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Discursive Voices of Diaspora Islam in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the genealogy of Islam in South Africa. It attempts to situate the unfolding of Islam during two historical phases: first, the period of white exploration, conquest and settlement between 1488 to 1902; second, after 1902 which signalled the end of the Anglo-Boer war followed by the formation of the Union of South Africa until contemporary times. The narrative explores the nature of the communities formed by the diaspora Muslims who hailed from Southeast Asia and the institutions they built in the Dutch colony at the Cape. In the early nineteenth century there are clear signs that Islam had struck roots in southern Africa. The arrival of Muslims from India and the creation of more permanent social structures makes Islam an ineradicable feature of the landscape in the region. The article then highlights the contours of a 'peripheral' Muslim community and reflects briefly on future challenges.

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini menyusur asal usul Islam di Afrika Selatan. Penulis berusaha menjelaskan bagaimana Islam berkembang dalam dua fasa sejarah: pertama, semasa orang kulit putih membuka Afrika Selatan, menaklukinya dan mendudukinya mulai tahun 1488 hingga 1902; kedua, selepas tahun 1902 apabila peperangan Boer berakhir dan Union Afrika Selatan ditubuhkan. Antara lain artikel ini meninjau komuniti-komuniti Islam yang terbentuk dengan kedatangan orang Islam dari Tenggara Asia dan institusi-institusi sosial Islam yang mereka tubuhkan di kawasan tersebut. Penulis menyatakan bahawa kegiatan-kegiatan pendatang Islam ini menjadi petunjuk yang nyata bahawa Islam telah berakar di Afrika Selatan pada awal abad ke-19. Kedatangan orang India Muslim dan penubuhan beberapa struktur sosial yang lebih tetap dalam tahun-tahun yang berikutnya memperkukuhkan Islam dan menjadikannya satu ciri penting dalam lanskap sosial Afrika Selatan. Penulis kemudiannya membincang ciri-ciri utama komuniti Islam yang berada di pinggir sistem sosial Afrika Selatan dan merenung sejenak akan cabaran-cabaran yang komuniti tersebut akan hadapi di masa hadapan.

WHITE EXPLORATION, SETTLEMENT AND CONQUEST 1488-1902

Some ten years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, the Arab general, 'Amr bin al-'As, snatched away Egypt from Byzantine control in 642 AD. This was the first significant political and cultural impact Islam had on Africa. Prior to that, and perhaps more dramatically, around the year 615 Prophet Muhammad sent a small band of his persecuted Arab followers to seek asylum in the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). This means that Islam reached the shores of Africa long before it even reached the vital centres of Arabia, such as Madinah and Taif. "The faith and culture of Islam", says the renowned African historian Robin Hallett, was "... Asia's last major contribution to the development of Africa. Islamic culture implied far more than a religion: a new language, new concepts of law and government, and new standards of dress and architecture accompanied the new faith."[1] Today, Islam has comparatively become more indigenized than any other immigrant culture on the continent.

Across North Africa Islam spread dramatically mainly by conquest; but, Islamization south of the Sahara occurred primarily through economic means. Mainly nomads and pastoral migrations carried Islam towards the equator. In west Africa travel on horseback and economic traffic between the different sections of the continent brought Islam to that region. Arab maritime trade on *dhows* during the monsoons carried Islam to east Africa. Trade and proselytization went hand in hand, since Muslim traders were also part-time missionaries of the faith.

White conquest and European settlement in southern Africa halted Islam's southward drive from the seventeenth century onwards. Christianity's high visibility and European political presence south of the equator were responsible for arresting the Islamization of this region. This had to do with the nature of colonization south of the Sahara. "If north of the Sahara Islam spread by the sword," observes Ali Mazrui, "south of the Sahara Christianity spread by the gun."[2] But, even grand theories of religious distribution in Africa have their own exceptions. Recent studies show that Islamic penetration from the north into regions beyond the Soutpansberg in modern South Africa, may have occurred as early as the 15th century or possibly in the late 18th century. Indications are that Swahili-Arabs may have reached as far south as the St. John's river on the Pondoland coast in what is now known as the Transkei. This is further confirmed by accounts of 'Islamic' Africans who were members of broken tribes who flourished among the Shona in southern Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), and Venda, Sotho and Thonga people in what is today the Transvaal province of South Africa. These "Islamic" Africans are called by various names such as Lemba, Varemba or Balemba, while variations of this name are used in other regions. Historians of religion have found among the Lemba certain religious and cultural practices which unmistakably resemble certain Islamic rituals and the Arabic language.[3]

ROOTS, REPRESSION AND SLAVERY: EARLY ISLAM AT THE CAPE

Ironically it was colonisation that brought Islam to the Cape and later to other parts of the country. The broader African hinterland carries a very slight, if not insignificant, influence on Islam here. Islam's unfolding was largely interrelated with the colonisation and decolonisation of the region.

Back in the seventeenth century it was events in South East Asia, from areas known today as Indonesia, the Molucca islands, Bengal and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and later on the Kurumandel coast in India that had the most determining effects on southern African Islam. Two colonial powers can be singled out in this respect, the Dutch and the British. While it is disputed whether there were Muslim slaves in the party of the first coloniser, Jan van Ribeeck, when he set foot in Cape Town on April 6 1652, the arrival of the Mardyckers six years later in 1658 put this beyond doubt. These free Muslims from the Molucca Islands were employed as mercenaries to protect the Dutch settlement against marauding indigenous groups or, as servants of the Dutch, some of whom settled at the Cape.

The Dutch policy of subjugation and exclusion of the Muslim populations of the East Indies also applied to the Cape. From as early as 1642, the Dutch governor Van Dieman, issued a proclamation in the form of '*Plakaaten*', better known as the Statutes of India, which prohibited the public practice of Islam in the Cape on pain of death. The 'Plakaaten' was again issued in 1657 by governor Maetsuycker in a bid to reinforce the prohibition. This repressive policy prevailed nearly one and a half centuries until 1804, when religious freedom was granted to all people. The liberalisation could stem from the fact that governors Janssens and De Mist were influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution which promoted the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. However, freedom of religion non-Christians was different from that applied to Christians. Non-Christian religions could be practised in public to the extent that white Christian authorities tolerated it. While Catholics and Lutherans were also subject to prejudicial treatment by the dominant Dutch Reform Church, it was still less than that shown to non-Christians.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Islam struck roots in the Cape under extremely difficult circumstances in the 17th and 18th centuries. The level of repression and limited freedom in turn produced unique social formations which in turn shaped the type of religion and religious institutions which emerged within these contexts. This further had a bearing on the psychology and attitude of its adherents. In East

Asia the increasing fierce resistance shown to the Dutch in places like, Amboyna, Batavia and Molucca produced a steady flow of political prisoners that were banished to the Cape. Among the political exiles were not only rank and file anti-imperialist activities and some petty criminals, but also senior leaders of the resistance in the Dutch East Indies. Some of the landmark figures responsible for the establishment of Islam could be counted among the founders of Islam at the Cape.

EARLY FOUNDERS

Chief among the early proselytizers was Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar (1626-1699), who is best known as the spiritual father of Islam at the Cape. His real name was Abidin Tadia Tjoessoep, but was respectfully known as Shaykh Yusuf. He was born in Macassar, in the region which is today known as the Malay Archipelago. He was educated in Java, but later he visited several Islamic capitals such as Makkah, Madinah, the two holy cities of Islam where he performed the pilgrimage (*hajj*) and became a pupil of several learned authorities there. From Arabia he went to Damascus and Istanbul, two of the leading intellectual capitals of Islam at the time. It was in Damascus that he became a disciple of the Khalwatiyya[4] order. Later in life, his *sufi* affiliation added to his role as a leading figure in the Batamese independence movement and his charismatic ability to lay the spiritual foundation of the Muslim community in the Cape.

Since he was related to the Prince of Bantam, Sultan Ageng, by marriage to his daughter, the Shaykh was inevitably drawn into the conflict between the Sultan and his son, Abd al-Qahhar. The conflict involved Dutch and British colonial interests in the region. The local royalty supported opposing sides, the father on the side of the British and the son aiding the Dutch.[5] In support of the older Sultan, Shaykh Yusuf showed heroic defiance, eluding the Dutch authorities in a guerilla war for nearly one year. When he gave himself up on the promise of pardon the Dutch reneged on their promise. He was at first sentenced to death but an appeal by the Moghul Indian ruler, Aurangzeb (1618-1707), to the Dutch authorities resulted in the sentence being commuted. Fearing his incluence on the populace in Java, the Dutch exiled Syakh Yusuf to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in 1684. It was only in 1694 that Shaykh Yusuf and his retinue of wives, children and attendants arrived at the Cape aboard the vessel, the *Voetboog*.

