁸ Iqbal is often cited as justification in both official persecution and popular violence.

This is no “mere” theological issue for adjudication by Doctors of Law, since Iqbal’s arguments are not centered on theology nor, for that matter, does theological reasoning exist in a socio-political vacuum (as pointed out by critical religion research generally, and in the case of Ahmadiyyat specifically).⁹ Given Iqbal’s moral authority, it becomes crucial to ask what implications his hereticization of the Ahmadiyya has for understanding modern South Asian Islam. This article probes Iqbal’s texts on Ahmadiyyat to ask how he justifies his argument to declare the Ahmadiyya heretics and “beyond the pale of Islam.” The intention is to get at discursive themes undercutting his argument which, in turn, become points of entry to

⁶ Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); A. Qadir, “Doors to the Imaginal: Implications of Sunni Islam’s Persecution of the Ahmadi ‘Heresy,’” *Religions* 9, no. 4 (2018): 91–107.

⁷ S. R. Valentine, “Prophecy after the Prophet, albeit lesser prophets? The Ahmadiyya Jama’at in Pakistan,” *Contemporary Islam* 8 (2014), 99–113; S. Saeed, “Pakistani nationalism and the state marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7 (2007), 132–52; N. Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Editorial, “Events of 1974: Anti-Ahmadi hostilities,” *The Review of Religions*, March 2008; A. U. Qasmi, *The Ahmadiis and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2015); A. Qadir, “Parliamentary hereticization of the Ahmadiyya in Pakistan: The modern world implicated in Islamic crises,” In *Religion in Times of Crisis*, edited by G. Ganiel, C. Monnot and H. Winkel (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 135–154; A. Qadir, “How heresy makes orthodoxy: The sedimentation of Sunnism in the Ahmadi cases of South Africa,” *Sociology of Islam* 4, no. 4 (2016): 345–367.

⁸ A. Qadir, “When heterodoxy becomes heresy: Using Bourdieu’s concept of doxa to describe state-sanctioned exclusion in Pakistan,” *Sociology of Religion* 76 no. 2 (2015): 155–176; A. Qadir, “Parliamentary hereticization of the Ahmadiyya in Pakistan”.

⁹ T. Fitzgerald, “Religion and politics as modern fictions,” *Critical Research on Religion* 3 (2015), 303–19; R. T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). On defining theology when hereticizing Ahmadiyyat, see A. Qadir, “Doors to the imaginal”.

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L'Ahmadiyya dans l'Empire britannique et en Angleterre

À propos de :

BALZANI Marzia, *Ahmadiyya Islam and the Muslim Diaspora: Living in the End of Days*, Londres, New York, Routledge, 2020, 223 p.

HANSON John H., *The Ahmadiyya in the Gold Coast: Muslim Cosmopolitans in the British Empire*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2017, 287 p.

Le mouvement de réforme de l'Ahmadiyya a été fondé en 1889 dans le Pendjab britannique en réaction à des tentatives de conversions massives et agressives des missionnaires chrétiens. Le fondateur du mouvement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, s'est présenté dans un premier temps en tant que réformateur du siècle (Mujaddid). Il adressa d'abord son message au sous-continent indien. Cependant, ses adeptes diffusèrent très rapidement ses idées en Angleterre, en Afrique de l'Est, dans le Ceylan britannique et sur l'île Maurice où ils formèrent des communautés dès 1910. Les érudits musulmans contemporains de Ghulam Ahmed accueillirent son message avec bienveillance, avant de s'y opposer lorsqu'il proclama être aussi le Messie promis et l'imam Mahdi. Après la mort de Ghulam Ahmad, son mouvement se scinda en deux branches dès 1914.

La branche de l'AAIL, *Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i Isha'at-i Islami*, s'établit dans la ville de Lahore. Ses membres se présentaient comme des intellectuels libéraux qui souhaitaient une modernisation de l'islam et un dialogue avec des savants occidentaux. Pour eux, leur fondateur était un réformateur de l'islam. Les membres de la deuxième branche, *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at* (AMJ), basée dans la ville de Qadian, considéraient le même fondateur comme un messie qui réunissait en lui les expériences de prophètes précédents pour renouveler l'islam. Avec cette conception, ils poursuivaient une valeur essentielle de la tradition islamique, l'accès à la transcendance par le charisme, et s'attiraient en même temps l'opposition de la majorité des musulmans par leur exégèse du dogme du sceau du prophète.