

The Memory of Imam Haron in Consolidating Muslim Resistance in the Apartheid Struggle

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Abstract

Imam Haron, who died in detention in 1969, became a symbol and icon for the Muslim struggle against apartheid in the late 1970s, although, his sacrifice had nearly fallen into oblivion. The historical reconstruction of political attitudes amongst Muslims in the late 1950s and 1960s, in comparison to those of the 1970s and 1980s reveals the dynamics of creating a martyr or a legend at a time where the need for role models was obvious for Muslims involved in the liberation struggle. Imam Haron's memory suggests a continuity of the Muslim struggle against oppression. However, an in-depth analysis shows that this is a historical transfiguration rather than experienced reality. Furthermore it reveals how Muslims' relate to their recent past, especially concerning the phenomenon of invention of tradition.

Introduction

The martyrs are the candles of society. They burn themselves out and illuminate society. If they do not shed their light, no organization can shine.¹

Imam Abdullah Haron is one of these candles: a candle for the Muslim communities in South Africa, a symbol and an icon for the Muslim struggle against apartheid, even if it took ten years for his death in detention to be integrated in the community's memory. The life and death of Imam Haron stands for more than resistance against apartheid; it also stands for the continuity of Muslim

resistance against oppression. Of particular interest for this essay² is not his life or the circumstances of his death as such but the complex dynamics of creating a martyr or a legend of Imam Haron after his sacrifice had nearly fallen into oblivion. It took quite a while before the memory of Imam Haron was perceived as a symbol to the Muslim anti-apartheid struggle. The deconstruction of the myth about Imam Haron will reveal that the above mentioned continuity reflects a historical transfiguration rather than experienced reality and that it serves to maintain an image of the Muslim commitment to the struggle against apartheid.³

It is remarkable that despite the sudden rediscovery of Imam Haron's legacy no critical in-depth analyses have been published up to now.⁴ The following analysis makes use of both published and unpublished material, complemented by interviews that have been conducted during the last two years.⁵ Detailed biographical elements will be referred to only on two closely related levels: firstly the broader context of recent South African history, and secondly, the context of Muslim resistance against apartheid. My approach is inspired by the concept of 'invention of tradition' which is described as a "process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by the reference to the past" (Hobsbawm 1983: 4). Inventing tradition is a process of creation and construction of symbolic or ritual complexes. Although this concept is normally used to explain the phenomenon of nation-building it also provides tools to examine and explain developments within the Muslim community. It allows for consideration of symptoms or indicators that otherwise would have been difficult to identify or to embed in a broader context.

It is important to mention here the specific situation in South Africa where apartheid divided the entire society, artificially segregating groups according to 'racial' classification. A specific hierarchy was established among the different 'racial' groups which either created separate cultural entities or fostered already existing cultural differences and made them permanent.⁶ In the context of apartheid religious and/or cultural identity created an important sense of belonging and therefore served as a kind of refuge. In some cases a specific linguistic affiliation even strengthened this sense of belonging. Against such a background the Muslim community can be compared to a mini-nation within the broader South African society.

The concept of invented traditions additionally allows us to look at the relation of a specific community with the past, revealing the focus they use and the elements of the past that they exclude, i.e. the blind spots and blank spaces. The latter will give deeper insights into hidden, maybe even unconscious motivations and structures within the community as well as between the community and other parts of society.

Invention of tradition occurs often

when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which "old" traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not appli-

cable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side (Hobsbawm 1983: 4).

The particular context of the Muslim community during the last two decades of apartheid, can be characterized as one of rapid change on various levels. This posed particular socio-political challenges to the minority community. The nature of the rapid change and its challenges will become more obvious if we include in our reflection the socio-political landscape of the late 1950s and 1960s, i.e. the period of Imam Haron's political activism.

Political attitudes among Muslims in the late 1950s and the 1960s: *If you are not happy with the government, you should make hidjra.*⁷

This quotation summarizes the attitude of the majority of Muslim during the 1950s and 1960s. The Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1962 and the rigorous implementation of the Group Areas Act in the early 1960s are some of the most significant events that signal increasing repression and persecution on the part of the government. This and the collapse of the Non-European-Movement and the Coloured Peoples' Congress weakened the progressive forces in the country. Once again conservative forces gained the upper hand, even more so because numerous persons had either to go underground or to leave the country. The political attitude of the Muslim community - excepting a small part of the youth that was already politicised - was deeply influenced by the major ideological and religious force of the *ulama* (i.e. religious scholars). Most of the religious leaders were part of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), a judicial and theological body in existence since 1945. They perceived themselves as the representatives of the Muslim community and the custodians of orthodoxy. Accordingly they took a very conservative stand, and it would not be exaggerated to describe them as being complacent, silent, even apolitical with regard to the political landscape (Davids 1985; Esack 1992: 169; Jeppie 1991). This position is linked very much to the cultural background of the Muslims in the Cape, denoted as Malayism. The term derives from an ethnic classification of the Muslim community by the British in the early 19th century which was to become the almost exclusive Cape Malay identity (Omar 1987: 10ff; Davids 1985). According to Achmat Davids this identity:

[does] not set them apart, but also above the other people of colour in their common environment. And though they

were subjected to the same forces of oppression they were made to believe that they were the 'elite of the coloured' people. This exclusivity and false superiority made it difficult for them to fuse with the other sections of the oppressed, and to develop a common united struggle against oppression (1985: 6; 1981).

Major elements of Malayism were its religious parochialism and the unquestioned acceptance of white dominance (Omar 1987: 11). The already mentioned lack of progressive forces during the 1960s also left its traces on the Muslim community, because it fostered obedience to the attitudes of the clergy and "... allowed the reactionary forces to re-emerge as the dominant political influence over the Muslim community".⁸

According to Ali Gierdien the MJC and the community as such:

... were scared of the government Where Haron, like myself, we were outspoken people. We were associated even with the Black Sash and people like that. [...] By and large the Muslim community was very reticent and very a-political at some stage. [...] That time we were very annoyed with the leadership of the MJC because they were, the majority at that time, the older guard, they were a-political. ... they would be friends with the Coloured Advisory Council, and the Coloured Affairs Department and things like that.⁹

To add just another example of a currently widespread perception of the general Muslim attitude towards the government in the late 1950s and 1960s:

People were very scared. The Nationalist government had put a lot of fear in people and the people were very afraid to be locked up, to be imprisoned. And therefore they shied away from people who were politically active.¹⁰

As long as religious matters were not endangered by the government the *ulama* found no necessity for any resistance; even the implementation of the Group Areas Act had no impact on their stand:

Has the government forbidden the worship of Allah and the spreading of Islam? Has the government closed down or ordered the demolition of any Mosque in a declared white area? If the government has ordered us as Muslims to desert

the faith of our forefathers, then our *Ulama* (religious leaders) would have been the first to urge us to resist even to death.¹¹

However, from this silent majority within the Muslim community some politically sensitised members emerged and became actively involved in the liberation movement.¹² Imam Haron was one of them. On Friday, 31 March 1961 in co-operation with eight individuals and four Muslim organizations, he launched a circular entitled *Call of Islam*. The publication was aimed at voicing protest against the implementation of the Group Areas Act and of other apartheid laws like the Urban Areas Act, the Pass laws and those institutionalising job reservation. *Call of Islam* was a political protest publication with an Islamic impetus. The MJC did not add their names to those of the signatories, on the contrary the clergy refused to support the circular as they found it to be political rather than Islamic.¹³

We can no longer tolerate further encroachment on these our basic rights and therefore we stand firm with our brothers in fighting the evil monster that is about to devour us - that is, oppression, tyranny and baasskap. [...] Therefore, we hereby declare for everyone to know that we solemnly pledge ourselves to fight against all the injustices on the basis as ordained by Almighty Allah.¹⁴

Although the essential messages of Islam, namely social justice and equality of all human beings, were stressed as motivation to stand up against oppression, the *ulama* was not impressed at all. At that particular time such a stand constituted an offence to the still persistent Malayism.

Muslim News commented on the circular while quoting from it without clear reference to the source:

The first organized move in the history of Cape Muslims to declare their determined opposition against the evil monster that is about to devour us - that is, oppression, tyranny and baasskap.¹⁵

Some weeks later *Muslim News* reported on another circular condemning *Call of Islam* for “dragging the Muslim community into the dirty arena of politics”, but it did not otherwise comment on the circular.¹⁶ Admittedly this is a clear political or rather anti-political statement on the part of the newspaper that was known for its ideological link to the clergy, even if it is only implicitly expressed. One is lead to presume that they found it unnecessary to recommend abstaining from

political activism explicitly, as the readers were most probably familiar with the clergy's attitudes and expectations in this regard.