Syakh Yusuf was admired by both friend and foe and legend has it that governor Willem Adrian van der Stel in the end befriended him. As a political prisoner with royal connections, the Shaykh was afforded certain privileges which allowed him to settle at Faure, near Eerste River in the Cape. Most of the surviving 50 members who originally accompanied him

were repatriated to Macassar after his death. At the request of the Sultan of Goa, the Shaykh's remains were taken to his native land where it was reburied at Lakiung on May 23, 1703.

Shaykh Yusuf's impact on Islam at the Cape was perhaps more symbolic than real, largely because his movement was restricted as a prisoner of war, albeit with a special status. Yet, it is undeniable that he did manage to transmit knowledge of religion and spiritually to the slaves and free blacks - *vryezwarten*[6]. The momentum derived from his work sustained the nascent Muslim community for at least a century. Some sources even suggest that he may have clandestinely provided religious instruction to the slaves in Cape Town in defiance of his restrictions.

TUANGS AND EXILES

Towards the end of the eighteenth century several other important Muslim figures such as Shaykh Madura (d. 1754), Tuang Said (d. *c.* 1760) and others helped further entrenched Islam in the Cape. Their first pupils were fellow prisoners and slaves who in turn taught the others. These religious figures wrote the Qur'an from memory and circulated copies of the sacred text in the newfound community. A semblance of community organization could be detected with the coming of Imam Abd Allah ibn Qadi Abd al-Salam (1712-1807), better known as Tuang Guru (Mister Teacher). He could well be described as the second spiritual father of Islam at the Cape. Tuang Guru was born on the island of Tidore in the Moluccan sea. Details of his background were unknown. Towards the close of the 18th century anti-Dutch resistance was high in Indonesia and Tuang Guru appeared to have been one of those who opposed foreign rule. He was brought to the Cape in 1780, during a phase of tough Dutch action against their rebellious colonies. Since Tuang Guru had no royal connections to allow him privileged treatment, he was imprisoned at Robben Island for some 13 years.

On his release to the mainland, Tuang Guru devoted himself to the task of establishing a community. One of his first goals was to establish a mosque, the symbolic expression of Islamic *communitas*. In its traditional or pre-modern role, the mosque served as a place of worship, sanctuary and spiritual retreat as well as a context for social and political organization. Tuang Guru's first application to the Dutch authorities for a mosque site was turned down. He however persisted and his efforts finally led to the founding of the mosque in Dorp Street in 1804 although some believe it could be as early as 1798.

Tuang Guru's zeal for the cause of Islam was far from being dampened even though he was a political exile. After the authorities refused him a mosque site, he defiantly lead an open-air Friday (*Jumu'ah*) congregational prayer in a disused quarry site at the foothills of Table

Mountain, in what is today known as the Bo-Kaap area of the Mother City. Tuang Guru's action was a veiled threat against the Dutch that as the Imam he could mobilise his community if their rights were to be ignored. This was the first of a series of organised Muslim political activities opposing Dutch rule in the Cape.

MOSQUES AND IMAMS: THE RISE OF INSTITUTIONS

Putting his energies to maximum use in a period of 14 years on the mainland, Tuang Guru laid the foundations of an enduring Islamic educational tradition. This tradition is akin to those in Muslim heartlands dating back to the ninth century where the landscape was dotted with educational institutes known as the *mosque-madrassah* (mosque-school) complexes. Over the centuries, leading mosques in the Muslim world also had extensive educational programmes which concentrated on religious curricula and other disciplines preparing students as teachers, judges, lawyers, secretaries or religious functionaries. It was Tuang Guru who implemented a similar system but on a reduced scale at the Cape in the late eighteenth century.

The elimination of illiteracy and empowerment through education were identifiable goals as the means for the social advancement of slaves and free blacks. The first mosque in Dorp Street was at first a warehouse which was used as a school. The history of Islam at the Cape could have been very different had it not been for the emphasis on education and the institutionalization of Islam by means off the *mosque-madrassah* complex. The magnitude of this educational project is impressive even by today's standards. A governor at the Cape during the second British occupation, the Earl of Caledon, was concerned by the fact that (Mohammedan) Muslim "priests" were educating some 375 slave children at this venue. Other accounts confirm that by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, well over 500 free black and slave scholars attended the school founded by Tuang Guru.

SLAVERY AND MANUMISSION: WRITING FREEDOM

Tuang Guru not only founded a school, but also wrote the religious treatises (*kitabs*) on jurisprudence and related Islamic sciences. Some of these *kitabs* have survived in the form of copies that were circulated and transcribed by his students and followers. They were in the *lingua franca* of the slaves, a mongrel Dutch. Social necessity produced a language which was neither pure Dutch, but one that contained elements of slave mother tongues, such as Javanese and Bouganese. Since the majority were not literate in the culture of the ruling classes, they wrote in a script familiar to them, Arabic. This produced the novel script of Arabic-Afrikaans, phonetic Afrikaans written in Arabic script. The first printed

kitab in Arabic-Afrikaans in 1856, preceded the first Afrikaans book printed in Roman script by almost six years. It is only of late that historians of language have been forced to admit the contribution of 'the words slaves made'[7] to the Afrikaans language.

'WRITING' MANUMISSION

The demise of slavery and the final emancipation of slaves in the Cape in 1834 is in part intricately related to the ceaseless struggle of the enslaved Muslims to liberate themselves. Although the Qur'an and medieval Islamic culture acknowledged the institution of slavery, at the Cape Muslim slaves could actually purchase their freedom. This was made possible through the practice of *mukatabah* which refers to a contract whereby slaves could purchase their freedom. Concerning the mukatabah the historian, G. M. Theal states

> "... this has been more particularly the case with slaves of Mohammedan proprietors who, if their slaves profess the same faith, allow them to purchase their freedom at cost price, and for that purpose often permit them to work on their own account."[8]

The Arabic word for a contract of manumission *mukatabah*, shares the root *k-t-b* with the word for 'writing', from which is derived kitab, 'book'. *Mukatabah*, literally means 'mutual writing', but technically it is a written agreement between a master and slave, whereby the latter would pay the former a sum in return for his or her liberty. The contract itself partially manumits the slave in order to be free to earn income.

The repetition of the same root *k-t-b* which appears both in 'writing' and a 'contract of manumission' is not purely coincidental, but coheres according to a semantic echo. If words are 'signs' or a two-sided sheet, then it is clearly an interwoven sheet containing relations of differences where the one element exists only in terms of others. For this reason the root *k-t-b* has no edge of exterior. It is known that the most essential thing about words are that they are repeatable. So the 'same word' can be reiterated in different contexts to yield *different* meanings. In this reiteration of the word, there is also something paradoxical about it. The word is modified in the different usuages and contexts for 'writing', and a 'contract of manumission'. On the other hand, what it reiterates remains the same. In every modification of the word a trace of 'sameness' remains, what we experience as the word's meaning. A further paradox is that the colonial authorities desired that slaves become literate in order that they may become 'civilized'. Clearly what they had in mind was European literacy and alphabetization. What Tuang Guru's school initiated and promoted was Arabic alphabetization and literacy in a mongrel language, Arabic-Afrikaans. In short, the slaves eschewed the cultural prison of the oppressive culture and secured their liberty through

literary means. It is also interesting to observe how conceptual literacy and knowledge became the gateway to freedom. Through the process of empowerment - knowledge and literacy - the Cape slaves procured their inevitable liberation. To 'know' was not only to control, but to put slavery to death.[9]

SLAVERY AND CONVERSION

Emancipation was itself fraught with anomalies and ambiguities. The colonial authorities and slave owners were caught in a double-bind. On the one hand, slaves were viewed as a form of property but on the other the newly discovered awareness in Europe at the time increasingly regarded slavery as morally reprehensible. By the middle of the eighteenth century a law was passed prohibiting the sale of Christian slaves. This led to Muslim slaves acquiring a premium largely for their habits of sobriety, but more for the fact that there was no restriction on them being re-sold. In a strange way the material context encouraged and favoured conversion to Islam, a faith to which innumerable free blacks turned. It was advantageous at that time to own saleable Muslim slaves than unsaleable Christian slaves. However, colonial and missionary concerns about the spread of Islam forbade the Christian master to allow any of his slaves to become Muslim, an offence that carried the penalty of confiscation of the slaves and a 500 rix dollar fine.

The growth of Islam in the eighteenth century therefore could be attributed to several reasons. Prominent among them were conversion, adoption, the purchase of slaves by free Muslims and inter-marriage. Coupled with its egalitarian spirit, Islam became an attractive option for the underclasses and disposessed. At the same time an Islamic identity entrenched their cultural differentiation from that of their masters. Easy assimilation into Islamic culture made such conversion attractive compared to the strictures of the dominant and elitist Christian culture. Since slaves were excluded from marital rights in the Christian church and the civil administration, the easy access to the Muslim marital rite further encouraged conversion. Conversion also took place as a result of the assimilation facilitated by the religious schools, *madrassahs*, founded by the Cape *imams*.

