



## MESSIANIC LEGITIMACY: THE CASE OF AHMADIYYA AND MAHDIYYA MOVEMENTS

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### Abstract

The Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya are contemporary Islamic messianic movements emerging in the late nineteenth century during a period of general Muslim discontent. This study aims to see how the respective leaders of these two movements, Ghulam Ahmad and Muhammad Ahmad, sought to legitimize their claims while addressing the problems they perceived to exist in their societies. It is found that the originality and magnitude of Ghulam Ahmad's messianic message, which aimed to address the claims of Christian missionaries as well as other religious groups by drawing on the example of the prophet Jesus for legitimacy and the abolishment of jihad, made the movement relatively inflexible doctrinally, but with focus on proselytization gained greater global influence. Muhammad Ahmad's message and practice, by contrast, though highly unorthodox in its treatment of prophetic hadith, emulated to a greater degree the example of the prophet Muhammad, was more humble in its doctrinal claims, and achieved relatively greater domestic popularity and doctrinal flexibility, paving the way for eventual political power in Sudan.

**Keywords:** Ghulam Ahmad, Muhammad Ahmad, Ahmadiyya, Mahdiyya, Messianism, Legitimacy, Jihad.

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### Öz

#### Ahmediyye ve Mehdiyye Hareketleri Çerçevesinde Mesihçi Meşruiyet

Ahmediyye ve Mehdiyye, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarında Müslümanların genel olarak sıkıntılı olduğu bir dönemde ortaya çıkmış modern Mesihyanik hareketlerdir. Bu çalışma, bu iki hareketin liderleri olan Gulam Ahmed ve Muhammed Ahmed'in kendi toplumlarında var kabul ettikleri problemleri irdelerken kendi iddialarına nasıl meşruiyet oluşturduklarını incelemektedir. Gulam Ahmed'in, meşruiyet için Hz. İsa'nın örneğinden ve cihadın ilga edilmesinden yararlanarak Hristi-

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yan misyonerlerin ve diğer dini grupların iddialarını ele almayı amaçlayan Mesiyaniğin orijinalliği ve önemi, aynı zamanda hareketi doktriner olarak sertleştirdi. Ancak bunu yaparken din değiştirmenin daha büyük global etkisine vurgu yapmıştır. Buna karşılık Muhammed Ahmed'in mesajı ve pratiği, hadislerle yaklaşımı ana çizginin oldukça dışında olsa da, doktrin iddialarında daha mütevaziydi. Bu nedenle lokal düzeyde daha popüler ve doktriner olarak daha yumuşak oldu. Nihayetinde Sudan'da politik bir güç olma imkanı buldu.

**Anahtar kavramlar:** Gulam Ahmed, Muhammed Ahmed, Ahmediyye, Mehdiyye, Mesiyанизm, Meşruiyet, Cihad.

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### Introduction

Both the Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya are Islamic messianic movements. A comparison between the two is also encouraged by the fact that each movement took place during the late nineteenth century, arose in circumstances related to British colonial administration, and had connections to sufism. The decline of Muslim power across the world from the seventeenth century onward and general discontent of Muslim peoples felt by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to the emergence of several Islamic uprisings, like the Wahhabi and Sumatran Padri movements in Arabia and Indonesia respectively as well as the movement led by Sheikh al-Sanusi in Libya. The two messianic movements to be studied here can be placed within this general trend of resistance. However, neither movement influenced the other, which makes the Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya respectively independent examples of Islamic messianism.

By taking their messianic content as the point of departure, these movements present a series of direct points of comparison, such as the Mahdi's appearance (or disclosure), his legitimacy, message, and death. In this sense, the two movements are mirrors to each other; what we find in one we can seek out in the other, and reveal what may have been less obvious by aligning points that were formerly obscure.<sup>1</sup> However, the particular issues raised by these points and the existence of some of these points themselves is as much depend-

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<sup>1</sup> A good example of this method of analysis and its fruits is demonstrated by John Voll in his paper 'Abu Jummayza: The Mahdi's Musaylima?' in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, eds. Edmund Burke, and Ira M. Lapidus, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).



ent upon the circumstances in which they were born as they are inherent to the mission involved. So here two different but connected areas are opened up for exploration: the imposition of the historical context, and the imposition of issues inherent to the nature of the mission itself.

Accordingly, there are two sides to this study, which reflect different approaches. Indeed, the significance of any comparison depends upon the approach being utilised and there are two main ones to the study of Islamic movements. As Edmund Burke notes, one traced back to Marx places the study of collective action in a sociological context. Its units of analysis are the systems of relations (economic, political, and social) in which they are caused and develop. The other, traced back to Weber, has as its units of analysis the concepts and rhetoric used in different political and economic settings. This approach is more focused on how and to what particular effect movements deploy cultural and religious resources to mobilize and legitimate their agendas.<sup>2</sup> Because the similarities the two movements share are varied in form and implication — with doctrinal considerations stemming from their messianic aspects, historical significance from their being contemporaries, political import from the colonial connection, spiritual and intellectual factors from the *sufi* resources they draw on — I have chosen to refer to both social and doctrinal subjects, with specific reference to the larger background focused on by the first mentioned, Marxist approach, though with primary attention to cultural and religious material, as in the Weberian approach.

More specifically, questions of legitimacy and authority are the main areas of focus, since the Mahdi is inevitably an imposter until he is proven genuine, whatever his teachings, after his disclosure. Thus, our two Mahdis provide us the same subject of study. In this context, the figure of the Mahdi clearly comes under Weber's understanding of charismatic leadership, where what

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, "Islam and social movements" in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, eds. Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) 19. That is not to say that it lacks the power to provide causal explanations of its own. The Weberian approach is perhaps best for dealing with the leader of a movement who derives his or her goals, legitimacy and authority from doctrine since the belief system of the movement can be taken as partially determining its structure and action, and even emergence.



proves legitimacy is first and foremost success. How this applies to the movements in question specifically is to be determined below, as well as how their belief systems relate to the historical background, on the one hand, and the development of the two movements, on the other, to identify the main factors in each case and shed light on their particular dynamics.

I aim first to survey the history of each Mahdi before his manifestation, followed by an analysis of the concepts and beliefs each espoused and whence they drew their legitimacy. Then, finally, I wish to analyse the history of the movements in light of these observations. This essay thus attempts to examine how circumstances and belief each shaped the Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya movements respectively. This means asking what the main determinants of the type of legitimacy sought and the type of message espoused were in each case. More, specifically, it means asking to what extent the message and legitimacy brought about was by the proposed Mahdis themselves or external social and historical factors, and also to what extent they were related in content to the classic tradition or advanced new ideas.

### Islamic Messianism

According to Sunni orthodoxy, the term *mahdi* denotes a restorer of religion and justice who will rule before the end of the world.<sup>3</sup> Such a messianic individual is not actually required for the End Times as expressed in Quranic eschatology, and the term itself does not appear in the Quran as such.<sup>4</sup> It is almost certainly derived from the Arabic root *h-d-y*, commonly used in the meaning of divine guidance, and other words so derived are found in the Quran.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this meaning of divine guidance is suggestive only; it is in *hadith* attributed to the Prophet where the specific and generally accepted attributes of the Mahdi are to be found. These attributes, as summarised by

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<sup>3</sup> Madelung, Wilfred, "al-Mahdi" in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (E1<sup>2</sup>) (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1230.

<sup>4</sup> Sandra Campbell, "Millennial Messiah and Religious Restorer: Reflections on the Early Islamic Understanding of the Term Mahdi," *Jusur* 11 (1995): 2.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, fn. 2



Kramer, are as follows; the Mahdi's appearance signifies that the world has reached its worst state, his reign is a time of natural abundance, he will defeat the enemies of Islam, miraculous signs will accompany his manifestation, and he will be extremely generous and divide the wealth of the Muslim community (*umma*).<sup>6</sup>

A related part of these beliefs is the view that the religious and spiritual condition of the Muslim community, and the world in general, will go from bad to worse over the course of history.<sup>7</sup> The person that will pull humanity back from the brink and restore religion and justice is accordingly a special person. Often, the Mahdi is reported to be none other than Isa ibn Maryam, Jesus son of Mary (*al-Masih al-Muhtadi* – the rightly-guided Messiah).<sup>8</sup> However, general belief is that the arrival of the Mahdi will merely prefigure the Second Advent of Jesus. In Shia belief, the centrality of the Mahdi is even greater. He is the final Imam in a line of Imams descended from the Prophet that the Shia have depended on for knowledge and leadership. Imam Mahdi will return from a centuries-long occultation to establish supremacy. Both Sunni and Shia, however, accept the Mahdi is a descendent of the Prophet. One *hadith* predicts the appearance of a religious saviour who shares the same name and bloodline as the Prophet.<sup>9</sup> Thus, being one of his descendants or at least sharing his name supplies one with lineal and social standing for the responsibility.<sup>10</sup> It is said the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert S. Kramer, "mahdi" Oxford Encyclopaedia of Islamic World, 1995, in Campbell, "Millennial Messiah," 1.

<sup>7</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 245. Rahman criticises the perceived fatalism in this view. A tradition ascribed to the Companion Anas reads 'Matters will only grow in hardship, the world will only increase in backward movement, and the people in greed. The Hour will rise only on the worst of people. There will be no Mahdī but 'Īsā ibn Maryām' (in Madelung, "*al-Mahdi*" (E1<sup>2</sup>), 1234).

