

Ahmadiyya and Development Aid in West Africa

Introduction

International agencies or governments are slowly shifting their focus on religious actors by integrating them into governmental or non-governmental development aid programmes. Recent development discourse has incorporated the social activities of religious NGOs into its agenda, therefore challenging the common assumption that religious institutions seem to be too closely linked to mission and proselytism. Major international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been intensifying their relations with civil society since the mid-1990s and discussing the role of faith-based organizations in development since the late 1990s. In 1999, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) initiated a programme called “Social Capital, Ethics and Development” which gathered together economists, religious leaders and former heads of state. The impact of religious actors as agents of development was also recognised by the UK Government's Commission for Africa in 2005. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up a forum on “Religion and Development Policy”, thus recognising the strong links between religious and development networks (Marshall/Keough 2004; Ellis/Ter Haar 2006; Carbonnier 2013). NGOs, as well as international organisations and various European and African governments stress that the joint commitment of religious communities and development organisations is necessary to find solutions to current crises and global issues, especially in the areas of health, protection of the environment and food sovereignty. Among other things, their argumentation is grounded on the conviction of the greater cultural closeness of religious actors, their long-standing familiarity with the local population, and the efficiency and transparency of their actions.

Instead of assuming the anticipated effects of religiously motivated development aid in advance, this chapter investigates this aspect empirically using an example from Muslim charity and development aid. This example affords the discussion of the main topic of this book: does religion make a difference for development?

This chapter focusses on the humanitarian work of the Islamic NGO Humanity First in Burkina Faso setting it in the network structures that link this NGO to the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* all over the world. The first section considers the works of Humanity First and the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* in a comparative perspective of other transnational Muslim Minority Groups and their implications in welfare activities. The second section offers a description of the NGO Humanity First—its history, the religious or moral values and motivations of its members and its activities in Burkina Faso. The concluding remarks return to the initial question. In order to understand the implications of religion for development, we must recognise that religious values exist in relation to other norms produced by social, institutional, or ethnic hierarchies.

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, who allowed me to participate in many medical outings in villages around the capital, distributions of medicines in the prison and cataract operations.¹ 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 dedicated to praying organised in every country hosting an Ahmadi community. I visited many institutions of Ahmadiyya and Humanity First in all these countries and participated in a humanitarian trip to Benin together with the German Humanity First Group.² I visited many Ahmadi families and I stayed for a few weeks with some of them. On those occasions, I felt

1 This work was part of a larger research project entitled “The denominational health system in Burkina Faso. Collaboration and conflict with the public health system” supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which I led and which was based at the University of Mainz, Germany.

2 This research was generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation (http://www.lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/ahmadiyya_bewegung).

extremely welcome.³ Since 2016, I have repeatedly attended conferences, ceremonies and festivals of the Ahmadi communities in France and Burkina Faso, as well as followed the activities of Humanity First Germany. As it is often the case with transnational and multicultural ethnographies following the networks of people, field research must develop over a long period of time in order to maintain ties with the delocalised persons and communities.

The *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*: a transnational Muslim group among others

The *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* is one branch of the Ahmadiyya founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, an Indian Muslim scholar (1835–1908). Within the group, there were theological differences and disagreement regarding the founder's successor which prompted the splitting of the movement into two groups as early as 1914: on the one hand, the Lahore Ahmadiyya (*Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i Isha'at-i Islami*—AAII), and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (*Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at*—AMJ) on the other hand.⁴ The vast majority of Ahmadis in the world today are part of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, whose administrative headquarters have been in London since 1984 because the Ahmadis are persecuted in their home country, Pakistan. Since the 1974 Islamic Conference in Mecca, the Ahmadiyya has been excluded from the Islamic community by *fatwa* (legal opinion given by a recognised authority; Ahmed 2012).

My investigations were limited to the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* branch of the Ahmadiyya in West Africa. In West Africa, Ahmadi missionaries first arrived in British colonies in the 1915s, and then in French-speaking countries in the 1950s. In the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Gambia and

3 I am grateful to many people, but particularly to the family of Sameena Nasreen in Ghana, the Härter and Zubair families in Germany and the families of Dr. Bhunoo, of Khalid Mahmood and Mahmood Nasir Saqib in Burkina. I also greatly appreciated the welcome of the family of Farooq Ahmad in Benin. In France, I am very grateful to Shafiq Ishtiaq and her family, to the family of Naseer Ahmed and to Astou Dramé, Munirah Doboory, Ameenah Nabeebaccus and Rokiah for the time that they devoted to me and for their kindness in answering to all my questions. I thank Adjara Konkobo, Denise Hien, Antonia and Valentia Pock for the transcriptions of the recorded interviews. Finally, I am particularly indebted to Mahamadi Ouédraogo for his invaluable assistance and active interest in my field research in Burkina and Ghana.