Numerically Islam certainly swelled as a result of the social processes which facilitated conversion and assimilation. If population estimates were anything to go by, then by the first quarter of the nineteenth century there were some 3000 Muslims in Cape Town, and by 1850, there were some 8000. Islam attracted all shades of race and class at the Cape and adherents to this faith were erroneously called, 'Malays'. In 1860 Lady Duff Gordon, an aristocratic English visitor to the Cape observed "Malay here seems equivalent to Mohammedan. They were originally

Malays, but now they include every shade, from the blackest nigger to the most blooming English woman.[10]"

STRATEGISING AUTONOMY

It appears that Tuang Guru's strategy with officialdom varied depending on the context and the colonial power he dealth with. Against the Dutch powers who brought him to the Cape, his opposition was consistent and uncompromising. With the British he seems to have adopted a more conciliatory attitude. Towards the latter part of his life, Tuang Guru counselled subservience and prohesized deliverance. He was reported to have said,

"Be of good heart, my children, and serve your masters; for one day your liberty will be restored to you, and your descendants will live within a circle of *karamats* (shrines) safe from fire, famine, plague, earthquake(s) and tidal waves.[11]"

Much of this statement was motivated by for concerns for survival and religious millenerianism. Thus it was politically expedient for the British to honour a pledge made by the defeated Dutch governor, Jansens, for greater autonomy to the Muslims if they participated in the Battle of Blouberg in 1795. The result was that during the intermediate British rule following the first occupation of the Cape, the Muslims were able to negotiate terms to build a mosque and have a separate burial place. This suggested that the British were aware of Muslim resistance at the Cape and tried to neutralise the hostility by granting the Muslims limited religious autonomy.

These liberalizing policies were not without their antecedents in the general matrix of international relations and local developments. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the abolition of the slave trade at the Cape and the intense campaign against the practice of slavery had a significant impact. Given the advent of the Napoleonic wars in the European and African theatres, colonial authorities could no longer impose their will unreservedly on the subject communities. This was certainly a tributary cause for the appearance of more liberalizing social policies. In an effort to generate support for the shortlived Batavian Republic between 1803-06, the Dutch allowed greater freedom of worship to the Catholic adherents, Muslims and Chinese. This effect is certainly noticeable in the Cape, especially among the Muslims, who from then onward, steadily but gradually organised themselves in order to acquire greater communal autonomy.

HALTING BETWEEN CHRIST AND ISLAM: ISLAM VS THE CHURCH

If early Islam adopted various strategies for survival, then the last quarter of the 19th century witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of Muslim institutions. The increased public visibility of Islam can be attributed to a

decline in legislative restrictions prohibiting the public expression of non-Christian religions. To a large extent it was as a result of a persistent Muslim effort to transcend the disadvantages of displacement, colonisation and prejudice. Official and social prejudice combined with paternalism in matters of public policy were some of the more challenging difficulties with which Muslim society had to contend, and which survive to this very day.

As part of a pervasive European attitude during the past four centuries, white colonial authorities and settlers unfailingly viewed Islam as the "other". In Euro-Christian terms, Islam was nothing more than a heresy and the very antithesis of Christendom. As such Muslims in South Africa, especially those in the Cape, became the subject of sustained proselytizing efforts of christian missionaries. The low success rate in converting free Muslims and slaves to Christianity and their gradual but noticeable upward social mobility evoked the scorn of the colonial settlers and the church. In relation to this, John Centlivres Chase, a prominent English settler and civil servant at the Cape said,

"In numerous cases the emancipated slave deserted the Christian faith, in which he had been instructed on the estate of his former proprietor for the dull, cold creed of Mohammedanism, everywhere a detestable heresy, but in this colony in particular, bereaving its votaries of the few virtues, which save that and all other false truth from execration.[12]"

These and other demonizing imageries fed the colonial bias against Islam and associate hostile crusader imageries with Islam in southern Africa Muslims (Malays) made good slaves and skilful artisans, but were unpredictable and quick to "run amok", a favourite phrase of derogation. Furthermore, it was also held that the cross and the crescent were locked in an overt and covert war in South Africa. Islam had the immense capacity to cause "mischief" among the "simple and credulous negroes still halting between Christ and Islam", observed one anonymous writer.[13] The settlers however also admired Muslims for their sobriety of habits and exotic beauty as this typical statement of Lady Duff Gordon suggest

"... They wear a very pretty dress, and all have a great air of independence and self-respect; and the real Malays are very handsome ...[14]" The same observer also reveals the attitude of the settlers towards the Muslims. He said.

"... They (the Dutch) hate the Malays, who were their slaves, and whose insolent prosperity' annoys them ... (T)he English ... they too curse the emancipation, long to flog the niggers, and hate the Malays, who work harder and don't drink, and who are the only masons, tailors ... 15"

An extract from a report in 1826 put it this way:

The exclusion of the free blacks and Malays from the right of acquiring property has partly arisen from an aversion to their religious creed, and partly from the spirit of jealousy and discouragement with which the Dutch East India Company regarded the efforts of any of these individuals that might tend a withdraw them from a state of servile dependence. If the first of these feelings arose from serious and conscientious objections to the propagation of the Mohammedan faith it has met with great disappointment, for the number of the coloured inhabitants professing that faith has continued to increase in spite of their exclusion from the rights and privileges of the burghers.[16]

If anything, these statements describe the Dutch-Muslim relationship as tense, coupled with a desire to subject the Muslim underclasses to settler hegemony. The organized church and particularly the missionaries, played a leading role towards that end. As was evident from the statements of missionaries, travellers and officials concerted efforts were made to convert Muslims by utilising state power and legislation. Against such odds, the assertion is unmistakable that Islam's achievements in spite of colonialism.

It was predictable that the demise of a charismatic figure like Tuang Guru would create a leadership vacuum. As was the experience of charismatic leadership in other instances, fragmentation and division should be viewed as part of a process of resocialization and the redistribution of power and prestige. Not long after his death, Tuang Guru's followers found several issues on which to differ, especially on the question of succession. The struggle over religious leadership positions such as *qadi* or *chief-imam* were some of the key issues. Davids reports that in the short period between 1866 to 1900 over twenty cases reached the Cape Supreme Court for resolution arising out of disputes over mosque leadership.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

SUFIS, KARAMATS, MAWLUD, RATIB AND PIRS

Given the repressive socio-political climate at the Cape, early Islam was very much an underground faith. Slaves and free black converts practised their religious rituals away from the eyes of the settlers. The "great men" of charisma mainly, *sufi shaykhs*, (sufi mentors) who arrived at the Cape at different intervals did make an impact on the community largely as result of their deeply spiritual personalities. The earliest and most prominent practitioners of *tasawwuf* or Islamic mystcism was Shaykh Yusuf. The traditions and rituals which survived their demise provided for the continuity of Islam over the centuries.

From historical sources it can be deduced that the muslim saints who were exiled to the Cape did have contact with their co-religionists, most of whom were slaves. It is possible that runaway slaves or those who went in search for wood into the mountain areas clandestinely met with their

spiritual, and at that time their only, political leaders. Traces of mystical practices that prevailed at the time still survives until contemporary times.

One of them was the *dhikr* which became a standard practice on Thursday evenings and the start of the Muslim Friday. This night gathering appears to have been held in lieu of the compulsory Friday midday congregational prayer. Since most Muslims were taken into slavery at the time, according to Islamic law they were not obliged to do that prayer. Much of the hymnology and songs in praise of the Prophet have survived in oral practice and provides evidence that they were sufi-inspired, particularly of the Qadiriyyah[17] order. It is also known that Shaykh Yusuf was an initiate of the Khalwatiyyah sufi order and Tuang Sayyid of the Alawiyyah order.[18]

It is not known to what extent *tasawwuf* became a widespread practice in so far that lay persons became initiates of the sufi orders (*turuq*; sing. *tariqah*). While some historians claim that elaborate sufi networks existed, others tend to discount such exaggerated claims. What is clearly indisputable is that some of the early leaders were sufi initiates. It is known that sufism and sufi intellectual thought was perhaps the single most important factor in the islamization of South East Asia. But the socio-political milieu at the Cape may have prevented such formalised networks from taking root. Therefore, some very specific sufi rituals and hymnology may have survived, but there is little, if any, evidence of traditional sufi networks (*turuq*).