<sup>8</sup> John S. Trimmingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 148. It is said this belief takes its source from *sura* 43:61, 'and He (Jesus) shall be a sign of the last hour.' This is accepted Muslim interpretation, however Trimmingham notes that David Margoliouth suggests the passage should probably be translated, "Verily there is knowledge of the Hour." Thus, the above cited *hadith* (fn.8) seems most relevant, recorded in Ibn Maja's, *Sunan*, *Kitab al-fitan* 24 (vol. 2, 1341, no. 4049)

<sup>9</sup> Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shiism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>10</sup> The Prophet is reported to have said 'I have [several] names, I am Ahmad, I am Muhammad, I am the Eraser by whom Allah will erase infidelity, I am the Gatherer at whose feet the people will gather [on the Last Day] and I am *al-aqib*.' *Al-aqib* is usually explained as a person after whom there will be no prophet (Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, p.84; cf. Ibn Sad, *Tabaqat*, vol. 1, part 1, p.65;



Mahdi will resemble the Prophet in disposition (*khulq*), though not in appearance (*khalq*).<sup>11</sup>

The sultan or caliph is in traditional political theory entrusted with defeating the enemies of Islam, dividing the wealth of the community, and preserving the purity of the religion. However, the Mahdi's appearance has been specifically prophesied, and he is divinely guided. He is similar to a prophet, but arrives only when the world is nearing its end and without new revelation. Yet to state what the Mahdi is supposed to be according to the traditions and scholarly interpretation, has limited relevance to what he can be historically. As Holt observes, Mahdism in Sunni Islam constitutes 'a deposit of ideas and hopes rather than an organised and coherent system of beliefs. To analyse Mahdism with any degree of rigour does violence to its nature as an essentially popular synthesis of elements, varying in their content and emphasis at different times and in different places.'<sup>12</sup> Thus, the identity of the Mahdi and the nature of his mission, having not been crystallised in Islamic thought, is open to a wide range of variation.

Trimingham observes that the majority of Mahdis in Islamic history have, however, been similar in that they become political, preach jihad in terms of war (not only against non-Muslims), and, if successful, form a state.<sup>13</sup> This is because the religion of Islam guides its followers in more than strictly spiritual matters. This is due to the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who combined in his person both religious and political authority, explicated clearly in his career respectively in Mecca and Medina, with ideals the *umma* is forever obliged to continue.<sup>14</sup> However, without continuous, or new, revelation to guide

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Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zad al-maad fi hady khayr al-ibad* (Cairo, 1953), vol. 1, p. 44; Ibn al Jawzi, *Al-wafa bi-ahwal al-Mustafa* (Cairo, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 103-4; and numerous other collections of *hadith* and *siyar* in Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, p.55)

<sup>11</sup> Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, 149.

<sup>12</sup> Peter M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, 149

<sup>14</sup> Sachedina calls it a 'historical responsibility' upon which salvation partly depends (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 2). As Sayyid Qutb explains, this period 'is not the whole of Islamic history, but a beacon erected by God so that man might reach up to it and try to attain it; might renew his hopes of arriving at the sublime summit by rising upward in ascent...' (*This Religion of Islam*, Gary Indian: In-



them through the trials and tribulations with which they are confronted over the course of time, it is possible for the veracity of the *umma* to be called into question and it to be perceived as in need of reform. To any Muslim witnessing the failure of public and private life to meet the standards of the ideal, a divinely inspired individual would no doubt be welcomed, even longed for and sought after.<sup>15</sup> Here the relevance of the Mahdi is obvious, as Muhammad's reign on earth is deemed the golden age of Islam that did not last due to innovation (*bida*), which is hardly distinguishable from heresy. Accordingly, to be acceptable from the religious viewpoint, anything 'new' has to be depicted as a revival or renewal of the original prophetic teaching.<sup>16</sup>

### 1. A Comparison of Ideological Content

#### The Crisis Situation in Sudan and Muhammad Ahmad's Early Life

For any movement to appear there must be a crisis of some sort. Naturally, where there is greater discontent, greater support for a Mahdist enterprise is likely. In the Sudan generally, there was an expectation for a messianic saviour, especially among the poor rural population.<sup>17</sup> Messianic beliefs have been widespread, deeply held, and significant in Muslim Africa since the tenth century, and the Mahdiyya can be seen against an historical background of messianic movements, including the Fatimids in Egypt and Almohads in Morocco.<sup>18</sup> But

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ternational Islamic Federation of Student Organisations, n.d. p.39 in John O. Voll, "Wahhabism and Mahdism: Alternative Styles of Islamic Renewals," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 4 (1982).

<sup>15</sup> Madelung notes that the term *al-Mahdī* had been used in the beginning of Islam as an honorific epithet bestowed upon various individuals, including the prophets Muhammad and Abraham without any eschatological connotations (Madelung, '*al-Mahdī*' in EP, 1231). When the *hadīth* collections were being written in the ninth-tenth centuries the idea had already become widespread among certain sections of the community. Firstly, the term came to be used as war propaganda for Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (See Wilfred Madelung, "Abd Allah B. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981), 291-305).

<sup>16</sup> See, Yohanan Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95; Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present*, trans Thomas Thornton (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2000), 256-60.

<sup>17</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Trimingham, *Islam*, 158 (Cf. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, p.42, fn.4). In contrast to Muhammad ibn Tumart (1130) of the Magrib, Uthman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) of the Fulani had established a more recent and successful invocation of the Madhist idea (See, Richard H. Dekmejian, "Charismatic Leadership in Messianic and Revolutionary Movements" in *Religious Resurgence*, eds. Richard T.



though the messianic beliefs of Sudan predated the modern period, there was a broad expectation of relief from widespread discontent in the region that Holt writes was born due to a range of social, economic, and religious causes that all relate, in some way, to the Turco-Egyptian regime.<sup>19</sup>

After repeated waves of conquest begun in 1820 by the ruler of Egypt Muhammad Ali, almost all of Sudan was under Egyptian rule by 1879. In Sudanese the period of Turco-Egyptian rule is known as *al-Turkiyya al-Sabiqa*, the former Turkish government. However, the name 'Turk' in this context does not denote a precise type of nationality or language. The Condominium, in which British officials predominated, came to be known as *al-Turkiyya al-thaniya*, the second Turkish government.<sup>20</sup> Quite simply, the name was practically synonymous with 'infidel;' a sentiment demonstrated many times in Mahdist propaganda, and throughout the Sudan. Therefore, the Mahdi execrated the officials and soldiers of the government for being 'Turks', not Egyptians.

The administration of the country suffered from a rapid turnover of governors; between 1825 and 1855 no less than twenty-five had ruled in Khartoum, most of whom had very brief tenures. Though it was a Muslim power that had conquered the Sudan, Holt explains 'Egyptian rule was unpopular not merely by its faults but by its very nature... it was alien, unremitting and exacting.'<sup>21</sup> Many writers have noted that the frequent employment of European Christians in high-ranking positions of the administration by the Turco-Egyptian government undermined the legitimacy of their rule in the eyes of the Muslim Sudanese. However, according to Moore-Harrell, the perceived illegitimacy of the government was more because the Sudanese simply despised the 'Turks', and not because of any aversion towards Europeans.<sup>22</sup>

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Antoun and Mary Hegland (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 94. Also, a Mahdi had a brief career in lower-Egypt during Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt (Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 23).

<sup>19</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 32-33.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 14.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 16.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Moore-Harrell, *Gordon and the Sudan, Prologue to the Mahdiyya 1877-1880* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 61.





The reasons for discontent must therefore be found elsewhere. Holt refers to Shocair's four-fold list of causes for the Mahdiyya: the destruction caused by the Turco-Egyptian invasion; the favouritism displayed by the government towards certain tribes and sects; heavy government taxation; and suppression of the slave trade.<sup>23</sup> Under the first, the destruction of Shandi, a main trading town in the north, by Defterdar Muhammad Khusraw (d.1833), leader of the invasion forces, especially caused lasting anger among the Sudanese.<sup>24</sup> Then the government's partiality to the Shaiqiya tribe and Khatmiyya sect stirred jealousy and further resentment toward the administration.<sup>25</sup> Heavy taxation was also a major cause of frustration, and anger featured even among the slogans calling the populace to join the rebellion.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Shocair declares the suppression of the slave trade the most important source of discontent, and this assertion is supported Moore-Harrell and Holt himself.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, two years after the most concerted effort to suppress the slave trade by Khedive Ismail (r. 1886-89), the Mahdiyya movement began.

Muhammad Ahmad was born on 12 August 1844 on the Island of Labab in the province of Dongola.<sup>28</sup> His family claimed to be descendants of the Prophet and one of his ancestors was noted for his piety. Muhammad Ahmad from a young age had shown an interest and aptitude in religious studies, so much so that Holt wonders why he did not go to the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo.<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Ahmad was able to recite the entire Quran by the age of nine, and by the age of sixteen had already become a *darwish* (mystic) and ardent student of Sufism.<sup>30</sup> He first became a pupil of Shaykh al-Almin al-

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<sup>23</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, Richard A. Lobban and John Obert Voll, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan*, 2d ed. (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1992), 148. See also, Naum Shuqayr, *Tarikh al-Sudan* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1981), 315-316.

