

Sharing the Gospel with 'Cape Muslims'; Some Contextual and Cultural Considerations

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1. Introduction

One of the most common mistakes that we can make in devising outreach strategies to people from non-Christian faiths is to approach religions as if they are being practised in exactly the same way all over the world. This, often unstated, assumption is obviously fallacious. It can also lead to significant mistakes and ways of sharing the Gospel that are not necessarily the best for a particular context. The most significant problem with a 'one size fits all' approach is that it disregards local culture and context. Yet as Bill Musk states: *"For Christians actually engaged with Muslims, it is these themes (culture and worldview) which seem most often to confuse their understanding of Muslims and to colour their interaction with them."*⁴⁰ A significant task for the missiologist is therefore to study and analyse culture and context and then to ask how the insights gleaned from this study can be used in devising an outreach strategy. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of cultural and contextual analysis in devising outreach strategies by using 'Cape Islam' as a case study.

Before focusing on Cape Islam it would be worthwhile to briefly consider the importance of cultural and contextual analysis when approaching Islamic communities.

2. The Importance of Cultural and Contextual Analysis in Outreach to Muslims

There is certainly no lack of books focusing on ways in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be shared with Muslims. Titles with this theme have proliferated since the September 11 terror attacks in the United States when Islam burst onto Western public consciousness in a way that was perhaps not

⁴⁰ B.A. Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam* (Crowborough: MARC, 1995), 17.

seen since the heyday of the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ While the availability of resources that enable Christians to reach out to Muslims is a welcome development, most of these resources suffer from a similar defect: they tend to speak of Islam as a kind of monolithic entity. This is evident in the fact that many of them are very similar in terms of the information that they present. Such works typically focus on the core Islamic beliefs, the 'Five Pillars of Islam' and some Christian apologetic responses. All of this information is undoubtedly important in helping Christians to understand Islam as a faith and ideology. It is, however, certainly not sufficient in terms of understanding specific Islamic communities.

Cultural and contextual analysis can be seen as an important part of the response to the fact that Islam is, in fact, not a monolithic entity. Besides the major theological differences between Shi'ites and Sunnis, there are also the vast differences between the cultures in which Islam found a home. Some useful questions that a researcher could ask in order to arrive at a better understanding of the theology, culture and specific context of an Islamic community include the following:

- How did this community develop historically and are there some aspects of its historical development that are still being regarded as formative and significant?
- Are there certain aspects of 'classical Islam' that are regarded as particularly important by this community?
- Are there certain significant beliefs or practices that deviate from the ideal of classical Islam?
- Are there certain unique cultural practices that are a significant part of community life?
- What are some of the context specific issues (i.e. issues that impact the life of this community)?⁴²

⁴¹ One of the best examples in this genre, precisely because the author moves beyond the standard treatment of the subject is: C. Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007). For an excellent apologetic resource see; R. Scott, *Dear Abdullah: Eight Questions Muslim People Ask About Christianity* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011). For a balanced and scholarly analysis of Muslim history, contextual factors and current worldviews see: P.G. Riddell and P. Cotterrell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003)

⁴² For a good example of how looking for answers to these questions can lead to a deepening understanding of how the Gospel can be effectively communicated in specific Muslims societies see: B.A. Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims* (Crowborough: MARC, 1989)

The answers to these questions will almost certainly have significant implications for how the Gospel can be more effectively communicated with members of this community.

Some answers to these questions based on research into the history and nature of Cape Islam will be presented in the next section. Afterwards some possible implications of the data presented will be explored.

3. Cape Town and Cape Islam: A Brief Overview

The Western Cape is the 4th largest province of South Africa in terms of population. Cape Town is by far the largest urban centre in the province and is the provincial capital (in addition to also being the seat of the South African national parliament). The major languages spoken in the province are English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Cape Town (often referred to simply as 'the Cape') had its origins in 1652 as a 'refreshment station' for Dutch ships travelling the spice route to Batavia. Although colonisation was not part of the original objectives of the Dutch in claiming the territory, a large number of Dutch settlers did arrive over time. The Cape therefore developed as a noteworthy outpost of Dutch culture (to which were added significant French and German influences). It was clear almost immediately, however, that Cape Town (or 'Kaapstad' in Dutch and Afrikaans) would not develop as a mere cookie-cutter copy of a European city. This showed in how the European settlers gradually developed their own cultural and linguistic emphases to the point that they eventually came to refer to themselves as 'Afrikaners' (literally 'Africans'). The cultural shift was further aided by the presence of a significant indigenous population and slaves and exiles from other parts of Africa and the Far East.

