

South African Muslim Clergy and its Political Response to Colonialism and Apartheid

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ABSTRACT The Muslim community in South Africa is heterogeneous in nature with diverse historical backgrounds and social composition although they subscribe to a common article of faith. Since their entry into the country, first as slaves and followed by indenture, they have experienced similar socio-political discrimination and exploitation no different to the majority of the indigenous population in the country. Given the heterogeneous composition of Muslims in the country, their response to the political atrocities perpetrated both by colonialism and apartheid took different forms in order to sustain its religious hegemony for more than three and a half centuries. This paper examines the response of the Muslim clergy within a community characterized by a set of complex socio-historical factors that has shaped its present day status within a liberated South Africa. The paper provides insight into how the diversity within the Muslim clergy impacted on a fragmented community response to both colonialism and apartheid. The Muslim clergy in South Africa and elsewhere in the world is known to exercise enormous hegemony amongst its followers although priesthood within the teaching and practice of Islam is not a norm. Nonetheless, the paper illustrates some of the social, religious and political dynamics within the Muslim cleric that resulted in a fragmented and diverse response to the colonial and apartheid regimes in order to win favor for its self-preservation as a religious grouping. A more progressive effort however becomes apparent in the latter days of apartheid through the formation of secular forms of social organizations within the community that identified with local and mass based struggle characterized by a diverse set of political actors in a quest for freedom. The Muslim community can claim to have nurtured distinguished political champions throughout its history. So did collaborationist political actors emerge within the community attracted by self-interest and narrow group motives. This tapestry of political responses may be attributed to the diverse sociological composition and history of the community resulting in low levels of social cohesion and polarization that is carried over into the post-apartheid era. Central to this has been the role of the diverse clergy which shaped and styled the communities political landscape that benefitted some and excluded others over centuries of political challenges and compromises.

INTRODUCTION

The political response of the South African Muslim clergy (theologians) both during colonialism and apartheid is characterised by a diverse set of socio-political, historical and economic factors. This heterogeneous political response in fact comes as little surprise considering its diversity. Islam in South Africa as a non-homogeneous faith grouping has the largest concentration of adherents of Malay origin confined to the mother city in Cape Town with a history of slavery commencing from the 1600s onwards, followed by Indians from the Indian sub-continent through indenture commencing in the 1860s and followed in their footsteps by a group of trading class Muslims. Muslims of indentured background are primarily concentrated in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal making it the largest faith grouping from the Indian sub-continent, whilst those of trading class backgrounds have located primarily in the now Gauteng Province and smaller towns adjacent to it. In KwaZulu-Natal a significant number are

known to be settled in deep parts of the province, whilst a large proportion concentrated in former townships created by the apartheid regime due to its racial segregationist policies. Around 1873, the Muslim community was enjoined by a group of African Muslims from Zanzibar who are largely concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal. With such diverse history and origin, the presence of Muslims as a religious community in the South African context has evolved around a complex set of socio-political and economic factors. Given the diversity of the Muslim community, it comes as little surprise that their political response to colonialism and apartheid varies across ethnic, religious and class factors which makes it a vibrant political space during the undulating history of oppression in the country.

This paper examines the role of Muslims as a minority community in two distinct political phases of South Africa's history, the socio-religious dynamics that has shaped its structure for its social reproduction in the country as a religious community and highlights how the clergy en-

joys hegemony over a diverse group of adherents and shapes their political consciousness resulting in a fragmented response to the social injustices perpetrated by colonialism and apartheid.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF MUSLIMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The evolution of Islam as a monotheistic religion in the Southern tip of Africa is within a context of specific moments of European conquest of the globe in pursuit of capital. It is characterised by a history of slavery, a system of indentured labour system and capital accumulation in a land where approximately ninety percent of the indigenous population were dispossessed of their political rights, social and economic privileges. Some Muslims were lured into the country in pursuit of economic rewards whilst the vast majority was enslaved to serve capital accumulation. The first arrival of Muslims in South Africa may be traced to Muslim soldiers in 1652 in the army of the Dutch East India Company known as Mardykckers (Nadvi 1988: 145; Naude 1992: 17; Randeree 1997: 69). However, these Muslims were prevented from overtly practicing Islam and never had a long-term presence in the country. A more permanent presence of Muslims in South Africa began to establish its root in 1667 in the Cape with the arrival of slaves mainly from Malaysia and the East Indies at the behest of the Eastern Batavian Dutch Empire (Randeree 1997: 69; Nadvi 1988: 145; Islamic Council of South Africa 1984: 14). After the abolishment of slavery in 1833, Islam became a flourishing religion and by 1840 it had gained approximately 6 435 adherents, equivalent to a third of the total population of the colony (Nadvi 1988: 147). Institutionalisation and emphasis on education and literacy played an important role in the growth of the community. Other factors such as conversion, adoption, the purchase of slaves by free Muslims and inter-religious marriages served as an important catalyst in promoting the spread of Islam (Dadoo <http://www.islamonline.net>). Muslims from the Cape Province are referred to as “Malays” and follow the *Shafee* school of thought.

