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## TOWARDS A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF ALMSGIVING IN “SOUTH AFRICAN ISLAM”<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In human history it is not uncommon for religious ideas to shape the behavioural attitude of actors within it. This paper finds its influences in Max Weber’s seminal essay *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. The quest of this paper is to investigate the formations of different forms of Islam in South Africa and how the ideas of early historical Islam at the Cape influences attitudes toward charity (*sadaqa*) and obligatory almsgiving (*zakah*). The Cape Islamic tradition is contrasted against the more doctrinal form of the religion in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The methodology employed is historical-sociology which, in this case study, allows further comparison with the Dutch Reformed Church in the region and its attitude toward the “poor whites”. Conclusionary remarks are offered after three prominent Islamic organisations involved in Islamic forms of charity are investigated.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper finds its inspiration in Max Weber’s grand project published at the beginning of the twentieth century: understanding the role of religion and its “*innere Zusammenhang*”<sup>3</sup> with modern capitalism (Weber 1962). In the current paper, pressing questions – explicit and sometimes implied – are addressed, questions with regard to the relationship between religion and the attitude toward poverty alleviation in general, and more immediately, the case of “South African Islam”. Questions include: How are we to understand poverty in capitalist societies where life chances are seemingly equal for all citizens? Is it fair to expect the same level of commitment to the poor given the divergent religious backgrounds in our globalising

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2 A contribution to the consultation on *Religions and the Eradication of Poverty in the Context of Economic Globalisation* at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, 19-20 May 2008. The consultation formed the second leg of a four year Research Project on *Religions in the Search of the Common Good in Pluralistic Societies*.

3 The term *innere Zusammenhang* literally means an “inner hanging together”. For Weber it is the intrinsic or elective affinity between modern capitalism and the peculiar Protestant ethic that he sets out to prove that promotes a distinctive synergy between religion and capital.

world today? Then, more specifically, how does the religion of Islam in South Africa engage with issues like poverty, given the country's unique socio-historical background? And finally, how does "South African Islam" attend to its social responsibilities? This question is addressed through an investigation of three Muslim organisations – Mustadafin, a Cape-based social welfare organisation, the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) and the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF) – and their use of doctrine in poverty alleviation. Drawing on the methodological approach of Joseph Bryant and John Hall (2005:I), this paper underscores the idea that

the manifold realities investigated by economists, sociologists, scholars of religious studies, theologians, and other students of the human social condition can find comprehension only through a full engagement with historical modes of analysis while progressively enfolding within its interpretive operations a corresponding sociological awareness.

Max Weber's essay, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, first published in 1904, continues to serve as the touchstone for ongoing discussion about the rise of "modern capitalism"<sup>4</sup> and the role of Protestantism in the shaping of modernity.<sup>5</sup> For Weber, it was Protestantism, most notably in its Calvinist variant, which was instrumental in providing the "ideal" legitimation to the incipient capitalism that was taking shape in Western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. Weber's celebrated thesis, however, has not gone unchallenged. From its first publication to the present, for approximately 100 years, scholars have argued from both sides in either affirming or rejecting Weber's thesis.

The Protestant ethic thesis has generally been assessed in reference to Europe and the Americas. More recently, however, scholars have been extending the Weber question to non-Western countries. The expansion of economic development and modernisation in non-Western countries has stirred renewed interest in Weber's thesis (Eisenstadt 1968:3). Over the last decade, more scholars are returning to the Weber thesis as China emerges as an economic superpower, and then in particular considering Weber's work with reference to the religions of China. Many seek within the Protestant ethic, or some religious equivalent, as the key to an understanding of why some non-Western countries have achieved modernisation while others have not. Others are interested in how religious ideas affect economic outcomes, as well as other psycho-social behaviour such as, for example, racism, and in the case of this paper how it affects the poor and poverty alleviation.

Weber's essay seeks to offer a causal explanation for the spirit of modern capitalism. This, he says, is to be found in the Protestant ethic. This ethic differs from that adopted by other groups such as Roman Catholics and Jews in that rather than a ruthless pursuit of capital, the Protestants had a somber and more calculating approach to the accumulation of capital:

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<sup>4</sup> For Weber's distinction between premodern and modern capitalism, see his *General economic history* (1981), Part IV.