4 For more details on these two branches and on the outsider situation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community see Lathan 2008.

Sierra Leone, Ahmadiyya appeared around 1915 and was present in the public arena as early as the 1930s, particularly in the education system of the Cold Coast and later Ghana (Fisher 1963; Hanson 2017; Skinner 2013). From there, the movement was introduced in Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, around 1950, but it only became really visible in the public arena during the 2000s (Cissé 2010). In Benin, the first Ahmadi missionaries arrived from Nigeria in 1960. However, it was not until the 1990s that the movement was well settled and expanded in Benin (Bregand 2006). In West Africa, the largest Ahmadi community is now established in Ghana.

Ahmadiyya's missionary activities in Europe began at about the same time as those in English-speaking African countries, mainly after the First World War. In Germany the first Pakistani missionary settled in 1924 in Berlin and ten years earlier in London (Jonker 2016; Hanson 2017). In France, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was established late in the 1980s, after a first attempt in 1946 which was unsuccessful.⁵ The largest Ahmadi communities in Europe today are settled in Great Britain and Germany. The spread of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* from British India and Pakistan to Europe, America and Africa has long been based on linguistic and geopolitical lines of communication and also on personal connections established in the wake of study and business travels. In that respect Hanson (2017: 123ff) stresses the importance of the Afro-Brazilian diaspora in expanding the Ahmadiyya connections from London to Lagos.

The international *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* offers a wide range of social services and charities to its members and to all people in need. However, since 1995, the Ahmadiyya religious movement has also set up a humanitarian organization: Humanity First, an NGO devoted exclusively to humanitarian aims and whose activities benefit the entire population of a country and are explicitly not associated with proselytising. Before describing the activities of Humanity First in more detail, I would like to compare the NGO of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* with the welfare activities of other Muslim Minority groups, the Tablighi Jama'at and the Gülen Movement. Not through evaluating their organisational structure or

5 The French *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* purchased their first building in 1985 where the Amir office is currently located. At that time there were not more than around twenty Ahmadis in France. The group was made up of Mauritian immigrant workers, Ahmadi by birth, and was gradually supplemented by Pakistani Ahmadi refugees, and then by Muslims of other nationalities who accepted Ahmadi Islam. In 2008 the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* inaugurated their first mosque in France in St Prix (Val de l'Oise) (Interview Amir, May 2014).

mobilization strategies, but by comparing the history and characteristics of the religious organisations to which they belong.⁶

Like the *Tablighi Jama'at* and the *Gülen Movement*, the *Ahmadiyya* is a new Muslim Missionary Movement. It can even be considered as a precursor in the growing concern for proselytism issues of the early 20th century. The Ahmadiyya is the first transnational Muslim movement founded in India, independent of any state support and attracting converts of all cultures and origins (Gaborieau 2001: 38). The evolution of the Ahmadiyya is closely linked to the birth of Pakistan. Even before the partition the Ahmadiyya was attacked by the Ahrar party (*Majlis-e Ahrar-e Islam-e Hind*). Between 1940 and 1947 they had stood against the idea of the division of the colony of British India according to religious criteria and the creation of a separate state. However, when the division was enforced, opposition to the Ahmadiyya was a welcome issue for the Ahrar party in order to gain authority and attention in the public arena in the young Pakistani nation, whose existence they had fought. In this atmosphere some Islamic actors, not only the Ahrar, were successful in portraying the Ahmadiyya as enemies of Islam (Lathan 2010: 81). These accusations became a political issue around 1947 by the demand that the Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims and that their missionary activities be prohibited. Qasmi (2015) states that anti-Ahmadi disputations had unfolded during the colonial period and thoroughly examines how, in the context of the postcolonial state of Pakistan, a theological polemic was transformed into a political issue.

While the Ahmadiyya and the *Tablighi Jama'at* came up in a colonial context—the Ahmadiyya was founded in Punjab, India, in 1889, the *Tablighi Jama'at* emerged in the 1920s in Mewat, North India, the *Gülen Movement* appeared about forty years later in the 1960s in Izmir, Turkey. These three Missionary Movements have rapidly become some of the largest transnational Muslim Movements in the world today (Langewiesche, forthcoming). They are now present in nearly every continent but are still minority movements within the global “mainstream Islam”.⁷ This minority status creates commonalities that are worth comparing. Studies on the construction of ethnicity have shown that an identity is always formed in relation to others (Lentz 1998; Peel 2000). This also applies to religious identities: they form

6 Essential elements of the comparison certainly also apply to the Ismaelites and the Agha Khan Foundation, but I will not go into more detail.