A separate stream of Muslims, from the sub-continent of India arrived from 1860 onwards to seize the opportunity exploited by British colo-

nialist in the sugar cultivation and processing industry in the Natal colony through a system of indentured labour (Ramphal 1985: 109; Meer 1980: 1). These Muslims originated from Malabar, on the west coast of South India and Hyderabad in the south. Around this time, a third group of Muslims classified as the passenger group followed their indentured counterparts. They were mainly Sunni Vhoras from Surat and Memons from Kathiawad and Kutch. Their history and origin vary from that of the indentured Muslims. The passenger Muslims were made up of predominantly the merchant class and referred to by the colonialists as “Arabs” due to their distinct dress code derived from the Middle East. As traders they enjoyed certain privileges from their colonialist masters, since they were free citizens of the British Empire. They were excluded from the full application of the Indian Immigration Law and as such their socio-political plight varied from their indentured counterparts (Sulliman 1997: 108).

The so-called “Arab” merchants of Durban motivated by capitalist motives supplied merchandise to many of the stores owned by their relatives or village contacts in the smaller towns of the Colony. They penetrated many of the remote areas of the country and established business interests amongst the indigenous communities (Sulliman 1997: 109). The availability of transport networks, the railways, and the rapidly developing mining industry attracted a significant grouping of Muslims of passenger origin to settle in the Transvaal. Small businesses were then set up in the city of Johannesburg including outlying towns such as Pietersburg, Nelspruit, Potgietersrus and Volksrust (Nadvi 1988: 149).

In 1873, Muslims from Zanzibar also supplemented the community in Natal. They were descendants of Muslim slaves brought to Natal to alleviate the serious labour problem prevalent in the colony (1873 – 1880). A large number originated from northern Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa, Malawi and Zanzibar and established themselves as a community in Kingsrest on the Bluff, in Durban (Randeree 1997: 70 – 71).

Despite the diverse socio-historical backgrounds of Muslims in South Africa and their religious, ideological, cultural and linguistic composition, it has established itself as a distinct religious community making its presence felt in the different facets of life in the country. Al-

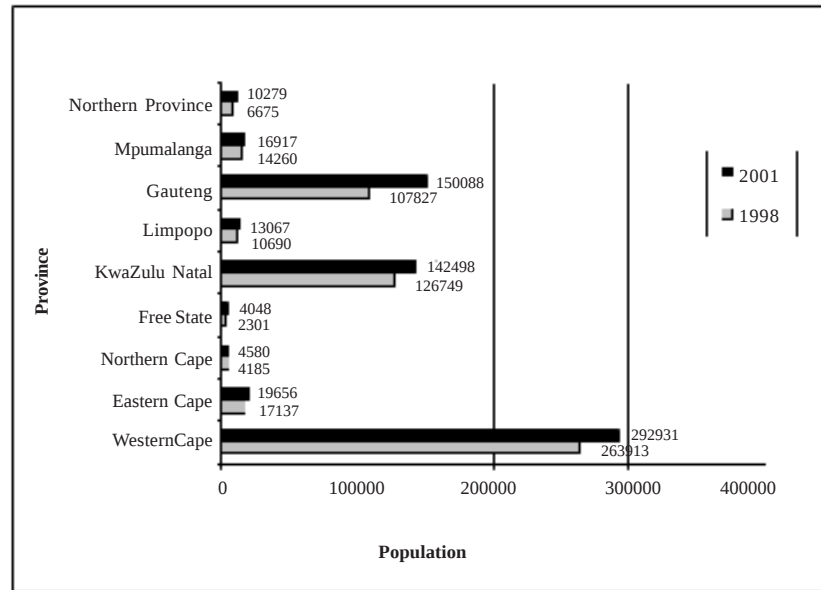


Fig. 1. Muslim Population by Province for Census Year 1996 and 2001

though the actual size of the Muslim population cannot be ascertained with accuracy, crude estimates suggest that the population could range from half a million adherents to in excess of more than a million during the 1990s (Naude 1992: 17; Randeree 1997: 68; Tayob 1998: 43). The lack of accurate data on Muslims in the country is attributed to the inconsistency in census recording arising from a complicated and cumbersome race classification system, which inaccurately identified people's religious beliefs. This has in recent years been partly addressed. Nonetheless, the 1996 and 2001 census data, which estimates the population at 553717 and 654063¹ respective-

ly, serves as an important and official baseline for analytical purposes depicted in Figure 1.

The above Figure illustrates the presence of Muslims in every province in the country with the largest concentration being in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Gauteng and the Western Cape. In each of these provinces, the population has increased significantly with a national growth rate of 18.1% between the two census years. A breakdown of population growth for the different provinces based on the 1996 and 2001 census data is presented in Table 1.