What this and other rituals suggest is that 'low' Islam and folk mysticism were practised at the Cape, rather than the 'high' Islam of scripturalism and puritanism. Despite the ambiguity between the two forms, there remains a distinction and no recognized boundary. So practitioners of the two styles of Islam could at times co-exist amicably, as was the case in early Islam; but at times they co-existed violently as it will become evident in 20th century Islam.

A characteristic feature of 'low' Islam in the Cape is the saint cult. Due to the absence of living sufi-*shaykhs* at the Cape, spiritual pilgrimages and visits to the shrines of saints (*karamats* - lit. supernatural events) had become a compelling component of popular religiosity. What may also be unique to this part of the world is the fact that many people considered themselves initiates of deceased *shaykhs* whom they had never met in life, a practice which is perhaps rare, if not unknown, in the annals of popular *tasawwuf*.

The 'saint cult' (*karamats*) as a source of religious inspiration should therefore not be underestimated in the history of early Islam. Combined with other practices of folk mysticism such as ecstatic superrogatory rituals and mystical exercises, it provided an escape from the misery of exile, slavery and social disadvantage. For this reason the Cape peninsula is until today dotted with *karamat* sites. *Karamats* can be found as distant

as Faure, where Shaykh Yusuf was originally buried in Constantia where Sayyid Mahmud and Sayyid Abd al-Rahman were buried in the seventeenth century on the hills of Table Mountain, on the shore of Camps Bay where lay Sayyid Nur al-Mubin and on Signal Hill where Tuang Sayyid was buried. Bradlow has identified 27 such shrines of the elders of mysticism in the Cape Peninsula alone.

'Low' Islam thrives on magic, ecstasy and saint cults. The influence of the pre-Islamic cultures of South East Asia on Islam in that region is now well documented. This effect is clearly traceable in the folk mysticism of Cape Islam. The most noticeable of these was the practice of *ratib*, also called '*khalifa* display'. It is a sword game in which the participants under some hypnotic trance actuated by musical chants in Arabic, hit themselves with swords or pierce sharp skewers into their flesh without bleeding. While this impressed audiences, Muslims and non-Muslim alike, it also caused considerable disagreement amongst the Muslim community and consternation to the city's officials. Some of the *imams*, under the influence of 'high' Islam, refused to acknowledge it as an Islamic practice and thus eschewed it, while others favoured it. On an occassion when a *ratib* ceremony became boisterous to the dislike of the white citizenry of Cape Town, the practice became the subject of a government inquiry headed by the Justice of the Peace, P. E. de Roubaix. In the end it was restricted to certain days of the year and special occassions. Other popular practices such as the use of talismans and amulets (*azimat*), the communal celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*milad or mawlud*), occasional collective prayers to bless the dead are also pervasive in the Cape. While some puritan strains of Islam may renounce such practices, Islamic orthodoxy at the Cape incorporated these in an established tradition.

ISLAM FROM INDIA: TRADERS AND MISSIONARIES

The arrival of the *SS Truro* in 1860 brought indentured south Indian labourers to work on the sugar cane fields of the British colonists in Natal. While the majority of them were Hindu, some 7 to 10% of them were Muslims. During 1830-1870 the effects of British capitalism created mass emigration of nearly 2 million Indians. Some of these emigres came to South Africa. They were called 'passenger Indians', due to the fact that they paid their passage to Africa rather than being indentured and settled in Natal, Transvaal and the Cape. Later this group came to constitute the commercial bourgeoisie among Indians.

Two factors clearly contributed to the establishment and spread of Islam in Natal and Transvaal: the influential sufi missionaries and the 'ulama' or jurist-theologians. The latter were essentially teachers and mosque leaders. The network of mosques spread rapidly with the movement of Muslim traders into rural Natal and Transvaal. Within two

decades after their arrival, the first mosques were established in the two northern provinces. Islam in the late nineteenth century had greater accelaration in the north given the favourable economic and social conditions there compared to restrictive conditions it faced in the Cape. The first mosque in Natal built by Indian Muslim businessmen. It was contructed was the one in Grey Street in 1884 and the one in the Pretoria city centre dates back to around 1887.

Sufi missionaries, along with traders, were the first to lay the foundations of Islam in Natal. These charismatic personalities, the first among them being, Badsha Pir and later Sufi Sahib, played a pioneering role among the early Muslims in Natal.

THE SAINTS OF DURBAN: BADSHA PIR & SUFI SAHIB

The earliest saint in Durban was Ahmad, but he was known popularly as Badsha Pir - 'King Saint' (1820-1894). Badsha Pir was believed to be a Malayalam who arrived with the third batch of indentured labourers from South India in early 1860s. His prestige was boosted by the fact that he was alleged to have been a descendent of the family of the Prophet of Islam and therefore bears the title of *sayyid*. A study of some of the religious practices attributed to him suggests that Badsha Pir followed a brand of sufism which was possibly the reason for him being called *majzub*, 'the one intoxicated with divine ecstasy'.[20] He claimed affiliation to the well-known Qadiriyyah sufi order which adopted green as their official colour. Legend remembers him as a person who could perform miracles, a power which gave him an extraordinary reputation among his followers and colonial authorities. It is difficult to separate legend from fact with respect to charismatic figures, precisely because the legends appear in the form of hyperbole. For most of the three decades Badsha Pir spent in South Africa, he was an itinerant preacher. Badsha Pir appeared to have been the source of religious inspiration for many of the early Muslim Indian contract workers. He was buried at the Brook Street cemetery, Durban.

Sufi Sahib (1858-1910), as he is popularly known, takes over the mantle of spiritual leadership from Badsha Pir. His real name was Shah Ghulam Muhammad, but his piety so impressed his spiritual mentor in Hyderabad, India, Khawaja Habib Ali Shah, who lovingly named him 'Sufi'. This epithet stuck and he became popular as Sufi Sahib ('Sufi Master'). He had a traditional Islamic education but later in life gravitated towards mysticism. Sufi Sahib arrived in Durban around 1896 on the order of his spiritual mentor to work among the Indian Muslim workers in South Africa. He found them straying from traditional Islamic practices and set about his work of spiritual reform

among them. He was also responsible for establishing several mosques in Natal, the Cape and Lesotho as well as networks of Islamic propagation.

THE 'ULAMA: PRE-TWENTIETH CENTURY

From their very inception in classical Islam, the *'ulama* (lit, 'the learned'; sing: *'alim*) or jurist-theologians played an important role in shaping the character of Islam. While Islam does not have any ecclesiastical office for a priesthood, the *'ulama* seem to play this role in a *de facto* capacity. To a large extent the *'ulama* are proponents of 'high' or scriptural Islam. Historically, the term was used to describe both academic lawyers who occupy professorial positions in traditional institutions of learning, and clergymen who play a role in pastoral care. In contemporary times, the term 'ulama refers primarily to the latter meaning.

The earliest of Muslim savants at the Cape were trained *'ulama* like Shaykh Yusuf and Tuang Guru. While they were both educated in the East, the latter was known to have trained some lay priests - *imams* - during his years at the Cape. Once the Cape Muslims made contact with the Islamic heartland for the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) since as early as 1799, it was likely that some of them studied there to be trained as *'ulama*. But such products could not have been many until the early twentieth century.

Very little is known of the structures and practices of the *'ulama* save the court-records and other official sources which reflect the nature of disputes over mosques in the Cape between rival *imams* and the issues affecting their communities. The establishment of the first mosque suggested that the *'ulama* played a central role in educating the community in both conceptual literacy and religious precepts. The fact that the *'ulama* did have some structure by which they interacted with the community was borne out by the Colebrooke and Bigge Commission report of 1825. In it the *imams* described how they dealt with religious offenders and how they discouraged the practice of polygamy and slavery. One of the *imams* admitted that offenders were flogged while the other denied it. However it was difficult to acknowledge or deny whether a religious judiciary (*qada*) with the power to enforce sanctions existed just based on this record.

Shortly after the arrival of the first Indian Muslims in Natal, came Abubakr Effendi (c. 1835-1880), a scholar of Kurdish origins, who made a dramatic impact on Cape Islam from 1863 onwards. Justice of the Peace, P. E. de Roubaix, known for his Muslim sympathies, was largely instrumental for Effendi's appearance at the Cape. After de Roubaix was appointed as Consul of the Ottoman Sultan – also called the Sublime Porte – at the Cape, he requested through his British contacts, for a

scholar to be sent to resolve the unending religious disputes among the Cape Muslims.

Ironically Effendi's arrival was marked by controversey. Firstly, he had a language difficulty in communicating with the Cape Muslims. Secondly, he was a staunch follower of the Hanafi legal school which was at variance with the local practices of the majority followers of the Shafi'i school. His legal chauvinism as a Hanafi gave offence to the community and fomented dissent especially when the courts considered his opinion as decisive in inter-Muslim litigations. Despite his controversial nature, he soon had a large following and established a school for women. He also mastered the 'Malay' Arabic-Afrikaans and wrote a treatise on religious ritual, called the 'Elucidation of the Religion' (*Bayan al-Din*) which was published in Turkey.