7 Regarding the *Tablighi Jama'at* I refer to the works of Gaborieau 2000, Janson 2014, Reetz 2010, regarding the Ahmadiyya to Fisher 1963; Friedmann 1989; Gaborieau 2001 and regarding the *Gülen Movement* to Dohm 2013; Tittensor 2014; Yavuz 2013.

and change in conjunction with or in opposition to other religious or confessional traditions. The members of a minority like the Ahmadiyya have different priorities from those of the religious majority. Moreover, in many states the Ahmadiyya Muslim community faces a twofold minority situation, as a minority within Islam and as a demographic minority among a religious majority. For a religious minority, participation in development cooperation can be a means to impose itself as a legitimate and valuable member of society so that potential converts may be appealed in a context of a pluralistic religious landscape.

The interesting common element between these three Muslim minority groups is that they grew and consolidated under the pressure of other competing religious or secular groups in their respective countries and have maintained strong links to their Indian, Pakistani or Turkish diaspora until today (Tittensor 2014: 41). The Tablighi formed as a response to aggressive conversion drives by Hindu radicals in the 1920s, the Ahmadiyya as a reaction to Protestant Missionaries during the colonial period in British India since the end of the 19th century, while the Gülen Movement can be seen as a counter-reaction to secular state authoritarianism in the late 1960s in Turkey, which thought to write religion out from the public sphere. In the context of Turkey's second military-led coup in 1971, Fethullah Gülen was charged with the crime of leading a secret religious community that threatened the integrity of the secular Turkish state (Hendrik 2013: 5). In addition to being a religious leader he had long been associated with allegations of conspiracy in Turkey. After the attempted military coup in 2016 the Erdogan government insisted Fethullah Gülen orchestrated the coup, and the movement was internationally suspected of being responsible for it.⁸

Rather than acting in a violent manner against their adversaries, all three movements adopted self-reflecting practices to help their followers to become "better" Muslims and to improve the society by individual agency. Individual responsibility, personal piety, playing down the importance of the material and shying away from formal politics remain important elements of all three movements (Tittensor 2014: 41). Even if the Ahmadiyya and the Gülen Movement were highly politicised movements especially in the beginnings of their histories in Pakistan and Turkey and have once again become politicised today in their home countries, both claim to strictly

8 For more details on the relationship between the AKP and the Gülen movement during the different historic periods see Hendrik 2013; Yavuz 2013. For a current statement about the Gülen movement and the events of 15 July 2016: Hendrik: <https://theconversation.com/fethullah-gulen-public-intellectual-or-public-enemy-62887>.

avoid interfering in the political agendas of their host countries. In their transnational proselyte activity, the Ahmadiyya and the Gülen Movement have left their political agendas aside. The answer Hendrik (2013) finds to this question—which factors explain the shift of the Gülen Movement from an “openly political” to a “passively political” Muslim actor—can be partly transposed to the Ahmadiyya. Both movements combine aspirations of faith-based social change in a secular environment and their current apolitical attitude, at least in the diaspora, can be considered as a product of globalization and an attempt to spread their vision of Islam in a secular, neoliberal context.

All three movements promise an escape from the materialistic lifestyle of the West. The Gülen Movement and the Ahmadiyya take a more global stance than the Tablighis but they operate in a very similar way by focussing on personal piety that plays down the importance of wealth and worldly success. This aim involves constant control and improvement of one's behaviour which shapes individuals as subjects of a certain moral discourse. All three movements ensure strong connection to a community, are strongly hierarchised, finance their religious and social activities through strictly defined, centrally-managed taxes of all followers. In all these movements, we are “confronted with a different sensibility that is not improving their personal material wealth or that of others, but rather about behaving in a way that is directed towards the well-being of others through a particular spiritual outlook on life; one that is driven by a strong sense of community” (Tittensor 2014: 47).

The Ahmadiyya and Gülen movements combine the provision of education and health care with a spiritual approach of wellbeing. In opposition to the *Tablighi Jama'at* which emphasises a predominantly spiritual approach to improve the capacity of those worse-off. Indeed, the three movements differ in their emphases. For example with regard to conversion, the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* employs professional full-time missionaries, educated within a seven-year curriculum in special universities. They are the main actors inviting Muslims as well as non-Muslims to profess their faith in Ahmadi Islam. The *Tablighi Jama'at* operates with lay missionaries which leave their family for days, weeks or months to travel around the country in preaching caravans with the aim to strengthen Muslims in their faith. Although non-Muslims convert to the *Tablighi Jama'at*, especially in Europe, the movement's main effort is to strengthen the faith of Muslims (Reetz 2010: 45; Gaborieau 2001: 41). By contrast, the Gülen Movement does not name their followers “missionaries”. Gülen members use the word ‘hizmet’ that means “service” particularly service for a religious cause to designate

the work of their full-time members, who are usually teachers in Gülen schools. The moral education of the students and not their conversion to Islam are in the foreground here (Dohrn 2013: 235, 245).