The comparative data in Table 1 suggests that there has been a significant growth in the

Table 1: Comparison of Muslim population growth by provinces for periods 1996 - 2001

Province	1996 census	2001 census	Variance in population	% population growth
Western Cape	263913	292931	29018	11.0
Eastern Cape	17137	19656	2519	14.7
Northern Cape	4185	4580	395	9.4
Free State	2301	4048	1747	75.9
KwaZulu-Natal	126749	142498	15749	12.4
Limpopo	10690	13067	2377	22.2
Gauteng	107827	150088	42261	39.2
Mpumalanga	14260	16917	2657	18.6
Northern Province	6655	10279	3624	54.5
Total	553717	654063	100346	18.1

Muslim population for all provinces since 1996. The Free State, Limpopo, Gauteng and the Northern provinces, which were once the preserve of Afrikanerdom have experienced population growth beyond the national average of 18.1%. This increase in migration needs to be understood in the context of post-liberation movement and settlement of South Africans without restriction as compared to that imposed in the past by a political regime that systematically managed and controlled Black human settlement and movement within the country. Nonetheless, as a community, Muslims reflect the same diversity that characterises the rest of the South African population with African adherents constituting the fastest growing segment, having increased by 52.3% since 1991 (Vahed and Jeppe 2005: 253). Figure 2 provides the national breakdown of Muslims by race as extracted from the census 2001 database.

Apart from racial differences, the community is differentiated along distinct class lines within each of the racial groups. Class differences emanate from discrepancies in education levels, unemployment and income levels of the employed. The average per capita income for Indian Muslims was R2 163 per month, Malays, R1 262 and Africans, R935 in 2001. Marked difference in per capita monthly income is noted at a regional level with R2 794 for Gauteng, R2 396 for the Western Cape and R1 656 for KZN. This

trend reflects the economic well-being of the merchant class Indian Muslims in Gauteng and the Western Cape, with most Muslims in KZN having indentured and South Indian roots struggling to climb the economic ladder (Vahed and Jeppe 2005: 253).

Census data analysed by Vahed and Jeppe (2005: 253) suggest that 55.76% of Muslim males in the Western Cape were not working while unemployment for this category stood at 37.75% and 40.25% in Gauteng and KZN respectively. In terms of education, African Muslims were most disadvantaged with 13.9% having no formal schooling compared to 5.23% for Indians and 2.29% for Malays. These deep historical differences have shaped the social-political and economic composition of Muslims in present day South Africa which militates against a sense of cohesiveness, unity, homogeneity and a source of political tapestry prevalent in the post-democratic era. To a large extent its present political form and shape has evolved within the context of challenges confronting their sense of community in the different epoch of the South African oppressive political landscape. Notwithstanding, the impact of such historical political and economic influences, the institution of religion which is known to be an important catalyst to promote a sense of community responded in varying forms to the political atrocities perpetrated by colonialism and apartheid amongst the Muslims in South Africa.

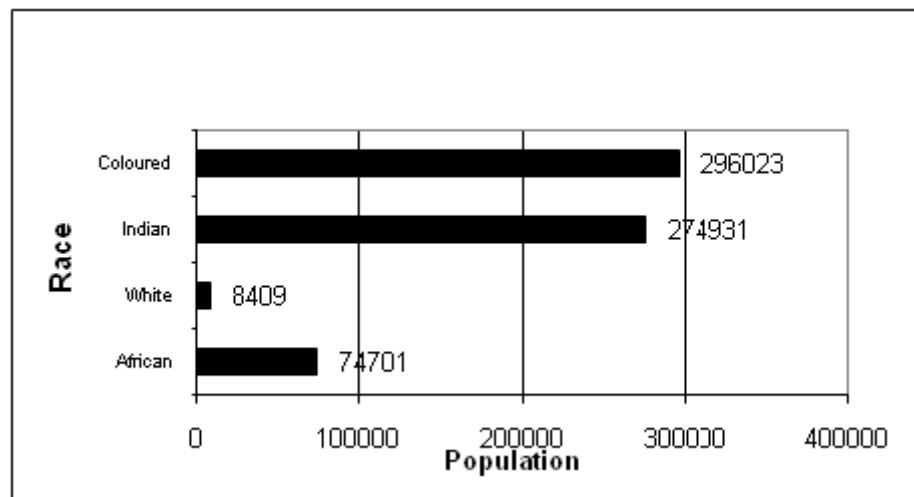


Fig. 2. National population breakdown of Muslims by race as at 2001

MUSLIM POLITICAL RESPONSE TO COLONIALISM

The different trajectories of Muslims in South Africa during the colonial period were characterised by diverse political responses in a quest to preserve their religious identity and reliance. Since the Malay Muslims were the first group to arrive in South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century (1667) they may be considered as pioneers for the introduction of a monotheistic faith predominantly manifest in the middle-east to the western tip of Africa. Outstanding among the early Malay arrivals at the Cape was a political exile and influential religious leader, Shaikh Yusuf, who was the brother of the King of Goa. He remained the spiritual guidepost for the South African Muslims in the early period of establishment of the faith in the country and dubbed as the nucleus of the religion (Mandivenga 2000: 347).