<sup>25</sup> Shuqayr, *Tarikh al-Sudan*, 315-320; Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Peter M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan: From the Fung Sultanate to the Present Day* (New York; NY: Grove Press, 1961), 79.

<sup>27</sup> Moore-Harrell, *Gordon and the Sudan*, 2; Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 37

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* 37-38

<sup>30</sup> Richard Berman, *The Mahdi of Allah*, introduction by Churchill (London, 1931), 53; Byron Farwell, *Prisoners of the Mahdi* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 5 in Dekmejian, "Messianic and Revolutionary Movements," 96.



Suwaylih in the Gezira and subsequently Shaykh Muhammad al-Dikayr Abdallah Khujali near Berber. The latter received subsidies from the government, and it seems Muhammad Ahmad fell out with his teacher for this reason, refusing to eat the food he provided.<sup>31</sup> In 1861, he joined the neo-Sufi tradition of the Sammaniyya order under Shaykh Muhammad Sharif Nur al-Daim.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Muhammad Ahmad's religious development proceeded within Sudan's Sufi orders. The proliferation of these orders had since the Funj period reflected a free-flowing mysticism of 'frontier' Islam, unencumbered by the homogenising weight of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>33</sup> After seven years, Muhammad Ahmad became a licensed shaykh and began to travel the country on religious missions. By this time he had gained a considerable reputation for piety and asceticism. With his brothers he settled on Aba Island in the White Nile, near to al-Kawwa, and this became his headquarters in 1870. Here his reputation helped him gain a substantial following from local tribes.

Around 1878, Muhammad Ahmad fell out with his master. This occurrence owed much to the fact that in 1872 Muhammad Sharif had moved near Aba Island at his student's invitation. From here disputes arose as the two, it seems, became rivals, leading ultimately to Muhammad Ahmad's expulsion from the order. Muhammad Ahmad humbly sought forgiveness for his defiance and readmission back into the order, but was unsuccessful.

Such an incident is indicative of the general religious fragmentation of society under a growing variation and number of shaykhs and orders. Dekmejian writes 'not only did authority become fragmented, but the great diversity of 'truths' produced conflicts and spiritual uncertainties among the faithful.'<sup>34</sup> Clearly, any religious saviour would have to be more than just another shaykh. In a sense, Muhammad Ahmad was in fact already on his way to eminence, since as part of the neo-Sufi tradition, the Sammaniyya laid heavy emphasis

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<sup>31</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 37

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel R. Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism: Some Aspects of Mahdist Ideology and Politics in the Sudan," *Der Islam* 70:1 (1993): 187.

<sup>33</sup> Dekmejian, "Messianic and Revolutionary Movements," 96.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 95.



upon *dawa* (preaching) activity, and sought to transcend the usual restrictions of the *tariqa* to tribe or village that was partly responsible for the disparate religious environment.<sup>35</sup>

As a shaykh with a large following and an established reputation, Muhammad Ahmad was admitted back into the order he had devoted his life to under the elderly and highly respected Shaykh al-Qurashi w. al-Zayn, a rival of Muhammad Sharif. Thereafter, he proceeded to resume his work and life of devotion at Aba Island and when Shaykh al-Qurashi died in December 1880, Muhammad Ahmad was recognised as his successor.

### **The Crisis Situation in India in Ghulam Ahmad's Early Life**

Ghulam Ahmad's ancestors hailed from Samarqand, and were highly placed with regular links to a succession of governments in India; Mughal, Sikh, and, apparently, with Ghulam Ahmad's father, the British.<sup>36</sup> Ghulam Ahmad was born in the Panjabi village of Qadiyan in the late 1830s. His early life is somewhat comparable to that of Muhammad Ahmad's. Friedman notes that Ghulam Ahmad was not subjected to the indoctrination of orthodoxy inevitable as a student at a *madrassa*.<sup>37</sup> This is also true of Muhammad Ahmad and in fact constitutes a significant similarity between the two men. Ghulam Ahmad was educated by tutors and received the staple of Islamic education, with its mediæval contents. Like Muhammad Ahmad, Ghulam left worldly occupations in order to follow his own inclinations and devoted himself entirely to religious study, though members of his family regarded his lifestyle as impractical.<sup>38</sup>

When we look at the religious environment within which Ghulam Ahmad emerged, we see at least one major similarity between his and Muhammad Ahmad's. The growing fragmentation of the Sufi orders is clearly paralleled by the great diversity and rivalry of scholarly schools within the Sunni community of India, which must have produced conflicts and uncertainties among the faith-

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<sup>35</sup> Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 188.

<sup>36</sup> These observations are taken from Ghulam Ahmad's own accounts (Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 2).

<sup>37</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 4.



ful there too. Sufism was also a major dimension of Islamic life in India, consisting of a variety of orders.<sup>39</sup> Writing in 1959, Titus notes that an estimated 'two-thirds of the Muslim population are under the influence of one or another of the darwish orders'.<sup>40</sup> But while Ghulam Ahmad's messianic beliefs, were likely inspired by *sufi* teachings, he was not a member of a *sufi* tariqa,<sup>41</sup> and his religious thought placed him more directly in opposition with the *ulama*, as well as other non-Muslim religious figures, as we shall see. In the Punjab at this time, public debate between rival religious groups was a prominent part of the religious scene.<sup>42</sup> British rule in India, though often a source of civil unrest, caused relatively less resistance than that of the Egyptians in Sudan since the Muslims in India had gradually come to accept the relatively effective British administration.<sup>43</sup> It was only the religious debates that would therefore have been the main arena of struggle. Ghulam Ahmad became involved with these debates and was initially exposed to the arguments of Christian and Sikh figures.

Any equivalent arena to be found in the Sudan relates directly to the Turco-Egyptian regime, and especially its suppression of the slave trade. Thus, on the one hand, a political and military threat required resistance, and on the other, in the main, a theological threat. While the necessary condition for the

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<sup>39</sup> See Murray T. Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan: a Religious History of Islam in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2005), 116-136.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119

<sup>41</sup> Freeland Abbot, *Islam and Pakistan* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), 151.

<sup>42</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 4; Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 215-234

<sup>43</sup> For example, in his 'Treatise on Jihad', written in 1887, Muhammad Husayn, a leading member of the Ahl-i-Hadith, defined the concept of *dar al-Islam* (house of submission) as referring to any country 'so long as all the religious exercises of the Mohammedan religion are not forbidden and stopped'. This line of thought follows the Hanafi position as stated in the *Fatawa-i-Alamqiri* of Awrangzeb 'that a dar-ul-Islam cannot become Dar-ul-Harb [house of war] as long as there exists even one performance of the Religious acts of Islam...' (Muhammad Husayn, *Iqtisad fi masail al-jihad*, 1887, p.10, in Spencer Lavan, "Polemic and Conflict in Ahmadiyya History: the 'Ulama', the Missionaries, and the British (1898)", *Muslim World* 62 (1972): 288). Friedman notes, 'The fatwa in which Shah Abd al-Aziz al-Dihlawi (1746-1824) declared India *dar al-harb* has been the subject of numerous comments, but the interpretation which maintains that this declaration implied a call for jihad against the British has been convincingly challenged [...] In the second half of the nineteenth century, when Indian Muslims gradually came to terms with British rule, more and more thinkers explicitly voiced the opinion that circumstances in British India, where the Muslims enjoyed religious freedom, did not justify the call for jihad' (Yohanan Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilisation in Honour of Professor David Ayalin*, ed. M. Sharon, (Leiden: Brill 1986), 230).



emergence and success of the Mahdiyya was the general discontent with the Turco-Egyptian regime, conversely, what allowed the Ahmadiyya to rise was the religious neutrality of British policy. Yet, Syed Nadvi claims that in India at this time the Muslims longed for a saviour who could deliver them from their troubles. The Muslims were faced with what he calls a multi-dimensional challenge: the spread of Christianity under the patronage and supervision of the English, and the revival of the Arya Samaj, also at the instigation of the English regime. He also states that the English sometimes prompted discord in order to allow them to consolidate their colonial power.<sup>44</sup>

It is with this context of religious depredation that Ghulam Ahmad emerged. However, unlike Nadvi, he chiefly attributed responsibility for the deplorable situation to the *ulama* of the time. As Friedman notes, Ghulam Ahmad was convinced that Islam had sunk to unprecedented depths and saw the ascendancy of Christianity in particular, a result of missionary activity, as one of the greatest problems for the Indian Muslim community. Yet the *ulama* concerned themselves with petty issues, attacking each other and other Muslims.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Brush writes that the Ahmadiyya 'can be viewed as a cultural counter attack against the west. In this context, its strong anti-Christian bias can be understood'.<sup>46</sup> According to Ghulam Ahmad, two things resulted from this state of affairs, one was the ascendancy of the cross, and the other was the apostasy of many Muslims. The situation was seen as so bad that only a divinely inspired leader could fully restore Islam.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Ghulam Ahmad's assessment of the situation may be said generally to resemble that of the Sudanese Muslims at the time, with both perceiving the need for a divinely inspired leader.