The Gülen Movement and the Ahmadiyya Community have a common approach towards education by translating the Islamic background of their educational engagement into a moral training that is framed in universal terms. Secular education and training are viewed as a precondition for individual and national development. By educating future lawyers, engineers, architects, investors and accountants both movements reframe spiritual requirements to follow God's path as a social requirement to realise economic success and the constitution of a social elite (Hendrick 2013: 8). Both the secular and religious education of all members is a main objective of these movements. The *Tablighi Jama'at* attaches less importance to the secular education of their followers, but promotes teaching the knowledge of Islam and the correct execution of the rites. These different attitudes concerning secular education is also reflected in the social welfare activities of these religious movements or their NGOs.

A final example of the differences in emphasis between the three movements is their attitude to participation in social issues. The Gülen and Ahmadiyya Movements combine modern development principles with a traditional donation culture. The Gülen movement and the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* and their related NGOs or Foundations⁹ are looking for civil partnerships, for non-religious collaborators and donors in the international development community, and they argue that it is possible to separate humanitarian work from active faith spreading. The welfare activities of the Gülen Movement and its Foundations, and of the Ahmadiyya and its NGO Humanity First, whose work I will discuss in the next paragraph more thoroughly, can be described as philanthropic enterprises and an attempt to foster an Islamic alternative. Humanity First is one of the Muslim NGOs that illustrates in the Islamic field the tendency of "NGOization" that Paul Gifford identified for the Christian churches (Gifford 2016). Peterson has labelled this recent approach to development of Muslim faith-based organisation a, 'desacrilized' form of aid (Petersen 2015). Development aid and

9 See for example the *Işık Medical and Educational Foundation* in Tanzania, consisting of Turkish and Tanzanian trustees with the aim of providing educational and medical services in Tanzania. The NGO (*Türkiye İşadamları Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu Türkiye*, in short TUSKON) founded in 2005 as an NGO that now includes approximately 50,000 Gülen affiliated businessmen. TUSKON activities in Sub-Saharan Africa have been very successful for numerous business arrangements (Dohrn 2013: 236, 240).

social welfare activities are mobilised to achieve the respective goals of the Ahmadiyya and Gülen Movements, while the *Tablighi Jama'at* is, on a global level, more inclined to charity. Dietrich Reetz points out that this tendency is changing, especially in European countries where *Tablighi Jama'at* is active. In France and Great Britain, the *Tablighi Jama'at* is under great pressure to engage in cultural and social activities in order to avoid accusations of religious sectarianism and radicalism (Reetz 2010: 46). The minority situation of the *Tablighi Jama'at*, be it in Europe or Africa, means that leaders and scholars of these groups have to 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 the host states (Rohe 2017). The Gülen Movement and the Ahmadiyya are also Muslim minorities who must adapt their activities and priorities to the diversity of the surrounding Muslim and Christian lifestyles in order to be accepted in the arriving society. The stakes for a minority group lie in the way in which each one positions oneself in relation to other religious groups and competes with each other in the public arena according to their specificities.

Now that the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* has been placed in a global context of transnational Muslim Groups, the next section retraces the work of Humanity First in Burkina Faso and then returns to the question of the social and cultural implications of Humanitarian work of a religious group using the example of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* in Burkina Faso's plural religious landscape.

Humanity First: history and current activities in Burkina Faso

According to the international website of Humanity First, the NGO “focuses to preserve and safeguard human life and dignity”.¹⁰ The international website of the NGO does not in any way refer to its ties with the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, and the various national Humanity First websites do so in passing. The proximity to Islamic values can only be deduced by the visitors of these websites from the actions of the NGO. For example, in Germany and England, they published calls for *Qurbani* sacrifice.¹¹ In its web presentation and also in the interviews I conducted with the leaders, the organization does not define itself as an Islamic NGO. It sees itself as a humanitarian association and is keen on cooperating with

10 Cf. <http://humanityfirst.org/>.

11 Humanity First donates funds to allow the slaughter of an animal in line with religious duties known as *qurbani*.

secular or Christian institutions and NGOs, as well as with the authorities in the countries where they work. On their German website, they mention secular and religious NGOs and international organizations such as the World Health Organization as privileged partners¹². The Canadian Humanity First group states that the NGO has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Humanity First was founded in 1995 by the fourth khalifa of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* (Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad) rooted in the idea that a religious neutral organisation might give an opportunity to all “noble souls”, regardless of their religious affinity, to devote themselves to a “noble task” without eventually being discouraged by the Muslim identity of the NGO (Interview Härter, 2014). In 1992, in his preliminary reflections on the establishment of Humanity First, Mirza Tahir Ahmad discusses the difficulties of the Ahmadiyya community to intervene in Somalia to address the famine in the 1990s because of the defiance of international agencies in Islamic organisations:

“As far as I understand, charitable Christian Organisations are permitted to work in such a way [based on principles of justice without discrimination of creed or nationality] and they are formally registered by the United Nations. If my understanding is correct, then the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community should do its best to establish an international organisation to serve humanity.” (28 August 1992, address of Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad to the Ahmadiyya Community)

Accordingly, to avoid this defiance, Humanity First was established as a humanitarian organization, and the proximity with the Ahmadiyya community and the religious motivation of the members continue to be little publicised on the websites.