However, Islam in the Cape suffered a heavy setback during the decades beginning in 1700 to about 1850 when the power of the Dutch East Indies waned (Mandivenga 2000: 348). Social contact amongst the Cape Malays' with their homeland in Java and other parts of the Malay Archipelago also weakened resulting in the number of local Muslims who had a distinguished knowledge of Islamic traditions and religious scriptures reducing in size to a point of becoming extinct. As the decline of religious practices became less important the Qur'an was no longer studied. After more than a century of virtual loss of a sense of Islamic identity, at around the 1850s Islamic traditions and practices began to resuscitate a new generation of Cape Muslims drawing from Saudi Arabia revered to be the epicenter of Islam. This was accomplished through frequent pilgrimages to the holy land and mastery of the Arabic language which contributed to a revivalist fervor for the Islamic faith. It was, however, only in 1798 that the first mosque—known as the 'Awwal Masjid—was built in the country by the community as a centre of religious worship (Esack 1998: 474) around which a sense of religious community began to emerge.

The first political expression against colonialism in order to preserve a sense of Islamic identity was noted in the 1840s with the outbreak of small pox and the hospitalisation of afflicted Muslims in hospitals that prohibited access to *halaal* food, denial of burial rights with-

out due consideration for the Islamic custom and traditions of the deceased. At a public meeting in the Cape's Plein Street in 1882, Muslims made it clear that their objections to these measures was religious and that "their religion [was] superior to the law". The closing of the Tana Baru was another example in the way early Muslims rose to defend their faith. The Tana Baru was the main cemetery of the Muslim community in Cape Town until it was closed in January 1886, by colonial government decree in terms of the 1883 Public Health Act. Two days after the official closure of Tana Baru, 3,000 Muslims in defiance of the law proceeded with the burial of a child at the cemetery despite prohibition imposed by colonial legislation. It resulted in a riot lasting for three days. This religio-political response of the Muslims as early as the 1880s may be considered a historical landmark in their defense in maintaining their faith and culture even to a point of violent confrontation with the law. Despite such extreme measures to preserve their sense of identity there is no evidence to suggest that at this point they identified with the political struggles of the indigenous people (Esack 1998: 474). Neither they were interested in spreading a more comprehensive; 'political' form of Islam across the country. However, the first expression of organised political opposition was in the 1920s which saw the formation of the African Political Organisation (later People's Organisation) under the leadership of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman² (Esack 1998: 474). Despite such organised political expression, Fataar (2007: 158) asserts that the Cape Muslim adaptation to a non-Islamic environment was shaped by a politics of accommodation that adjusted to the strictures of a colonial and radicalised environment. Such an assertion needs to be perceived from the context of vulnerability that the early Muslim settlers in the country had to endure, hence necessitating concessions, collaboration and compromises with the colonialist regime so that it could adapt in a strange and foreign environment to ensure its social reproduction.

In the eastern coast of the Province of Natal, the majority of indentured Indians settled on colonial owned sugar plantations. Similar to their slave Muslim counterparts and the rest of the indentured Indian population comprising different faith and ethnic groups, their socio-historical evolution was characterised by struggles to preserve a sense of Islamic identity through ad-

aptation derived from concessions, collaboration and compromises to ensure its social reproduction. In this period, indentured Muslims were hardly organised at a political level but expended their energies through hard labour, establishing family life, re-orientating their religious identities through the guidance of revered saints and establishing a sense of religious community life.³ However, in the absence of organised religion, many had to depend on religious knowledge prevalent amongst them. An elaboration on the religious practices of the first generation Muslims of indentured extraction is difficult to construct due to the absence of oral history and records. However, reports of instances in which religious norms and values were defended through confrontation with their colonial masters suggest that the preservation of the Islamic value system was of primary importance as compared to contesting the political source of atrocities inflicted on the community or identification with the struggles of the local indigenous population. Objections to working in a piggery, shaving of beards, celebration of religious festivals, avoidance of non-*halaal* foods, maintaining personal hygiene and the preference of women to adorn the *purdah* are some of the Islamic etiquettes and norms which this grouping won over from their colonial masters to ensure their social reproduction and cohesion (Vahed 2001: 311-313). Confined to the remote corners of the province, these groups of indentured Muslim could not organise themselves politically but had to persevere in sustaining their sense of religious identity.

The affluent merchant class Muslims dubbed as “passenger Indians” also strived towards maintaining their religious identity, but were more inclined to promote their business interests and hence their political response to colonialism focused primarily on challenging trading rights, restrictions on encroachment on white business districts and suburbs. Their political struggles both in the Natal and Transvaal provinces centred on economic interests which took a political form. Interestingly, thirty three years later (1893-1914) in May 1893, Gandhi was engaged by a Muslim business man to represent his economic interest against a fellow Muslim business competitor (Palmer 1957: 51) which changed the political landscape for all disenfranchised South Africans including colonial oppression in his land of origin, India – one from enslavement to

emancipation. It was Gandhi’s inhumane encounter with politically atrocious and discriminatory treatment of disenfranchised Blacks in general that raised his political antenna which Indians of all faith and ethnic groups embraced through a process of consciousness about their self-worth and dignity. This resulted in the mass mobilisation of the Indian community within the political ideology of “passive resistance” which made the colonial supremacist crumble to its knees without the use of physical force. The formation of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1894 to champion the political rights of Indians helped to solidify a common space for interaction and dialogue across all religious and ethnic groups within the Indian community. However, in the Cape, there is little recorded history of Muslims of Malay origin being mobilised under the political ideology of “*satyagraha*” as expounded by Gandhi although small groupings of merchant class Indian Muslims had close contact with him and subscribed to his philosophical approach to challenge the colonial hegemony. The same applies to Muslims of African origin. In so far as the Cape Malays were concerned the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was the most popular political movement in the province that gained support from those with a history of slavery.