<sup>5</sup> Modernity, like all epochs, includes distinctive forms of economic and political organisation, characteristic cultural institutions, and persistent tensions between antithetical civilisational trends.

Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. The infraction of its rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty. That is the essence of the matter. It is not mere business astuteness, that sort of thing is common enough, it is an ethos. This is the quality which interests us (Weber 1962:51).

This psycho-social attitude, Weber argues, had its roots in the religious ideologies of the Reformation period of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Similarly, the Chinese with their Confucian-Taoist religious background or the radical world renunciation of Indian Buddhism engages capital in unique ways and finds ideas that set it on a "developmental course that permitted an enduringly functional social presence" for centuries (Bryant 2008:538). Islam finds its classical formulations within seventh century *jahiliyah-bedouin* society and sets its "accommodative transformation" process along unique paths very different from those of other world religions.

Taking my cue from Weber then: what ideological underpinnings within Islam send the actors in Islamic tradition along a path of a socio-psychologically constructed attitude toward poverty? In this case, the religious attitude is not necessarily primarily for Islam's engagement with modern capitalism, as Weber might have sought to argue, but rather an attitude that is born of a philosophy toward capital accumulation in general. One has to bear in mind that much of Islamdom is still rooted in patriarchal societies around the world, engaging traditional forms of capital accumulation and Islamic modes of addressing the needs of the poor – as, for example, in bedouin societies in North Africa, where Islamic societies are far removed from notions like bureaucracy and the rationalisation of economics along Euro-American lines. With this broader teleology of societies and their modes of production, a historical sociology of Islam in South Africa will be attempted.

However, an explanation of the ideological tenets of Islam that informs its orthodoxy and orthopraxy will be offered first. Islam insists on five "pillars". First, the belief in "the God", Allah, and the belief that the seventh century Arabian prophet, Muhammad, as Allah's prophet. Second, that it is mandatory to carry out the five daily prayers (*salat*). Third, that it is obligatory to give *zakat* (alms) to the poor. Fourth, it is a must for the adherents of the faith to abstain from food and drink for one lunar month (*Ramadan*) of the year. And, finally, that a Muslim must visit the Islamic holy city of Mecca on pilgrimage (*hajj*) at least once in his/her lifetime only if he/she has the financial means to do so. The ontology of these tenets is non-negotiable and is ranked in order of sacrality. It is therefore more important for one to give alms to the poor than to fast during the month of *Ramadan*. Or, it is not orthopraxy for a Muslim to go on holy pilgrimage if he or she has not given alms to the poor. Epistemologically, these tenets are rooted in the *Qur'ān* (Islam's sacred text) which believers agree are the literal words of Allah, sometimes even expressed in the first person. Muhammad, they believe, was only the medium through which the words were revealed. What is evident in these injunctions is the necessary social commitment to a collective: a social responsibility that is built upon a cast-iron ontological platform.

Besides these five injunctions placed on Muslims in the *Qur'ān*, the Islamic holy book also lays the groundwork for Islamic ethical economic transactions including prohibitions on investments and usury, the relationship between employee and employer, laws of inheritance, attitudes on frugality and thrift, the question of hoarding, many laws regarding the philosophy of money and laws, and attitudes regarding the giving of charity. The Islamic notion of giving alms to the poor takes two forms: (1) *Zakat*, which is the obligatory giving of alms assessed annually on all personal wealth above a set minimum; and (2) *Sadaqa*, which is the *Qur'ān's* motivation to believers to donate voluntary alms to the community. However, a theme that is ever-present is the responsibility of one human toward another, and in many instances “human” is the preferred noun used over “Muslim”. For example, the Arabic phrase “*Rahmatullilalamin*” (God as a mercy to humankind) is favoured over “*Rahmatulillmuslimin*” (God as a mercy to Muslims).