Political attitudes among Muslims in the 1970s and 1980s: *Allahu akbar has joined Amandla*¹⁷

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a general trend towards an increasing political consciousness and therefore a constantly growing resistance movement against apartheid. This was especially so after the Soweto uprisings of 1976. This also affected the Muslim communities and the organizations that had been established during the 1970s or had emerged as off-shoots and transformations of already existing organisations that reshaped their aims and perspectives.¹⁸ In view of the extremely dominant clergy and in the absence of an alternative leadership during their formative years, the new organizations were moulded by the emergence of a progressive counterpart to the traditional *ulama*. Their monopoly in the area of interpretation and their religious parochialism was called into question. Thus the organisations started as purely religio-cultural movements that were trying to reformulate a Muslim Identity which differed from the *ulama's* version. Their aim was primarily to establish a new clergy. Such an aim could be pursued without them having to take a political stand. This process of emancipation of the established religious leadership seemed to lay the foundation that was necessary to examine the possibility and the nature of a cultural, social and political commitment for Muslims within the broader South African context. The coincidence of such internal development with the unfolding struggle in general and the social crises of the 1980s created a climate where practical action and political commitment became absolutely imperative.

Two socio-political events provoked the dawn of consciousness and growing awareness of the local political situation beyond the dividing lines of the different sections of the population. On the one hand the Iranian Revolution, which was perceived by many Muslims as an Islamic victory over an oppressive system, and on the other hand the implementation of the Tri-cameral Parliament in 1983 and the elections of 1984 in South Africa. The latter events produced a revolt that spread throughout the country and should be considered the major impulse for Muslim organisations to rethink their positions. Eventually the Muslim organizations focussed on the South African context and apartheid, thus they entered the political arena. Organizations that started out as purely religio-cultural institutions underwent significant changes and became actively religio-political and contextualized.

With the general trend of awakening and political sensitivity among young Muslims role models became important in order to mobilize and politicise members. This is particularly true if one takes into consideration the complacent and a-political attitude among Muslims in general during the sixties. It is little won-

der that at precisely this time the almost forgotten religious leader and victim of the system, Imam Haron, re-entered the collective memory as a particularly meaningful icon.

Imam Haron during his lifetime: A political role model for the politicians amongst the Muslims - an embarrassment for the ulama¹⁹

Imam Haron was thirty-one years old when he was appointed Imam at the Stegman Road Mosque in Claremont, Cape Town in 1955. Although having been to Mekka several times and even having spent some years there studying Arabic and Islamic theology the older members of the congregation reproached him for lack of knowledge and for his youthfulness. Not only was his appointment as Imam controversial, his knowledge of religious matters, even of Arabic, was also debated. Nicola Monro refers to a lack of formal education because he had to leave school at standard 4, i.e. at the age of thirteen; however, simultaneously she insists on his broad general knowledge due to a strong personal impulse to broaden his horizon (Monro 1977: 1). Barney Dessai and Cardiff Marney emphasise that he was fluent in Arabic at the age of 14, and that furthermore he was a *hafiz*, i.e. he was able to memorize the entire Qur'an by heart (1978: 1). Achmat Davids states "he was not regarded as one of the great religious scholars of his days" (Davids 1996: 15). Sheikh Abdul Hamid Gabier, a member of the MJC with a juridical Islamic education from the University of Cairo and strongly involved in the struggle for liberation, shares Davids' assessment: "His role is not really as a great learned ... because his understanding of religion was very limited; his Arabic was very limited."²⁰

It is beyond the scope of my knowledge whether Nicola Monro knew Imam Haron personally. The other voices were either close friends of his or colleagues. One can only speculate about the reasons for such contradictory assessments. The negative ones might be an indicator of the conservative clergy's power of definition during Imam Haron's lifetime and even afterwards. They might also indicate a certain resistance to the developing legend of Imam Haron. The positive ones might represent a true state of affairs but there is still the possibility that they are part of the myth emphasising the particularity of Imam Haron's personality.

One should take into consideration that Imam Haron had always stressed the importance of education (Dessai & Marney 1978: 13ff). This had an impact on the way he understood his tasks as an Imam: he taught Arabic because he wanted to facilitate a different approach to the holy scripture in order to counterbalance the usual memorizing of verses of the Qur'an without knowledge of the language that was common practice. Not to mention his evening classes and discussion groups that were established also for women. This was an innovation of which the conservative clergy did not approve. Imam Haron perceived Islam as an entire way of life and for him social and political commitment became an inte-

gral part of an Imam's life. Such an understanding must be considered an enormous challenge to the hegemony of the clergy, i.e. the MJC. Here might be a key to understand the controversial assessments of Imam Haron's religious knowledge: an Imam declared as possessing limited knowledge of religion and Arabic seems less dangerous and less threatening to the established orthodoxy. Such a leader would not necessarily be taken seriously in those circles. It might be surprising that Imam Haron was part of the MJC and never left it, although he was "aware that the MJC was an obstacle to progress" (Monro 1977: 7).²¹

Despite the disapproving older community and the attitude of the old guard of the clergy Imam Haron became a very popular and respected Imam soon after his appointment. Although sometimes he had to face harsh criticism from the clergy, he consistently continued what he considered to be the obligations of a committed Muslim.²²

At the time of the General Law Amendment Act he was one of the few religious leaders in the forefront of the fight against oppressive and discriminatory measures. He had a strong feeling of right and wrong and a lot of courage.²³

Perceiving Islam as being more than just some rituals, but instead as a holistic way of life, it then becomes possible to recognise how his religious engagement inspired various social and political activities at the grassroots of society:²⁴

He was the only Imam in Cape Town who refused to be paid for his services.