Another important influence was added to the mix when the Cape and the interior beyond were annexed by Britain in 1806. Cape Town thus became the capital of what would eventually become the Cape Colony. This colony was one of the founding members of the 'Union of South Africa' (1910) and was afterwards regarded as one of the four provinces of the Union, or as it was known later, the Republic of South Africa (1961). With the coming of full democracy to South Africa the Cape Province was divided into three (Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape) with Cape Town becoming

the capital of the Western Cape. It remains the legislative capital of South Africa and therefore the seat of parliament.⁴³

About one in seven Capetonians claim adherence to Islam. In terms of the ethnic make-up of this community, most would self-identify as 'Malay'. This is actually quite a misleading designation as it leaves the impression that most Cape Muslims can trace their ancestry straight back to the modern country of Malaysia. This is, as we shall see, not the case. It would perhaps be more useful to note that the vast majority of Cape Muslims can also be classified as being part of the 'Coloured' (sometimes referred to as 'Cape Coloured') community. This designation, normally not regarded as derogatory within the South African context, refers to people from mixed racial backgrounds (indigenous, European settler, South East Asian and slaves from other parts of Africa) who are not traditionally regarded as part of the white or European community. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the make-up and cultural distinctives of the Coloured community as a whole. It is worth remarking, however, that Cape Muslims are accepted and regarded as a vital part of this community. Some of the cultural distinctives to be discussed below can, therefore, be traced back to the membership of most Cape Muslims to the broader Coloured community.

4. The Historical Development of Islam at the Cape

The history of Islam at the Cape is intimately intertwined with the history of Dutch settlement at the Southern tip of Africa. Almost as soon as the settlement was established the Dutch began to ship in labourers from the Amboyne region of the Molucca Islands (now part of Indonesia).⁴⁴ Most of these labourers (known as 'Mardyckers') were Muslim, but they were strongly discouraged from practising their faith openly.⁴⁵ A second major wave of Muslim arrivals came to the Cape as a result of Dutch political troubles in South East Asia. The trade monopoly of the Dutch East India Company in what they called 'East India' (roughly modern Indonesia and Malaysia) was strongly challenged by the native population of this region during the second part of the 17th century. Resistance to Dutch authority was often led by leaders with a strong Muslim inspired power base. Many of these leaders were arrested and sent to the Cape as prisoners. Prison sentences (normally

⁴³ The other two capitals are Pretoria (Administrative) and Bloemfontein (Judicial).

⁴⁴ S.E Dangor, *The Muslim Community in South Africa* (Durban: UDW Press, 1991), 67.

⁴⁵ E. Moosa, *Islam in South Africa in A South African Guide to World Religions* (Claremont: David Philips Press, 1995), 130.

on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was also incarcerated centuries later) were followed up by indefinite exile on the mainland.⁴⁶ This meant that the Cape very quickly acquired a permanent Muslim population (as opposed to the Mardykckers who mostly returned to the Molucca Islands) led by respected and articulate leaders with ample reason to resent the Dutch and, by extension, Christianity.

The best known among these early Islamic leaders, and someone widely regarded as the 'founder' of Islam in South Africa, was an Indonesian nobleman Abidin Tadia Tsjoessoep (later commonly known as 'Sheik Yusuf') who arrived at the Cape in 1694⁴⁷. The date of his arrival is commonly seen as the foundation date for South African Islam. He was able, despite severe restrictions placed on his movements, to establish a small Islamic community on the farm Zandvliet near Cape Town. His grave in a town called Macassar (named after his birthplace) is still a major focus of pilgrimage for some Cape Muslims. There are some questions about his long-term legacy at the Cape since many of his followers were able to return to the East after his death. It is, however, beyond doubt that he led what was probably the first organised and regularly worshipping Islamic community at the Cape. Ebrahim Moosa evaluates his contributions as follows: "*Shaykh Yusuf's impact on Islam at the Cape was perhaps more symbolic than real, largely because, as a prisoner of war, albeit one with a special status, his movement was restricted. Yet it is undeniable that he did manage to transmit knowledge of religion and spirituality to the slaves and free blacks. 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.*"⁴⁸

The last sentence of Moosa's evaluation of Sheik Yusuf's contribution points the way to the major source of Islamic growth during the 18th century. Some of his successors began to teach Islam to the many slaves pouring into the

⁴⁶ M.M. Mahida, *The History of Muslim in South Africa: A Chronology* (Durban: Arabic Study Circle, 1993), 3.