Notably, in this period certain sections of the Muslim community, especially those in Natal originating from merchant class backgrounds chose to collaborate with the colonialist to gain favour through negotiation politics. Since Gandhi’s departure to India in 1914, the Natal Indian Congress took a bumpy political ride due to the vacuum left by his absence resulting in different groups emerging to occupy the political space that was created by the Mahatma. Such a trend is noted in the 1940s when the Natal Indian Congress came largely to be dominated by Muslim elites and merchants resulting in the leadership changing into the hands of Mr A.I. Kajee a prominent business man. This marginalised the working class members of the Indian community especially those of indentured origin in Durban resulting in the emergence of a diverse number of political groupings (Palmer 1957: 116) defined at times by religious affiliation. Although Palmer, in her book recognises the leadership of Mr Kajee⁴ grounded in philosophical and political thought within an international context, she asserts that his leadership was under attack local-

ly by ordinary Indians in Natal for the simple reason, he advocated against Indians purchasing properties in white owned residential areas. This was perceived to be tantamount to perpetuating segregationist policies which the Afrikaner Nationalist Party implemented when ascending to power in 1949. Indeed the purchase of land in white residential areas was accessible only to the rich and those considered to uphold western values as a pre-condition to socially co-exist with whites. Interestingly, wealthy Muslims invested in property for financial returns instead of the commercial banks so that their earnings were not diluted by interest which is forbidden in Islam (Palmer 1957: 120).

MUSLIM POLITICAL RESPONSE TO APARTHEID

Upon ascension to power, the Nationalist Party implemented the incomplete racial segregationist project left behind by their British political nemesis into a stricter territorial segregation policy through the notorious Group Areas Act (1950) which forcibly removed and relocated all disenfranchised Blacks to tribal homelands and monolithic townships on the periphery of cities and towns (Maharaj 1994). It is estimated that three and a half million (Walker 1982: 2) Black South Africans of different persuasion were systematically uprooted from settled communities and forced to live in dormitory style townships so that South African cities were purely reserved for white privilege. To illustrate the extent of damaging effects of this policy in numerical terms, according to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) Survey, (1981: 220) in Natal only, 23 227 Indian families were victims of forced removals. Muslims like their Indian counterparts of different ethnic, class and religious extraction living in the city in areas such as Riverside, Cato Manor and Clairwood with established social networks and a stable means of livelihood were once again challenged by another wave of socio-economic vulnerability. The grand policy of apartheid based on the principle of divide and rule resulted in the breakdown of community solidarity, social cohesiveness and new political spaces within the Muslim community.

The social dislocation caused by apartheid policies had varying levels of impact on the lives of Muslims. The vast majority of working class Muslims living in political landmark spaces such

as District Six in Cape Town, Sophiatown in Johannesburg and Cato Manor in Durban were forcefully resettled in mono-functional, high density and socially sterile public housing estates a distance from their work places and sources of livelihood.⁵ Many middle and high income families settled in private rented flats whilst the rich moved into racially designated residential suburbs. It was in the townships, that most low income families had no choice but to accept the forced resettlement scheme perpetrated by the apartheid regime. The more affluent Muslims were able to recover from this social dislocation by establishing themselves as a community through rapid growth in social and religious amenities. However, those confined to township life are until today recovering from this dislocation⁶.

However, in 1945 the Natal Indian Congress was politically re-invigorated with a change in leadership under the more radical Monty Naicker, which opposed apartheid policies vigorously. Within the ranks of the NIC were many Muslims who supported both the congress movement and were at the same time part of the South African Communist Party. These Muslims supported secular forms of political thought that identified with the broader struggle efforts of the majority of the disenfranchised indigenous people of the country. Their political ideology transcended intra-community social dynamics and they identified ideologically to universal principles of social justice, equality and democracy.

At an intra-community and religious level, this period was characterised by the emergence of many community based organisations to serve the religious, cultural and physical well-being of Muslims. The more wealthy sections of the community, through compulsory religiously ordained charities commenced reconstructing community life through social welfare organisations, religious, educational and cultural centres to alleviate the socio-economic problems inflicted as result of relocation.⁷ Given the availability of religiously ordained charities, much effort was expended to resuscitate a religious sense of identity and community as compared to political engagement with other secular mass based political movements to oppose apartheid.