In terms of Islamic law, the Cape was, and remains until today an area in which the Shafi'i shool prevails. This is because Islam here stems from South East Asia where the Shafi'i school reigns. The Shafi'i school is one of the four prominent Sunni legal schools dating back to the ninth century and is of the traditionalist strain. Traditionalism in this case means that the concrete precedents of the past are the models of exemplary religious behaviour, ethical and juristic morality. Rational interpretation of the prophetic practices are eschewed and the literal activity suggested by tradition is favoured. Although the legal schools do not, strictly speaking have any doctrinal implications, inter-school conflict has in the past produced fanatical rivalry. One such event is the fierce Hanafi-Shafi'i dispute at the Cape soon after Effendi arrived at the Cape in the late nineteenth century. Doctrinally the Ash'arite theological interpretation dating back to the tenth century was and remains the dominant one in Islam as a whole. While Muslim speculative theology borrowed heavily from the Aristotelians in a bid to defend the Islamic faith, the Ash'arites were neo-conservatives compared to their more staunch rationalist rivals. A feature of the Ash'arite school is its emphasis on predestination and divine creationism in history. The Cape Shafites were also committed to doctrinal matters as interpreted by Ash'ari and his followers.

TURN OF THE CENTURY: THE PUBLIC FACE OF ISLAM

COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Events towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century revealed several instances of collective Muslim resistance against white colonial authority. The confrontation between two communities, Muslim versus Christian, underscored the religionization of politics. For instance Muslims refused to be vaccinated during the 1882 smallpox epidemic in Cape Town. This

was a statement of protest against racial prejudice and social grievances. Ostensibly the reason for the refusal was a religious one. Muslim leaders explained that disease was an affliction imposed by the 'will of God' and as such mortals could not interfere with divine predestination. Although disguised in religious language, it was clear that a statement such as the one made by a Muslim leader that his 'religion is superior to the law' conveyed a political message. Clearly the Muslims rejected the opportunism of the white authorities who were only concerned about poor sanitary conditions among the non-white community only when the city was in the grip of an epidemic and when white health was at peril. In more normal circumstances the authorities ignored the plight of abject living conditions which directly affected the Muslims in the city.

Again, in 1886 during the now famous cemetery riots, Muslims resorted to civil disobedience in protest against the Public Health Act of 1883 which closed all cemeteries within the city. One of the prominent civil rights leaders who emerged during that protest was the educated cab-driver Abdul Burns (d. 1898). After failing to persuade the colonial authorities through deputations and representations, on the eve of the enforcement of the proclamation, some 3000 defiant Muslims buried one of their deceased in a prohibited cemetery. This led to the army being called in to restore of law and order in the city.

EARLY MODERNIZERS

It was people like the charismatic Abdul Burns who argued fiercely for the civil rights of Muslims. Burns, whose father was a Scotsman, was eloquent and an impressive figure in the city's politics. He was an able organizer and virtually singlehandedly mobilized the community with his skill and intellectual acumen. Burns' approach to politics was that of a reformist and constitutionalist. For this he was widely acclaimed in the local press. When this approach failed, Burns resorted to more radical means which earned him the opprobrium of his liberal admirers. For his role in the cemetery riots, he was fined and had to serve a sentence of two months of hard labour.

One of Burns' close associates was the enigmatic Ahmad Effendi, son of the famous Abubakr Effendi. The younger Effendi was the first non-white person ever to contest an election to Parliament in 1894. With a reasonable chance to win, Cecil John Rhodes and the Afrikaner Bond connived to keep him out by supporting a legislation which abolished the cumulative vote in Cape Town. This meant that each voter had one vote and could cast it in favour of one candidate. Under the old system, the 'Malay vote' could have brought Effendi to office. Effendi's mistake was to announce his candidature for nomination while the 1893 term of

Parliament was still in session. This gave his opponents time to introduce legislation that would thwart his chances.

DOMINATION, LIBERATION AND RELIGION IN 20TH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

By the end of the Boer war in 1902 there was a substantial hub among the Muslims in the Cape, the Transvaal and Natal. In the Cape, it was reflected in the establishment several Muslim organisations each with different political objectives. Around 1903, the South African Moslem Association was formed but was short lived. Its demise was due to lack of support from the Cape *'ulama* of whom it was critical. At about the same time, the African Political Organisation, later called the African People's Organisation (APO) captured the imagination of the Cape Muslims due to the visible participation of one of their co-religionists, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman (1872-1940).

Where Ahmad Effendi's career ended in the previous century by failing to be elected to Parliament, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman's started. He was born in Wellington, in a family which two generations back purchased their freedom from slavery. Abdullah's grandfather acquired wealth and prominence through business and educated his son (Abdullah's father) in Cairo and Makkah. Abdullah's father by contrast sent his son to an exclusively white grammar school in Cape Town, and later to Glasgow in Scotland to study medicine. On his return, the young Abdurrahman practised his profession but he was passionately drawn to politics and education. It was due to his pioneering that several Muslim mission schools were established. In addition, he was elected to the City Council and later the Provincial Council, positions he held until his death.

Another prominent and influential organisation which emerged in 1923 was the Cape Malay Association (CMA). Among the CMA'S prominent actor were Arshad Gamiet, Shaykh Ahmad Behardien and Imam Moegamat Sudley Awaldien. Although the CMA was essentially socio-religious in nature, a few of its leaders were sympathetic to General J.B.M. Hertzog's appeal for coloured and black support. Later, the CMA supported Dr D.F Malan who in return promised the Malays an 'enhanced status' like the 'coloureds', a pledge the Nationalists reneged upon when they took power.

By the 1930's, the CMA was eclipsed by more radical and younger intellegentsia, who espoused secular politics without any appeal to Islam. Among them was Dr Abdurrahman's daughter Zaynunisa 'Cissy' Gool (nee Abdurrahman) and her husband, Dr Goolam Gool. The prominence of the young radicals as well as the CMA's support for the discredited

Coloured Affairs Department sounded the death knell to this once popular religio-cultural organisation.

In the Natal and Transvaal, Muslim activism was not carried out under the banner of Islam but became part of the Indian civil rights campaign. One of the demands made was for the authority to recognise Muslim and Hindu marriages. While politics in this context was not overtly couched in religious language, religious issues were central to individual and communal self-assertion of the Indian Muslims.

Some of the earliest religious organisations in the Transvaal was the Habibia Muslim Society about which little is known. It is interesting to note that Muslim organisations were visible at an earlier period in the Boer republic of the Transvaal, than the British colony of Natal. Closedly aligned to Mahatma Ghandi, was the association known as the 'Pretoria Group' lead by Moulana Mukhtar and Ahmad Muhammad Cachalia. Ghandi expressed great admiration for the loyalty and commitment of A.M. Cachalia in his later writings on Satyagraha in South Africa.

THE 'ULAMA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

If folk Islam reflects local knowledge and parochial religiosity then the *'ulama* tradition is unmistakably the carrier of 'high' or universal Islam. In the practices of the 'ulama this effect is discernable at two levels: from a juristic point of view and a theological one. Islam being nomocentric in its public character elevates the status of the law, similar to rabbinic Judaism. In the Transvaal and Natal, the Muslim of Indian origin followed the legal doctrines of the eighth century Hanafi school. To be precise, it is a version of the Hanafi school as interpreted by *'ulama* of the Indian seminary of Deoband, near Delhi and its satellite colleges in India, Pakistan and those in South Africa. In its Arab mutation, the Hanafi school is considered as one of the more liberal and rational legal schools. Thus, during the Ottoman empire the Hanafi school was the pioneer of legal reform to meet the demands of modernity. However, on the Indian subcontinent the pervasiveness of *hadith* (prophetic traditions) studies since the sixteenth century has compelled legal scholarship to adopt more traditionalist approaches. Neo-sufism is also another feature of Indian 'high' Islam. Both conservative traditionalism and neo-sufism find their way into South African Islam. This happens via the *'ulama* bodies of Transvaal and Natal which serve as the purveyors of the Deoband school and therefore are rigid in their commitment to the Hanafi school. Creative and independent thinking on religious law is hardly promoted among the *'ulama* and imitation (*taqlid*) of the Hanafi school is generally viewed as imperative.