Twenty years later, in 2015, in his address to Humanity First leaders the fifth Khalifa insisted that “Indeed, religion itself is the very motivation and inspiration underlying the objectives of Humanity First. And so, to say that Humanity First should be independent and free from religion is completely wrong.” (Keynote address at the international Humanity First conferences 2015, UK). It seems that there is now a changing trend that points to the proximity to the Ahmadiyya. Contrary to what was asserted a few years ago, this proximity is no longer perceived as an obstacle to collaborating with secular international organizations or individuals. After 9/11, Islamic agencies were for some years suspected of financing terrorism via Muslim wel-

12 Care International, Oxfam, Red Cross, UN, WHO, Samariter, Action medeor, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat (AMJ), Welthungerhilfe, IAAAE, Diakonie etc. (cf. <http://www.humanityfirst.de/uber-uns/zusammenarbeit>).

fare (Bellion-Jourdan 2002; Seesemann 2005; see also Petersen in this volume). But, today transnational Islamic aid is becoming as institutionalised as that of Christian NGOs. This professionalisation necessitates that the missionary impacts of humanitarian work are minimised or accepted as inevitable side-effects. In attempt to avoid the defiance towards Muslim NGOs, the proximity to the Ahmadiyya was handled rather discreetly, while the international positive appraisal towards religious NGOs currently drives them to emphasise their religious motivation. However, this trend has not changed the fact that Humanity First's humanitarian operations are still strictly separated from *da'wa* (mission, i.e. invitations to join Islam). While the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* is a missionary group committed to active proselytism, their NGO Humanity First was and is still excluded from all missionary activities. In fact, I have never been able to observe that during or after medical work, religious literature was distributed or was preached. According to this understanding of separation of mission and development, conversions to Ahmadi Islam are viewed as a by-product of the members' exemplary peaceful life and their commitment to humankind.

Nearly all the members and managers of Humanity First are Ahmadis. For special actions, non-Ahmadis are included, for example non-Ahmadi doctors are invited to participate in surgery. The Humanity First groups in the global South are supported by Humanity First groups in Europe or America. For example the German Humanity First team works in close partnership with its Benin counterparts.¹³ All their projects in Benin are financed and managed by the German group. Most of the donations come from members of the Ahmadiyya community, as *ṣakat* (compulsory charity) or *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) donations. Ahmadis can settle their annual *ṣakat* donation via Humanity First, thus contributing to the spread of Islam through their contribution to Humanity First. On the website of the German Humanity First group, the members can donate alms which have to be paid during *Eid-ul-Adha*.¹⁴ Religious practices such as Islamic sacrifices and alms are translated into a humanitarian narrative. In the modern context of an NGO, obligatory almsgiving has become the source of communal and collective improvement not only for Muslims in need but for all the needy. However, the policy of development cooperation is interpreted

13 The American Humanity First group funds the Humanity First activities in Ghana, Humanity First UK finances their counterparts in Burkina and Mali. The French Humanity First group collaborates with those in Senegal.

14 Approximately 70 days after the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate the Eid-ul Adha to commemorate Abraham's obedience to God and his willingness to sacrifice his son.

as a religious practice and an example of worshiping. The spiritual blessing experienced by those who devote themselves to development aid¹⁵ was also clearly emphasised by the khalifa in his speech of 2015:

“The benefit of serving others is such that the Promised Messiah^{as16} has aligned human compassion with spirituality by stating that loving others is a great means of worship and a way to attain Allah’s blessing and rewards. Which Ahmadi Muslim could ever wish to deprive himself or herself from Allah’s bounties and rewards? Keeping these points in view, I say to every member of Humanity First, no matter where in the world they are living or serving, that they must conduct their duties with sincerity and heartfelt love for others.” (Keynote address 2015)

In order to assess the development work of Humanity First in Burkina Faso it seems necessary to outline how this organisation is positioned in relation to the government and other faith-based and secular NGOs. 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 Burkina, Benin, and Ivory Coast, Humanity First funds hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other types of infrastructures for villagers. They organise medical camps and emergency aid in crisis situations. In the Anglophone part of West Africa, particularly in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, Humanity First provides the same kind of social welfare but in a more institutionalised manner and in collaboration with the authorities. Formal partnerships are established between Humanity First schools and hospitals and the different Ministries. These differences can be accounted for by historical reasons. The collaboration with the English-speaking nations and its institutionalisation is due to the long-term presence of Ahmadiyya in these countries, unlike in Francophone countries where the Ahmadiyya established themselves relatively recently.