From Table 2 it will be ascertained that the Muslim community during the major part of apartheid period have established 1328 religiously centered institutions comprising places of worship, social institutions and community

Table 2 Distribution of Muslim associational live characterised by places of worship, social and educational institutions by province as at 1997

S. No.	Province	Places of worship	Social institutions	Community organisations	Total
1	Free State	10	6	8	24
2	Gauteng	122	128	108	358
3	Mpumalanga	35	8	22	65
4	North West	25	6	19	50
5	Northern Cape	4	2	3	9
6	Western Cape	111	172	108	391
7	Eastern Cape	21	12	20	53
8	Northern Province	11	6	11	28
9	KwaZulu-Natal	116	125	109	350
	Total	455	465	408	1328

Source: Extracted from Murshid David's (1997) Directory of Muslim Institutions and Mosques in South Africa

based organisations with the largest concentration being in the Western Cape (391), followed by Gauteng (358) and lastly KwaZulu-Natal (350).

In so far as the different sectors supported by Muslims, social welfare and places of worship initiatives take up 16% and 14.5% of the communities religiously ordained charities as depicted in Table 3. Given the socio-economic costs incurred by apartheid forced removal and relocation policies, such a trend is not unexpected. However, in terms of support for socio-political causes is concerned, it ranks tenth on the sector list of twelve priorities. This strongly suggests that as a community, support for political issues during the apartheid era won very little support.

The theological sector however, ranks eight of the twelve sector supported by the Muslim community but it constitutes the most important and powerful decision maker on issues of community life in keeping with the divine code of Islam. As mentioned earlier, the South African Muslim community is not a religiously ho-

mogeneous grouping and from an analysis of Table 4 it is evident that the Muslim Judicial Council (1945) predominantly serves the religious needs of its adherents in the Cape, whilst the Sunni Jamiatul Ulema (1978) is present in all three provinces with a majority following from the indentured Indian grouping.

However, the Jamiatul Ulema which was established in 1952 has wide support in Gauteng province and smaller towns in the former province of Transvaal. Similarly, it is well established in the City of Durban and smaller towns in the Province of Natal and represents Muslims predominantly from the wealthier merchant classes. Since Muslim theological organisations play an important role in providing spiritual guidance to its adherents, their interpretation of Quranic texts and views on the socio-political life of society was seldom disputed by its followers including those secular organisations that have a close affiliation, affinity and association to it.

Interestingly during the apartheid era, the Muslim Judicial Council in the Cape and the

Table 3: Breakdown of the different sectors supported nationally by South African Muslims as at 1997

Organisations	Social welfare	Places of worship	Charitable and relief	Youth and student movements	Bursaries	Propagation	Burial societies	Theological	Women's groups	Socio-political	Radio and electronic media	Culture and arts
No.	64	52	44	45	38	35	31	29	22	18	10	7
%	16.0	14.5	11.2	10.4	9.6	8.9	7.9	7.3	5.6	4.5	2.5	1.6

Source: Extracted from Murshid Davids 1997 - Directory of Muslim Institutions and Mosques in South Africa

Table 4: Distribution of Muslim theological organisations by province and major towns

<i>Cape Town</i>	<i>Gauteng</i>	<i>KwaZulu-Natal</i>
Muslim Judicial Council	Head Office – JU Transvaal	Durban – JU Head Office
Sunni Ulama Council	Azaadville- JU	Newcastle- JU
United Ulama Council	Benoni- JU	Pietermaritzburg-JU
Darul Waqaf Islamic Trust (E/Cape)	Klerksdorp- JU	Port Shepstone- JU
	Laudium- JU	Umzinto- JU
	Lenasia- JU	Stanger- JU
	Mpumulanga- JU	Sunni Jamiatul Ulama
	Waterval- JU	Sunni Ulama Council
	Middleburg- JU	Raza Islamic Council
	Roshnee- JU	
	Rustenburg- JU	
	Springs- JU	
	Warmbaths - JU	
	Waterval Islamic Council	
	Sunni Ulama Council	

(JU Refers to Jamiatul Ulema)

Source: Calculated from Murshid Davids (1997) Directory of Muslim Institutions and Mosques in South Africa

Jamiatul Ulema representing primarily the wealthier Muslim sections of the community with the largest following in the Transvaal and Natal did not take a firm political stand against apartheid. It was in the Cape that the legendary Imam Haron⁸ was martyred by apartheid forces on the 27th September 1969 having spent four months in detention for opposing forced removal through the implementation of the Group Areas Act. A total of 30 000 people attended his funeral - the largest gathering at a time when the apartheid forces were at its helm to protect its political hegemony. What is noteworthy was the silence of the different theological bodies following his assassination despite the fact that he was part of the theological fraternity. The demise of Imam Haron did not deter other theological organisations in continuing their silence against apartheid (Esack 1998: 475-476). As a clergy, Imam Haron laid his life in the belief that Islam condemns oppression and tyranny and it is the duty of Muslims to ensure justice, equality and fairness even though it means to die in attempting to achieve it. Islam, he perceived to be a practical religion and any association or collaboration to sources of tyranny and oppression is abhorred by the divine code.

