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Understanding the Oppressed: A Study of the Ahmadiyah and Their Strategies for Overcoming Adversity in Contemporary Indonesia

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Abstract: The Ahmadiyah is a highly controversial Islamic reformist movement that is persecuted throughout the Muslim world. In Indonesia, the movement's situation has become increasingly precarious with the growth of conservative Islam. This article examines the everyday experiences of oppression suffered by individual Ahmadis at the hands of the state and their Muslim opponents in Indonesia, and looks at their responses to these experiences. I found that Ahmadis employ six diverse strategies to emotionally, socially, and spiritually withstand adversity. These strategies are conceptualised under the following labels: 'Fortitude through faith and spirituality', 'Rationalising oppression', 'Ideological manoeuvring', 'Acts of resistance', 'Harmonising identity', and 'Satisfying the need to belong'. I argue that the agency of Indonesian Ahmadis is embedded in these strategies, which mitigate their suffering, and at times seek to change oppressive social environments.

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1   Introduction

The Ahmadiyah has been one of the most active and highly controversial movements within modern Islam ever since its inception in 1889 British India. The movement describes itself as an 'Islamic reformist movement'. As such its central message is, with a few exceptions, identical to that of Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, these exceptions are sufficient to provoke extreme intolerance of the Ahmadiyah and its teachings within orthodox Islam. The Ahmadiyah's acceptance of its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, as a prophet is the most contentious of their teachings, and a central reason for Muslims' widespread rejection of the movement as heretical and beyond the bounds of the acceptable in Islam. What originally began as a doctrinal dispute has since developed into a political issue with far-reaching consequences for the rights and safety of individual Ahmadis throughout the Muslim world, including in Indonesia.

The Ahmadiyah's[1] position in Indonesia has become increasingly precarious since the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998. Throughout Suharto's rule, Islam as an organisational and political force was heavily restricted and controlled by the state. As Indonesian Muslims' religiosity increased in the wake of Islamic revivalism in the 1980s and 1990s, the authoritarian regime introduced policies of Islamisation in the pursuit of legitimacy (see Hefner 1997; Liddle 1996). After 1998, endeavours to democratise and decentralise Indonesia provided the opportunity for radical Islam to influence politics, and for conservative Islam's influence to grow significantly in both the private and political lives of Indonesians. The early years of Indonesia's nascent democracy witnessed outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence (see Klinken 2007), and a trend towards 'sharianisation' (see Bush 2008; Hefner 2011). Whilst these conflicts have since ended, and the pace of sharianisation has generally slowed, conservative Islamists continue to retain influence disproportional to their numbers. Liberal Muslim voices that promote pluralism and tolerance have been pushed into the background by their louder conservative, and sometimes radical, counterparts (see Bruinessen 2013, Gillespie 2007).

Within this context, animosity towards religious minorities has intensified, as has become evident in the increased incidence of violence and intimidation, and the proliferation of discriminatory laws and regula-

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1   Due to internal divisions and strife, the Ahmadiyah split into two separate factions in 1914. Both have established Indonesian branches. This article focusses on members of Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI), the larger and more controversial of the two organisations.

tions (see Crouch 2009b). Such developments have brought the limits of religious freedom in post-Suharto Indonesia to the forefront of academic research in recent years. As one of the most persecuted minorities in Indonesia, the Ahmadiyah has attracted a significant amount of attention (HRW 2013; ICG 2008). The body of literature mentioned above has often focussed on the historical and socio-political causes of the discrimination against the Ahmadiyah, with particular attention having been paid to the role of specific laws, institutions and/or radical Islamists (see for example Crouch 2009a; Crouch 2012; Hicks 2014; ICG 2011; Platzdasch 2011). Another common approach, also adopted by Indonesian mainstream media, focusses on the theological and ideological explanations for Indonesian Muslims' rejection of the Ahmadiyah (see for example Burnhani 2014; Damayanti 2008; Febiana 2007; Nasution 2008). To date, the perspectives of Indonesian Ahmadis have been largely overlooked.

However, since the inception of Subaltern Studies in the 1980s, a movement established by Indian historians such as Ranajit Guha critiquing the elite bias in studies of South Asian history, a wealth of research across the disciplines has investigated the agency in the resistance to domination of a range of other subordinated groups (see, for example, Gupta 2015; Kerkvliet 2009; Mills 2012; O'Nell 1994; Scott 1985). In more recent conceptualisations, resistance is not seen as being dichotomously opposed to power and domination. Instead, it is viewed as being located within, or even 'entangled' with the very structures of subordination that it seeks to undermine (Chandra 2015). Consequently, scholars have increasingly pointed to the importance of paying consideration to the sociocultural, historical and geographic specificity of oppression, and of subordinate groups' resistance to it (Fox and Starn 1997; Moore 1998; Prilleltensky 2003).

This article[2] seeks to address this lack of understanding of Indonesian Ahmadi subjectivity. I applied grounded theory methods with the aim of creating a substantive, conceptual-descriptive account of Indonesian Ahmadis' real-life experiences as they themselves narrated them. The first section of this article discusses how members of Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI) experience and perceive oppression, where 'oppression' designates the whole spectrum of negative experiences that they endure at the hands of their Muslim opponents. Such a participant-oriented understanding of oppression is necessary because it underlines the central question that this article seeks to answer: In what ways do

individual Ahmadis respond to these oppressive experiences? Like the Afghan women in Mill's (2012) study of their English memoirs, Ahmadis are not silenced and are rarely passive in their own accounts, and so the question arises as to what types of Muslim subjecthood and agency they are able to accomplish. This article contends that Ahmadis' agency is multiplex, embedded in six diverse strategies that enable them to attain a level of psychological empowerment. The six strategies are conceptualised under the following labels: 'Fortitude through faith and spirituality', 'Rationalising oppression', 'Ideological manoeuvring', 'Acts of resistance', 'Harmonising identity', and 'Satisfying the need to belong'. Each of these strategies contributes to the Ahmadis' ability to emotionally, socially and spiritually make sense of, negotiate, respond to, and resist hegemonic forces.

2 Method

In this exploratory research, I applied grounded theory methods, an approach that is particularly useful to shed light on participants' perspectives, and to provide insights into areas that are relatively unknown. Charmaz asserts that grounded theory is well-suited to "advanc[ing] understandings of how power, oppression, and inequities differentially affect individuals, groups and categories of people" (Charmaz 2011: 362). Given that the aim of this article was not to generate a full grounded theory per se, but rather to create a conceptual-descriptive account, only the first two phases of Corbin and Strauss' (2008) coding process (open and axial) were conducted. The third and final coding procedure, selective coding, brings categories together to form theory, and was therefore omitted.