The value of these *Qur'ānic* injunctions is not to be taken lightly as we witness its power in South Africa in 2008. The notion that a seventh-century Islamic economic idea, formulated in a desert region far removed from competing civilisations, could have import more than fourteen-hundred years later on the southern tip of Africa is soon dispelled when you visit the local banking institutions – many with major share-holdings by British and Chinese investment companies. The terms “Islamic banking” or “Shari’a compliant banking” are catchwords used by the major banks in South Africa including ABSA, Standard, and First National Banks. What it explicitly says is that it values its Muslim customers and what it implies is that a seventh-century Arabian idea is real in South Africa today, albeit pushed along by the dynamics of interest. In summary, the psycho-social attitude that early Islam developed through ideas is still evident today and is felt ubiquitously in Muslim societies of South Africa, including ideas and related attitudes toward the poor.

### Islam compared to other faiths and churches in South Africa today<sup>6</sup>

Religious group	Number of followers	%
African traditional belief	125 898	0.3
Anglican churches	1 722 076	3.8
Apostolic Faith Mission	246 193	0.5
Bandla Lama Nazaretha	248 825	0.5
Baptist churches	691 235	1.5
Congregational churches	508 826	1.1
Dutch Reformed churches	3 005 697	6.7
Ethiopian type churches	1 150 102	2.6
Hinduism	551 668	1.2
<b>Islam</b>	<b>654 064</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Judaism	75 549	0.2
Lutheran churches	1 130 983	2.5
Methodist churches	3 035 719	6.8

<sup>6</sup> This table is from Statistics South Africa (2001) and presents data for revelatory analysis into religious affiliation post-1994.

Religious group	Number of followers	%
No religion	6 767 165	15.1
Orthodox churches	42 253	0.1
Other African independent churches	656 644	1.5
Other Apostolic churches	5 627 320	12.6
Other beliefs	283 815	0.6
Other Christian churches	2 890 151	6.4
Other Reformed churches	226 499	0.5
Other Zionist churches	1 887 147	4.2
Pentecostal/Charismatic churches	3 695 211	8.2
Presbyterian churches	832 497	1.9
Roman Catholic Church	3 181 332	7.1
Undetermined	610 974	1.4
Zion Christian Church	4 971 931	11.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44 819 774</b>	

### Islam by region<sup>7</sup>

Region	Number of followers	%
Eastern Cape	19 671	3.0
Free State	4 036	0.6
Gauteng	150 081	22.9
KwaZulu-Natal	142 459	21.8
Limpopo	10 287	1.6
Mpumalanga	16 837	2.6
Northern Cape	4 651	0.7
North West Province	13 133	2.0
Western Cape	292 908	44.8

### RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARD POVERTY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Poverty today is different to the poverty of a pre-capitalist context where farmers might have been victims of drought or disease. In the pre-capitalist era, agrarian societies – mostly defined within a patriarchal society – were neither necessarily self-consciously “poor”, nor were they always socially stratified as such. In South African history over the last four centuries, people were socially stratified according to religion and colour with terms like Christian, heathen, Malay, bastard, white, mixed, black, Indian, and coloured being some of the primary markers used. The unique historical sociology of South Africa, especially since the arrival of the Dutch in 1652 and continuing today, produces social classes and stratifications that favour whites over people of colour on the hierarchical rungs of affluence. What is suggested here is that poverty in South Africa was and remains predominantly a problem for those of colour. This is not to dismiss the plight of the indigent whites in South African history over the last centuries.

<sup>7</sup> These statistics are taken from the *South African Christian Handbook, 2005-2006* (Symington 2005:37-76).

The Reformed Church at the Cape between 1652 and 1795 showed a heightened commitment to the poor, offering support through both church and state institutions – the two intricately fused in this case. Examples abound in early Afrikaner history where poor and destitute immigrants were afforded land, money and facilities to alleviate states of poverty, and in many cases these poor would within a generation become upwardly mobile and join the *nouveau riche*. After the South African War of 1899-1902, many Afrikaners, almost exclusively from the Reformed tradition, were forced off their farms by the forces of modern capitalism. For many decades following the war, the plight of the “poor white” dominated both church and state agendas. These “poor whites”, mostly unskilled workers handicapped by language and lack of material means, posed the threat of developing a mixed-racial stratum and possible alienation from their church and mainstream white society. The threat of racial mixing among the “poor whites” served as the primary motivation to poverty eradication (Freund 1992:xviii). The kind hands of the Dutch Reformed Church through the formation of the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV), established in 1904, came together precisely to solve the “poor white” problem (De Gruchy 2005:89). The Dutch Reformed Church also established labour colonies like De Lagersdrift in 1907 which “became the focus of the ‘poor white solution’ in Middelburg for the next thirty years” (Morrell 1992:4).