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<sup>44</sup> Syed H. H. Nadvi, (1987) *Islamic Resurgent Movements in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries: a Critical Analysis* (Durban, South Africa: Academia, the Centre for Islamic, Near, and Middle Eastern Studies, Planning & Publication 1987), 155-6

<sup>45</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> S. E. Brush, , "Ahmadiyyat in Pakistan: Rabwah and the Ahmadiis," *Muslim World* 45 (1955): 167

<sup>47</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 106.



### The First Messianic Disclosures

Through the early years of their lives, both Muhammad Ahmad and Ghulam Ahmad came to view the religious authorities with suspicion and contempt. After falling out with his master and failing to gain forgiveness and reconciliation, Muhammad Ahmad felt that corruption extended even to the highest levels of the Sufi orders as well as the state sanctioned *ulama* of the Sudan. Similarly, Ghulam Ahmad clearly opposed the *ulama*, but his distrust did not extend directly to the Sufi orders, and the *ulama* of India were largely independent from and un-associated with the British administration.

Other factors also require consideration in regards to Muhammad Ahmad's messianic disclosure. Firstly, the appearance of the Mahdi was popularly expected to coincide with the end of the century and at this time the thirteenth Muslim century was nearing its end. Secondly, Shoucair states that after Muhammad Ahmad's succession, his followers began to assert that it was written in their religious texts the Mahdi would be from among their order, and this was told to Muhammad Ahmad by Shaykh al-Qurashi. Lastly, there was the arrival of Abdallahi b. al-Masallamiyya, a soothsayer from Darfur. He came from a religious background and had already been seeking a Mahdi figure before meeting Muhammad Ahmad. Indeed, he had written a letter to al-Zubayr of Darfur, addressing the latter as the Mahdi, but Al-Zubayr denied the suggestion, whereupon the correspondence ceased.<sup>48</sup> Abdallahi eventually made it to Muhammad Ahmad and immediately recognised him as the Expected One.<sup>49</sup> There is little doubt that Abdallahi turned Muhammad Ahmad's attention to the popular Mahdist expectation, and now Muhammad Ahmad was soon studying the relevant *hadith*. This inner conviction turned out to be the sufficient condition for the emergence of a religious movement.

Although it is possible that an Islamic movement in the Sudan could have been realised at this point without reference to messianic notions, the

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<sup>48</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* 43. Their first meeting occurred following the Egyptian conquest of Darfur in 1874. 'Abdallahi himself had suffered a long journey to the east, the death of his father, and was by the time of his arrival in utter poverty.



regional expectation, itself a result of the nature of Islam prevalent in the country, where holy men, wanderers and soothsayers were common place, dictated the likelihood of a messiah. Official religion was largely limited and related to the Turco-Egyptian administration, and adherence to this form of Islam was therefore relatively small. Nevertheless, Muhammad Ahmad neither developed the concept nor did he begin the process of its application in regard to himself, but merely confirmed it. In such cases, the people find their leader, and he follows them. He gives content and direction to the beliefs of the masses, but is at the same time forced to listen and adhere to their hopes. Therefore, Muhammad Ahmad closely followed the received interpretation of the Mahdī's mission.

None of this could be further from the case with Ghulam Ahmad. While, on the one hand, regional expectations played the decisive role, on the other, it was in a progression of individual beliefs. Ghulam Ahmad appeared in the form of a solitary figure, unconnected and un-encouraged by personal acquaintances. It was not until the age of around forty that he came to be of any repute, having formerly led a fairly secluded life. His initial relation with the wider Muslim community was peaceful. An anthology of Urdu articles that he had written appeared in 1879 and refuted the claims of the rival religious group the Arya Samaj and brought Ghulam Ahmad public renown.<sup>50</sup>

His original claims to eminence, however, came in the publication of his first book the *Barahin-i Ahmadiyya*.<sup>51</sup> Although this was a formidable work challenging all other religions, in very first volumes there were already claims that alarmed some members of the *ulama*. Yet the book still did not initially seem to have caused much controversy. Abbot claims this is a possible indication of the respect with which the traditionalist theologians accepted it. As Friedman notes, Ghulam Ahmad's claims to spiritual eminence are inspired by Ibn Arabi's vision of the world and thereby predicated on the belief that divine revelation

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<sup>50</sup> A. R. Dard, *Life and Ahmad: Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement* (Lahore: Tabshir, 1948), 63; Nadvi, *Resurgent Movements*, 156.

<sup>51</sup> Ghulam Ahmad, *Barahin-i Ahmadiyya*, (Amritsar, (vols. 1-2) 1980; (vol. 3) 1882, (vol. 4), 1884); (2d ed Siyalkot, 1900).



continues in certain forms since the death of the Prophet.<sup>52</sup> This is the source of legitimacy upon which Ghulam Ahmad based all his claims to authority; that continuous divine guidance is never absent in the world. This guidance means the continual existence of divinely inspired individuals who come under a range of titles, several of which Ghulam Ahmad claimed himself to be.<sup>53</sup>

While writing his *Barahin-i Ahmadiyya*, Ghulam Ahmad initially claimed to be the renewer (*mujaddid*, pl. *mujaddidun*) on the eve of the fourteenth *hijri* century (which started on November 12, 1882). A trustworthy *hadith* attributed to the Prophet prophesies the appearance of a *mujaddid* every *hijri* century, and down the line various scholars have been recognised as bearing this honour. Indeed, there were several nominees to the title of *mujaddid*, and some consequently held that there might be more than one at each century's end.<sup>54</sup> This uncertainty was due largely to the diversity and rivalry among the Sunni schools.

While the claim to be a *mujaddid* is not in itself considered deviant, Friedman notes that Ghulam Ahmad associated a more general conception of *tajdid* (renewal) to the *Mujaddid's* identity, as one given 'knowledge of the Quranic secrets and sent to earth to explain them to the people.' He also asserts that the *mujaddidun* possess prophetic-like perfections, though only in a subsidiary, or 'shadowy' form.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Ghulam Ahmad's *mujaddid* claim deviated from orthodoxy.

A more serious claim was his declaration to be a *muhaddath*, 'a person spoken to' (by Allah, or an angel). Unlike the title of *mujaddid*, the title of *muhaddath* has almost never been awarded to any specific individual in the Sunni tradition. It bestows upon the claimant a religious authority of special nature, and such a rank would no doubt have attracted the heated attention of the *ula-*

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<sup>52</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 106

<sup>53</sup> See Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi, *Kitab al-futuhāt al-makkiyya*. 5 vols. ed. 'Uthman Yahya. (Cairo: Maktaba al-'Arabiyya, 1972). vol. 2, 3, 6, 118, 334; vol. 3, 391 (sect. 348), 391-94 (sect. 349-51). Also evident in the Shii tradition, see Al-Bursawi, *Tafsir ruh al-bayan* (Matbaa Uthmaniyya, A.H. 1330) Vol. 7, 188.

<sup>54</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 107.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.109





ma and masses alike. The specific words that granted him the rank of *muhaddath* were published for the first time in *Barahin*; 'You are the *muhaddath* of God' said Allah, 'there is a *faruqi* [discriminatory] substance in you.'<sup>56</sup> As Friedman notes, Ghulam Ahmad's understanding of the *muhaddath* goes well beyond that set out in the *hadith* commentaries, following and furthering notions conceived by sufis such as al-Hakim Tirmidhi and Ibn al-Arabi.<sup>57</sup> Their influence on Ghulam Ahmad provided the impetus behind the evolution of his thought and thus to his eventual claim to be the Mahdi.

His two further claims, that of being the *mahdī* and *masīh*, are, as recognised by Friedman, central to his desire to counter the Christian missionaries in nineteenth century India, but also was useful for contending with the arguments of Muslims too since Jesus has a crucial place in Islam as well. It was this that in fact proved particularly useful for the Christian missionaries efforts among the Muslims.<sup>58</sup> Indicative of his background in 'high' Islam, unlike Muhammad Ahmad, Ghulam Ahmad addressed and engaged with the strict orthodox version of Islamic messianism where Jesus plays the eminent role. Such an idea was perceived to be little short of an anathema, for it seemed to Ghulam Ahmad to mean that in the last resort Jesus and not Muhammad would be the real saviour of Islam.<sup>59</sup>

This version of eschatology is closely related to the belief prevailing in Islamic thought that Jesus has been alive in heaven since the crucifixion. In response, Ghulam Ahmad held that Jesus did not die on the cross but had only swooned there, and survived the ordeal to die a natural death at the age of 120 years in the city of Srinagar in India, where his tomb is said to be situated, while seeking the 'Lost Tribes of Israel'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, it is his spirit but not his body that

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<sup>56</sup> Ghulam Ahmad, *Barahin-i Ahmadiyya*, vol. 4 (R. kh., vol. 1, p.666) in Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 110.