The bulk of material for this article was collected between May and June in 2012 in the cities of Yogyakarta in Central Java and Bogor in West Java. These locations were selected as they are home to two of the largest and most well-established Ahmadi communities in Indonesia, but whose encounters with other Muslim groups have been somewhat dissimilar. Accordingly, the distinct experiences of each community increase the likelihood of finding conceptual variations in the data. Bogor is the location of the JAI's national headquarters, and this Ahmadiyah community has been attacked by radical groups numerous times in the past (see Avonius 2008; ICG 2008; Olle 2009). Some of the Ahmadis interviewed for this study, hereafter referred to as 'participants', were present when radical Muslims attacked the Bogor compound in 2005, which resulted in its forced temporary closure. In contrast, the Yogyakartan community's

mubaligh, Pak Fajar[3], noted that Yogyakarta is the most tolerant of all the cities he had worked in. In his assessment, the city provides a comparatively peaceful and hospitable environment for Ahmadis. None of the participants of this study have suffered from extreme forms of violence such as those that occurred during the infamous 2011 incident in Cikeusik.[4] Nor have any participants faced the kind of long-term displacement that some Ahmadis on Lombok, for example, endure – they have been unable to return to their homes since 2006.

I conducted informal participant observation and 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews.[5] The interview participants ranged from 19 to 70 years of age; six were female, seven were male. They variously come from, or have in the past lived for extended periods of time in, areas of Indonesia including Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, East and West Java, Bali and Lombok. The participants are urban-based, and their educational backgrounds vary from high school to university educated. Interviewees included students, housewives, employed and retired persons, as well as two local *mubaligh*. Some participants are converts; others were born into the Ahmadiyah. All members of the sample are highly religious. This assessment is based on the participants' own self-characterisations as well as my own observations. They report that they diligently perform religious obligations such as the five daily prayers, regularly attend *Sholat Jumat* (Friday prayers), and are actively involved in the organisation. In addition, interview and observational data was supplemented with what Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to as "nontechnical" literature, such as content from the JAI official website, an Indonesian JAI Facebook group page, and various official JAI print publications.[6]

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3   A *mubaligh* is an Islamic preacher. Pak Fajar has worked as a preacher in many areas throughout Indonesia, including East Kalimantan, Lombok, South and Central Sulawesi, Bali and various locations in Java.

4   This incident involved a mob of between 1,000 and 1,500 Muslims who attacked Ahmadis in Cikeusik, Banten Province. Three Ahmadis were murdered in this attack, while police stood by and were unable to intervene.

5   All but one of these interviews were conducted in Indonesian.

6   Due to insufficient data, this article does not purport to be applicable to the entire population of Indonesian Ahmadis. Hence, where general terms such as Ahmadis or JAI/Ahmadiyah are used throughout the discussion of this study's results, they refer to the participants of this study.

3   Understanding the Ahmadi Experience of Oppression

In her influential discussion of the politics of difference, Young (1990) draws attention to the impossibility of defining oppression. In the past, the term has been used to describe a myriad of different situations and processes; these include tyrannous groups in power, countries engaged in colonial domination, or specific types of society (e.g. communist societies). Young argues that oppression has acquired a further meaning in modern times, whereby it "designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer [...] because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (Young 1990: 41). This structural form of oppression is entrenched in cultural stereotypes, in media bias, and in the unquestioned traditions, norms, symbols and practices of a society.

Groups can be oppressed in many different ways, and to various extents. The term 'oppression' can refer to a wide variety of injustices. Rather than seeking a precise and universal definition, it is more fruitful to understand oppression as "a family of concepts and conditions" that fall into five distinct categories (Young 1990: 40). Young labels these the five "faces" of oppression, and asserts that they are adequate to describe the array of injustices experienced by any oppressed group.[7] Ahmadi participants were found to experience four specific forms of oppression, namely: stigmatised identity, social exclusion, state sponsored discrimination, and violence. Each resembled one of Young's forms of oppression as the following discussion will show. The only one of Young's five "faces" of oppression that was absent from Ahmadi lives was that of exploitation, whereby the results of a group's labour are diverted for the economic benefit of another group.

Young describes the oppressive category of cultural imperialism as the process whereby a dominant group establishes its perspectives, cul-

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[7]   This article operationalises the concept of oppression over its equally elusive conceptual cousin, persecution. In his historical analysis of the term, Kuosmanen (2014: 138) argues that persecution involves "asymmetrical and systemic threat of severe and sustained harm that is inflicted discriminatorily and unjustly." The specification of severe and long-lasting harm as key characteristics of persecution, arguably restricts the scope of its application (see Kuosmanen 2014). Collectively, the JAI might be classified as a persecuted group, but not every individual member of the JAI necessarily endures 'severe' harm at all, let alone on a long-term basis. Some participants' negative experiences are, for example, largely limited to the stigmatisation of their religious identity. Thus, Young's encompassing approach to conceptualising oppression is more suitable for grasping the experiences of individual participants.

ture, and religion as the norm, and then imposes these onto others. It involves stereotyping groups in society that are in some way different, and marking them as the 'other'. This sort of stigmatisation involves a transition "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, cited in Major and O'Brien 2005: 394). This category closely resembles one of the participants' central concerns: stigmatisation of the JAI by other Muslims as a heretical movement. The Indonesian word *sesat*, meaning 'to deviate' or 'to go astray', is ubiquitous in Indonesian discourse on the Ahmadiyah. In the context of religion, *sesat* can also be translated as 'heretical', denoting error in belief or practice. Assigning the label *sesat* to the Ahmadiyah has the effect of ascribing difference or otherness to the organisation, as well as to individual Ahmadis, by denying their status as Muslims. The boundaries of Muslim identity set by the majority exclude the Ahmadiyah, against their will, from membership of the *umma*.[8] *Sesat* narratives regarding the Ahmadiyah are promoted by both influential individuals (e.g. politicians and religious leaders) and official bodies such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) and the Coordinating Body for Mystical Beliefs in Society (Bakor Pakem) (see Crouch 2009a). The stigmatisation of the movement spreads, and is further strengthened, by negative media reporting (see, for example, Budiwanti 2009). In this manner, belonging to the Ahmadiyah becomes a devalued and even despised identity, a status that deeply distresses participants. This is reflected in the following comment made by a university student named Ratih:[9]

> One person who is anti- [...] who has a low opinion of the Ahmadiyah is my teacher on campus at university. He said that the Ahmadiyah is heretical. He even convinced my friends – he's a teacher and he convinced my friends that the Ahmadiyah is heretical, [that] the Ahmadiyah is wrong. So I was more worried […] more afraid of telling my friends that I'm an Ahmadi. I was there [at the time]. I just kept quiet.