All the focused attention that the Dutch Reformed Church afforded its poor was informed by ideas. The fact that poverty alleviation was almost exclusively focused on whites speaks of a peculiar attitude that finds its origins in notions like *uitverkore volk van God* (“chosen people of God”), “showing outward material signs of election” and the notion of a calling (Begg 2008:35). In the South African form of Calvinism, these ideas were combined with colonialism and, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, this was even supported and legitimated by racial Darwinism. These ideas were used to rationalise the necessity of alleviating poverty among “poor whites” while, at the same time, to appease the social conscience when it came to the neglect of the poor of colour.

### A BRIEF SOCIAL HISTORY OF ISLAM: 1654 TO THE PRESENT

In South Africa, Islam is roughly as old as Calvinism. Historically – around the second half of the seventeenth century – Islam was imported to the Cape along with the institution of slavery. These slaves, many of Islamic origin, were initially brought by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) from their colonies in East and West Africa, South India, Ceylon and the Malaysian Archipelago, to provide labour for the nascent Dutch colony at the Cape. Since the VOC would only allow Calvinism freedom of religion at the Cape whilst opposing other forms of Christianity, Islam as slave religion, offers interesting insights into master-slave relationships of that time. The fact that the slaves were able to continue in private with their Islamic practice and ritual, says much about how those in power viewed the Muslim slave and his religion.

Among the prominent Muslim captives to arrive at the Cape was Sheikh Yusuf, also known as Abadin Tadia Tjoessoep, who came from Ceylon for further incarceration at the Cape. Parts of his writings translated in the twentieth century reveal the strong influences of

mysticism in his religious thought and practice. Sheikh Yusuf was followed by Tuan Guru in the late eighteenth century. Both these prominent scholars were committed to political ideals that cost them their freedom in their countries of residence and they were subsequently banished to and incarcerated in the Cape Colony by the VOC. The history of Islam in South Africa, and especially at the Cape, including its philosophies and rituals, owes much to the charisma of these religious virtuosi.

However, historians generally agree that Islam's growth at the Cape came mostly from the relationship between white colonialism and slave ownership. The 1770 Statutes of India, imposed at the Cape, prohibited the sale of Christian slaves. The colonists interpreted this as interference in their rights to the ownership of slaves, and instead of leading their slaves towards Christianity, they encouraged them to become Muslims. Therefore, these regulations, which had been specifically designed to promote Christianity among the slave population, in reality led to the promotion of Islam. The result was that by 1800, the benches set aside for slaves in the Groote Kerk were empty (Da Costa & Davids 2005:59).

For the first two centuries (1652-1860), Islam in South Africa was largely confined to the Cape. The rituals and practices of these formative years cemented structure and agency, at least for the Cape Muslims in the South Africa of today, and find its impetus in *tasawwuf* (Sufi orientation). The Muslim slaves and prisoners brought to the Cape came from regions where Islamic practices generally followed one of the four schools of religious jurisprudence (*madh-hab*), and certain special orders of mysticism known as *tasawwuf* orders. Slaves from West Africa followed the *Malikiyyah madh-hab* and the *Qadiriyyah tasawwuf*. East African slaves followed and promoted *Qadiriyyah* and *Alawiyyah tasawwuf* while adhering to the jurisprudence of Sheikh Shafi. Some of the other *tasawwuf* orders that can be traced to the Cape are, the *Qadiriyyah*, *Alawiyyah*, *Sammaniyyah*, *Shattariyyah*, *Naqshabandiyyah*, *Suhrawardiyyah*, *Chistiyyah* and *Aydarussiyyah* (Da Costa & Davids 2005:129). What is important to note is that before the institutionalisation of Islam at the Cape around the beginning of the twentieth century, the rituals, beliefs, philosophies, and practices of the Muslims were strongly infused with *tasawwuf* philosophies.