It is appropriate to cite the position of the different theological fraternity response to apartheid as cited by several authors. Moosa (1998: 2-3) argues that the Muslim clergy maintained that if the government allowed Muslims the religious liberty to pray, build mosques and go on pilgrimage they could not engage in *jihad* (strug-

gle) against such an authority. To invoke *jihad* while co-operating with non-Muslims, as Muslim activists did, was not religiously acceptable on the grounds that Islam strongly rejects anarchy and advocates non-confrontation. The conservative theologians considered political organisations on the left as infidels as the method used for liberation was perceived to lead to the total destruction of Islamic belief, Islamic practice, Islamic morality and Islamic values (Moosa 1998: 4-5). Since there were communist elements within the anti-apartheid movement including a fair number of Muslims, other faith groups participating in the struggle against apartheid, mass demonstrations involving the mixing of sexes and violent approaches to achieve liberation objectives, the Muslim theologians found this approach inappropriate from an Islamic perspective.

It is also not surprising that under the apartheid government and under the inhumane "State of Emergency" of the 1980s in which gatherings were restricted and carefully monitored under the vigilant eye of the then apartheid security force, the *Ijtima*'s⁹ used to draw crowds of thousands of devotees organised by the Jamiatul Ulema which is founded on the *Deobandi* School of thought (aka *Tableeh Jamaat*¹⁰). There was not a single policeman in sight as compared to a gathering where civic and political issues were discussed. This comes as little surprise considering this strand of Islam subscribed to subservience to apartheid policies and the rejection of *Jihad* in all its practical aspects. Hence this theological grouping was not considered as a threat

to national security as it strayed away from condemning the apartheid regime.

In the height of the state of emergency in the 1980s the Call of Islam and *Qiblah* (1980) movement originating primarily in the Cape was scorned at and singled out by the local theologians. *Qiblah* activists were specifically singled out and assaulted by a vigilante group, known as the 'A-team'. These Muslim vigilantes accused the *Qiblah* activists of being Shi'is due to the latter's open support for revolutionary Iran in the late 1970s. The victimisation of these activists was carefully orchestrated. Several confrontations between the 'A-team' and their *Qiblah* opponents resulted in street gun battles. With the exception of a few politically aware individuals within the Muslim clergy, the 'official' 'ulama bodies were silent about the brutality meted out to *Qiblah* activists (Moosa 1998: 3-4).

On the contrary, the response of the Sunni Jamiat Ulema (1978)¹ which represents the vast majority of the indentured Muslims took a more progressive position and joined the radical Muslim groups that emerged in this period to oppose the tri-cameral elections designed to co-opt Indian and Coloured people in a co-governance arrangement with the apartheid state. It described the apartheid state and the August 1984 tri-cameral elections as '*Satanic and un-Islamic and an insult to human dignity and prestige*' (Moosa 1998: 2). Despite this, many Muslim candidates participated in this system of political co-option either through casting their vote or standing as political election candidates. During the apartheid era and at the height of revolutionary activity between the 1970s and 1980s a number of progressive political developments began to emerge despite the collaborationist approach of the Muslim clergy with the apartheid regime. The Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) was established in 1970, the progressive paper titled *Al-Qalam* which provided a balanced and moderate picture of Islam was established. At schools and universities the Muslim Students Association (MSA) was established in 1974 which was a prelude to the June 1976 youth uprising against apartheid education. The establishment of the Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA) in 1975 to promote unity amongst Muslim faith based organisations for a common voice against apartheid failed in its mission due to the powerful clergy (Esack

1998: 477). During the height of anti-apartheid agitation in the 1980s under the aegis of the United Democratic Movement, it was the secular Muslim organisations that identified with broader liberation struggle. Amongst the theological organisations, the Sunni Jamiatul Ulema with a mass following of working class Muslims from indentured backgrounds openly identified with the broader liberation movement with a diverse number of opposition groups including amongst it Jews, Christians, Hindu's, agnostics and communists.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the role of the Muslim clergy in the fight against colonialism and later apartheid. Clearly, the vast majority of the Muslim clergy provided little or no identification against the political brutality inflicted against humanity by both colonialism and apartheid despite the fact that it enjoys enormous authority and religious prestige amongst its adherents. The Muslim community nonetheless, has nurtured legendary political personalities many of whom died in their fight against apartheid whilst a significant number were incarcerated, banned or had to flee into exile under trying conditions. It is not the aim of this paper to judge whether these luminaries, many of whom are still alive, were indeed practicing Muslims due to their subscription to political ideological thoughts which was considered by the local clergy inconsistent with Islamic belief and teachings. However, what is indeed clear is that at an individual level they committed themselves to a sense of political consciousness which the martyred Imam Haron aptly practiced as a cleric, that is, the belief that Islam condemns oppression and tyranny and it is the duty of Muslims to ensure justice, equality and fairness even though it means to die in attempting to achieve it. Such a belief is consonant to Islamic political thought and thinking as it encompasses the social, economic and political aspects of life. It would appear that the clergy and the vast majority of its followers subscribed to the social and economic principles of Islam to the exclusion of the political. Perhaps engagement with the political meant risking its theological hegemony over its adherents as it would expose them to secular forms of movements which might lead them astray from the folds of Islam and reduce their religious author-

ity over the community. Since the power of the clergy lies in the interpretation of the divine texts for its adherents who are reduced to passive followers of their religion without empowering themselves to understand the text within their own social, political and economic reality and context, it comes as little surprise that the energies of the Muslim clergy was devoted largely to the preservation of Islamic traditions and practices so that their respective congregations became subservient to their religious school of thought. The diverse sets of interpretations of the divine texts amongst different strands of the clergy further prevented a unified Muslim response to the atrocities perpetuated by colonialism and apartheid both amongst Muslims with a history of slavery and indenture and the majority of the oppressed indigenous people of the country. It was individuals and later secular forms of Muslim organisations that have made a significant impact on the liberation struggle in the country.