His work as a sales representative made it possible for him to travel through the country and to gain contact with black communities and liberation movements, like the ANC and the PAC. This afforded him financial independence.

He applied the Islamic message to contemporary issues in South Africa and used his Friday sermons to criticize and condemn the actual political and social situation, e.g. the Group Areas Act and the concept of separate education. Besides this innovation within the mosque and his congregation he led evening prayers and short talks after the prayer dealing with topics chosen by the youth. Furthermore he openly invited women to attend the discussion groups and even established special groups for them. The acceptance of women was not common at all at this stage. It is not exaggerated to consider this attitude a clear denial of the *ulama's* patriarchy.

He was one of the first Muslims who regularly visited the black townships of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu. His motivation was not only missionary, it was part of his social commitment and his non-racist attitude. He became involved in the black communities. He talked about the Muslims' indifference towards the black community and succeeded in getting his congregation to welcome black Muslims. This was a challenge to the concept of Malayism and a break with the *ulama's* hegemony.

He supported both victims of the system and liberation movements alike, collecting money for them, organizing shelter and offering messenger services in the country and abroad.

In 1958 he founded the Claremont Muslim Youth Association (CMYA) a progressive youth movement. One year later they launched a monthly leaflet, *Islamic Mirror*.²⁵

In 1960 he was nominated to the editorial board of *Muslim News*, the first Muslim newspaper.

In 1961 he was part of a group of Muslim individuals and organizations who launched the *Call of Islam*.

In 1966 and at the end of 1968 he officially went to Mecca for pilgrimage using these stays abroad to travel secretly to Egypt and Europe in order to contact the World Islamic Council, representatives of Arabic countries and political exiles of the ANC and PAC.²⁶ He informed them on the political situation in South Africa and lobbied for both the PAC and ANC and the Muslim minority in South Africa. He also collected money from the Defence and Aid Fund for victims of Apartheid and distributed it on his return to South Africa.

We do not know whether the very first impulses for Imam Haron's political involvement were political, social or religious, or a combination of all of them. However, there are enough indications to assume that there had been several influences shaping his political consciousness. If one follows most of the academic and non-academic work on Imam Haron one might tend to adopt the image of a personality acting on purely individual capacities and with a purely

Islamic motivation.²⁷ Yet, further investigation and a critical reading will prove the contrary. Imam Haron was part of a larger group of intellectuals and politically conscientized persons of various political backgrounds.²⁸

One has to mention the younger members of his congregation, former Livingstone High-School Students. This high school was known for its teachers' affiliation to the Teachers' League of South Africa and their influence on the politicisation of the students. These students had formed the CMYA that was observed by the Security Branch.²⁹ Besides the contacts to his students Imam Haron kept direct contact to members of the Teachers' League, the Coloured People's Congress, the Non-European-Movement, the PAC and the ANC, even with PAC and ANC exiles and anti-apartheid movements abroad.³⁰ Amongst them were e.g. Ali Fataar, Alex La Guma, Albie Sachs, Robert Sobukwe and Victor Wessels, to name but a few.³¹

There are contradictory opinions as to whether he was a member of the PAC or not. Generally the different voices refer to interviews with people in close contact with Imam Haron. His membership is either considered to be part of the myth (Davids 1996: 20) or entirely denied.³² Either it is left open with an implication in favour of membership:

Then the PAC became very activist and he was one who wanted to be an activist, whereas the Unity Movement was so scattered around ... So whereas if you went to the people on ground level things, grassroots issues, you'd become an activist. And so that is what took him into this field of activism.³³

Or, alternatively his membership is presented as certain (Dessai & Marney 1978: 22). The latter statement goes even further while mentioning the Imam's involvement as a member of the Coloured People's Congress. When this party was dissolved it called upon its members to join the PAC.

The consequences of this were that at that time - March 1966 - Abdullah Haron's political career entered its most hazardous phase to date. He was now a member of a party dedicated to the overthrow of apartheid ... (Dessai & Marney 1978: 22).