A text compiled by Tuan Guru in 1781, *Ma'rifah al-Islam wa al-Iman*, while the teacher was still incarcerated on Robben Island, became the main textbook of the school he started at the Cape.

Through over 600 pages, the *Ash'arite*<sup>8</sup> concepts of *taqdir* (predetermination), *iradah* (the Will of God), *taqwah* (piety, attained through fearing God, and being submissive to His commands) and *iktisab* (acquisition – in the sense that God created the acts of man, and man acquires them) – Tuan Guru manages to weave a system of social relations in which the slaves and their free-black slaves owners could coexist harmoniously (Da Costa & Davids 2005:48-49).

The *Ash'arite* philosophy that Tuan Guru employs speaks to the strong Sufi commitment to the first pillar of Islam: absolute philosophical monotheism. Given the slave condition, orthodoxy

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<sup>8</sup> *Ash'arite* followers adhere to the basic theological methodology and doctrine of Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 935).

was favoured over orthopraxy. A slave could not pay *zakat*, the third pillar of Islam as he or she was said to be *onvolkoem* (“incomplete”). The notion of being *onvolkoem* excluded the slave from leading the congregational prayers on a Friday. What we see emerging is an “*ulamaless*” (without priests) class developing that feeds egalitarianism of a certain (“low”) form of the Islamic tradition during these early years.

The import of these early *Sufi* leaders abounds. A tour of the many *kramat(s)*<sup>9</sup> around the Western Cape affirms the significance of the *tasawwuf* orders on Muslim ritual, practice and philosophy still present today.<sup>10</sup> Those

very specific Sufi rituals and hymnology have survived and what these practices suggest is that folk or “low” Islam and folk mysticism were practised rather than “high” Islam of scripturalism and puritanism (Moosa 1995:137).

The nineteenth century brought British liberal ideals to the Cape, including the final emancipation of slavery in 1838. From the 1860s onwards, the British also brought their own waves of indentured Muslims, merchant-types, from their colonies in India to work on the sugar plantations in Natal. These Muslims would remain relatively distinct from those Muslims at the Cape up until today. In the Robert Redfield typology of “folk versus urban” religion or Ferdinand Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft* or “low” versus “high” religiosity, Islam at the Cape conformed to the more parochial, folk, *Gemeinschaft* and the “low” form of the religion. In contrast to the “low” form of Islam, the “*ulama* tradition is unmistakably the carrier of ‘high’ or universal Islam” (Moosa 1995:143). The Muslims of the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly Natal) and Gauteng (formerly Transvaal) today represent 21.8% and 22.9% of all South African Muslims respectively. These Muslims subscribe to the *Hanafi* School of jurisprudence

... as interpreted by ‘ulama of the Indian seminary of Deoband, founded in 1867 near Delhi, and its satellite colleges in India, Pakistan and South Africa (Moosa 1995:143).

The conflation of peculiar aspects of religion, history, politics, and economics in Natal and Transvaal produced a distinct “high” form of Islam in the northern provinces of South Africa.

Today, followers of Islam in South Africa number around 650 000 or 1.5% of the religious affiliation in the country (see earlier table). However, when taking a closer look at their distribution in South Africa, it becomes apparent that most are located in the Western Cape (44.2%) with almost all of the balance of the South African Muslim population found in KwaZulu-Natal (21.8%) and Gauteng (22.9%). It is argued that Islam remained relatively limited when compared to Christianity partly because it was historically denied any state support, and partly due to the modes of production that Cape Muslim slaves engaged: mostly semi-skilled artisans confined to and around the major cities where their skilled labour was needed. Thus, the Islamic religious tradition experienced very little growth in rural areas.

<sup>9</sup> A *kramat* (holy site) is the name given to a *Wali* (friend) of Allah or a place where he lies buried.

<sup>10</sup> Today, approximately 50% of all South African Muslims live in the Western Cape.



The post-1994 era witnessed the removal of the Group Areas Act. Ironically, this divisive Act that dumped people of similar racial classification together unified the Muslims, mostly coloured, in their townships and suburbs. The apartheid years fostered a sense of belonging that is now slowly being eroded as South Africa moves from a race-based society to a class-based one. In many ways post-1994 Islam is moving from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. The movement in social stratification, from middle class to upper class, is especially evident in the Cape with its large Muslim community, where individuals readily engage higher forms of Western education and capital.