This treatment made Ratih feel angry and misunderstood. She and other participants feel that animosity towards the JAI is spreading. From their perspective, the rejection of their claim to 'Muslimness', and attempts by outsiders to force them to 'reform', constitute huge injustices.

Stigmatised religious identity translates into Ahmadis' social marginalisation. Young (1990) describes marginalisation as the process whereby

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8   The universal community to which all Muslims belong.
9   All names used in this article are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

individuals are refused the opportunity to participate in economic and social life. In many instances, these individuals suffer from material deprivation, or become dependent on others for subsistence and support. This understanding of marginalisation emphasises the economic disadvantage endured by oppressed groups. However, the participants of this study are educated and relatively affluent. Social marginalisation is the prevalent cause of their distress. They report experiencing social marginalisation in various forms: Rejection by friendship groups, being avoided, having rumours spread about them, and being verbally mocked and insulted. Marginalisation occurs in numerous social contexts (at work, school, and university, as well as in society in general), and is a distressing experience for Ahmadis. A Facebook entry made by one Ahmadi illustrates some of these characteristics:

> At school, my friends avoided me. After grade four at primary school, I started to understand [why]. People didn't like me because I'm the child of an Ahmadi. [...] One girl encouraged classmates to shun me. My friend said that they didn't hang out with me because they weren't allowed to. It was really sad.[10]

Knowledge of someone's links with the Ahmadiyah can lead to blatant exclusion. However, in some cases, those whose association with the JAI is not public knowledge, report fear at the prospect of being found out, and that others would then "certainly avoid" them. Younger participants in particular not only report actual experiences of social exclusion; they also often anticipate it.

Social opprobrium can be informal, as is evident from the excerpt above, but it can also take the form of institutionalised discrimination. It correlates loosely with 'powerlessness', another of Young's faces of oppression. Powerlessness refers to an individual's inability to participate in making decisions that affect his or her life. Similarly, participants report that Ahmadis are often unable to exercise control over activities and decisions that directly affect them. This form of discrimination has increased over the last few decades. The Ahmadiyah are not represented on the MUI, an authoritative and highly influential Muslim clerical body that draws its members from across Indonesia's Islamic organisations. The MUI has released several *fatwa* [11] against the Ahmadiyah (see

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10   Excerpt from the personal essay 'Ahmadi dari Baros' posted on the AhSoc Facebook page, online: <www.facebook.com/notes/ahsoc/ahmadi-dari-baros /10150176989812178> (25 August 2015).

11   A *fatwa* is a legal opinion, given by a qualified Muslim scholar on a specific matter.

Nasution 2008). In 2008, a joint ministerial decree, Surat Keputusan Bersama (SKB), was issued by Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General and the Minister of Home Affairs, demanding that the Ahmadiyah cease spreading interpretations and undertaking activities that deviate from the teachings of Islam. These demands were accompanied by the threat that the Ahmadiyah would elsewise face penalties under existing laws. Participants complain that the SKB forces them to restrict their gatherings to private meetings and internal events. At the same time, they do not feel that official restrictions of public gatherings have a great effect on their everyday lives, commenting that the SKB is "not super important" in their lives. Pak Ridho, a *mubaligh* in Bogor, even went as far as to suggest that the Indonesian government had good intentions, seeing the SKB as "an effort by the government […] so that we aren't attacked and we don't offend other people."[12] While participants are not overly concerned by the SKB itself, they are worried about the ripple effects that such official opposition might generate. According to the participants, the SKB provides legitimation for allowing intolerance of the Ahmadiyah to permeate Indonesian politics and society. Numerous regional regulations (*peraturan daerah),* and administrative decisions banning and restricting Ahmadi activities, have indeed followed (Crouch 2011, 2012). Not surprisingly, participants object to these restrictions, and view them as constituting a violation of their "fundamental human right to worship". They also report that, since the issuance of the SKB, they have been increasingly treated as second-class citizens by other Muslims, by representatives of the state, and by law enforcement officers.

The most extreme forms of oppression reported by the participants, though less common, are unprovoked physical violence and harassment. Since MUI released its 2005 *fatwa* declaring the Ahmadiyah to be outside Islam, attacks against Ahmadis, and damage to their property, have increased throughout the Indonesian archipelago, leading to permanent displacement and even death in some extreme instances. None of the participants interviewed for this study have suffered such extreme violence, but some have experienced intimidation and/or damage to prop-

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12   Bernhard Platzdasch (2011: 16) has suggested that the JAI leadership also believes that the Indonesian government issued the SKB in an attempt to straddle the gap between conservative Islamic groups and the proponents of religious pluralism. According to Platzdasch, Ahmadi leaders regarded the SKB's vague language, lack of clarity regarding which activities are banned, and the fact that the decree only has the status of a Joint Resolution (Surat Keputusan Bersama), and not a Presidential Resolution (Surat Keputusan Presiden) (as was called for by Islamist conservatives), to be proof of this.

erty. Several participants report that their mosques have been attacked by demonstrators in the past. They describe their fear during demonstrations by angry mobs, though only one Ahmadi reported an attack on their person. Participants who have not personally suffered such violence report attacks against fellow Ahmadis as though they themselves had been targeted. Gita, a housewife from Bogor, explains, "there are brothers and sisters of ours who have, who have been persecuted, tortured, murdered. And we don't retaliate. We don't respond." Gita's use of inclusive language is typical, and suggests that Ahmadi experiences of violence run deeply throughout the community; violence is sometimes experienced collectively. Young (1990) noted that social context is central to determining whether violence constitutes a 'face' of oppression. Violence becomes oppressive when it is tolerated, made possible, or accepted by institutional and social practices. This rings true from the participants' perspectives, who feel they are criminalised and targeted by law enforcement officers who interrogate them rather than protect their community, and by the judicial system that creates a culture of impunity for their attackers.

4   Ahmadi Strategies for Overcoming Oppression

Participants' accounts reveal their experiences of cultural imperialism, social marginalisation, powerlessness, and violence at the hands of both state and private actors.[13] However, lessons from Subaltern Studies have taught us to be wary of uncritical presumptions of one group's hegemonic dominance over another. The Ahmadi participants' responses to oppression are multiple and varied. Some strategies that Ahmadis employ seek to subvert normative understandings of Islam. Other strategies are less adversarial, but nonetheless serve to mitigate or avoid negative or painful emotions and events. In a similar way to the young women in Phillips' (2000) study of dominance in heterosexual relationships, Ahmadis' agency occurs when they achieve psychological empowerment via

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13   This is, however, not to say that participants' exchanges with non-Ahmadi Muslims are exclusively negative. A young female participant from Yogyakarta reports, for example, "my [non-Ahmadi] friends know that I am an Ahmadi and they value [me]." Another older participant from Yogyakarta similarly claims he is well-respected by the wider community, although not all are aware of his membership of the JAI. Such incidents indicate the fallibility of dichotomous and homogeneous social divisions that set apart the dominant from the dominated (see, for example, Hollander and Einwohner 2004).

these strategies, even though psychological empowerment usually does not translate into sociocultural or political empowerment.