<sup>57</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 110.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>59</sup> Abbot, *Islam and Pakistan*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Shahid Aziz, "Death of Jesus," *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore* (UK), Bulletin October 2001; Mirza Bashir-ud-din Mahmud Ahmad, *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat: being a statement of beliefs, a rationale of claims, and an invitation, on behalf of the Ahmadiyya Movement for the propagation and rejuvenation of Islam*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 134.



exists in heaven. Furthermore, since the Messiah of the latter days must be a Muslim, Ghulam Ahmad claimed that Jesus cannot be expected to perform that role because the independent prophethood of Jesus precludes the possibility of his joining the Muslim community.<sup>61</sup> Such an event would necessitate Jesus' renunciation of his own revelation in favour of Muhammad's, which Ghulam Ahmad says would be tantamount to a sort of punishment. With this he claims the *hadith* predicting Jesus' appearance are but a 'subtle metaphor', and the person to come is not the son of Mary but rather a person who resembles him. Of course, this person is none other than Ghulam Ahmad.<sup>62</sup> It was in particular by addressing the ascendancy and influence of the Christians that he claims attainment of the title hitherto associated with Jesus, *masih-i marwud*, 'the Promised Messiah.'<sup>63</sup> The announcement of the revelation that led him to declare himself the Promised Messiah and the Mahdi came in 1891. He shortly after reiterated this declaration in three books, *Fareh Islam*, *Tanzih-i-Maram*, and *Izala-i-Auham*.

Holt writes that Muhammad Ahmad's nahdiship came in the form of a series of visions. He then revealed his divine election in a succession of meetings. First he told Abdallahi and then his followers in March 1881 and then went to Kordofan and declared his mahdiship to the educated religious men. Moreover, when the common people thronged about him, he spoke to them emotionally, urging them to look to the other world, and less upon this one. He also stated that the Prophet had conferred his mahdiship upon him. Those that decided to join him were summoned to secretly pledge an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) and when he returned to Aba, he administered the oath to members of the religious order and chiefs of the nomad tribes. He afterward made his way to the relatively autonomous King of Taqali, Makk Adam Um Dabbalu. Although the king did not offer a pledge, there was no ill feeling.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Muhammad Ahmad returned to Aba Island and on the 29 June, 1881, initiated the

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<sup>61</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 116.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 108.

<sup>64</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 53-54.



beginning of the Mahdiyya, naming himself Muhammad al-Mahdi. He dispatched letters to various notables, and summoned his adherents to assemble themselves around him.

It was toward the end of 1888, shortly after the publication of the *Barahin*, that Ghulam Ahmad too felt himself elevated enough to receive *bayat*, and invited the people to pledge allegiance to him. The birth of the Ahmadiyya as an organisation was inaugurated in the subsequent gathering, held in March 1889.<sup>65</sup> Here it should be stated that the movement is not named after Ghulam Ahmad but after the Prophet. Ghulam Ahmad held that the Meccan period of Muhammad's life, marked by patience, persecution and forbearance was a manifestation of the name Ahmad,<sup>66</sup> and this is indicative of the political character the movement would express.

Soon after the publication of the *Barahin*, Ghulam Ahmad began to leave the solitude of earlier years and appear in public, participating in religious debates with the ulama, members of the Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries.<sup>67</sup> Ghulam Ahmad's first public debate was in March 1886 in the city of Hoshiarpur with a member of the Arya Samaj, Lala Murli Dhar. He never again engaged in public debate with the Arya Samaj after 1886, however, as his relationship with them was always acrimonious.<sup>68</sup>

Since Ghulam Ahmad's express disclosure as the Mahdi occurred after the creation of the Ahmadiyya, there is chronological disparity between the Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya movements. Like Ghulam Ahmad, Muhammad Ahmad gained a following before his disclosure, but the beginning of the Mahdiyya depended specifically upon the disclosure. In contrast, strictly speaking, the Ahmadiyya did not begin as a messianic movement, though claims by Ghulam Ahmad by this point had already implied just little less than that. Thus, the

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<sup>65</sup> Dard, *Life of Ahmad*, 151-156; Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, *Hazrat Maulvi Nooreddeen Khelifatul Masih I*, (London 1983[?]), 41-42; Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Abbot, *Islam and Pakistan*, 148. See, 'the True Significance of the Name Ahmadiyyah' trans. from Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *The Light*, (June 1, 1958), 7-8.

<sup>67</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 8.



manners of messianic appearances are quite different. Ghulam Ahmad's comes about as the culmination of an intellectual evolution, whereas Muhammad Ahmad's appears fairly suddenly, notwithstanding that he had first become head of the Sammaniyya order and acquired a considerable reputation, for there was no indication that he sought any greater significance than this.<sup>69</sup> The importance of all this is in the respective frame of reference and expression with which the two movements began. The Mahdiyya was from the outset explicitly messianic and almost certainly militant; the Ahmadiyya was, in contrast, none of these things, but nonetheless spiritual and restorative. Both, however, were eventually lead by a claimant to the Mahdist mantle.

### Legitimacy

The declaration of mahdship raises the stakes of a person's mission as it imbues the work of a *mujtahid* with historic significance. Becoming a Mahdi is largely an act of symbolic expansion; it does not so much legitimise the individual's work as place it onto a bigger stage — a stage that itself requires bigger achievements. In the immediate religious milieu, Muhammad Ahmad's possession of the Mahdi title meant he became clothed in prestige, with a dignity and power that exceed the value of mere subjective personality that is variable, relative and subject to criticism. For so long as his movement continued to succeed, he was legitimized and continued to enjoy the eminence the Mahdi title bestowed. Ghulam Ahmad, however, did not have this luxury, as the religious environment in which he emerged was not favourably disposed towards the *sufi* inspired concepts of perennial prophecy he derived from his readings of Ibn Arabi or the consequent messianic beliefs he espoused. Therefore, it can be argued that while Muhammad Ahmad's authority came easily, Ghulam Ahmad's had to be built up over time.

Both men derived general legitimacy from assertions regarding the appearance of the signs of the End Times — essentially revolving around the extent of the religious corruption prevalent at the time, which they each perceived

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Holt, who speculates that the reason behind Muhammad Ahmad's choice to join the branch of an elderly shaykh was the prospect of a quick rise in status (*The Mahdist State*, 40).



in their respective societies. Nevertheless, one cannot simply proclaim to be the Mahdi without some kind of proof. One traditional condition was ancestral lineage tracing back to the Prophet, which Muhammad Ahmad claimed to possess. He used this in his propaganda, and due to the power it represented, banned other people from claiming the honorific title of *sayyid* this lineage bestowed.<sup>70</sup> According to Dekmejian, Muhammad Ahmad's claims to mahdship were based on a number of specific and general criteria found in Sudan's cultural system in the form of *hadith*. He usefully summarises the criteria them as follows:

1) Appointment by the Prophet Muhammad in a vision as the Mahdi and as the Prophets khalifa, reinforced through divine voices and messages.

2) Lineage to the Prophets family, through Ali, his cousin, and Fatima, his daughter.

3) Resemblance to the Prophet in character, though not in physical attributes.

4) Birth from a father called Abdallah — the name of the Prophets father.

5) Possession of specific physical attributes: bald forehead; aquiline nose; Arab complexion; cleft between front teeth; birthmark on right cheek; and countenance like a brilliant star.

6) Emulation of the Prophets activism in Arabia; practicing God's word; call to puritanism; unifying the tribes in holy war against the infidels; fleeing when threatened; working miracles while taking people to victory.

7) Appearance as the Expected One at 'the End of Time and the Hour' around the end of the Islamic century.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See, *Al-Asar al-Kamila li'l-Imam al-Mahdi*, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim, III, (Khartoum: Camiat al-Khartoum, 1991), 88.

<sup>71</sup> Dekmejian, "Messianic and Revolutionary Movements," 98.



Almost all of these qualifications are of a physical nature and in that sense quite primitive; only the visions and call to puritanism are of a spiritual kind. In addition, they all pertain to prophetic precedent, if not directly the Prophet himself. Compare, these with Ghulam Ahmad's position on each point:

1) Appointment by God via divine revelations as the *mujaddid*, *muhaddath*, *mahdi*, and *mahsi*. Receives messages directly from God or from an angel.

2) No claim of descent from the Prophet — lineage is not as important as spirit like quality. Ghulam Ahmad is at the end of the *ismaili* chain of prophecy, like Jesus was is the end of the one begun by Moses.<sup>72</sup>

3) Resemblance to Jesus in spirit but not in appearance, though Ahmad-iyya is named after Muhammad in Mecca.

4) Ghulam Ahmad's father was called Ghulam Murtaza, and he made no claims relating to it.

5) Possession of certain spiritual qualities that draw affinities to Jesus.

6) Ahmadi history expresses little emphasis upon the notion of *hijra* in relation to prophetic precedence. The Prophet Muhammad, whose action Muhammad al-Mahdi sought to replicate in many ways, left the city of Mecca due to the extent of the persecution and discrimination of the Muslim community there. Emerging under British rule, no such situation initially existed for the Ahmadi's. In regard to holy war Ahmadi thought differs very clearly from the Mahdiyya, in that it is defined as an absolutely defensive endeavour. The task is to unite people of all the faiths and countries by non-violent means.

7) Appearance as the Expected One at 'the End of Time and the Hour' around the end of the Islamic century. Furthermore he claimed that the scriptures of the Zoroastrians, the Hindus, and the Buddhists all prophesied the coming of a great World Teacher.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 120-121.

<sup>73</sup> Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan*, 257.