⁴⁷ Sheik Yusuf was born in the Makassar region of Indonesia and educated on the island of Java. He travelled widely throughout the Muslim world and was able to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca (a rarity for East Asian Muslim of his time). He also visited Damascus where he was strongly influenced by Sufism (the mystical strain of Islam). Back in Indonesia he strongly supported his father in law (Sultan Ageng) in his struggle against the Dutch. This led to his arrest and exile to the Cape in 1694.

⁴⁸ E. Moosa, *Islam in South Africa in A South African Guide to World Religions* (Claremont: David Philips Press, 1995), 131.

Cape during this period.⁴⁹ Conversions to Islam were actually actively encouraged by the Dutch settlers since Dutch law stipulated that the children of baptised slaves could not be sold.⁵⁰ This translated into steady growth although open Islamic worship was generally not tolerated by the authorities. It was, in fact, only in 1804 that the practice of non-Christian religions was allowed at the Cape. Before this the focus of Islamic activities was small informal schools where the basics of the faith were taught to children and converts. This process made a significant contribution to the Afrikaans language as the teachers had to make use of a common language and idiom that would be understandable to people from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is for this reason that the first piece of Afrikaans writing was an Islamic teaching text.⁵¹ Many Cape Muslims still speak Afrikaans as their home language.

The first official mosque at the Cape was opened under the leadership of Imam ‘Abd Allah ibn Qadi Abd Al-Salam (1712-1807). Tuan Guru (as he was commonly known) is therefore regarded as the founder of institutional Islam at the Cape.⁵² The Mosque he founded (the Auwal Mosque) was in an area on the lower slopes of Table Mountain in an area known as the 'Bo-Kaap' ('Upper Cape'). This area became the heart of Islamic life at the Cape. Because the community was often led by exiles from an Indonesian or Malay background, the whole community came to be associated with this part of the world, even though slaves, exiles and other community members came from a very wide variety of backgrounds. This led to the fact that Cape Muslims are still referred to as Malays, even though most of them have very tenuous ancestral links with modern Malaysia. A contemporary observer made the following comment on the incongruity of this situation: “Malay here seems equivalent to Mohammedan. They were originally Malays, but now they include every shade, from the blackest nigger (sic) to the most blooming English woman”⁵³

With the British gaining control of the Cape in 1806 Islam entered into a new phase because of the greater institutional freedom allowed by the new authorities. This led to a flurry of activity in terms of mosque and institution

⁴⁹ A. Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995), 43.

⁵⁰ M. Haron, *Three Centuries of NGK Mission among Muslims* in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (London, Volume 19, No. 1, 2002), 116.

⁵¹ Karim, G.M. *The Contribution of Muslims to South African Culture* in *Bulletin of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (Birmingham, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1984), 4.

⁵² A. Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995), 48.

⁵³ L. Duff-Gordon, *Letters from the Cape* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1926), 26.

building. Much of this was driven by internal divisions in the community (with aggrieved parties splitting off and forming new mosques).⁵⁴ In sheer numbers the number of Islamic adherents more than doubled from 3000 in 1800 to about 8000 in 1850.⁵⁵

Towards the end of the 19th century the Muslim community became increasingly confident and assertive. Their attempts to find a place where their rights would be respected in a largely Christian society even erupted into violence on some occasions. The most notable example of this occurred in 1886 when the authorities closed the most important Muslim cemetery (Tanu Baru) at the Cape. The resulting riots and state of emergency led to a much greater level of political awareness and organisation in the Muslim community.⁵⁶ This eventually led to the emergence of high-profile Muslim political leaders. One of the most important was Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman (1872-1940) who would eventually become a member of the Cape Provincial Legislature.⁵⁷

In terms of theology and practice Cape Islam developed some interesting and unique practices due to the fact that Muslim life at the Southern tip of Africa was effectively cut off from the wider world of Islam. Some of these practices can be traced back to the strength of Sufism⁵⁸ at the Cape. Sufism certainly flourished during the Dutch period due to the fact that it could so easily go 'underground'. Large scale organised Sufism did not survive into the modern era in the life of Cape Islam however. It was rather the case that some Sufi practices that would normally be frowned upon by more orthodox Muslims were incorporated into the mainstream of Cape Islam once the setting up of mosques and other institutions became legal. This is confirmed by Moosa:

Other popular practices, such as the use of talismans and amulets (azimat), the communal celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (milad or mawlut), and occasional collective prayers to

⁵⁴ A. Davids, *The Mosques of the Bo-Kaap* (Cape Town: Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980), 124-125.