These psychologically empowering strategies provide individual Ahmadis with feelings of inner strength, and can be considered agentive if following Mahmood (2001, 2006), who argues that agency is neither synonymous with resistance nor necessarily adversarial. She rebuts the notion that all forms of agency must resignify or subvert societal norms. From such a perspective, even seemingly passive everyday acts that do not pursue change may be agentive. The following section discusses the six strategies adopted by Ahmadis. The labels given to each strategy reflect its main characteristics or concerns, namely: 'Fortitude through faith and spirituality', 'Rationalising oppression', 'Ideological manoeuvring', 'Acts of resistance', 'Harmonising identity', and 'Satisfying the need to belong'. The participants themselves were not consciously aware of these behaviours as strategies. Rather, the following descriptions represent my own conceptualisations of the participants' accounts.

4.1   Fortitude through Faith and Spirituality: Love, Prayer and Trust in God

Religion (*agama*) is of central importance in the lives of many Indonesians and the Indonesian state philosophy, Pancasila[14], requires citizens to believe in the one and only God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*).[15] Unsurprisingly then, faith[16] and spirituality[17], in one form or another, intertwine with and permeate all aspects of the participants' lives and actions. Both strengthen their ability to manage difficulties associated with being a

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14   The Pancasila is the philosophical basis of the Indonesian state that envisioned a united monotheistic, democratic, and just state and society.

15   Only six religions are officially recognised by the Indonesian government. When the participants talk of *agama*, it is predominantly used as a synonym for Islam, but it also refers to the other recognised religions: Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism.

16   The Indonesian term *keyakinan* is translated in this article as faith. As used by the participants, *keyakinan* is distinct from *agama* (religion) in that it conveys the *strength* of their conviction, of their belief in God, and of their acceptance of Islamic doctrine. For readers' ease of comprehension, the English terms are used throughout this article.

17   This article leans on Joseph G. Pickard and M. Denise King's (2011: 262) definition of spirituality as the relationship with God, and the endeavour to strengthen that relationship. It involves trying to find meaning and purpose, and to make sense of life experiences that are complex and confusing (see Pickard and King 2011).

member of a marginalised, stigmatised and victimised religious minority. Participants acknowledge that their faith is a fundamental cause of their oppression, but it is also a means for them to emotionally respond to and ameliorate oppression, and they believe it would be the ultimate solution to their situation.

Previous research has shown that religion and spirituality can provide individuals with extra tools for managing hardship, and that they are complementary to non-religious ways of mitigating oppression. Thus, they can ultimately have a positive overall impact on an individual's quality of life (Faigin and Pargament 2011: 164). One response that contributes to the resilience of participants, involves resorting to the movement's philosophy of peace and forgiveness as is embodied in its international slogan: 'Love for all, hatred for none'. This aspect of the JAI's teachings is the spiritual and emotional source of a participant's ability to accept the oppressive attitudes and actions of others, to forgive intolerance, and to move beyond these experiences. For participants, showing 'Love for all' requires them to accept their oppressors, and to strive for peaceful coexistence, regardless of their treatment by others. In the words of Pak Anton, a well-respected Ahmadi in Yogyakarta:

> According to us, like someone said earlier, the Ahmadiyah is about 'Love for all, hatred for none.' Even though people don't treat us well, Ahmadis won't retaliate. We are not give revenge [sic] because our, our saying, because we have a slogan 'Love for all, hatred for none.'

Participants find comfort in the notion of being good Muslims who are tolerant and accepting of others. Their self-perception contrasts starkly with their representations of opponents to the Ahmadiyah.[18] Some participants also believe that this behaviour will eventually win them favour in the hearts of other Indonesians, who will "come to have sympathy and empathy" for Ahmadis.

Prayer also constitutes an essential form of emotional support that comforts and assists Ahmadis to move beyond their suffering. Prayer is closely linked with the participants' unwavering faith in God, and in the truth of their religious community. These convictions instil them with hope that God would protect them and judge their attackers. Pak Taufik, a retired government employee from Yogyakarta, believes that prayer will ultimately be the Ahmadiyah's salvation from oppression:

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18   See, for example, sections 4.2 and 4.3.

> There is a verse in the Qur'an which says that such changes [to persecution] can only occur when humankind wants to change. However there is also a verse in the Qur'an which says that if you ask God, God will give you what you want to get [...] and we use it to pray all night to God. We believe if we pray it well, then God will give it [to] us.

Whilst Ahmadis entrust the betterment of their situation to God, they nevertheless accept that whatever happens is God's will, and is therefore beyond their control and knowledge. Some participants seek to resolve the apparent conflict between their trust in God and the fact that God continues to allow their community to be persecuted, by viewing their oppressive circumstances as a test of their faith. For these participants, oppression does not undermine their faith, but actually reinforces it, as in the following example:

> I myself feel that when we become Ahmadis, there is a test of faith. So when we have a religion, we believe in something and then there are times when our faith – our belief – is tested. Meaning, what you really believe in has to be tested. As an Ahmadi, I feel that we are always tested and we are always ready to be tested [...] a test in the sense that we experience intimidation […] [in the sense] that terror attacks continue.

This statement by Zaid, who moved to Yogyakarta from Bogor in search of work, shows that he views oppression as an opportunity to prove, and thus strengthen, his allegiance to the JAI. In this manner, Ahmadis' fortitude is inextricably linked to their faith. Certainty of faith enables participants to withstand initial opposition, and this in turn fortifies their determination. Some characteristics of this strategy are so prevalent, and the accounts so similar (to one another as well as to official JAI rhetoric), that they are probably sentiments imparted in a top-down manner from the JAI leadership, and reinforced laterally.