## THE CASE OF ISLAM AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION AT THE CAPE

Against the above historical backdrop, this study will look at three major Islamic organisations involved with welfare and poverty alleviation in the Western Cape: the Mustadafin Foundation founded in 1986, the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) founded in 1945, and the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF) established in 1974. The primary question addressed is: what is the attitude of these organisations toward serving the poor and how do religious ideas and doctrine within Islam inform their respective attitudes. By investigating these three organisations, through a *verstehen* (Weberian interpretive) sociological methodology, an attempt will be made to offer an explanation as to the religious ideas in Islam that inform the attitude toward poverty alleviation in the Western Cape and in South Africa at large.

Mustadafin was officially founded in 1986 but had unofficially been in operation a couple of years before that. The organisation finds its roots in the Cape Town uprisings against apartheid, working mostly in the then tumultuous areas of Crossroads, Langa and Nyanga – then exclusively black residential areas. This group works at grassroots level with a full-time staff of 42 and a host of volunteers. Of the 42 employees, 23 are Muslim and 19 non-Muslim. The gender stratification shows a workforce of 35 women and 7 men. There is an absence of official clergy (*Imams* or *Sheikhs*).

Mustadafin's organisational philosophy and approach is holistic and, in an attempt to pursue its ideals, it has to date 21 daycare centres concentrated in Khayelitsha, Crossroads, Delft, Mannenberg and Philippi – the poorest areas of Cape Town. Mustadafin supports an adult literacy program, mainly geared towards home-based care and vocational skills. It also supports and is actively involved in HIV/Aids programs, providing around 3 000 HIV/Aids patients with food on a daily basis. Their feeding scheme also provided for around 15 000 men, women, and children daily, through shelters and their own centres. Mustadafin is also involved in disaster relief programs in partnership with the city of Cape Town, some of the Cape radio stations like Radio 786, Voice of the Cape, and Heart 104.9, and some of the local banks like Standard Bank South Africa. They host Christmas dinners and Eid<sup>11</sup> lunches for "their people". More recently, Mustadafin has embarked on transporting seventy-five children from their daycare centres in impoverished areas to a more-affluent primary school located in the city of Cape Town. The funding for Mustadafin's day-to-day activities comes mainly

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<sup>11</sup> *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha* are the two sacred days of celebration in Islam.

from local Muslim businesses, the greater Muslim community in the Cape, and occasional grants from corporations and Christian churches<sup>12</sup> in the community.

My own research was done by way of interviews and personal observation at three of the Mustadafin centres. In response to a question relating to their target audience, the director of the organisation replied, “*Hudan lil-nas*”, which literally means “guidance to [hu] mankind”. When asked to explain “*Hudan lil-nas*”, in summary her response was that there are no distinctions made when it comes to religion, race or background. “Whoever needs help, gets help” was part of her response. In response to the question as to what percentage of the roughly 15 000 people that are fed belong to the Islamic religious tradition, she had no idea. When asked if the majority were Muslim or non-Muslim, she replied without hesitation, “Non-Muslim”. In response to questions regarding commitment to Islamic education at the daycare centres, she responded that only 3 of the 21 centres were *madrassa* (Muslim school) oriented. She was quick to respond that their philosophy does not insist on a *madrassa*-style preschool education but that it was only on the insistence of a predominantly Muslim group at a few centres that they had decided to accommodate parents (Johnstone-Adams 2008).

The second organisation, the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), is an organisation of Imams formed in 1945. On their website they represent 136 affiliated mosques and *jamaat khana*'s<sup>13</sup> in the Western Cape and outer regions, and their vision is: *To preserve and promote Islam as a practical, divine way of life, resulting in holistic approaches to all challenges and in all spheres of human activity*. Among the main departments of the MJC is its Social Welfare Department. The primary focus of this department is the provision of counselling in marital and other social matters of Muslim Personal Law. The overarching emphasis on matters legal in the welfare department has forced the MJC to “appropriately renaming it as: the Department of Muslim Personal Law Services”.<sup>14</sup> The major projects listed on its website include a poverty alleviation project that consists primarily of a smallholding growing vegetables in the wetlands region of Philippi, Cape Town (Domingo 2008). In summary, given the size of the MJC and the political-economy of this group of *Ulama* (priestly class), welfare can be defined as giving religious *fatwas*<sup>15</sup> and Islamic guidance to the laity.