Ghulam Ahmad's claims have little relation to the Prophet, but pertain to a host of religious titles. What is more, mahdship was part of a prophesised and strictly religious restoration. There is also an absence of militant ambitions, with reference specifically to the early part of the Prophets career as well as to figures cited in non-Muslim religions, most especially Jesus. Indeed, Ghulam Ahmad saw his spiritual eminence as largely predicted upon is affinity to Jesus. In fact, he was able to find many similarities between his spiritual mission and that of Jesus, one being the fact that both he and Jesus appeared when their respective communities were subjected to foreign rule. Jesus' rejection of jihad under these circumstances is used by Ghulam Ahmad as a justification for his conception of jihad (discussed further below) — and to demonstrate he is similar to Jesus and entrusted with the same messianic task.<sup>74</sup> The relation is made also geographically intimate once we recall that Jesus is not believed to have been transported to heaven by God, but to have travelled to Kashmir, where he finally died.<sup>75</sup>

With the lists of what the respective Mahdi's held to be the basis of their authenticity, and the genuine task of the Mahdi's mission, we can set out to analyse and comprehend the historical and political development of the two movements.

## 2. Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya in History

Recruitment involves the direct exposure of the movement's ideas to the social environment and the public assessment upon which its immediate success critically depends. When Muhammad Ahmad's messianic disclosure was made and followers were sought, the *baya* contained nothing of military jihad.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, a threat was apparent to the government authorities. Muhammad Rauf Pasha, the governor general of the Sudan, eventually became suspicious of the activities in Aba after coming across some Mahdist propaganda, and therefore sent to inquire about what was going on. Muhammad Ahmad responded

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<sup>74</sup> Freidman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 229.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmad, *Invitation to Ahmadiyyat*, 134-35.

<sup>76</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 54.



by affirming his divine appointment and threatened hostilities against the unbelievers in his mission.<sup>77</sup> As a result, just six weeks after the appearance of a Mahdi figure, the government moved its military into action with an expedition reaching Aba on 12 August.

Muhammad Ahmad was fairly fortunate in that the people already expected a Mahdi and were fairly desperate; his arrival would not need to be explained. In addition, doubts about why he personally gained the Mahdi title would have been parried by his renowned religious devotion. However, the Mahdiyya comprised various groups who had little in common except a desire to expel the 'Turks.' Holt lists three categories; the original nucleus of 'ascetic priests' who wished to bring about a radical reform of doctrine and manners; malcontent sedentaries aggrieved principally because of the suppression of the slave trade; and the mass of tribesmen to whom the Mahdiyya meant an end of taxation and the prospect of attaining booty. This latter group was fickle and inconsistent, joining the jihad once it seemed successful and abandoning it each time they satisfied their material needs.<sup>78</sup> (A study of the first adherents to the Ahmadiyya does not yet seem to have been carried out,<sup>79</sup> but it is certain that the number of followers Ghulam Ahmad acquired was incomparably smaller to his counterparts).

In order to persuade the *ulama*, Muhammad Ahmad had recourse to a sophisticated line of argument. Despite his wish to closely follow the example of the Prophet, by which means he styled himself the Prophets successor according to Warburg, he did not attempt to cite proofs from the Quran or the *hadith* to support his claim. Though in later documents such proofs were indeed cited, even then Muhammad Ahmad's *sufi* background remained prominent.<sup>80</sup> This was inevitably used against him by both the Egyptian and Sudanese *ulama*. His response was to undermine the traditions describing the Mahdi, though in such a way that their authenticity remained intact. Essentially, he claimed that the

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>79</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, xviii.

<sup>80</sup> Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 189.





will of God is not limited or constrained by the criteria indicated in the traditions regarding the expected Mahdi. As Warburg notes, 'his was a charismatic leadership in which *barraka* [divine blessing], implying an active power of holiness, played an important role'. The citing of religious texts was therefore not as important to him nor the majority of *sufi* shaykhs in the Sudan than to his antagonists the Azharite trained *ulama*.<sup>81</sup> According to his son Sadiq, Muhammad Ahmad opposed the *ulama* for their subservience to texts, which they used to denounce his mission and justify their siding with the government.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Muhammad Ahmad's means of legitimatisation was to do away with the traditional criteria, and leave nothing in their place other than his own divinely inspired revelation. As a result, he clearly felt threatened the continuing existence of other *sufi tariqa*, for the Mahdiyya remained at its core a *sufi* establishment, and with the gained significance of messianism, could not afford to share legitimacy with others. Muhammad Ahmad soon banned the other *tariqa* of Sudan so that only the Mahdiyya remained.<sup>83</sup>

Yet out of our two Mahdi's, it was he who sought to replicate prophetic precedent most clearly, in political and sociological ways. Following the creation of the Mahdiyya, a well-timed *hijra* to Jabal Qadir in Western Sudan, paralleling that of the Prophet Muhammad's from Mecca to Yathrib some 1250 years earlier, was carried out in the face of the government military.<sup>84</sup> Underestimation of the strength and devotion of the Mahdi's forces resulted in a series of defeats for the government that proved to the victorious Mahdi's followers the truth of their mission. The first Mahdist victory occurred on 12 August on the way to Jabal Qadir. A second victory soon followed and despite a setback on 30 May, the town of Abu Haraz was captured on 20 April. By 19 January, 1883, the capital of Kordofan, El Obied, was in Mahdist control. Similarly, the province of Sennar was gradually conquered due to the recurrent inability of the govern-

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Sadiq, summarised the views of the *ulama* opposing the Mahdi (*Yasalunka*, 145-149), and those of the ones supporting him (*ibid.* 149-53), in Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 189.

<sup>83</sup> *Al-Asar al-Kamila li'l-Imam al-Mahdi*, III, pp. 319-320. The letter was written to Muhammad al-Amin and Hamid.

<sup>84</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 46.



ment forces to follow up any victory they made and the growing amount of allies the Mahdi acquired. Despite the efforts of General Gordon, Khartoum fell on 26 January, 1885.<sup>85</sup> The Mahdi, however, died soon after, on 22 June, 1885.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the list of legitimations noted by Dekmejian, we may cite some other things. The Mahdi's followers, who in the early stages of the revolt were called *darawish* or *fuqara*, were thereafter named *ansar*, in another act to parallel prophetic precedent.<sup>87</sup> Warburg explains that the Mahdi quickly realised that he had to define his movement and its supporters in a distinctive way so as to differentiate them from the many *sufi* orders scattered throughout the Sudan. While in the initial stages of his movement the support of many *sufi* shaykhs and their followers was essential, it later became intolerable since the Mahdiyya could only have one central authority, namely the Mahdi.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, sufism in the country experienced a period of general decline that did not end until the Mahdiyya was defeated.<sup>89</sup>

Warburg notes that the earliest version of the *baya* was based mostly on *sufi* tradition, but later the *baya* took a more elaborate form and clearly indicated a return to traditions linked with the Prophet's biography. It resembled the *baya* given by the *ansar* of Yathrib (Medina) to the Prophet following his *hijra* from Mecca in 622 C.E. Within it are contained the principle aspects of the Mahdiyya, including an opposition to *shirk* (polytheism) and the oath not to flee from jihad. Muhammad Ahmad pronounced jihad as more important than the *hajj* (pilgrimage), one of the five pillars of Islam. In a letter from 1853, he wrote 'know that a sword which has penetrated for the sake of God is preferable to seventy years of worship.' This emphasis on jihad was similarly given to simple life and asceticism, together forming the core of the Mahdist ideology.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 118-19.

<sup>87</sup> *Ansar*, 'helpers', was the name given to the supporters of the Prophet at Medina.

<sup>88</sup> Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 190.

<sup>89</sup> R. S. O'Fahey, "Sufism in Suspense: The Sudanese Mahdi," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. De Jong, F., Radtke, B. (Leiden: Brill 1999), 267-82.

<sup>90</sup> Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 193.



In another act corresponding to prophetic precedence, the Mahdi appointed four *khulafa* (deputies, sing. khalifa) named after *al-rashidun*, by the prophetic *hadra*, which according to *sufi* beliefs resembled the *shura* council.<sup>91</sup> The actual title al-Khalifa, however, was only bestowed on Abdallahi al-Taaishi who was second to the Mahdi and hence sacred and infallible. As for the other deputies, their title 'never implied actual succession or inheritance'.<sup>92</sup>

In India, Ghulam Ahmad, had also been at the heart of a series of battles, but these were of an intellectual type. Following the December 1891 gathering in Qadiyan, Ghulam Ahmad participated in further debates with Muslims and in May 1893 also with Christians. Shortly after the publication of the *Rath-i-Islam* and *Tauzih Maram* in 1890 and 1891,<sup>93</sup> the principal opponents against him were the Muslim mullahs. According to Dard, a coalition of them encouraged Muhammad Husayn to turn against Ghulam Ahmad.<sup>94</sup> Abd al-Haqq Ghaznavi had already challenged Ghulam Ahmad to a *mubahala* (public debate), but this encounter was apparently delayed indefinitely because Ahmad 'had not yet received any divine command in the matter'.<sup>95</sup> As a result, it seems, Muhammad Husayn was then urged to repudiate the claims of Ghulam Ahmad in public.<sup>96</sup> Ahmad sent his two volumes to Husayn and urged that they get together to discuss the issues of controversy, but Muhammad Husayn refused.<sup>97</sup> With Ghulam Ahmad's opponents having already declared fatwas against him to the effect of his excommunication, the leader of the Ahl-Haddith challenged him to

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<sup>91</sup> These councils, usually held in the Ghar Hira cave in Mecca, under the chairmanship of the Prophet, with other prophets and leading Sufi shaykhs in attendance, continued to take place under the prophets successors (Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 189).