4.2   Rationalising Oppression: "For Every True Movement, There Must Be Opposition"

While Ahmadis are confident in their knowledge that they and the Ahmadiyah are good and kind, they are also mindful of the fervour of hatred for them, which seemingly contradicts this knowledge. Participants thus make sense of oppression, and emotionally cope with it, by explaining and rationalising their victimisation in a manner that does not undermine their religious identity or damage their self-worth. Some partici-

pants do this, and account for the opposition to the Ahmadiyah, by drawing parallels between their own situation and that of the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca. Shila, a young university student from Yogyakarta, demonstrates this in the following comment:

> They [opponents of the Ahmadiyah] aren't a big problem for me because […] at the beginning of Islam it was like this – during the prophet Muhammad's time there were a lot of people who didn't like him. There were a lot of people who had radical leanings and wanted to attack Islam. But Islam still exists today. It couldn't be broken. Now, my situation is like that […] whatever they want, it doesn't create problems for me.

This sentiment is echoed by many. The following comment shows how widespread persecution actually reinforces Pak Anton's belief that the Ahmadiyah is a legitimate movement:

> It [persecution] is unquestionable […] unreasonable of course. But I think it is the nature of true movement. It is always the nature of a true movement that there must be opposition […]. All Prophets in their period, that is the way […]. So for me it is a great […] rule. Why in Ahmadiyah and then many opposition? That is the symptom that it must be a true movement. While the others, where no oppositions, well what for? All true movements, always oppositions [sic].

According to Pak Anton, true religious movements will necessarily be rejected and persecuted initially, because this was the experience of earlier prophets. In his perception, it is logical that any subsequent true reformer will naturally receive the same treatment. This comparison makes it possible for Ahmadis to frame the reason for widespread opposition to the Ahmadiyah positively, because it becomes the necessary sign of a true movement.

Participants also make sense of their negative experiences by locating the origins of intolerance outside of Indonesia. They are committed to the idea that intolerance is not the natural culture of Indonesia, which in their view boasts a long history of peaceful coexistence of different religious communities. Ahmadis insist that the multiple forms of oppression they experience in contemporary Indonesia are the result of external and negative influences emanating from, and sponsored by, countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which propagate intolerant versions of Islam to Indonesian students abroad as well as on Indonesian soil. These countries are seen as being ultimately responsible for alienating Indonesian Muslims from the Ahmadiyah. Ahmadis gain comfort from

locating the true source of intolerance towards them outside Indonesia. It enables them to view their current situation as an aberration, and not a permanent state. They look forward to change whereby Indonesia can truly be based on the Pancasila, and return to its innately tolerant culture.

Some participants attribute their difficulties to the role of Indonesian religious leaders and political culture in polarising opinions and contributing to anti-Ahmadiyah sentiment. For example, the Yogyakarta JAI community's *mubaligh*, Pak Fajar, explains:

> People who are trying to gain political advantage or achieve power often use the Ahmadiyah as a scapegoat [...]. People say things in order to expand their power, in order to win as many votes as possible and attain a good political position. The Ahmadiyah is often used as a tool [...] to gain the sympathy of the community. In Indonesia, the use of political manoeuvres to create a chaotic and unstable atmosphere in politics is typical. These are games in which the Ahmadiyah is used as a tool, a tool to create chaos.

Mubaligh Pak Fajar attributes the victimisation of his community in Indonesian politics to actors' exploitation of the issue for their own gains, a position that finds support in scholarly literature on the Ahmadiyah (see, for example, Hicks 2014; Nastiti 2014). In other words, according to Pak Fajar, opposition is not a religious issue whereby orthodox Muslims reject the authenticity of Ahmadi doctrines. In his view, politics is a central cause of their oppression. By painting the rejection of the Ahmadiyah as a political issue, Pak Fajar and other participants weaken their opponents' position, and thereby the potency of their criticism of the Ahmadiyah. Hence, before even addressing the actual content of opponents' critiques, these critiques are delegitimised as actually being politically motivated. They thereby become dubious, and are attributed to deviant and opportunistic individuals within the system. In these ways, rationalising oppression assists Ahmadis to make sense of (and to delegitimise) strong opposition to the JAI.

4.3   Ideological Manoeuvring: "Ahmadiyah Is Islam"

Ideological manoeuvring[19] is a key strategy that participants use to manage the conflict between their own views of Ahmadi religious beliefs and

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19   The label "ideological manoeuvring" is adapted from Michelle Wolkomir's (2001) study of homosexual Christian men who subvert Christian ideology that denounces them as sinners in an attempt "to re-create themselves more positively" (Wolkomir 2001: 408). According to Wolkomir, this type of ideological

the beliefs of others. This strategy, like rationalising oppression, enables participants to turn negatives into positives, and their victimisation into affirmations that build faith and strengthen determination. Ideological manoeuvring is, however, distinct from rationalising oppression in that it is not concerned with the reasons for the JAI's oppression. Instead, it deals with the content of Ahmadi religious identity itself. Ahmadi ideological revisionism involves rejecting the devalued identity attributed to them by outsiders, and creating their own alternative identity-affirming narratives. Using this strategy, participants work to subvert orthodox Muslims' claims to knowledge of doctrinal truths, and even assert the superiority of Ahmadi religious knowledge.[20] In this sense, ideological manoeuvring is a form of resistance. It also reduces the hurt, and enables participants to avoid being changed by oppression. Ahmadis' "ideological work" (Scott 1985) comprises several components that are described by the conceptual labels 'asserting Muslimness', 'us and them', and 'flipping the discourse'. These three components represent the participants' daily efforts to disrupt the stigmatisation of their religious identity. Whilst they do not have much of an effect on external perceptions of the JAI, they do much to assert the participants' Muslim subjecthood for their own benefit.

'Asserting Muslimness' involves the rejection of so-called *sesat* narratives, and simultaneously affirms the Muslim identity of Ahmadis. The participants constantly emphasise that there is no distinction between Islam and Ahmadiyah, and that Ahmadiyah *is* Islam. Participants emphasise the truth and authenticity of Ahmadi doctrines by highlighting direct links to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. In order to further galvanise this perspective, they do this on an individual basis, for the benefit of non-Ahmadis, as well as collectively at their internal gatherings. Many a private conversation with leaders and general community members revealed similar rhetoric, along the lines of Pak Anton's remark:

> The teaching[s] of Islam [are] actually the same as the teaching[s] of Ahmadiyah. It's the same, because the purpose of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad being sent to earth by God was to revive the religion of Islam, which had been brought by the prophet Muhammad in

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revisionism, though not all-encompassing, is nevertheless a demanding process that requires significant effort, particularly when done by powerless groups.