The fact that even the PAC claimed Imam Haron as an icon might support the faction in favour of his membership.³⁴ Until proof emerges the speculations might continue. Therefore we should turn attention rather to the discourse and ask whether there might be a subliminal message. This discourse needs to be embedded in the broader discourse about the purely Islamic motivation of Imam Haron's political commitment and activities. Two points are important in this context: firstly that both discourses occurred only with the resurrection of the

memory of Imam Haron, i.e. in the 1980s, and secondly that the very first document about Imam Haron, *The Killing of the Imam*, published in 1978, did not contribute to this discourse.³⁵ The authors stressed both the membership of the PAC and the religiously based motivation of Imam Haron's contribution to the struggle for justice. The analysis of these discourses will disclose elements of the creation of the myth and simultaneously explain the special meaning of Imam Haron for the consolidation of Muslim resistance against apartheid.

Imam Haron's political, social and religious activities suffered a sudden end. After his return from Mecca at the end of 1968 he was constantly kept under surveillance.³⁶ We do not know whether he underestimated the danger of his activities, we only know that it was already too late by the time he planned to leave the country (Monro 1977: 7; Haron 1994b: 78f). Imam Haron was arrested on the 28 May 1969.³⁷ This date fell on prophet Mohammed's birthday, and it was exactly 14 years after his appointment as Imam. For 123 days he was held incommunicado. He died in detention on 27 September 1969. The family was told that he died of natural causes having fallen down some stairs.³⁸

Imam Haron's detention and death: *The Muslims have a revolutionary prophet but the Muslims are still asleep*³⁹

Although the news of the detention of the Imam spread like a wildfire, the protests of the Muslim community against it were mostly limited to the congregation of the Imam's mosque and some individuals. The Muslim clergy did not respond to the demands for a formal protest against his detainment, on the contrary they preferred silence. This would guarantee that they remain detached from political matters as the detention was a political affair for them.⁴⁰ Even *Muslim News* abstained from immediately reporting on the arrest of one of its editors.

The *Cape Times* of 30 May 1969 ran the headline "Top Moslem held under 180-day law" and reported:

In his position as editor of the *Muslim News* he expressed anti-racialist ideas and condemned certain injustices in South Africa which are contrary to Islamic teachings.⁴¹

Only then, in fact the very next day, did *Muslim News* react, expressing their concern about how the newspaper is perceived rather than their concern about the detention.

Muslim News is not a political paper and does not publish political views or news. It only concerns itself with the religious and social needs of the Muslim community. [...] What-

ever political views Imam Haron expresses is entirely his own views and not in the capacity as Editor of the *Muslim News*.⁴²

It took another week before *Muslim News* commented in its editorial on Imam Haron's detention:

Imam Abdullah Haron, editor of "Muslim News" had been taken into custody by the authorities and detained under the 180 Days Law; the reason for his detention is not known to "*Muslim News*". But it is safe to assume that Imam Haron is not being detained for his religious views and that he is not being detained for spreading the doctrine of Islam. If Imam Haron is being held because of his political views, then there is nothing "*Muslim News*" can do about the situation, as Imam Haron's position as editor was to express the religious aspects of the community. "*Muslim News*" would not hesitate for one moment to register the protest of all Muslims if our Deen (religious) were imperilled.⁴³

The newspaper's main concern was for its own reputation rather than for what had happened to its editor. In view of the oppressive apartheid system this statement is not without a degree of cynicism and it speaks for the general policies of the paper: only religious matters for the "enlightenment of Muslims" were of interest.⁴⁴ Having been closely linked to the clergy and the conservative forces within the Muslim community the indifferent attitude of *Muslim News* nipped the protest of the Imam's congregation in the bud.⁴⁵

The refusal to make a statement that would be appropriate concerning the detention of a religious leader of the Muslim community - be it for political or religious reasons - prevented other official expressions of protest. This fostered political apathy within the community. The influence and power of the conservative forces within the Muslim community can be described as a monopoly of definition. They set the tone, even implicitly for the range of possible reactions to the detention and eventual death of Imam Haron. Omar observes:

The Muslim community as a whole had displayed a consistent indifference throughout the 4 month period of the Imam's detention. Those isolated individuals who were concerned about his plight were hampered by the lack of an effective vehicle to mobilise the community and thereby amplify their protest. This lack of voice compelled them to plead with the clergy, who represented a powerful institution within

the community. The indifference the community displayed was no doubt influenced by the input of the dominant Muslim institutions, particularly the *Muslim News*.⁴⁶

Concerning the death of Imam Haron and especially the particular circumstances of his death in detention the reaction within the broader community did not differ from the general reaction to his detainment. This is remarkable considering that Imam Haron was the first Muslim leader to die in political detention. The post-mortem revealed implicitly that the bruises and injuries could not have resulted from a fall.⁴⁷

However, the funeral showed a difference response. The sudden death of the popular religious leader seemed to force the Muslim community to awaken from their deep sleep.⁴⁸ One can presume that the sudden awakening gave the community such a shock that complacent and indifferent attitudes vanished and the whole range of emotions that had been kept under lock due to the hegemony of the conservative clergy was released.