⁵⁵ A. Davids, *The Mosques of the Bo-Kaap* (Cape Town: Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980), 125.

⁵⁶ A. Davids, *The History of the Tana Buru: The Case for the Preservation of the Muslim Cemetery in Longmarket Street* (Cape Town: Committee for the Preservation of the Tana Buru, 1985), 65.

⁵⁷ S.E. Dangor, *The Muslim Community in South Africa* (Durban: UDW Press, 1991), 6.

⁵⁸ Sufism can be defined as the 'inner' or mystical dimension of Islam. Sufi practices are often significantly at odds with more traditional and orthodox expressions of the Muslim faith.

bless the dead, are also widespread at the Cape. While some puritan strains of Islam may renounce these practices, Islamic orthodoxy at the Cape has incorporated them in an established tradition.⁵⁹

Some of these practices will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

The 20th century was a period of upheaval and dislocation for many communities in South Africa and the Muslim community was no exception. Most Muslims at the Cape were classified as 'Coloured' under the Apartheid policies of the National Party government that came to power 1948. Many Muslims therefore felt themselves to be part of a persecuted group, not so much because of their religion but rather because of their skin colour. Massive fault lines opened up in the community because of differing responses to the reality of Apartheid. Some members of the community responded positively to the fact that the free exercise of Islam was allowed and therefore decided to co-operate with the government as far as possible.⁶⁰ Others became intensely involved with the struggle against the regime. Many of the Muslim leaders who became involved with the resistance to Apartheid⁶¹ became senior leaders in the *United Democratic Front* (in many ways the 'local arm' of the banned and largely exiled *African National Congress*). This meant that many people from a Muslim background rose to become very senior members of the post-1994 government under Nelson Mandela. Their leadership was not universally accepted by Cape Muslims however. The principal reason for this was that in the parliament after the momentous political changes of 1994, as loyal party members first and foremost, they had to support ANC policies that could be interpreted as anti-

⁵⁹ E. Moosa, *Islam in South Africa in A South African Guide to World Religions* (Claremont: David Philips Press, 1995), 138.

⁶⁰ G. Lubbe, *Muslims and Christians in South Africa in Theologia Viatorum* (Pretoria, No. 20, 1993), 50.

⁶¹ Perhaps the most famous Muslim 'martyr' in the struggle against Apartheid was Imam Abdullah Haron. He was born in 1924 in Cape Town and (unusual for a South African Muslim) received his theological training in Mecca. In 1955 he became the Imam of the Claremont mosque in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. He was arrested in 1969 due to his contacts with the (banned) African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress. After his arrest he was detained for 123 days. He died in police custody on 28 May 1969. A post-mortem examination revealed severe internal injuries. For more on his role in the 'Struggle' see: M.M. Mahida, *The History of Muslim in South Africa: A Chronology* (Durban: Arabic Study Circle, 1993), 78.

Islamic (e.g. the legalisation on abortion and gay marriage).⁶²

Perhaps the most disruptive event in the life of the Cape Muslim community during the Apartheid years was the forced removal in 1967 of the entire population from a suburb called District Six, next to the Cape Town CBD, to an undeveloped area known as the Cape Flats. The area, prime real estate, had been classified as a 'white' area under Apartheid legislation. This government action obviously led to a great deal of suffering and dislocation. It also meant that the Islamic community at the Cape was now much more dispersed across the Cape Peninsula than was previously the case. Before the closure of District Six Muslims were overwhelmingly concentrated in District Six and the historic Bo-Kaap area (which was spared forced removals).⁶³

Two of the most significant developments in the life of Cape Islam after the fall of Apartheid were the rise of PAGAD and the increasing 'internationalisation' of community life. Each development will be the discussed in turn.

The Cape Flats where most District Six Muslims were moved to is an area that faces huge social problems, with rampant drug use and violent gang activity topping the list. Anger in the Muslim community at this boiled over during the late 90's through the creation of Muslim dominated vigilante organisations targeting drug traffickers and gangsters. The most famous of these was *People Against Gangsterism and Drugs* (PAGAD). PAGAD succeeded in channelling a great deal of community anger in combatting social evils⁶⁴ but the vigilante nature of the organisation meant that its activities sometimes bordered on illegal. It is far less active today but it did leave a legacy in terms of setting up the Muslim community as intractable opponents of the gang culture that still dominates large parts of the Cape Flats.