Nevertheless, since 2002 the Burkinabe ministry of health has worked in collaboration with the private and confessional health care centres and favoured the collaboration between the Islamic and Christian health facilities. One of the fundamental problems of cooperation between denominational health care institutions and government agencies is the lack of inter-

15 One of the French Ahmadi remembers in a collective email on June 2016: “N’oubliez pas également que la liste des membres qui s’acquitteront de leur chanda Tehriké jadis avant la fin du ramadan sera présentée au Calife pour des prières spéciales. Incha’Allah.”

16 The letters ‘as’ or ‘(as)’ after the name of the prophet and all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning ‘peace be upon him’. It is derived from ‘Alaihis salatu wassalam’ which are words that a Muslim utters out of respect whenever he or she comes across that name.

locutors on the side of religious movements (with the exception of Catholic institutions) (Langewiesche 2011a). The Ahmadiyya Muslim community overcomes this shortcoming by offering the government an easily accessible partner through its hierarchical organization. This gives it a head start over the other Islamic NGOs working in Burkina.

Today in Burkina Faso 800 NGOs are registered in all sectors. If we consider only the field of health care, at least 20 Islamic NGOs are operating along with 23 Christian ones, one “mixed” organisation and approximately 100 non-religious NGOs (Vitale 2016; Kaboré 2016, 2017; LeBlanc/Gosselin 2016). Consequently, there can be a strong competition between different NGOs as they try to gain visibility and legitimacy within the state and international structures. All the more so as all Islamic NGOs have very similar projects: financing schools, orphanages, health care centres, sewing courses, constructing wells and funding cataract operations.

Being recognised by the state is a crucial stake for Humanity First in order to prevail against the Muslim majority and gain legitimacy in civil society. The Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, but they are not recognised as such by the majority of Muslims in Burkina and elsewhere. This non-recognition has led to dramatic persecution of the Ahmadis in some countries. By building schools and respecting the public curriculum, as well as by integrating their healthcare centres into the national scheme, Humanity First is one of the transnational Islamic NGOs that align their activities with public policy. The recognition by the state of Humanity First and their services to the population is one of the tools that allow the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* to stand up for themselves in front of the Muslim community of Burkina. Since Humanity First’s cooperation with other Islamic NGOs is difficult due to the outsider position of Ahmadiyya, Humanity First focusses on finding partners among secular and Christian NGOs to underline its willingness to cooperate within the civil society¹⁷.

Religious affiliation can be identified as a key motivating factor for the employees and volunteers of Humanity First.¹⁸ Thus, it is important to consider how a wide range of individual actors—from high-ranking officials to rank-and-file volunteers—reconcile religious faith, humanitarian commitment with collective projects and individual strategies. Volunteers themselves often link economic development, social and political activism, and

17 In Burkina, they are currently working with “one dollar glasses”, a secular association.

18 This is probably true for the most faith-based organisations whether actively proselytizing or not. For further examples see Leblanc et al. 2013; Duriez et al. 2007; Bompiani/Frahm-Arp 2010.

religious norms in a very pragmatic way. They do not consider this gap between charity as a disinterested gift and the use of NGOs for personal or collective aims as problematic but as a modern way of living their religious affiliation. The contradiction of a commitment to community engagement with self-interested engagement in development activities is not a major issue. The two impulses are reconciled within the theological framework of Ahmadi Islam. Opportunities for self-transforming and self-improvement provided by Humanity First and the Ahmadiyya are understood to be beneficial not only to themselves, but to society as a whole. Personal transformation can be reached in the opinion of the Ahmadis by the obedience to the khalifa, individual prayers, material sacrifices, and by volunteering for Humanity First or other Ahmadi organisations. The khalifa encourages material sacrifices in his Friday sermons at the beginning or end of each year. He unveils the ranking of the countries according to the donations made, and he gives advice on how members can be talked into increasing their donations.

	In terms of positions, Pakistan is always first
1st	Germany
2nd	United Kingdom
3rd	USA
4th	Canada
5th	India
6th	Australia
7th	Middle-Eastern Country
8th	Indonesia
9th	Middle-Eastern Country
10th	Ghana
11th	Switzerland

	In terms of per person individual payment
1st	USA
2nd	Switzerland
3rd	UK
4th	Finland
5th	Singapore
6th	Germany
7th	Norway
8th	Japan
9th	Canada
But before that there are five Jama'ats from Middle-East who have highest per person payment	

Excerpt of Power Point summary of the Friday sermon delivered by Khalifatul Masih V from Bait-un-Noor Mosque, Calgary, Canada, November 11th 2016 “Essence of Financial Sacrifice, Tehrik e Jadid 83rd Year” (cf. <https://www.alislam.org/archives/sermons/summary/FSD20161111-EN.pdf>).