The third group, SANZAF, came into existence in 1974. The organisation's primary function is the collection of *zakat*<sup>16</sup> funds from the Muslim community. However, SANZAF also receives *sadaqa* from the general Muslim population. *Zakat* funds have to go to the impoverished belonging to the Muslim faith only while *sadaqa* is used for the needs of both Muslims and non-Muslims (Jacobs 2008). The organisation has offices across South Africa and maintains good working relations with all Islamic bodies, including the MJC and

12 The organisation is also sometimes approached by Christian churches in the Western Cape community to assist with aid.

13 A *jamaat khana* is a small Muslim prayer facility.

14 The information and direct quotation was taken from the MJC's official website, <http://www.mjc.org.za>

15 A *fatwa* is a formal opinion or decision treating a moral, legal or doctrinal question by someone recognised as knowledgeable in the juridical sciences of Islam.

16 *Zakat* is calculated at 2.5% of an adult's nett material worth at the end of a financial year. Those who have debt and remain in a deficit are not eligible or obliged to pay *zakat*.

Mustadafin. There are *imams* and *moulana* (Muslim clerics) involved in the organisation at various levels. SANZAF lists involvement in *da'wa* (Islamic propagation) work, programs for the aged, programs for orphans, skills development workshops, and in Operation Winter Warmth where clothing and blankets are collected for distribution to the needy during the winter months. According to SANZAF, it collected R41.4 million in the 2007-2008 financial year, with R29 million marked for *zakat* and R12.4 million for *sadaqa*. The administrative costs of running the organisation and its poverty-relief projects come from funds donated as *sadaqa*. As mentioned above, *Zakat* funds are used exclusively for helping the indigent that belong to the Islamic faith. Furthermore, after the deduction of administrative costs, the R12.4 million *sadaqa* funds are divided 60/40: 60% goes toward poverty relief and the remaining 40% toward skills development projects (Jacobs 2008).

### CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

For most of its history in South Africa, from 1652 to the present, Islam mostly had to endure an oppressed and pariah status. The first century and a half saw Islam as a slave religion proper. It was only after 1795, when the British took over the administration for the first time, that Islam felt the loosening of restrictive laws. It is fair to argue that Islam during this period was a religion of the poor and that their attitude toward poverty was infused with that of a "low" form of Islamic religiosity. At the Cape, by the turn of the nineteenth century, very few people, of all races, were literate. However, many of the Islamic religious leaders that came to the region, either as political prisoners or as slaves, were very well educated.<sup>17</sup> The practice of their religion in public spaces was, however, prohibited by the state. Religious rituals, like *salat*, were practised in stone quarries around the Cape (Shell 1994). And as mentioned above, the orientation of the Cape Muslims were toward Sufism (*tasawwuf*).

*Zakat* as the obligatory form of almsgiving must have been rare given the slave status of these early Muslims. However, in contrast, examples of the giving of *sadaqa* by the Muslim slaves abound in the writings of Robert Shell and others. It was not uncommon for free Muslims to pay for the manumission of other slaves, and it became customary for free Muslims not to own slaves. The very growth of Islam during this period is argued to be a direct consequence of Muslim slaves showing kindness (acts of *sadaqa*) to others in bondage. Robert Shell (1994:356-362) avers that many a slave would embrace Islam on the day of his execution as Islam offered all slaves that embraced the religion the minimum of freedom in the eschaton.

What is of particular significance to understanding the attitude of the adherents of the faith today, is that Islam in South Africa is a religion of the poor, but for a few; and that for most of the three hundred and fifty years in South Africa, poverty remained rampant among the Muslims – and more so in the Cape. Poor people are not, as a rule, able to give *zakat*.