As South Africa emerged from international isolation after 1994, the Islamic community was finally able to link up more effectively with the rest of the Muslim world. Some segments of the worldwide Muslim community

⁶² So derided were some of the ANC allied Muslim leaders in the wider Muslim community that a special organisation called '*Muslims Against Illegitimate Leaders*' was established to oppose them.

⁶³ The mosques of District Six were not demolished together with the rest of the suburb and can still be observed on the lower slopes of Table Mountain.

⁶⁴ Pretoria News (28 April 1998), *Muslim Community Calls on PAGAD to Halt Gangs*.

(especially Wahhabi⁶⁵ inspired movements) were, in fact, also very keen to interact with and impose more orthodox interpretations of Islam on Cape Islam. This has led, among other things, to a flurry of foreign funded mosque building activity (often with some significant theological and practical strings attached).⁶⁶ The result of this was that the concerns and practices of international Islamic communities (especially support for Palestine) are increasingly becoming part of the South African Islamic scene. One striking example of this is the growing prevalence of the full face veil on the streets of Cape Town. This is something that is certainly not a traditional part of Cape Islamic culture and its introduction is often fiercely resisted by members of the community. The struggle between 'traditional Cape Muslims' and those who want to bring in emphases regarded as 'foreign' by Cape Muslims will most probably continue to be a major feature of Cape Muslim life into the future.⁶⁷

5. Notable Cultural Features of Cape Islam

The purpose of this section of the article is to briefly analyse some of the notable cultural features of Cape Islam. It will be shown that some of these are unique to Islam at the Cape while others can be compared to similar trends in other parts of the Islamic world:

5.1. Deep Integration into the Cape Town Community

It should be clear from the historical overview presented above that Islam is not a new arrival on the Cape Town scene. As a community with a history stretching back more than 300 years, Cape Town Muslims are an accepted and appreciated part of the fabric of Cape society. This can, for example, be seen in the popularity of the '*Kaase Klopse*' where song troupes made up of predominantly Muslim men compete to sing in the New Year in the most flamboyant way possible. Cape Muslims often make it clear that they know

⁶⁵ Wahhabism is the most conservative and puritanical strain of modern Sunni Islam. It is centred on Saudi Arabia and is 'exported' from there with the aid of the Kingdom's vast oil revenues.

⁶⁶ S. Jeppie, *Amandla and Allahu Akbar: Muslims and Resistance in South Africa* in *Journal for the Study of Religion* (Vol. 4 No. 1, London, 1991)

⁶⁷ E. Moosa, *Islam in South Africa in A South African Guide to World Religions* (Claremont: David Philips Press, 1995), 146.

no other home. This sentiment was expressed in the following way by Faried Esack (translation by author):

We are a community, making up about 1.32% of the South African population. We have been here for 350 years, having originally arrived here as slaves and exiles. Today we have no other home. When, in 1961, the Malaysian king made the offer that we can all come ‘home’ we looked at each other and asked ‘Which home is he talking about’?⁶⁸

In the context of the Cape this integration is most profoundly expressed in the areas of marriage and conversion. Inter-marriage between Muslim and Christian families is very common (in both directions) and members of faith-blended families often move quite easily across religious lines. While it would be erroneous to assert that all Cape Muslims share in this relaxed attitude to inter-marriage and conversion (particularly given the growing influence of Wahhabi influenced groups), it is nevertheless a significant and relatively unique feature of Muslim culture at the Cape.

5.2. Devotion to the shrines of ‘Saints’ and Holy Men

The centuries of isolation from the wider world of Islam meant that Cape Muslims had to, of necessity, develop alternative pilgrimage traditions since visiting Mecca was an unattainable dream for the vast majority of the members of such a poor, isolated and marginalized community. The need for local ‘places of pilgrimage’ was filled, aided by Sufi emphases, by the graves of the pioneers of Cape Islam.⁶⁹ Foremost among these local shrines was the grave of Sheik Yusuf at Macassar, but there are also many other such shrines (or ‘kramats’) dotted around the Cape Peninsula and further inland. Since the main shrines are concentrated in a relatively small area, with all of them reachable in an hour or two journeying by car, it is possible for Cape Muslims to visit them regularly. For at least some of them these kramats (rather than local mosques) form the centre of their spiritual lives with the saints being honoured and ‘consulted’ during major life events and rites of