When the Ahmadi staff of Humanity First are questioned on their motivations to participate in the humanitarian actions, their primary reason is the religious obligation to do charity and to answer the call of the khalifa. Each Ahmadi is expected to serve the community at least three months a year, depending on the circumstances. Additionally, they mention personal concerns, such as, for example, a father who describes his three-month internship in Benin as a way to relieve himself from domestic duties, or a retired English engineer working for Humanity First and the Ahmadiyya community in African countries who describes his engagement as the fulfilment of his travel dreams, after a successful career. A Beninese Ahmadi explained that he considers his voluntary work as both a religious duty and a professional training, but also as a springboard to find a job (Interview in Cotonou, 2013). In Burkina Faso, where, even after the transition and the democratic elections in 2015, the expectations of social innovations were not (or were only partially and very slowly) fulfilled by the new government, civil society organizations such as Humanity First are seen as a substitute for the authorities' failure to bring about social changes. One of the Ahmadi students in Burkina expressed it like this:

“On a marché! On a marché fatigué! Maintenant l'espoir est parti. En tout cas, tout seul tu ne peux rien faire. Il te faut un groupe fort qui te soutient, comme l'Ahmadiyya et qui est actif comme Humanity First. C'est comme ça que ça va bouger!”

“We walked! We walked ourselves tired! Now hope has gone. In any case, alone you can do nothing. You need a strong group who supports you, like the Ahmadiyya and one that is active like Humanity First. That's how things are going to move on!”


To summarise the Ahmadis' logics to serve Humanity First and their ideas about the meaning of 'development', the focus is on 'human development' and not only 'economic development', and 'development' is more aligned to personal transformation, which will bring about material improvement, as a by-product. Development is situated for the Ahmadi Members of Humanity First, like for many volunteers of Christian or Muslim NGOs, on the continuum between private and public, between the individual and the community, and between the spiritual and the material.¹⁹ The shift from being a religious activist to becoming a development volunteer emerges as

19 Kroessin (2008) provides a short summary of concepts and different Islamic understandings of 'development'. For further examples of the visions about development of members from other Muslim NGOs see Sounaye 2011. Renders (2002) focusses on the instrumentalization of the discourse of Islamic development in Senegal.

an ideal way of pursuing religious social activities in a neoliberal society which requires professionalism and economic performances.

After the presentation of the Islamic principles that support the development goal of Humanity First and the entanglements of individual career strategies, social or political aspirations, and religious duties of the Humanity First volunteers, it is worth asking what the outcomes of this humanitarian and development aid are for the local beneficiaries. While the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed description, it is possible to note that number of case studies in Burkina Faso, Benin, and Ghana illustrate positive achievements while some others indicate the ambiguous nature of the development activities. The analyses of these cases show that, as with any development action, be it motivated by religious or secular values, the historical and political context is essential for the outcome of a development action. This context is as important for the understanding as to whether religion is an obstacle or a help for development just like the structure of the religious group, its vision of mission, its commitment to the local political agenda and its integration into international networks. Social innovations introduced by NGOs can benefit some groups of the local population but not others so that the “success” of a development project is an ambiguous value and depends on the point of view adopted (Olivier de Sardan 1995; Bierschenk 1988).

When Humanity First collaborates with the state’s authorities, for example by building schools that integrate into the national public education system, or by offering health services integrated into the country’s healthcare facilities mapping, the local population recognises the benefits of Humanity First’s work.²⁰ On the other hand, Humanity First’s interventions such as well drilling or the installation of “millennial villages” can become sources of conflicts locally. To emphasise the importance of the local historical and political context for the success of development action, the example of the ‘model village’ of Tinknebel in northern Burkina Faso pro-

20 Hanson (2009) makes the same observation in Ghana, not for the NGO Humanity First, but for the welfare activities of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*. “Effective collaboration between the local and the global [Ahmadi] communities along with government is a hallmark of Ahmadi development in Ghana” (Hanson 2009/10: 68). Yacoob (1986) emphasises the provision of physical and social needs of the urban poor and migrant women in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) by the strong networking of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*.
Open Access –  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>

vides useful reference.²¹ The ‘model village project’ is a common project of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, the Association of Ahmadi Engineers (IAAAE) and Humanity First.²² The first model village was that in Burkina in Tinknebel. There are other “model villages” in Benin, Sierra Leone and Mali. A new model village was recently inaugurated in south-western Burkina, near Bobo-Dioulasso. These villages are also called “millennium villages” in reference to the Millennium Goals issued by the United Nations (Interview Ahmad, 2015).

The Ahmadiis have taken up this idea by saying that these villages must meet all the needs of the population: access to water, electricity, agriculture, health and education. In these villages, the Jama'at and the Association of Ahmadi Engineers acquire all the equipment and make them available to the population. These villages are set up where there is a kernel of an Ahmadi community with the hope—not explicitly expressed—that the socio-economic infrastructure will attract people to Ahmadi Islam and strengthen a local community in a rural area to encourage young people to stay.