The other mainstream Sunni legal schools, like the Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali are variants of the traditionalist movement in which fideism rather than rationalism prevailed. In the Transvaal followers of the Shafi'i school are also to be found who historically hail from regions south of Bombay. At least two mosques in the greater Johannesburg area follow the Shafi'i code. In the Cape, the traditionalist Shafi'i school predominates although there are two mosques which recognised the Hanafi school. By definition the Cape ought to be conservative given its Shafi'i majority yet it is one of those regions where legal dogmatism is on the wane. One of the reasons for this change in attitude is because at one point most of the Cape *'ulama* were trained in the Middle East, in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon or Jordan, where legal eclecticism (*talfiq*) is encouraged and legal dogmatism abjured.

The difference between the Shafi'i and Hanafi *'ulama* is not entirely due to the influence of ideas of 'high' Islam. The regional cultures in which Islam finds itself also has an impact. The Muslims of Malay origins have managed to develop a unique culture over a longer period of acculturation given the diversity of communities with which they co-existed for over 300 years. A synthesis of South East Asian Islam elements of Afrikaner and indigenous cultures most likely had a determining effect. This gave Cape Islam its visible cultural flexibility and adaptability. Indian Muslims on the other hand, are comparatively recent immigrants given their presence here for just over 100 years. Therefore, they resist acculturation and emphasize cultural particularism which fosters rigidity and conservatism. In their legal and ethical vision, both the Shafi'i and Hanafi *'ulama* are perhaps equally conservative and resistant to innovative jurisprudence.

THE RISE OF ASSOCIATIONS, TENDENCIES AND SCHISMS

THE JAMIATS: THE DEOBAND TRADITION

At first neither the indentured labourers in Natal nor the merchants in Transvaal had any *'ulama* to educate them or provide religious leadership. Basic religious functions were fulfilled by the labourers and merchants themselves. Only after 1880 did the authorities permit religious teachers and *imams* to enter the country and that also for special purposes only. These communities thus managed to employ *'ulama* and some school teachers from India in order to ensure the formation of structures for religious education. It was the Indian Muslim mertchants, who as a class, formed a stable and strong alliance with the *'ulama* over the decades. So the formation of a new association of 'ulama, the *Jamiat al-Ulama* in Transvaal in 1922 with the collaboration of businessmen could hardly come as a surprise. Although the association was shortlived, an

organisation by the same name was revived in 1935 by Mufti Ebrahim Sanjalvi (d.1983). This took place with the assistance of the affluent Mia family, several of whose members were themselves *'ulama*. Together with Mufti Sanjalvi they founded the Jamiat al-'ulama of Transvaal (The Association of Transvaal *'Ulama*). The attempt to organise religious leaders into a formalised guild or association was part of a modernizing strain which featured in the Muslim world from the 18th century onwards. This association clearly derived its impulse from tendencies prevalent among their *'ulama* counterparts in India who were organized along similar lines. Modernization in this context means adopting modern administrative and organisational skills, but not cultural and intellectual modernity.

In Natal the incipient sufi-based Islam with its popular religious practices was more resilient to encroachment by the *'ulama*, although it was not totally impregnable. With the visible presence of the *'ulama* after 1880 the conflict between 'high' and 'folk' Islam did not occur till late into the twentieth century. The first attempt to organize the *'ulama* in Natal took place in 1955 with the formation of the *Jamiat al-'Ulama* of Natal (The Association of Natal *'ulama*). Islam in Natal was clearly marked by class interests. There was a large group of Muslims from working class background who in terms of sub-ethnicity and language were very different from the merchant class Muslims. The latter hailed primarily from the Indian state of Gujerat while the former were from the Deccan and South India speaking Urdu and other south Indian languages. Another interesting feature of Islam in Natal was that the religious proclivities peculiar to each class was determined by the religious tendencies prevalent in the region in India where they came from. In the same way that different strands of Islam could co-exist amicably, they could also be found within tha same class. Among the merchant class one could easily find orthodox puritans as well those more inclined to ecstatic practices. In other words, class divisions and cultic practices do not always coincide.

Until the middle of the twentieth century certain practices among Indian Muslims, like the public celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mawlud*) and veneration of saints (*urs*), which today may be deemed to be part of the folk Islam, were found to be prevalent among all sectors. Given the class and ethnic differences in Natal, these religio-ethnic divisions took on an ideological character towards the latter part of the twentieth century. Fragmentation along schismatic lines were precipitated by factors originating in India where rivalry between puritanical scripturalist and charismatic folk versions of Islam reached new levels of conflict.

TABLIGH JAMA'AH

In South Africa one such factor in the sixties was the introduction of a movement originating in India, called the Tabligh *Jama'at* (Evangelical Association). This movement of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), a member of the Indian 'ulama was started around 1919 and focussed on reviving the foundational practices among Muslims. To date this movement has gained wordwide influence. Recruits do evangelical work on a voluntary basis, travelling inside their home countries and abroad and recruiting new members to continue the cycle of evangelical work. These lay itinerant preachers as well as some *'ulama* use the mosque as spiritual retreats and a base for their work. Seven fundamental teachings underpin its ideology: an understanding of the article of faith (that there is no God other the Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger); observing the five times daily prayer (*salah*), acquiring knowledge (*'ilm*), remembering God (*dhikr*), showing respects to fellow Muslims, sincerity of intention; avoiding idleness and doing evangelical work, *da'wah* - calling unto the way of God.

Most of the people associated with this movement tend to align themselves with the religious thinking of the seminary founded in 1867 in Deoband, India. Arabs for instance who identify with the movement display conservative and scripturalist tendencies. The Tabligh Jama'ah was soon viewed as a wing of the Deoband seminary which aimed at ending folk and popular Islam. Hence, Deoband soon received oppositions from other 'orthodox' quarters, an antagonism which has worsened over the years.

THE BARELVI TRADITION

One theological and possibly political opponent of Deoband was Mawlana Ahmad Riza Khan of Barelvi (1856-1921). Like the Deoband *'ulama*, he was also concerned about the law. However unlike his opponent Ahmad Riza was detached from political activity. With the aid of legal scholarship he justified meditations, intercession of saints and custom-laden Islam. While these debates were centuries old in Islamic theology, they coalesced at a critical juncture in Indian politics adding to the complexity of the issues. The rift in Indian Islam ultimately spread to South Africa. The Barelvi movement accepted the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlud*) and defended the theological validity of saint veneration and the doctrine of prophetic presence among believers. The Deoband movement opposed this and adopted a more puritan approach which resembles the Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia. The opposition between the Deoband and Barelvi movements was often acrimonious, leading to heated public debates, polemics and, at times violence and deaths.

By the third quarter of the twentieth century, the *Sunni Jamiatul 'Ulama* of South Africa, supportive of the Barelvi cause was formed in 1978. The Sunni Jamiatul 'Ulama has a visible presence in Natal, and an office in the Cape and some representation in Transvaal. This structure formalizes the schisms within orthodox Islam in South Africa. (The term 'Sunni' as appropriated by the Barelvi movement is part of a polemic stemming from their claim that they are more committed to the prophetic practice (*sunnah*) than their opponents. Used in this context, it should not be confused as equivalent of the major polar schism in Islam called the *Sunni and Shi'ah*.)

THE MUSLIM JUDICIAL COUNCIL

In the Cape, the first formal *'ulama* body formed was the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC). This took place in 1945. The MJC originated in the Moslem Progressive Society (est. 1942) which focussed its attention on issues like relief for the poor and welfare. One of MJC's objectives however was to urge the religious leaders to elect a judicial council to which all religious matters could be referred for solution. It was evident that some amount of turmoil in Islamic affairs in the Cape must have precipitated the emergence of the MJC. Prior to its formation, disputes were settled by the *bechara* method, a type of informal meeting between disputing parties and their supporters. A viewpoint would be deemed favourable or rejected depending on the response and ovation it evoked from those present. The secular-educated professionals in the Progressive Society clearly found such dispute resolution mechanisms unsatisfactory and thus urged the 'ulama to establish a body along modern lines. It was these professionals who drafted the constitution for the MJC in the form of a ten point programme which set out its goals. Among other things the MJC pledged to unite Muslims promote education through the establishment a Muslim college, issue religious decrees that would be binding and final to all Muslims and secure official recognition of Muslim marriage rites. The MJC also had broad political goals to forge unity 'in the interest of all non-Europeans' in order to combat all 'oppressive forces' which would hamper their progress. In its formative years the MJC adopted a non-political stand although some individual members (like did espouse political views, Shaykh Hanief Booley and the late Imam Abdullah Haron). It was Imam Haron's death in 1969 which set the scene for a more politically aggressive Muslim stance a decade later.