<sup>92</sup> Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 190.

<sup>93</sup> Lavan, "Ahmadiyya History," 284.

<sup>94</sup> Dard, *Life of Ahmad*, 181.

<sup>95</sup> According to Lavan 'The word 'mubahala' derives from the Arabic root *bhl* which means 'to curse'. Literally the *mubahala* means 'an act of cursing each other'. In our context it is used to signify a procedure in which two opponents in a debate invoke the curse of God upon the person who is wrong. Lavan notes that the *muhabala* is 'a practice ordinarily permitted to Muslims in debating non-Muslims but not previously known to have been used by Muslims against each other. The incidents referred to here take on unusual significance in this light' ("Ahmadiyya History," 284).

<sup>96</sup> Dard writes that Husyan was specifically selected because he had formerly been an influential source of support for the Mirza, and Lavan concurs with this hypothesis. Thus with this support overtly withdrawn, Ghulam Ahmad's position would be severely weakened and vulnerable to further orthodox attack.

<sup>97</sup> Lavan, "Ahmadiyya History," 285.



debate the Jesus issue. The debate began on July 20 1891, and after twelve days ended in such uproar that both men had to leave the town of Ludhiana where it took place.<sup>98</sup> Things reached a conclusion when on December 10, 1892, Ahmad declared God had now granted him permission to hold *mubahala* against other Muslims following the numerous fatwas from his opponents.<sup>99</sup> This declaration seems to show the official confirmation of divergence from the Muslim mainstream.

Debates, however, were not the only means of publicising and furthering the growth of the movement. The publication of the first periodical began in 1897, and another soon followed in 1902. This relates to another development. By 1902 Ghulam Ahmad's faith in the efficiency of public disputations to restore the superiority of Islam over Christianity had weakened and he wrote that people were not capable of understanding the arguments employed.<sup>100</sup> Without any concern for warfare under the circumstances, Ghulam Ahmad, as well as the Ahmadiyya as an organisation, produced an immense amount of literature. As Friedman observes, Ghulam Ahmad's literary output alone exceeds fifteen thousand pages by conservative estimate.<sup>101</sup>

This predilection for writing is no doubt a result of Ghulam Ahmad's revision of the idea of jihad, not to mention a supposed proof of his mahdship. In 1892, Lekh Ram, the Arya Samaj leader, published a book that accused Islam of being a religion of the sword and unfit for the modern age.<sup>102</sup> The book was not directed specifically at Ghulam Ahmad, but rather mainstream Muslims in general. Its ideas, as Friedman hints, may possibly have figured in the development of Ghulam Ahmad's thought on military jihad. His own major exposition on the subject was not published until 1900. Like Lekh Ram's, it riled a

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, 286

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 287. See Dard, 184-95.

<sup>100</sup> Friedman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 117.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 9.



wide section of the Muslim community, expressing an attitude not altogether contradictory to that of his opponent, the Arya Samaj leader.<sup>103</sup>

Ghulam Ahmad's teachings expressed a novel conception of Islamic political responsibility. Lavan notes that, on the surface, the positions of Ghulam Ahmad and Husayn on jihad and loyalty seem identical.<sup>104</sup> However, the Ahmadi formulation of this view is distinctly unconventional. According to Ghulam Ahmad, the commandment of jihad came into being as a result of the great danger Islam faced in the first years of its existence.<sup>105</sup> The Quranic verses revealed during the Meccan period of the Prophet's career, which express jihad in a defensive sense, supports this view. However, later Quranic verses speak of a more aggressive jihad, which according to the accepted Sunni view, abrogate the previous verses. In order to counter this position, the Ahmadi's reject the idea of abrogation (*nashk*).<sup>106</sup> If there are contradicting statements on a certain issue, one should look upon the circumstances in which they were revealed and act according to the ones revealed in the circumstances most similar to one's own. Because the commandment of jihad was only promulgated when the nascent Muslim community was in grave danger, it is therefore valid only during circumstances of a similar kind.<sup>107</sup> Ghulam Ahmad vehemently rejected the idea that the *mahdi* will be a violent person who will kill the non-Muslims unless they embrace Islam.<sup>108</sup> He says that in the modern period, a new sense of jihad is required since the problems of Islam principally came from the arguments and persuasiveness of other religious groups. The sword cannot refute these arguments; the only weapon suitable for this task is the pen. In a collection of poems

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<sup>103</sup> Ghulam seems to have been fond of predicting the time of death of his adversaries in order to prove which individual spoke the truth. an announcement prophesising the death of Lekh Ram, the Arya Samaj leader, in 1893 was proved true when he later was assassinated in 1897 (Freideman, *Prophecy Continuous*, 7)

<sup>104</sup> Lavan, "Ahmadiyya History," 288.

<sup>105</sup> Ghulam Ahmad, *Zinda nabi aur Zinda madhhab* (A living prophet and a living religion) (Amritsar, 1925), 40-41; idem, 'My attitude to the British government' (Lahore, 1895), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 227; Abbot, *Islam in Pakistan*, 153.

<sup>107</sup> Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 227.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, 228.



entitled *Durr-i thamin*<sup>109</sup> he says 'we have killed the infidels with a sword of arguments, and the one who wants to kill us has not hope of success'.

Friedman notes that in addition to scriptural proofs, Ghulam Ahmad adheres to an evolutionary view of history in order to substantiate his view of jihad. Whereas human history was in its early stages characterised by unbridled violence, gradually Allah reduced the severity of religious wars, and the development of human civilisation reached its peak with the emergence of the Promised Messiah, since whose time jihad must be completely abolished.<sup>110</sup>

All this is part and parcel of Ghulam Ahmad's invocation of the figure of Jesus and his mission of peace while facing foreign occupation. However, this did not mean that he was absolutely neutral in political terms. While the *ulama* of India had a complicated relationship with British rule, characterised by tolerance, cooperation as well as opposition,<sup>111</sup> Ghulam Ahmad was a keen supporter.<sup>112</sup> What is more, he also predicted the collapse of the Turkish government on more than one occasion as if warfare against the Ottomans was something to be celebrated. Here the messages of Muhammad Ahmad and Ghulam Ahmad display in inverse symmetry, both adverse to Turkish rule but with radically different ideas of jihad. It is important to note here that Ghulam Ahmad did not refrain from saying that if he tried to perform his religious task in a Muslim country, he would be treated with utmost hostility.<sup>113</sup>

According to Lavan the controversy with Muhammad Husayn reached its height late in the year 1898 and during 1899. The Muslim attacks against Ghulam Ahmad no longer centred only on the death of Jesus issue or on Ghulam Ahmad's claims to be *masih*, *mawud* and *mahdi* but now on his interpretation of the issues of jihad and loyalty to the government. In late August 1898, in

<sup>109</sup> Ghulam Ahmad *al-Huda wa al-tabsira li-man yara* (R. Kh., XVII, 265 note); *Haqiqat al-mahdi* (Qadiyan, 1899), 22; *Fath-i Ihsam* (Amritsar, 1308), 12-15, all cited in Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 231.

<sup>110</sup> Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 228.

<sup>111</sup> See, Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi thought," 230; Naeem M. Qureshi, "The 'Ulama' of British India and the Hijrat of 1920," *Modern Asian Studies*, 13:1 (1979): 41-59; Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972), 168-74.

<sup>112</sup> Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi Thought," 230.

<sup>113</sup> Ahmad *Barahin-ahmadiyya* (R. Kh., XXI, 294), cited in Friedman, "Jihad in Ahmadi Thought," 231.



an issue of *Ishaat-i-Sunnah*, Muhammad Husayn criticised Ghulam Ahmad for 'making disparaging remarks regarding the Turkish Government and predicting its downfall', that is, the downfall of the officially recognised caliphate of the Muslim world. To Ghulam Ahmad, the Ottoman caliph would have been like a rival, since with his divine selection, Ghulam Ahmad, like Muhammad Ahmad, considered himself to be the true leader of the *umma*. Husayn continued his article by insisting that the even positive remarks he had made about the *Barahin* he no longer upheld since Ahmad had declared himself a Mahdi.<sup>114</sup>

In 1905, Ghulam Ahmad made his will, and it was further supplemented in January, 1906. As Friedman notes, this demonstrated that unlike most messianic movements the Ahmadiyya was expected to continue after its founder's death. Ghulam Ahmad died in Lahore on 26 May, 1908.

The defeat of the formal Mahdiyya under Abdallahi al-Taaishi by the British under General Kitchener in 1898 did not eliminate the movement in total, despite the implementation of governmental bans on their devotional practices.<sup>115</sup> The Mahdi's son, Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, gained leadership and realised his movement's path to survival lay in cooperating with Great Britain against its common enemies Egypt and Turkey. Instead of armed struggle, the Abd al-Rahman now propagated *jihad al-nafs*, an eminently sufistic rendering of jihad directed at overcoming internal disbelief and vain desires.<sup>116</sup> Though this rendering of jihad was challenged by remaining traditional Mahdists, it is important to note the striking similarity between the formulation of this interpretation and that of Ghulam Ahmad's. Both view circumstances as of central importance to the actions one should pursue, and what is more, both gave support to the ruling power, in this case the British, even over that of other Muslim states. With this radical development the Mahdiyya became much like the Ahmadiyya in political terms.