NOTES

1. It is perceived that the population of Muslims especially from different parts of Africa, Pakistan, India and parts of Europe has drastically increased the Muslim presence in the country in the past eighteen years after democracy.
2. Palmer (1957: 185) regards Dr Abdurahman as one of the most distinguishable political personalities that served in the Provincial Council and City Council of Cape Town to have engaged at a political level with the colonialist led governments on community issues.
3. Hadrat Badsha Pir (King of the guides) from Chittoor, Madras is one such spiritual master known to have inspired an Islamic way of life amongst Muslims of indentured extraction until his death in 1894 (Vahed, 2003: 33-34). After the death of the King of Guides, Hadrat Sufi Saheb known to be a descendent of the Prophet Muhammed arrived in 1895 to spiritual minister to indentured Muslims and provided the necessary infrastructure for them to pursue religious associational life. As early as April 1896, Soofie Saheb purchased land on the banks of the Umgeni River for £185 from a Hindu Narainsamy, where he built a mosque, khanqah (teaching hospice), madrassahs and cemetery. Between 1898 and his death in 1911 Soofie Saheb dedicated his life in consolidating Islam amongst indentured Indians and their descendents by building mosques, madrassahs, cemeteries and orphanages in Springfield and Westville (1904), Overport (1905), Kenville and Sherwood (1906), Tongaat (1907), Ladysmith and Colenso (1908) and Verulam and Pietermaritzburg (1909). (Vahed, 2001: 321).
4. Mr Kajee is known to have a deep political insight into the affairs of the Indian community as a whole and befriended many political personalities of the time. His home was open to a diverse group of political activists and he started a regular reading group on a wide range of political literature. Many prominent Muslim political activists benefitted from Mr Kajee's political literature resource and later joined the South African Communist Party.
5. Settled communities were dispossessed of their social capital in the form of places of worship, recreational spaces, and community centres, schools that they have established and forced to live in high density block of flats with little or no choice on determining who their neighbour will be. Post resettlement, especially the very poor Muslims had to reorganise their lives as they were stripped of close social contact with kith and kin as established within the extended family system.
6. See Khan, S. (2009), "Children of a Lesser God": Contesting South Indian Muslim identities in Kwa-Zulu-Natal. *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 86-102 which highlights the plight of indentured Muslims living in townships within the city of Durban after the implementation of the Group Areas Act. Muslims for example in the sprawling township of Chatsworth, have to date not fully recovered from the social, economic and political impact of forced removal and relocation.
- 7 For example, the Muslim Home for Orphans and Destitute (Durban) was established in 1934 to serve the social welfare needs of poor Muslims in the Durban and surrounding areas. The paper the Indian Views was established in 1914 to articulate a progressive perspective on the political events unfolding in India and South Africa, the controversial Islamic Propagation Centre (1957) was established to proselytise new adherents to the faith, The Muslim Assembly (1962) was formed in the Cape to bring different faith based organisations together.
8. Imam Haron was the founder of the Claremont Youth Movement and the Muslim News, an anti-apartheid newspaper highlighting the atrocities of apartheid since the 1960s.
9. The Ijtima is a major gathering of members of the Deoband/Tablighi Jamaat that takes place in different provinces which orients its devotees to the specific teachings and practices of this strand of Islam. It is an all-male gathering where the devotees live in make shift tents for the duration of the programme.
10. The Tableeghi Jamaat is purported to be set up under the British Rule in India before the partitioning of India into Pakistan. After closely watching the Jamaat for some time it is alluded that, the British realised that a movement such as this absorbed the energy of its members and as such did not threaten British domination in any way as the doctrine of Jihad was totally absent in this movement. The British had noted that instead of the Jamaat directing its energies outwardly towards them, it was now directed inwardly towards the rest of the Muslims towards a pure form of Islamic way of life that was allowed to flourish. In South

Africa, this movement is strong primarily amongst the wealthy merchant class Muslims and its clergy draw important power and control over matters concerning faith in keeping with this sects doctrines and community life.

11. Given the fact that majority of the working class Muslims were victims of forced removal and were of indentured Indian background, they were able to organise themselves theologically very late in the history of Muslims in the country. The Sunni Jamiatul Ulema (1978), Darul Uloom Aleemiyah Razvia (1983), and Imam Ahmed Raza Academy (1986) (Vahed, 2002: 5) were established to champion the theological, spiritual, educational and general social welfare needs of Sunni Muslims and openly supported the United Democratic Front as compared to other theological groupings within the community.

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