THE ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

A more ambitious project in the form of the Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA) was launched in 1975. ICSA was to become an umbrella

body which would officially speak on behalf of all Muslims in South Africa. It would have both a religious judiciary and a programme of action. Its leaders consisted of both *'ulama* and professionals. ICSA also attempted to include the traditionalists and adaptationist strands of Islam in one embrace. Youth groups, *'ulama* organisations, professional associations and other socio-religious groups all supporter the initiative. However, differences among the affiliate bodies of the ICSA and problems related to foreign funding soon cause the ICSA to dismantle its the larger projects. Although ICSA still exists, it has very little impact at the grassroots level because religious leadership still remains in the hands of the affiliate bodies.

THE AHMADIYYAH

During the late sixties another strand of Islam from the Indian sub-continent surfaced in South Africa. This was the Ahmadiyyah movement. It was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadiyan (1839-1908) and made individualist assertions based on charismatic leadership. Ghulam Ahmad claimed special revelation from God and regarded himself as a prophet and promised messiah. His claims were rejected as heretical. In South Africa most of the Ahmadis consider themselves as part of the Islamic tradition though majority Muslims reject them as heretical.

CIRCLES, BOOKS AND REVOLUTION

The sixties also witnessed nationalist movements in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. At that time influential Third World personalities, like the Egyptian leader, Gamal 'Abdul Nasser and Soekarnoe of Indonesia were the role models for the politically conscious Muslim youth in South Africa. Drawing inspiration from pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism and the latter's association with pan-Islamism, a youth organization known as the Muslim Youth Movement was formed in the famous District Six suburb in 1957. The following year, the Claremont Muslim Association (CMA) was founded by persons under the influence of Imam Haron. These movements addressed questions of a socio-political nature such as human rights, democracy as well as social problems affecting the poor and the aged. The sources of ideas for these groups could also be traced to the Salafiyyah writers, such as the famous pan-Islamic reformer, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Egyptian reformer, Shaykh Muhammad Abduh and Shaykh Rashid Rida, his Syrian disciple. The Muslim Youth Movement was also concerned about the quality of leadership the *'ulama* was offering and called for not only for a more effective style of preaching in the mosque but also for more socially relevant sermons. Perhaps the greatest impact of these youth movements

was their publications in the form of newsletters and pamphlets. When Imam Haron died, these organisations gradually became less active.

The mid-fifties serve as an important watershed phase in the broader pattern of modern Islamic expression in South Africa. In various centres of the country there was visible disenchantment with the *'ulama* and their leadership. An index of this dissatisfaction was the mushrooming of small study groups and associations in the Transvaal, Natal and the Cape. These organisations consisting of a younger generation of Muslims, like the youth groups in the Cape encouraged lay persons to study the Qur'an on their own by reading English translations. There was a strong emphasis to read accessible Islamic literature in a bid to reduce if not break customary dependency on the *'ulama*. While this rather protestant activity did not prompt vehement opposition from the 'ulama, relationships between the two sectors were certainly strained from time to time. In the Cape at least, these groups became the purveyors of a modernizing tendency, not modernism. The difference being, that modernization involves the adoption of technology and contemporary technical know-how in the service of Islam. Modernism entails the adoption of in conceptual and cultural patterns augmented by the knowledge and intellectual legacy of modernity. 'Modernism' as it is known in its 19th and 20th century expressions, attempts a radical intellectual renewal of Islam that can commensurate with contemporary social and intellectual demands. The youth groups and circles were adaptationist in their thrust while promoting individualism and intellectualism.

The group that really provoked the hostility of the *'ulama* was the Arabic Study Circle (est. 1950) in Durban. Consisting mainly of young Muslim businessmen and professionals who were thoroughly disenchanted with the conservative discourses of the *'ulama*, they embarked on gaining direct access to the Qur'an. The rationale of this approach was that the Qur'an being in Arabic required proficiency in that language. If this linguistic feat was achieved it would end the dependency of lay persons on the *'ulama* since then they could read and understand the scripture individually. Ambitious as it may have been, the Arabic Study Circle did to some extent promote modernization, given its opposition to the hidebound tradition of the *'ulama*. The *'ulama* certainly viewed them with suspicion and condemned as being 'misguided'. However, it was the Study Circle's efforts to promote the study of Islam at a tertiary level that led to the establishment of Arabic and Islamic studies at schools and the University of Durban-Westville.

The heirs to modernization and particularly the Study Circle's tradition of self-empowerment in matters of religion and independence from the *'ulama*, was the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (MYMSA) which was established in 1970 in Natal. The silence of Muslim

political discourse in the sixties and especially after the death of Imam Haron created a leadership vacuum among Muslim youth. It was at this juncture that the MYMSA stepped in as a national movement. It started out primarily as a religio-cultural body with a muted political agenda. Drawing largely from the middle-class sector, the MYMSA was unmistakably influenced by ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the Jamat Islami of Pakistan. Writings by people like Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1906-1966), a journalist and militant ideologue of the same group who was executed by Nasser's government and Abu'l a'la al-Mawdudi (1903-1979) founder of the Jamat Islami of Pakistan, were the intellectual diet of the youth movement. Idealism clearly marked this phase of the MYMSA.

In its earliest phase the MYMSA operated along the lines of its equivalents elsewhere. Membership ranged from an associate member to a senior associate called a *'rukn'* (pillar). Ideological indoctrination took place at intense weekend and holiday training camps. But the most enduring feature of this movement was the emphasis on self-education in matters of religion via small study circles called, *halaqah* (pl. *halaqat*). In these weekly circles, members were encouraged to read and reflect on the Qur'an in translated form, master the works of the ideologues and familiarize themselves with the history of Islam with several goals in mind. They saw such training as a protection against westernizing influences and the anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an by the *'ulama* with the ultimate goal of preparing for the inauguration of an Islamic state.

Together with the Muslim Students' Association (MSA), the MYMSA exerted significant influence on the Muslim youth for more than a decade. Within two decades, the MYMSA set up an impressive array of social organisations on a national scale. These included a major welfare body, the South African National Zakat Fund (SANZAF), the Islamic Medical Association, which served as a guild for Muslim doctors and provided health services to disadvantaged communities, a number of schools to train and reorientate converts to Islam in some African townships as well as an active disaster and relief agency called Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA).

But the youth groups, especially the MYMSA found it difficult to make the transition from a religio-cultural ethos to that of a socio-cultural one. The movement lacked a contextual Islamic idiom through which it could articulate its political concerns, especially during the tumultous seventies and the Soweto uprisings in 1976. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 provided a crucial impetus for the global Islamic political discourse. For those Muslim communities far away from the Muslim heartland, South Africa included, it had added significance. For the first time Muslims found a point of reference for their religio-moral struggle which coincided with the revolutionary zeal prevalent at the time among liberation

movements in South Africa. However, it was not the MYMSA who embraced the Iranian revolution with its charged rhetoric and fervour. This space was reserved for the Qiblah Mass Movement and to a lesser extent, the Muslim Students Association.

Founded in 1980, Qiblah immediately identified itself with Islamic Iran and especially its main architect, Ayatollah Khomeini. Qiblah's main ideologues were longstanding supporters of the Pan-Africanist Congress and black consciousness tradition. The Qiblah's key rallying point was the unity of Muslims and the need to transform South Africa so it could achieve Islamic ideals. The movement supported armed struggle by actively seconding some of its members to this task, as part of *jihad* religiously sanctioned armed resistance. The Qiblah might be described as idealistic and extremist in its critique of South African Society.

MARCHES, RALLIES AND FUNERALS

The advent in South Africa of the discredited tricameral system in 1984 and the era of repression during the P.W. Botha reign gave rise to spontaneous political oppostion. One such constellation of opposition was the ANC-backed United Democratic Front (UDF), which later successfully managed to lobby the religious sector, the Muslim included for support. A dispute within the ranks of the MYMSA over the issue of political alliances with the UDF led some of its members to and set up in 1984 to breakaway a pro-UDF group called Call of Islam (COI). The COI articulated an expression of Islam which coincided in most cases with a UDF agenda in the same way as the Qiblah would pander to a PAC agenda. The COI emphasized the centrality of the leadership of the *'ulama* and consistently dragged their reluctant alliance partners, the MJC into political issues.

By the mid-eighties, the MYMSA entered a revisionist phase along with the MSA and in conjunction with other groups began to develop a contextual expression of Islam with a strong focus on South African political realities. Meanwhile, the MJC was unique among the *'ulama* groups to side with the liberation movement due to the visibility and influence of some of its key officials who were also members of the COI. Together these groups developed a hermeneutics of Islam as a religion which opposed oppression (*zulm*), in this case apartheid, and enjoined Muslims to constantly bear in mind that god sided with the oppressed (*mustad'afin*), that justice (*adl*) and equity (*qist*) were the goals towards which Muslims should strive as part of the ongoing *jihad*. These concepts were part of a general anti-apartheid discourse mounted by the Muslims. While some Muslim organisations may have privately accepted the tricameral dispensation by tacitly supporting members of parliament who were Muslims, few publicly did this. Among the northern *'ulama*-groups,

only the Jamiat al-'Ulama of Natal and the Sunni Jamiat al-'Ulama issued statements opposing the tricameral dispensation. By the early eighties, the rift between the politically conservative *'ulama* organisations and the progressive socio-cultural and political organisations was quite marked.