⁶⁸ Die Burger (16 January 1999), *Mynveld word betree met soeke na ware aard van Moslems*

⁶⁹ For a book length treatment of the prevalence and nature of Sufi beliefs and practices in South African Islam, see: J. Gilchrist, *Sufi Muslim Saints and Shrines of India and South Africa* (Johnesburg: MERCESA, 1997)

passage.⁷⁰ This devotion to shrines is, once again, something that is frowned upon by more traditional Muslims, but many Cape Muslims are fiercely protective of what they see as a very important and non-negotiable part of their heritage.

5.3. Folk Islamic Practices

Folk Islam refers to non-traditional attempts by ‘ordinary’ Muslims to influence and change their environments.⁷¹ It is often preoccupied by evil spiritual beings (which are mostly identified with ‘jinn’ in Islamic cosmology) and ways of placating them, thus minimising their influence. Folk Islamic practices tend to be heavily influenced by context and the pre-Islamic religions of the areas where it occurs. Its influence also tends to be weaker where strong orthodox theological institutions exist.⁷² All of this means that early Cape Islam (consisting of people from a vast array of previously animistic cultures and completely isolated from major Islamic institutions) must have been a prime candidate for the development of a vigorous folk Islamic culture. This is indeed how it turned out. Charms, amulets, spells and other hallmarks of folk Islamic practice are mainstays of the spiritual experience of many Cape Muslims. A special class of practitioner (called ‘Dukums’), believed to be skilled at providing means to keep evil at bay, developed at the Cape and were (and are) widely consulted in times of need. An interesting facet of Cape Folk Islam is its ‘ecumenical’ character. Many Cape Muslims are more than willing to pray at Christian (mostly Catholic) shrines if they perceive them to be powerful repositories of spiritual power. It is also interesting to note that many of the early settlers were more than willing to make use of the services of the ‘dukums’ (often known as ‘Slamaaiers’ by rural Afrikaners) to help them to find water or to

⁷⁰ E. Moosa, *Islam in South Africa in A South African Guide to World Religions* (Claremont: David Philips Press, 1995), 143.

⁷¹ B.A. Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims* (Crowborough: MARC, 1989), 15.

⁷² Paul Hiebert distinguishes ‘folk Islam’ from ‘formal Islam’ in the following way: “Formal and folk Islam each deal with different areas of human concern. The former focusses on ultimate questions: on the most comprehensive and lasting nature of things, and on the origins, meaning and destiny of the universe, of Muslims and of the Muslim. Folk Islam concerns it more with everyday human problems. ... The domain of folk Islam includes such things as jinn, saints, sacred animals and shrines, evil eye, omens, divination, amulets and magic.” P.G. Hiebert, *Power Encounter and Folk Islam* in J.D. Woodberry, J. D (ed.) *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Pasadena: MARC, 1984), 45-61.

ward off evil influences on their farms. Many of them, therefore, ranged far beyond areas of Muslim settlement to offer their services.

5.4. Significant Levels of Westernisation

The isolation of Cape Islam from the rest of the Muslim world means that communal knowledge of 'Islamic languages' gradually faded away. Arabic obviously continued to be used as a 'faith language' through the reading of the Qur'an and the performance of prayers, but it was really only a very tiny minority who had any knowledge of the meaning of the text. The vast majority of Muslims at the Cape could eventually only express themselves in Afrikaans and later English. This made them probably one of the very first Islamic communities in the world unable to speak any of the major languages of the Muslim world (Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Malay/Indonesian) or their derivatives.⁷³ Language has an immense influence on cultural development and this linguistic reality eventually also translated for many into a cultural orientation that is, in many ways, quite Western. This means that although Cape Muslims are, for the most part, very loyal to their faith, most are very comfortable with Western food (provided it is halaal), music and ways of expression.

6. Contextual Factors Shaping Cape Islam

In this section we shall be looking at factors that are not so much cultural in nature, but rather external factors related to the wider South African and Western Cape political and social context. The most important among these include the following:

6.1. Deep Concern over Social and Moral Decline

It has already been noted that one of the most significant recent developments in the life of Cape Muslims was the rise of Muslim dominated vigilante organisations seeking to challenge rampant drug trafficking and gangsterism on the Cape Flats (the part of the peninsula where most Muslims live). While the vast majority of Muslims did not actually join organisations such as PAGAD, it was clear that they did enjoy strong community support.⁷⁴ This

⁷³ S.E. Dangor, *The Muslim Community in South Africa* (Durban: UDW Press, 1991), 6.