[M]ore than just a funeral procession. It was a political demonstration.⁴⁹

The delay which resulted from the post-mortem enabled 30,000 people from all directions and walks of life to attend the funeral. This extraordinarily large number of mourners, the unique manner in which the funeral was arranged and more particularly, the anti-apartheid eulogies delivered at the funeral service and the graveside contributed towards turning the funeral into a political demonstration against the Apartheid regime and its police force. Never before had the Muslim community converged in such vast numbers to pay their last respects to a religious leader. But more than this, never before had this complacent community's feelings and emotions reached such a pitch against the perpetrators of Apartheid (Omar 1987: 51).

One might expect that the revolutionary spark would persist and initiate a general awakening, but this was not the case. The community - except for the former congregation of Imam Haron - fell back into complacency and Imam Haron was forgotten.

Although *Muslim News* distributed a special issue entitled *Tribute to a Humble Man*, reporting only the funeral, with more photographs than text, the paper did not seize the opportunity to comment on the circumstances of Imam Haron's death or on his detention. In fact, no reference was made to this. The Imam's

activities be they political or religious were not mentioned at all. If one looks at the issue, disregarding the political and religious background, one would have to ask about the reasons for this “royal funeral” for this “humble man, free of thoughts of self-aggrandizement”.⁵⁰ In comparison to other testimonies emphasizing the anti-apartheid eulogies and the openly expressed anger against the regime during the funeral it becomes obvious that in the Muslim response what was left out tells more than what was actually said. My impression is that by not mentioning what happened on the political level, the reality could be denied.

The non-Muslim response gave full recognition to the political dimension of the entire event.

Whereas the death in political detention of Imam Abdullah Haron had moved white South Africans to start the first real protest over deaths in detention, for the Muslim community his funeral was a “nine day wonder”, as they reverted to their stoic silence over the issue.⁵¹

The broader reactions both in the country and abroad prove that Imam Haron must have been more than a popular and generally respected religious leader. These reactions focus more on his political involvement and are at least in part political statements. Simultaneously they took advantage of the propitious moment and utilized the Imam’s cause for their own purposes and for the broader resistance against apartheid. The national and international response can be summarised as follows:

Imam Haron death was the sixth in detention, and it caused the first openly articulated protest against deaths in detention.⁵²

Between 18 February and 10 March 1970 an inquest took place revealing numerous bruises and injuries that had been caused several days before the Imam’s death. This led to severe protests amongst the non-Muslim community without regard to political conviction. It was reported by the *Cape Times*.⁵³

Catherine Taylor, member of the United Party and member of Parliament, continuously called for further investigation into the circumstances of the Imam’s death asking “whether a criminal charge is pending in connection with the Imam’s death”.⁵⁴

The Anglican priest Bernard Wrangmore fasted 67 days

close to a Muslim shrine on Signal Hill in order to protest and to insist on further investigation.⁵⁵

Reverend Kime of Paarl also protested against the detention in a letter printed in the *Cape Times* 4 June.⁵⁶

Anti-apartheid movement members in London organized a protest demonstration outside the South African Embassy.⁵⁷

Canon Collins, President of the International Defence and Aid Fund in London who was close to Imam Haron organized a memorial service held in St. Paul's Cathedral on 6 October.⁵⁸

The United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid protested in a communiqué about the circumstances of the Imam's death.⁵⁹

Funeral prayers were held in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

The *Cape Times*, by publishing regular reports, contributed to keeping alive the non-Muslim protest concerning the circumstances and the political impact of Imam Haron's death in detention.⁶⁰

The national and international responses to Imam Haron's detention and the eventual death all refer to his political activities as a religious leader. Without minimizing the religious motivation of the Imam's social and political engagement they emphasise the political level and the impact of his contribution on the struggle against oppression. It could be that this was seen more as purely politically motivated struggle than anything else, especially from a non-Muslim perspective, thus the political elements were removed from the religious context, effectively excluding the religious. Particularly two international reactions, i.e. the United Nations communiqué and the memorial service in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, indicate that Imam Haron must have been known as an important South African activist who deserved to be honoured as such. This kind of reaction was at the time not common at all.

Despite the particularity of the national or international non-Muslim reactions and despite the expressed impact of Imam Haron's political commitment and his death in detention, the Muslim community continued to ignore the contribution of their religious leader as a political activist. This was also true for South Africa's political reality.⁶¹ Although Imam Haron's death in detention

gave the Muslim community a unique chance to carry on his legacy and follow his example they did not make the most of this opportunity. They apparently preferred to keep on following in the *ulama's* footsteps with which they were familiar and this without the slightest signs of a bad conscience.