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<sup>17</sup> Sheikh Yusuf of Macassar left at least thirteen texts in his name by the time he died in 1699. He wrote in three languages, Malaysian, Bughanese and Arabic. Tuan Guru, while a prisoner on Robben Island, compiled a text called *Ma'rifah al-Islam wa al-Iman* in 1781, in which he expounds the rational traditional philosophy of *Sunnism*.

Therefore *sadaqa*, so evidently displayed in the attitudes of the early Muslims, became the necessary form of charity and infused the attitude of the early Muslim slaves, and continues to infuse Muslims like those belonging to organisations like Mustadafin.

What is also evident is that the presence of an *'ulama* class or scripturalism-puritanism form of Islam – mostly in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng – insists on a Muslim/non-Muslim divide. *Qur'ānic* verses are readily invoked to rationalise charity for Muslims first. In the case of the *'ulama* group, the MJC, welfare is mostly defined as juridical advice to the nascent divorced and those social matters that need a sacerdotal eye, which goes partway in explaining why their help goes to Muslims almost exclusively.

In comparison to the MJC, SANZAF has few *'ulama*, but is unable to operate without them since it collects *zakat* in South Africa with the blessing of the MJC and the more than 100 mosques under MJC auspices. SANZAF uses the bulk of its annual *zakat* income exclusively in aid for the Muslim poor and some *sadaqa* funds for whoever is in need regardless of religion. The relationship between the MJC and SANZAF can be compared to that of state and capital in a capitalist society, where a mutually dependent relationship is necessary for stability. Since SANZAF is a national Muslim organisation, both the “high” and the “low” forms of the Islamic tradition have to be appeased. In other words, at some level of poverty alleviation, ethics toward the poor have to be compromised. In sum, “high” Islam favours *zakat* over *sadaqa*. Put differently, scripturalism gives impetus to religious social stratification and as a consequence thereof, Muslims have greater access to material for poverty alleviation from organisations like SANZAF.

A cursory glance at Mustadafin leads one to look for alternative ideologies that lie outside the scriptural tradition or, as Professor Moosa Ebrahim so lucidly describes, the “high” Islam led by an *'ulama* class. One example of this is Mustadafin, led by a female director with 35 out of its 42 fulltime employees being female and with a philosophy that reaches humankind rather than “Muslimkind”. Given roughly two hundred and fifty years of Sufi philosophy that infuses structure and agency at the Cape, the orthopraxy infused by the regional orthodoxy – as unfurled in the historical sociology – offers a theory as to the root of the ideas that lead to this particular attitude toward poverty: Given the slave condition and the struggles in carrying out timely rituals like *salat*, *hajj*, and, with limited means, to partake in *zakat*, emphasis shifted to the first pillar of Islam: the belief in the Oneness of Allah. In the words of South Africa’s most celebrated slave-prisoner-Sufi-mystic: “You have no right to judge others, not even yourself”. And, combined with the *Qur'ān*’s creation myth, so often heard in Sufi philosophical rationale, “I created you from dust, and then I blew my *ruh* (soul) into each of you humankind”, one moves towards the ideas that infuse actions such as that of Mustadafin. In the sociology of ideas, we are reminded in this instance of Max Weber’s famous metaphor of the switchmen. According to Weber, the “world images” that have been created by “ideas” very frequently have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interests (Weber 1958:280). The idea that all of humankind carries the *ruh* of Allah, so prominent in the *Qur'ān* and switched back on a course by *tasawwuf* reinterpretation of the Islamic creation myth, coupled with the philosophy that only Allah (“the God”) can judge, leads many in South Africa, and

especially those Muslims at the Cape, toward helping all poor rather than the Muslim poor only – something so instrumental in the ideologies of the Muslim slaves of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cape Colony. In sum, the ideas of *tasawwuf*, so appealing to “low” Islam, erodes notions of religious stratification and fosters an attitude toward charity that is significantly less conscious of class than the “high” form of the tradition. To end with the response of Mustadafin’s director when asked what percentage of Muslims versus non-Muslims her organisation serves, “overwhelmingly non-Muslim, we even celebrate an annual Christmas dinner!” (Johnstone-Adams 2008).

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## KEYWORDS / TREFWOORDE

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