20   This strategy has a similar outcome to story-telling for American Indians in northwest Montana. O'Nell (1994: 95) argues that story-telling empowers members of this community and "transform[s] negative messages of prejudice into positive images" of group identity (see O'Nell 1994).

the same way. So Ahmadis, including myself [...] we all refer to the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad.[21]

In other instances, participants base their claim to be true Muslims on their actions. In Islam, an individual's behaviour is an important way of expressing their membership of the *umma*, and is often taken as an indication of their level of piety. Ahmadis are proud of their regular observance of prayers (in some cases participants claim to pray more than the required five times per day), their knowledge of the Qur'an, and their dedication to fasting during Ramadan. Indeed, if one were to measure orthodoxy by a person's commitment to the observance of Islamic duties and obligations, one could argue that Ahmadis are more orthodox than many of their critics. The participants' recognition of their similarity to other Muslims, and the truth of their religious knowledge and actions, enables them to reject accusations of deviancy directed at the JAI. This reasoning leads some participants to the view that exclusion and intolerance of the Ahmadiyah by other Muslims is based on flawed assumptions and misinformation, either because their understanding is wrong, or because their paradigm is incorrect. As Aziz, who just graduated from high school, eloquently puts it:

> How can people say that the Ahmadiyah is a false doctrine, a heretical doctrine, even though we actually do good things? How can bad religious knowledge result in good practices or deeds? I've tried to synchronise this matter [of] how religious knowledge which is fundamentally bad can have results which are good. It means that someone must be wrong. Their understanding is wrong and actually, the basis of knowledge taught by the Ahmadiyah is general Islam. It is actually Islamic religious knowledge.

Another form of ideological manoeuvring juxtaposes the JAI and other Muslim groups in a way that places the former in a position of superiority. The discussion above has shown how participants are quick to emphasise similarities with other Muslims, and portray the JAI as a 'true' Islamic movement. Paradoxically though, participants also distinguish their own Muslim identity from that of other Muslims in a manner that places the JAI in a particularly positive light. This tactic resembles that employed by the marginalised women in Opsal's study, who "create vivid versions of their personal identities by challenging existing identities or

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21   This kind of rhetoric is also reflected in JAI publications. See, for example, Sy and Said (2010). This book counters critiques directed at Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's revelations. It often affirms his revelations by linking them directly to the Qur'an (i.e. to the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad).

constructing new ones" (Opsal 2011: 138). Ahmadi participants generally limit the notion of their difference to specific aspects of Ahmadi doctrine.[22] However, they also differentiate their community from the wider Muslim community with claims such as "I feel there is great difference with traditional Muslims. We always apply reason.", or by emphasising their organisational superiority, as the "only [Muslim] organisation that has a *khalifah*[23] out of all the Islamic organisations in the world." In such instances, Ahmadis' knowledge and assertion of their differences do not induce doubt; rather, they strengthen their self-worth, and their belief in the truth of their community.

Some participants assert difference in order to boost their own feelings of self-worth, and to question their critics' claims to Muslimness. By inverting the discourse in this way, participants reject opponents' stigmatising of Ahmadi identity, and discredit them in the process:

> Those who attack Ahmadiyah, they don't know who Ahmadiyah is. No, they don't know. Even […] they are not really Muslim. Well, [they are] Muslim statistically. But they don't know the teaching[s] of Islam [sic].

Whilst this Ahmadi participant does not declare opponents of the Ahmadiyah to be *sesat,* he does accuse the JAI's critics of being ignorant of Islamic doctrines. Gita shares this conviction that the Ahmadiyah's opponents do not understand Islam. She points out that opponents' attempts to force Ahmadis to change their beliefs directly contradict the Qur'an's edict (2:256) that there can be no compulsion in religion. Other participants note that some opponents' violent tactics are further evidence of their poor understanding of Islam, which is in their view an inherently peaceful religion. By diminishing the religious credibility of their Muslim critics in this manner, participants also effectively weaken their opponents' criticisms of the Ahmadiyah. Their construction of opponents as lacking in understanding of true Islamic doctrine stands in stark contrast to their representation of the JAI as being moral, tolerant and peaceful.[24] Thus, this strategy undermines dominant negative attitudes about the JAI, and serves thereby to empower Ahmadi participants;

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22   For a detailed analysis of the doctrinal beliefs of the Ahmadiyah and how these differ from those of 'orthodox' Islam, see, Friedmann 2003.

23   Caliph, i.e. successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community.

24   See the discussion in 4.1, for example, particularly in relation to the JAI's official philosophy 'Love for all, hatred for none'.

it is not, however, successful in changing the ideological positions of the JAI's oppressors.

4.4   Acts of Resistance: Striving "For Mutual Respect and Good Relations"

Sometimes Ahmadis go beyond the kind of internal and psychologically empowering strategies described above, and engage in physical acts of resistance. The resistance discussed here comprises outward displays of defiance, and is distinct from fortitude derived through faith, which involves seeking comfort in the teachings of the Ahmadiyah and from God via prayer. In the current strategy, rather than complying with bans on their religious activities, Ahmadis continue to practise and propagate their interpretation of Islam (albeit often on a smaller scale, and in a more private manner, than previously). This can be conceptualised as an act of resistance because the participants perceive it as such. They ignore Muslim critics' demands to declare themselves as non-Muslims, and continue on with their lives as Ahmadi Muslims. The participants find pride in their community's refusal to let 'radicals' restrict their activities, and in its collective steadfastness in the face of physical and emotional threats. Ipeh's comment provides a typical example of the determination voiced by numerous participants:

> Performing what one considers to be part of worship is every in-
> dividual's fundamental human right [...]. If we are for example
> banned from performing prayers, from using the mosque, well we
> can't comply. That's a private matter. I will continue to go to the
> mosque; I will continue to perform my prayers, even if it is
> banned!

Ipeh further claims that neither verbal threats nor physical acts of violence can weaken her resolve. Other participants also perceive the JAI community's efforts to rebuild their mosques after attacks by their opponents as acts of defiance, and their continuance in the face of bans serves to strengthen their resolve. [25] Participants' recognition of their right to practise their religion freely, and their determination to persevere

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25   Participants insist that their daily practices have hardly been affected by the increasingly oppressive circumstances of their existence in Indonesia. However, their experience is not universal. Some JAI communities are more restricted than others, and JAI activities have been affected on a national level. This is evidenced, for example, by the movement's compliance with the ban on its annual national meeting.

in the face of multiple forms of oppression, are manifestations of their agency.