At Tinknebel, this approach had very ambiguous consequences. The first Ahmadiis of this village founded a separate neighbourhood, next to the existing village, which they named Tinknebel (Baobab). This neighbourhood was equipped with many facilities by the *Jama'at* to support the small Ahmadi community who were stigmatised by the rest of the village. The inhabitants were mainly Bella, descendants of Touareg slaves. The new equipment contributed to the rivalry between the old village—who followed the customary Sunni way of Islam—and the new Tinknebel neighbourhood—who adopted the Ahmadi Islam. In this configuration, a mining company (Essakane) settled which attracted labour and equipped the older part of the village which had remained non-Ahmadi. Thus, there are today two very well-equipped neighbourhoods with houses built to last, fossil fuel powered electricity on the Sunni side and solar energy on the Ahmadi side, in the middle of the savannah. The infrastructures in Tinknebel were funded by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and those of

21 I am particularly grateful to Koudi Kaboré for collecting data on this model village of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*. He kindly provided me with his photographs and transcriptions of his interviews and observations.

The village of Goulougoutou is situated in the province of Oudalan. It is located about fifty km from Dori, capital of the Sahel region. Tinknebel is a neighbourhood of 171 families, only three of whom do not consider themselves to be Ahmadi.

22 For an auto-presentation by IAAAE see: <http://iaaae.org/projects/burkina-faso-model-village-project-2013/>


the older village by the mining company. But all the training institutions set up in Tinknebel: the sewing center, the carpentry, the market gardening, and even the school are being abandoned by the youth to go to work into the mine.

It is not an exaggeration to say that in this local context of gold mining, difficult climatic conditions, unemployment, and existing social conflicts between Bella, Touareg and Fulani²³, the Humanity First and Ahmadiyya's infrastructures have increased the social divisions and conflicts among the villagers, even if they have facilitated the access to water and electricity.

Conclusions

Development cooperation and welfare are essential elements for the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* as well as for other transnational Muslim minority groups in order to be recognised in their host countries and to position themselves within the global environment. We cannot understand contemporary faith-based NGOs without situating them in the context of access of religious institutions to resources and recognition. On a collective level, the challenge for *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* to assert itself in the public space in Burkina Faso, and perhaps one day to stand up for themselves before the international Muslim community, passes through humanitarian work. On an individual level, humanitarian aid is for Humanity First volunteers and Ahmadi members aligned with personal, intimate transformation, which as a by-product will bring about material improvement. The shift from being a religious activist to becoming a development volunteer emerges as an ideal way of pursuing both religious and social activities in a globalised society. Development cooperation is seen as a means to widen the spectrum of one's individual choices so that the volunteers engage in what they view as being in accordance with their religious values.

The history of Humanity First illustrates the changing trend starting with the reluctance to expose an NGO's Muslim background to the affirmation of one's religious convictions in the sphere of development. Working at the intersection of religious and development activities seems to be more

23 The precolonial societies of Fulani and Touaregs were characterised by slavery. Despite its abolition by the colonial power, the practice persisted and certain forms of master-slave relations are still observable today. In the Fulani milieu, like in the Touareg milieu, the descendants of slaves were still stigmatised and marginalised until recently. Since 1996 and the decentralization measures, the Bella have managed to have a representative in parliament (Kabore 2016: 127).  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>

widely admitted in the international development field nowadays than in the 1990s/2000s. The case of Humanity First also illustrates that an Islamic missionary movement like the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, whose emphasis is on mosque building and *da'wa*, can launch a humanitarian organization like Humanity First that strictly separates mission from aid and that will focus on poverty alleviation, even though both organisations are based on the same values and religious norms.

In all cases, the success of development activities is linked to local contexts and to wider geopolitical developments. The global statement of the added value of religion for development activities is much more of a discourse created by donors, religious activists and recipients than an observable fact. The empirical examples of this chapter have shown that in the framework of only one specific religious movement some development activities may benefit the poor whereas others have very ambiguous consequences. It is important to acknowledge that religious institutions, NGOs, religious beliefs and practices can negatively affect the lives of the local population just as they can induce effective, sustainable or swift help to people in need. Religion is one of many variables which influence development activities beside other general parameters such as kinship, changes in generation and gender relations, socio-political hierarchies, and environmental factors. It seems evident that religion matters for development but whether it makes a difference depends on so many elements that no global answer seems possible. In order to assess the ways in which the relationship between religion and development affects social life, it is therefore important not only to focus on the potential transformation of development by religion, but also to assess whether engagement in development itself situates religious movements within the wider historical and religious landscape. This chapter has provided such an exploration by examining the context in which Humanity First and the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* engage in development in Burkina Faso and by comparing the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* in a wider transnational perspective to two other Muslim groups engaged in development activities around the world.

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