Nationalist reforms coincided with popular political upheaval. In various parts of the country, stone-throwing youths fought street battles with security forces resulting in deaths, detentions and exile. The progressive Muslim movements were in the forefront in this popular resistance striking formal and strategic alliances with political groups spanning a range of political tendencies. While some Muslim groups espoused consciousness, others favoured Pan-Africanism and even aligned with the Charterists.

It was the killing fields of apartheid that succeeded in uniting historically and culturally divided communities. Between the period 1984-89 the main feature of civil rights activities was protest marches, political rallies and well organised funeral services of victims of political brutality. At the funerals of the martyrs a new inter-faith ecumenism surfaced which some Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus and secularists establishing unprecedented common moral foundations to prosecute the apartheid system. At the forefront of these new ecumenism was the COI, the MSA, the MJC, MYMSA and Qiblah. At mass meetings and funerals of those slain in struggle, Islamic symbols were visible in areas of Muslim concentration, such as the Cape. Youths donning Yasser Arafat-style Palestinian headgear (*kaffiyehs*) frenzied by revolutionary zeal raised the war-cry of 'One solution Islamic revolution'. Conservative *'ulama* groups on their part denounced any form of alliance with the 'infidels' and the free intermingling of sexes in political activities dubbing these as un-Islamic practices of the worst kind. For the progressive Islamic elements, the immorality of apartheid superceded the narrow theological interpretations of the *'ulama*.

This historic juncture in South African history of the eighties generated new discourses of religious pluralism, liberation, gender discrimination, and environmental destruction which were novel and innovative in modern Muslim history. It was also a phase which prominently featured a decline in Islamic particularism and a stress on Islamic humanism and universalism. At the extreme rightist end of the ideological spectrum it provoked the reverse reaction of rigid conservatism and a resistance to a contextual expression of Islam. It would be true to say that the destruction of the old society spawned the elements of the new vision for South Africa.

During the months of turmoil, the Islamic progressives were marginally hegemonic in that the national context aided their highly politicised agenda. But, that was a temporary achievement. The State in its attempts to mollify Muslim anger began recognising Muslim marriage and divorce law, as part of Personal Law, and giving opportunities for international trade with Muslim countries. This allowed the conservatives to regain their strength. The intense struggle of the eighties did sensitize the *'ulama* to some of the needs of the modernized youth but it did not in any way transform their overall religious and cultural thinking.

The period of the De Klerk reforms in the nineties and the unbanning of the liberation movements raised the prospects of South Africa heading towards full democracy. In the wake of the national debate on negotiations with the apartheid regime, a historic Muslim National Conference was convened that included the bulk of Muslim organisations. After two days of lengthy deliberation, the conference resolved that Muslims were not unanimous in their support for negotiations as some supported the strategy and others opposed it. The same conference highlighted an important phenomenon: that Muslims were not a homogenous or a differentiated group as it is wrongly assumed by both insiders and outsiders. While religious cohesion may give the impression of uniformity, the community was very much alive to the social and dynamic processes of social evolution and all its hazards.

In modern South Africa, Muslims have made great strides in to make themselves more visible in public life despite their numerical minority of an estimated half a million. In the fields of medicine, building industry, small business, fine arts, politics and law, Muslims have maintained a significant profile. The first 'black' person to be permanently appointed in 1922 as Supreme Court judge as stated in the annals of South African judicial history was a Muslim. Many Muslims have taken to the medical profession and law. Whereas, the early generation of Muslims were either artisans or petty shopkeepers, the new generation is taking on careers as professionals in nursing, social work and teaching.

CONCLUSION

During the oppresive years of apartheid it was *jihad*, understood as 'struggle' against an oppressive regime, that made Islam attractive to many black people in South Africa. For the black underclasses whose wretched experience of life was ostensibly sanctioned by Christianity, Islam was an attractive alternative. Already since the fifties several Muslim organisations have been doing missionary work (*da'wah*) among African communities with a growing rate of conversion. These two factors, politics and mission, has given rise to several Muslim communities in black townships throughout the country. Islam is today one of the fastest growing religions in the world by all estimations. The question remains whether the religious demographic picture of Africa will undergo any significant change as the dynamics of a new society gets

underway in South Africa. Islam shares this continent along with two other traditions, African religious tradition and Christianity: three religions vying for Africa's soul.

As South Africa slowly, but painfully, turns its back on the apartheid era, Muslims like other people have to face a new and challenging future. For the first time in history, all South Africans hope to participate in a democratic political dispensation. The new openness, pluralism and multiculturalism that will be experienced makes new demands of adaptation and adjustment from all communities religious ones notwithstanding. Exposure to the international community, and particularly relations with other Muslim communities, will most probably affect the social identity of South African Muslims. Cultural and social contact will inevitably introduce new tendencies in thought which may have far reaching implications for the Muslims in South Africa.

At the same, pressing domestic issues of reconstruction and nation-building will make several demands for adaptation to a new context. In the past Muslims felt alienated by the structures of colonialism and apartheid. Democratic and political dispensation will consider them as an integral part of the new society. In the post-apartheid era, South African society will certainly face the real propsect of multiculturalism where all cultures and value systems will be considered as full participants in society. For the South African Muslim, the challenge lies in on how the one and to exercise his right as a citizen and on the other insist on his right to remain different from the others.[21]

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NOTES

1. Robin Hallett. 1970. *Africa to 1875: A Modern History*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 17.

2. Ali Mazrui. 1985. "Religion and Political Culture in Africa". *In Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LIII/3 pp. 817-839.

3. There is also a suggestion that they may be *falashas* of Jewish descent. See G.C Oosthuizen, 1991. "Hebraic-Judaistic Tenets in the African Independence Churches and Religious Movements in South Africa". In David A. Shank (ed) *African Independent Churches* Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Board of Missions. For further reading see Ephraim Mandivenga 1989. "The History and Re-Conversion of the Varemba of Zimbabwe". In *Journal of Religion in Africa* XIX, 2 pp. 98-124.

4. The *Khalwatiyyah* has some obscure roots in thirteenth century Turkey and Persia. It is alleged that it gained the named *khalwatiyyah*, meaning 'the retreating one', due to the frequent spiritual retreats its founder, Muhammad Nur al-Balisi used to undertake. Others say the founder was 'Umar al-Khalwati, who was born in Lahij, Jilan, and who died in Tabriz in 800/1397. See *Encyclopedia of Islam 1987*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 991-93.

5. For further details see G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa*. Vol. 3, pp. 261-63.

6. Theal says: "They [freeblacks] consist of persons, who during the existence of the Dutch East India Company, were sent from Batavia or the other dependencies, either as convicts or in attendance upon their masters, or as manumitted slaves, and many of them consists of Malays and Natives of Malabar, who were not in a state of servitude." (*Records of Cape Colony*, vol 28:66)

7. This is a title of an unpublished paper by Achmat Davids.

8. Theal, p. 140.

9. Michel Serres. "*Hermes: Literature, Science & Philosophy*," p. 28.

10. Lady Duff Gordon, *Letters from the Cape* (ed) John Purves (London: Humphrey Milford, 1921), p. 81

11. I.D. du Plessis & C. A. Luckhoff 1963. *The Malay Quarter and Its People*. (Cape Town), p. 33.

12. Robert C.H Shell, "Rites and Rebellion: Islamic Conversion at the Cape", 1808-1915 citing John Centlivres Chase, the Cape of Good Hope and the Eastern Province of Algoa Bay, (London: Pelham Richardson, 1843), p. 235.

13. (Anonymous), 'The Cape Malays', *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 10 July 1861, p. 358.

14. Duff Gordon, p. 31.

15. Duff Gordon, p. 40.

16. Theal, p. 28-38.

17. The Qadiriyyah was founded by the reputable sufi Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir ibn Abi Salih Jangidost (1079-1165) who was born in Jilan, Iran and is therefore called al-Jilani. This order is perhaps one of the most popular sufi orders and is widespread with a stronghold on the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.

18. The Alawiyyah order was founded by Muhammd ibn Ali (1178-1255) of the Ba Alawi tribe in southern Arabia (J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in* Islam, (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 16.

19. Ernest Gellner. 1922. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge, p. 10.

20. See 'Islam' in J.W. de Gruchy and M. Prozesky. *A Southern African Guide to World Religions*. David Philip, p. 230.

21. Albie Sachs. *1990. Protecting Human Rights in New South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, p. 44.

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