⁷⁴ Pretoria News (28 April 1998), *Muslim Community Calls on PAGAD to Halt Gangs*.

was due to a clear perception in the community that deep rooted social decline was taking hold in the Coloured community and that a return to the values of Islam was the best possible response. Although vigilantism is now far less common as a response to the social ills of the 'Flats', there is still a widespread feeling that one of the main priorities of the Muslim community should be to campaign for social reform through whatever means necessary. In some circles this concern translated into open calls for the adoption of shari'a law in Muslim dominated areas.⁷⁵

6.2. A Community in Search of Leadership

It can almost be stated that the political realities of South Africa conspired to alienate two sets of leaders from different sections of the Cape Muslim community from each other. It was firstly the case that many of the ulama (religious scholars) followed a more-or-less conciliatory policy when it came to the National Party government, arguing that widespread Muslim agitation and unrest would lead to restrictions on the freedom of worship that Cape Muslims enjoyed. This meant that many of them came to be regarded as collaborators with the Apartheid regime by some in the community.⁷⁶ The second group of leaders were those who actively opposed Apartheid under the banner of the *United Democratic Front*. They tended not to be Islamic scholars, but were certainly people with a wide following in the community. Many of these leaders rose to very senior positions in the ANC government after 1994. The problem was, however, that they were required by internal party discipline to vote for many hugely unpopular (in the Muslim community at least) measures that the ANC was pushing through parliament. This included liberal abortion laws,⁵⁷ legalisation of gambling and 'gay marriage' legislation. This led to many of these leaders being effectively disowned by the rest of the Muslim community.⁷⁷ These two factors resulted in the fact that Cape Islam was effectively left without leaders who could act as moral authorities and spokespeople of the whole community at a time when effective leadership was sorely needed.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ S.E. Dangor, *The Muslims of South Africa: Problems and Concerns of a Minority Community* (Durban: UDW Press, 1994), 121-125.

⁷⁶ G. Lubbe, *Muslims and Christians in South Africa* in *Theologia Viatorum* (Pretoria, No. 20, 1993), 50.

⁷⁷ Beeld (7 November 1996), *Moslem LP's wat Aborsie Steun sal Gestraf Word*

⁷⁸ A. Tayob, *Charting Institutions on Expanding Frontiers in Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1999), 3.

6.3. A Community in Search of a Place in Wider Society

Islam is growing fast in South Africa (mainly through inward migration of Muslim refugees from other parts of Africa but also through Gulf-funded Islamic welfare programs in poor Black communities),⁷⁹ but Muslims still represent a small minority in the wider South African context. This means that reforms to benefit the Islamic community cannot realistically be achieved through the ballot box. Muslims, nevertheless, had high hopes that Muslim Personal Law (governing issues such as polygamy, Islamic marriage, divorce and inheritance principles etc.) would be recognized by the ANC government as a 'reward' for Muslim involvement in the struggle against Apartheid. The government took steps in this direction through the setting up of a *Muslim Personal Law Panel*. This was, however, riven with infighting due the massive distrust between different parties and leaders (see above) and the project was gradually abandoned.⁸⁰ This means that some Muslims feel like 'strangers in their own country' since they can see no realistic medium term prospect that reforms which they regard as urgently needed will be implemented.⁸¹

6.4. Responses to the Worldwide Resurgence of Political Islam

A discussion of the reasons behind, and the impact of, the worldwide growth of what might be termed 'political Islam' or 'Islamism' lies beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say, however, that the role of Islam in the world and its interaction with political structures is something that is very much on the radar of Muslim communities the world over. The fact that different sections of the community tend to give different answers to these questions can often be very disruptive and divisive, and the situation of the Muslim community in Cape Town is no exception. Deep fault lines have opened between different sectors of the community, between those who want to be actively involved in supporting Muslim groups calling for worldwide Islamic revolutions (sometimes to the point of providing material support and even setting up training camps)⁸² and those who feel that South African Muslims have no business getting involved in foreign political conflicts.

⁷⁹ M. Mumisa, *Islam and Proselytism in South Africa and Malawi* in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (Volume 22, Number 2, London), 265-298.