One can conclude that the Imam's death with its latent potential for radicalising the community, far from achieving this, resulted in them becoming even more entrenched in political complacency (Omar 1987: 68).

This part of the history has been buried with the Imam and was not remembered and topicalized as part of the resurrection of this particular event.

Resurrection of a memory: *The Imam does not need us, we need him*⁶²

Although the Imam's life and death included numerous elements that could have been utilized immediately for the making of a martyr and for the creation of a legend, it took almost a decade before South African Muslims became aware that they could refer to him in order to politicise the Muslim youth.⁶³ The elements that were suitable for a process of mystification can be summarized as follows:

The day of the arrest fell on prophet Mohammed's birthday. It was exactly 14 years after Abdullah Haron had been appointed Imam.

Synchronicities on various levels concerning the funeral might even have suggested divine intervention or might have been interpreted as a spiritual or mystical message: firstly a sudden wind caused the fall of a sheet of metal from the top of a building that injured several mourners,⁶⁴ secondly a traffic constable was rapped on the helmet after having revved the engine of his motor-cycle and then the engine died⁶⁵; thirdly a considerable earthquake shook the Western Cape the evening of the funeral, tremors occurred again the 7th, 10th and 100th day after the funeral.⁶⁶

The fact that 30 000 people, men and women, attended the funeral was exceptional for funerals at the time.⁶⁷

The fast of the Christian priest at the Muslim shrine on

Signal Hill stirred emotions among the Muslim community.⁶⁸ Simultaneously it secured public attention and kept the protest alive.⁶⁹

The memorial service in St. Paul's Cathedral could have been regarded as a small miracle, because it was the first time in the history of this Cathedral that a Muslim held a commemoration service for another Muslim in that venue.⁷⁰

The potential of a concept of martyrdom which is a very powerful one in Islam.

Muslim News started to commemorate the death of the Imam in 1975.⁷¹ The first commemorative meetings took place in 1979 and were integrated in the programmes of the Muslim organizations from then on.⁷² Both academic writings about the Muslim contribution to the struggle for liberation and Muslim publications on Imam Haron emphasize his death in detention as the turning point for the awakening of political consciousness.

But the Harun [sic!] death and funeral made an indelible mark on the consciousness and political conscience of the Cape Town Muslim community.⁷³

The death of the Imam marked a turning point in the socio-political history of the Muslim community.⁷⁴

There can be no doubt that the death of the Imam failed to intimidate the anti-apartheid Muslim activists. It had the opposite effect. It brought many new people into the struggle (Lapsley 1995: 4).

Milestones are the martyrdom of Imam Abdullah Haroun (who died in prison in 1969 after being detained for 133 days) and the unprecedented Muslim involvement in the heroic uprisings of the oppressed and exploited masses in 1985.⁷⁵

The general process of developing political consciousness in the late 1970s and early 1980s also affected *Muslim News* which saw an end to the period of complacency when it was the mouthpiece of the established *ulama*. This brought the paper into line with the Black Consciousness Movement. At that time *Muslim News* took a clear political stand in favour of the oppressed. This ideological

change reflects a trend that was already in the air and would necessarily affect the Muslim organizations as well.

His death and the subsequent publicity afforded conscientized the Muslim community far more effectively than any amount of mass rallies and pamphlets. It provided the impulse necessary for the projection of a more meaningful and socially relevant Islam - a message which had to a large extent been repressed by a section of the Muslim clergy. His death like that of a true martyr slain in the path of Allah, had the opposite effect of keeping him alive through his deeds and acting as a spur for generations to come.⁷⁶

It is remarkable that the shift within the newspaper did not automatically lead to critical questions concerning the paper's past. This might be explained by the phenomenon of *zero hour* that occurs often when ideological or political shifts of greater dimensions take place. The sole focus on the new era was on the elimination of the uncomfortable parts of the past. Once more we can conclude that what was left out tells more than what was actually said. By not mentioning what did not happen on the political level, the reality could be denied, thus more than a decade of Muslim complacency fell into oblivion.⁷⁷

We were even more disgusted at the spectacle some of these very people made of themselves at the funeral of Imam Haron. Their actions were highly hypocritical to say the least. Displays of religious and political fervour after the man's death were useless publicity stunts. [...] Our disgust here is against those people who by their silence and commission have betrayed one of their colleagues so callously. He did not mean much to them in life while in detention, he means nothing to them in death - even though they proclaimed him a 'martyr' at the time of his death.⁷⁸

The elimination of the complacent past is also true for the Muslim community after the resurrection of the Imam's memory. We do not know whether this coincidence results from the influence of *Muslim News* or whether there are other reasons.