Ahmadis' adversarial behaviour to persist is galvanised by their desire to counter 'black propaganda' about the JAI where they can. Instead of silencing their followers, criticism and opposition is met with active missionary and community-outreach activities that set out to alter the publics' negative impressions of the JAI. The participants typically perform two kinds of action in this quest to create more accepting social environments; both are strategic and deliberate. The first action involves individual participants' proactive attempts to reach out to, and to educate, others about the Ahmadiyah. This is an informal and individual behaviour that seeks to win others' acceptance, or at least to reduce social tension. Friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances, and fellow school or university students, become prime targets for individual Ahmadis' outreach. Participants' advocacy for the Ahmadiyah can occur in response to direct questions from outsiders. In other situations, it occurs in response to discriminatory and hurtful propaganda that participants perceive to be denigrating, inaccurate and uninformed comments about the organisation and its beliefs. The following excerpt from a Facebook posting illustrates this:

> Maybe I should stay quiet, listen to them berate my beliefs. "I'm an Ahmadi," I said resolutely. My friends froze instantly, stunned. They stared at me in disbelief: "Is that the truth? Are you lying?" "It's true! I'm an Ahmadi." Since that moment, I have been able to convey to others who the Ahmadiyah is, although I feel I don't truly understand it myself. But I was able to make my friends stop rebutting all the Ahmadiyah's explanations.[26]

Here, this Ahmadi honestly admits his membership of the Ahmadiyah. After proudly revealing his identity, he proceeds to confront negative stereotypes. This sort of confrontation does not necessarily require Ahmadis to disclose their identity. For example, another young participant, Rio, feels that his arguments are more effective if he withholds this information, making him seem more neutral. At the same time, he is able to avoid putting himself in a situation that would inevitably result in him experiencing discrimination:

> In one class there was a student from an Islamic university [...] she said some stuff about the Ahmadiyah, like, that it's heretical, stuff

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26   This excerpt is taken from a Facebook entry on the page "Saya Ahmadi loh!" ["I'm an Ahmadi!"], online: <www.facebook.com/notes/ahsoc/saya-ahmadi-loh/10150175839727178> (3 June 2013).

like that [...]. So I responded. I spoke in the seminar and said: "You've never had any contact with the Ahmadiyah. Come on, I invite you to come and meet my Ahmadi friends." "My Ahmadi friends," that's what I said to her, but I didn't say "my Ahmadi community." "Come with me to meet some Ahmadi people right now before you say things like that." She just kept quiet and left the seminar.

The second activity engaged in by Ahmadis is collective and constitutes a more formal style of advocacy for the JAI; for example, some participants promote and participate in events aimed at improving inter-group relations, and seek to redress misconceptions about the JAI in this context. Such activism is more typical of older participants. The *mubaligh* Pak Fajar in particular hope that these initiatives will enable dialogue between groups to "build up pluralism and tolerance for good relations" and "create a peaceful atmosphere, an atmosphere of mutual respect." Pak Fajar says that this form of activism constitutes one of the central responsibilities in his role as a *mubaligh* for the Ahmadiyah. Over the last 20 years, he has engaged, or attempted to engage, in dialogue and forums with other Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities throughout Indonesia. Pak Fajar concedes that his efforts to establish dialogue, and clarify peoples' understanding of the Ahmadiyah, are not always successful. Nevertheless, he remains resolute that he and other members of the JAI will continue to engage with others in an attempt to improve their situation.

4.5   Harmonising Identity

In some contexts, however, this form of resistance to oppression has to be forgone in favour of adaptation or accommodation. Moore (1998: 368) points out that subalternity is relational rather than essential, and thus that agency is person- and context-specific. Accordingly, alongside those vocal and outwardly defiant Ahmadis, there are also the quieter diplomats who seek out particular situations that call for harmony as a strategy for managing Ahmadis' controversial identities. Harmonising identity becomes the problem-solving strategy that enables Ahmadis to live in peace alongside, and to stay connected with, other Indonesian Muslims. Some participants achieve harmony, either by connecting with others and sharing their identity, or by avoiding possible negative reactions by keeping their identity a secret.

In the interests of safety, and to avoid rejection and ridicule, participants opt to modify their behaviour, and to conceal their religious identi-

ty. Ahmadis perform their religious duties in the same way that other devout Muslims do; therefore, concealing their religious identity generally involves self-censorship. This is quite common, and can be considered the participants' 'default' behaviour in unfamiliar non-Ahmadi contexts. It does not denote any change in their feelings about being an Ahmadi. It is simply a strategy that the participants employ in order to endure potentially threatening environments. It occurs in various contexts outside the Ahmadiyah community: at school, in university, in social clubs, in the work place, in general society, and even amongst non-Ahmadi friends. Younger Ahmadis are especially likely to opt to alter their behaviour in order to remain connected with non-Ahmadis in situations where they perceive their religious identity might damage their relationships with others, for example:

> Most [of my friends] don't know, no. Because outside opinions of the Ahmadiyah aren't different to theirs. They think the Ahmadiyah is heretical, that the Ahmadiyah is bad. So I am also afraid that most of them would avoid me, [that they'd] shun me if they knew that I'm an Ahmadi.

In certain situations, some participants reveal their identity to others if they deem it appropriate and safe to do so. Ahmadis share their identity purposefully, and of their own free will through the use of overt language, or inadvertently through symbols or pictures. This type of sharing occurs in situations judged to be safe, or when a participant's desire to connect with non-Ahmadis outweighs any reservations they may or may not hold. This generally occurs among close and trusted friends, as Shila says: "I don't want to cover it [my identity] up from my friends." In other instances, sharing is an unintentional, though not necessarily unwanted, consequence of connecting. For example, participants sometimes invite friends to their homes, where pictures of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the Ahmadiyah's *khalifah* (caliph) are displayed on the walls, inadvertently revealing their identity to their friends. The participants expect that these adornments may invite questions from their guests, and if or when these questions come, they answer them honestly. Sometimes, though, they feel forced to reveal their identity via direct questions of the more accusatory kind. Even under such circumstances, most participants claim that they always respond truthfully when asked directly if they are Ahmadi. Honesty is very important to the participants in this situation. They are of the opinion that lying to conceal their beliefs indicates that they are ashamed of their religious identity.

In the absence of direct questions, Ahmadis assess the situation, and adjust their behaviour according to the circumstances. This is an attempt

to achieve their desire for an existence free of oppression that does not isolate them completely from the wider Muslim community. They do this, either to fit in by emphasising their Islamic identity (strategically neglecting to mention the Ahmadiyah), or by honestly revealing themselves as Ahmadis in order to connect with open-minded individuals.

4.6   Satisfying the Need to Belong: Safe among *saudara*

In their discussion on the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary argue that the "need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings" (Baumeister and Leary 1995: 499). Whilst some may question this claim about the universality of the need to belong, the participants do indeed exhibit such desires, and do engage in specific behaviours to achieve belonging. Aware of the Indonesian public's hostility towards them, the Ahmadi participants seek accepting, supportive and safe places where they can be their true selves. In the absence of such a place in the wider community, they replace it to a large extent with the smaller, close-knit Ahmadiyah community. The participants' close identification and involvement with the Ahmadiyah community enables them to achieve a sense of belonging that they may otherwise be denied. By attaining this belonging, Ahmadis are able to reduce their reliance on outside culture to satisfy their emotional needs.