⁸⁰ Business Day (2 November 1998), *Muslims Desperately Seeking a National Leader*

⁸¹ Z.B. Randeree, *Muslim Minorities with Special Reference to South Africa* (Durban: UDW Press, 1997), 73.

⁸² The Daily Maverick (13 May 2013), *Al-Qaeda: Alive and Well in South Africa?*

7. Preliminary Reflections on the Gospel Implications of the Cultural and Contextual Background of Cape Islam

It should be clear from the discussion above that there are several cultural and contextual factors that will have to be taken into account while devising an outreach strategy aimed at Cape Muslims. These include the following:

- The fact that the Muslim community is so deeply integrated into the wider community (even to the point of extensive intermarriage) is significant. It should be easier to ‘gain entry’ to this community making use of existing connections with Christians than would be the case for many other Islamic communities around the world.
- Constant contact with Christians does not only have positive implications however. The fact that Muslims form such a small minority within the Cape Town context means that many members of the community will have had to think deeply about why they do not belong to the majority religion. Islamic community organisations also work hard to equip local Muslims to ‘withstand’ Christian evangelism, often through distributing large numbers of copies of the materials of anti-Christian Muslim apologists like Ahmad Deedat⁸³ and Zakir Naik. This means that those attempting to share the Gospel with South African Muslims will have to be particularly well-versed in dealing with standard Muslim objections to the Gospel.
- It should be clear from the preceding sections that many Cape Muslims entertain beliefs and participate in practices that could be described as ‘Folk Islamic’. Since these beliefs and practices can often differ markedly from orthodox Islam the evangelist will have to take great care to understand context specific beliefs in order to share the Gospel in a culturally appropriate way. In the case of Cape Islam the focus on the ‘magic’ and the appeasement of malevolent spirits is

⁸³ It is a matter of pride for many Cape Muslims that Deedat (1918-2005), who engaged in many high-profile debates with prominent international Christian leaders, was South African. His works are still widely circulated in the South African Muslim community. There have, however, also been critical voices within the Islamic community. Such criticism often centres on accusations that Deedat was much too provocative and that his vehement attacks against Christianity hurt rather than helped Muslim outreach to Christians. See for example: M. Makki, *How Relevant is Deedat’s Provocative Method of Propagating Islam for the New South Africa?* in *The Muslim Digest* (Volume 16, Durban, 1994), 56.

a significant factor in the lives of some. Evangelistic approaches focussing on Christ as the conqueror over the powers of darkness may, therefore, be particularly appropriate (cf. Colossians 1:16, Ephesians 6:12-17).

- The vast majority of Cape Town Muslims belong to the Coloured community. This means that they, or at least their parents, lived through the years of Apartheid as part of a group that was the target of official discrimination. As this discrimination was initiated by an ostensibly Christian government it significantly influenced the perception of Christianity in the minds of many community members. Those sharing the Gospel with Cape Muslims will therefore have to take great care to differentiate the message of Christ from the actions of some who claimed to be followers of Him.
- The rise of groups like PAGAD reflects a deep sense of anxiety about social ills in the Muslim community. It is not uncommon to hear statements like ‘Islam is the solution!’⁸⁴ when issues like these are discussed. Many Cape Muslims would also proudly declare that ‘Islam is a way of life’ that has answers that can transform society. The implication of this is that Islam is different from Christianity which is perceived as merely a personal faith with no wider implications for creating just and liveable societies. In response to this it will have to be stated that the Christian faith represents a complete worldview that has been very successful in transforming individual lives and societies.⁸⁵

8. Conclusion

At the beginning of this article it was stated that we should be wary of ‘one size fits all’ approaches to Muslim Evangelism and that cultural and contextual factors should be carefully taken into account when outreach strategies are developed. The author trusts that the analysis of Cape Islam that was presented above confirmed the truth of this statement. The Cape

⁸⁴ This is, for example, the slogan of *Qibla*, a movement openly campaigning for an ‘Islamic State’ on the Cape Flats. See: Beeld (5 September 1998), *Die Donker Hart van PAGAD*

⁸⁵ It is for this reason that the author believe that the ‘Worldview Thinking’ heritage of Reformed Christianity can be of particular value in discussions with Muslims about the way in which society should be shaped.

Muslim community has a unique history, displays unique characteristics and some Cape Muslims also hold to distinctive beliefs. Any evangelist will, therefore, have to take careful note of the factors listed in this article when approaching them with the life-changing message of Christ.