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<sup>114</sup> Lavan, "Ahmadiyya History," 288.

<sup>115</sup> M. W., Daly, "Islam, Secularism, and Ethnic Identity in the Sudan," in *Religion and Political Power* eds. Gustavo Benavides and M.W. Daly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 86.

<sup>116</sup> Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, *Jihad fi sabil al-istiglal*, (ed.) al-sadiq al-Mahdi, (Kartoum: turath al-Sudan, n.d. [1963?]), pp.b-c, 183 cited in Warburg, "From Revolution to Conservatism," 194.



In his paper on Wahhabism and Mahdism, John Voll argues that the Mahdiyya was a 'man-orientated' movement in that its focal point was the charismatic figure of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi. This is opposed to a 'message-orientated' movement such as Wahhabism, where emphasis is laid on a specific belief system. The former, due to freedom from traditionalist principles, is better able to adapt to new circumstances.<sup>117</sup> Mahdi-type messianism is closely associated with *tajdid*, and Muhammad Ahmad's *sufi* training and environment, was clearly demonstrated in his revelations and teachings. However, Warburg notes that despite his *sufi* background, seeking unity with God, al-Mahdi moved in the direction of asserting the transcendence of God, more in line with fundamentalist or literalist Islam. This dual messianic and fundamentalist role of al-Mahdi, closely affiliated with *sufi* traditions may also explain, according to Warburg, the movement's ability to adjust to twentieth century realities. The same *sufi* orders that had been denounced by the Mahdi in 1884, were invited to his son's 'wedding festivities' with their flags and *dhikrs*, and treated as honoured political-religious partners. The mass recruitment of members of various *sufi* orders to the Mahdist flag by Sayyid Abd al-Rahman and his successors, was a clear indication of their ability to compromise.<sup>118</sup>

Yet we must explain the reason why the Ahmadi's were left in an impossible position given the future Pakistani government's stance, which declared the Ahmadiyya non-Muslim in 1974 due to their belief in the Prophecy of Ghulam Ahmad, following various riots domestically and pressure from abroad. Further restrictions were added in 1984 in Ordinance XX, which effectively banned the Ahmadiyya from preaching and professing their beliefs. Like the Mahdiyya, Voll refers to the Ahmadiyya as a man-orientated movement, but whether Ghulam Ahmad's movement can be placed in this category is doubtful. For although the Ahmadiyya adheres to an idiosyncratic theology, the move-

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<sup>117</sup> John O. Voll, "Wahhabism and Mahdism." See also John O. Voll, "The Sudanese Mahdi: Frontier Fundamentalism," *International Journal of the Middle East Studies*, 10 (1979): 153-165

<sup>118</sup> Sudan Political Intelligence Summary, 51, July 1945, FO 371/45972, quoted in Dhafer Jasim Mohammed, *The contribution of Sayed Ali al-Mirghani, Leader of the Khatmiyya, to the political Evolution of the Sudan, 1884-1968*, (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Exeter, 1988), .262 in Warburg "From Revolution to Conservatism," 193.





ment that came out of it shows little of the doctrinal flexibility associated with Voll's conception (or with Weber's idea of charismatic leadership). Even though we cannot simply place the Ahmadiyya within *the* message-orientated group, it was nonetheless *a* message-orientated one. The early split experienced by the movement, and the inability to securely survive within Pakistan, and many other Muslim countries, without compromising Ghulam Ahmad's spiritual status, is evidence of this.

### Conclusion

There are a variety of similarities presented by the Ahmadiyya and Mahdiyya, and even in their dissimilarities, they often exhibit inverse symmetry. Both these messianic movements arose in the nineteenth century, when the acute effects of the general decline and crisis in Muslim power globally were being felt. Though one arose under nominal Ottoman rule, they both directly experienced British colonialism. Nevertheless, the underlying factors appear fundamentally dissimilar. Muhammad Ahmad's arose from disdain towards foreign occupation but more importantly economic frustrations vis-à-vis the ban on the slave trade, which was led by the Ottoman-Egyptian government. In contrast, the Ghulam Ahmad's frustration was directed more at the contemporary Sunni *ulama* and rival religious groups, such as the Arya Samaj. Still, each grew within a region of religious crisis and fragmentation and neither Ghulam Ahmad nor Muhammad Ahmad went to a madrasa, where the imprint of orthodoxy would have been made. Though this fragmentation involved the scholarly schools of India in the case of Ghulam Ahmad, and the *sufi tariqa's* of Sudan for Muhammad Ahmad, the effect was the same: a perceived need for sweeping societal change. With Muhammad Ahmad and Ghulam Ahmad we have figures disposed towards countering the immediate problems in their respective regions with the uptake of messianic doctrine. Thus, while Muhammad Ahmad was encouraged externally by figures around him as well as popular hope and expectation, Ghulam Ahmad's movement took off from what was first and foremost a personal intellectual development.



In this context, it appears foreign rule had an instrumental role in the formation of both movements, especially given the respective strengths and faults these ruling administrations had along with the rewards and handicaps each population experienced as a result. The questions of legitimacy were in a way influenced by this circumstance. The Mahdiyya initially came out against the Ottomans and fought against the British, even if only because the British intervened to put a stop to the movement and occupy Sudan. By contrast the Ahmadiyya openly supported British rule, due to the latter's granting all sects freedom to preach and debate, an atmosphere that fostered Ghulam Ahmad's intellectual stance and fame. In a Muslim majority country, Muhammad Ahmad need only fulfil the orthodox criteria to be accepted by a population already angry with foreign rule and the ban on the slave trade. With the immediate opponent popularly seen as a foreign government, contestation of power was by default more direct and primitive. By contrast, the foremost arena of contest in India was public debate; and the immediate opponents the Muslims faced were ones that espoused differed theologies to the Indian population. In a multi-faith country, with thriving proselytization, public debate rather than military resistance made more sense, and was allowed by the British, at a time when identities were based mainly on religious tradition. The idiosyncrasy of Ghulam Ahmad's doctrine can be related to his own intellectual persuasions and development, but also the debating opponents he faced in multi-faith India. With Muhammad Ahmad, the *sufi* social matrix had been as influential as the ideas with which he was trained. Conversely, in terms of *sufi* influence, Ghulam Ahmad was steeped in ideas sourced from books, rather than contemporary practices, and though the movement he created was less political than the Mahdiyya, it was more radical in its doctrinal stance. His unique uptake of the messianic figure of Jesus gave him grounds to make new sense of Islamic doctrine and combat Christian opponents at the same time. Orthodox messianic teaching would not have brought the same attention or distinction, nor spoken to the wider population of non-Muslims without turning the figure of the Mahdi into something unique while the more specifically Islamic champion as constituted



by the figure of the Mahdi suited the Sudan, as opposed to the melting pot of India.

Further, the seemingly apolitical position of the Ahmadi's was belied by their staunch support of the British regime, and overt opposition to the Turkish government. The British in fact seem the bridge with which the two movements crossed paths. Since while the Ahmadiyya was most suited to living under their rule and given the right to propagate their views and thereby directly confront the Christian missionaries and Muslim ulama, the Mahdiyya, and the Sudanese generally, were not as resentful of the British, at least initially, as they were of the Turco-Egyptians, since it was the latter that implemented the ban on the slave trade. In addition, it was under the British and due to defeat at their hands that the Mahdiyya was transformed from a militant to non-violent organisation. Thus, both movements found a home under British rule.

Also, with British departure from the respective countries in question, the two movements were destined to endure very different futures. Being non-militant, the Ahmadiyya managed to survive in its original form for the first fifty years of its existence, spreading far around the world. However, Ghulam Ahmad's claims have perhaps brought the Ahmadiyya more enemies than friends. The claims regarding continued prophecy perhaps would not have been so antagonistic had he not then proceeded to claim for himself the various titles that actually imply a rejection of the finality of prophethood. For this was, as many writers have observed, the most controversial of his claims and responsible for the hostile relationship the movement has held with the orthodox mainstream. Though holding aspirations of statehood, in religious terms Muhammad Ahmad claimed less for himself. Subsequently these differences would be felt. As the Ahmadiyya was in the 1940s completely forced out of the political set up of Pakistan, the Mahdiyya went on to become a major player within the Sudanese political system. Essentially, while with the Mahdiyya we begin with, from their point of view, a non-Muslim government, the movement progressed to eventually become the government itself, and with the Ahmadiyya we begin with a tolerant non-Muslim government, but followed by a Muslim



government declaring the Ahmadiyya non-Muslim. But the Ahmadiyya cannot really avert the battle in which it is placed, since its political relevance has been extracted directly from its religious self-definition. Yet it is likely because of their local suppression that the Ahmadiyya spread abroad, eventually gaining a world-wide following.

Though the Mahdiyya stressed a more sufistic version, jihad in both movements eventually came to be interpreted in very similar terms, with a rejection of war, revolt and armed struggle. Indeed, Ghulam Ahmad's understanding of what constitutes *dar al-harb* is similar to that of Muhammad Husayn. So though both movements were eventually supporters of the British, with Ghulam Ahmad this was from the outset based on his personal doctrine, while with the Mahdiyya this was only a later seduction, and with the loss of power and enthusiasm for military success.



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