The key to achieving belonging is, quite logically, a participant's ability to develop bonds with other Ahmadis. They draw significant comfort from the acceptance they gain within the Ahmadiyah community. For example, one participant relates his first experience of the Ahmadiyah: "And I met there and I was so touched because they accept me by embracing me. By embracing!" The elation and bewilderment that he felt as a result of the kind welcome that he received as a new convert some 25 years ago, clearly still touches him. He also reports that his conversion brought with it many new friendships. Siti also comments on acceptance, and the strong connection she feels within the Ahmadiyah community:

> I feel safer when I'm here [...]. And if I'm hanging out, I'm more comfortable among Ahmadis than I am outsiders because I feel like Ahmadis are already all blood relations. So I feel much closer and I don't feel self-conscious.

Many participants feel that the Ahmadiyah community is a "safe" place, and cherish the extreme closeness they share with other members of the community, who they regard as family or "relatives" (*saudara*) in a strik-

ingly real sense. Achieving this kind of relief from oppression also involves creating spaces that are separate from opponents, often centred on the local mosque, where Ahmadis feel safe and accepted. Participants deepen their emotional connections with fellow Ahmadis in these spaces by actively taking part in the organisation itself, as well as its activities. They connect with one another during various private religious and social events, through regular group prayer sessions (especially the Friday prayers), or by just 'hanging out' with other Ahmadis at the local mosque, at one another's homes, or elsewhere. Such activities satisfy their sense of belonging, and their need for deeper emotional attachment with others. In contexts outside the Ahmadiyah community, they often feel the need to conceal their religious identities to avoid oppression. Within the Ahmadiyah community, on the other hand, they feel free to be themselves; this, in turn, strengthens the emotional depth of their connection to one another, and the strong feelings of belonging that they derive from their membership of the JAI.

Opposition to their movement further tightens bonds between Ahmadis. Participants often share their own personal experiences of oppression with other members, and this has the effect of strengthening their emotional connections with fellow Ahmadis. Participants do this with Ahmadis in their local community, in other parts of Indonesia, and elsewhere in the world, drawing comfort from the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles. Connections with Ahmadis from other Indonesian localities, or countries outside Indonesia, are established and maintained for the purpose of 'mutual sharing', predominantly through the internet by using social networking sites such as Facebook. In the wake of adverse experiences, Ahmadis comfort one another in person and online, and these experiences give them the impetus to bond more deeply.

The practice of endogamy also reduces a participant's need to belong to outside communities. According to the participants, Ahmadi leadership advises its members to marry within the community. Those participants who have already married had indeed followed this advice, either by having married within the community directly; or, in the case of those who had converted after marriage, they had requested their partners to also convert. Younger unmarried Ahmadis express their desire to marry within the community. Ratih explains this inclination:

> In the Ahmadiyah there is a regulation which obliges members of the Ahmadiyah to marry another member of the Ahmadiyah […]. This isn't without reason because […] outsiders consider us to be a certain way, yeah. Outsiders discriminate against the Ahmadiyah.

> So to avoid things like that we are advised to marry other Ahmad-
> is who share our understanding so that we have one creed, one
> goal.

Hence, participants view endogamy as a way of limiting their exposure to opponents in their daily lives, and as a necessary measure to avoid discrimination within the family unit. All these measures that aim to satisfy the need to belong, constitute active efforts on behalf of Ahmadis to ameliorate and negotiate the circumstances of their oppression. However, they have no significant impact on the structures that dictate their subordination.

5   Conclusion

This article has examined the adversities faced by members of the controversial JAI community in contemporary Indonesia, and the manner in which they respond to, and withstand, these challenges. The experiences of Ahmadi participants correlate closely with Young's theorising on oppression. These experiences include: stigmatisation of their religious identity, social exclusion, official and state-sanctioned discrimination, and violence. However, this is not to say that all participants experience all these forms of oppression, and some forms are more prevalent than others. The experience of oppression varies between participants in its type and its intensity. What is common to all participants is the expectation that oppression would likely reoccur.

Ahmadis' agency is embedded in the six strategies they employ to overcome these various forms of victimisation: 'Fortitude through faith and spirituality', 'Rationalising oppression', 'Ideological manoeuvring', 'Acts of resistance', 'Harmonising identity', and 'Satisfying the need to belong'. Each strategy is distinct in its purpose and in its specific constellation. The discussion on these six strategies has shown that Ahmadis are not merely the passive objects of oppression, nor are they voiceless recipients of hegemonic messages. Participants, not silenced by other Muslims' rejection and victimisation of their organisation, rationalise oppression in an attempt to make sense of why they are targeted. They perform ideological manoeuvring to counter *sesat* narratives, and to assert their Muslim subjecthood. They draw strength from their faith in the truth of their beliefs, and from their trust in God. These strategies illustrate how Ahmadis draw strength from their faith in the truth of their movement, how they actively respond to, and engage with, oppressive structures in order to empower themselves psychologically, and to assert the worthiness of Ahmadi religious identity. Moreover, Ahmadis exhibit resistance

by their defiance of bans that they perceive as violating their religious freedom, and via individual and collective acts of advocacy to counteract widespread negative perceptions of the JAI. A participants' agency also occurs on less adversarial terms, such as through their humble attempts to avoid oppression by harmonising their religious identity with their surroundings. This is neither reformist, nor does it constitute a social critique; rather, it is a pragmatic strategy that enables participants to connect with other Muslims. In many instances, though, participants prefer to seek belonging within the safe and accepting boundaries of their own community. However, agency is not essential, or the same for everyone. Not every participant uses every strategy, or exhibits all characteristics of each strategy. Rather, the precise combination and character of strategies employed depends on who they are, and the circumstances that they face. Nevertheless, this collection of strategies serves its purpose well. Overall, the array of responses available to participants via each strategy enables them to remain strong, to be optimistic about their future, and to be closely connected to their religious identity.

However, a limitation of this study is the small sample of urban participants. Their personal experiences of oppression are less severe than the hardships endured by some other JAI communities. As a result, this article does not represent the experiences of all Indonesian Ahmadis. This article has taken an initial step towards integrating Ahmadi voices into the academic discussion, which has thus far focussed on the factors contributing to their increasingly precarious situation in contemporary Indonesia. Further research is necessary in order to substantiate statements about Indonesian Ahmadis on a broader, more general scale. Therefore, I recommend follow-up research involving Indonesian Ahmadis from more severely affected communities.

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