Although there were critical voices that questioned the perception of Imam Haron's death as crucial for the Muslim resistance they did not counterbalance the already consolidated discourse in a significant way.

Immediately after his martyrdom Haron was virtually for-

gotten by Muslims (Allie 1994).

So one may argue that the Imam's death did not politically "awaken" the Muslim community but rather drove them into further submission of oppression, racist politics and religious parochialism (CDA 1994: 38f.).

[T]he Muslim leadership at the time of the Imam's death did not exploit the changing conditions generated at particularly the funeral, and thus the Imam's death in detention was not a catalyst in transforming the collaborationist political attitudes of the Muslim community in the Western Cape. We need to look elsewhere if we are seeking an explanation to the changing political mood of the Cape Muslims (Omar 1987: iii).

Explaining the broader context for the changing political attitudes among Muslims and the Muslim organizations falls outside the scope of this article.⁷⁹ However, it is obvious that the death in detention of Imam Haron did not play a role in conscientizing and politicising the Muslim community at the time, even though the majority of the Muslim community currently tries to prove the contrary. Here I shall draw attention to the discourse considering the meaning for the context it has for the Muslim contribution to the liberation struggle. If the discourse on Imam Haron is understood as being embedded in the broader context of invention of tradition and the creation of symbols we will gain deeper insight into the process of consolidation of Muslim resistance against apartheid. It remains important to bear in mind that South African Muslims belong to one of the smallest minorities of the population. In this context the powerful Islamic concept of martyrdom suddenly emerged and became an integral part of the discourse on Imam Haron.⁸⁰ Martyrdom and sacrifice can be considered the key concepts in deconstructing the discourse in order to disclose its deeper meaning.

The concept of total sacrifice is the most important social concept in Islam. For the sake of Allah we sacrifice everything. We cannot escape sacrifice because the Qur'an clearly states: (90:4) "Verily We have created man into toil and struggle."⁸¹

Martyrdom is the highest expression of our freedom to choose. And we have chosen to be Muslims and therefore we have chosen to be eligible for martyrdom.⁸²

The martyrdom of the Imam has generally inspired the youth to view Islam as a “total way of life” within the South African Apartheid society. He has been and will continue to be viewed as a symbol of liberation for not only the Muslims but also for non-Muslims (Haron 1986: 251).

Imam Haron’s martyrdom and sacrifice was utilized to stir the emotions of the Muslim youth and to mobilize them to engage in the struggle against apartheid while keeping their Muslim identity and defending Islamic values and ideals.⁸³ In view of the minority situation of the Muslim community it seemed to be important to insist on the Islamic flavour of their contribution to the struggle for justice.⁸⁴ There is no doubt about the oratorical dimension in the following quotations that stand for numerous other statements at the time:

The essence of all great achievements is sacrifice. Are we ready? Are we fit? Is our Eemaan [i.e. faith] strong? As Muslims we are proud, but we are also humbled to acknowledge that such a Martyr lived amongst us. A Muslim should at all times be exemplary - even in his death. And such a Man, such a Muslim, such a Mujahed is IMAM ABDULLAH HARON.⁸⁵

[T]he “martyrs” remain the epitome of sacrifice and struggle for truth, justice and freedom. Their deaths enrich the dialectic of revolutionary struggle against the this [sic] regime and heralds a higher stage of resistance against the oppressors. Mujahideen Imam Haroon [sic], the struggle continues!⁸⁶

It is notable that with the resurrection of the memory of Imam Haron’s death the already mentioned elements suitable for the creation of a myth emerged as well. Generally one can record that they were utilized to foster the image of the Imam’s religious motivation, even if not his *purely* religious motivation. This becomes more evident if one takes into consideration what was left out, vigorously denied or considered to be questionable. The unmentioned part of the Imam’s history contains his purely political activities and his close relations to non-Muslim organizations, such as the fact that he used the pilgrimages for political purposes or for messenger services as well. The denied part of the history is reflected in the discourse on the Imam’s PAC membership.

Imam Haron was detained. Whether by design or coincidence, they chose a day which was *dear to him* (Hendricks 1988: 27).

The fact that the elements contributing to the legend appear consistently both explicitly and implicitly, even in the 1990s, indicates its persistence and the power.⁸⁷

Whether by design or co-incidence, Imam Haron was arrested on the birthday of the Prophet (pbuh) and the anniversary of his appointment as Imam 13 years earlier - never to return.⁸⁸

When the Imam died the earth responded!⁸⁹

And even the earth shook in awe of the Man who preferred justice to tyranny on the day he was buried.⁹⁰

Imam Haron's legend was important to consolidate Muslim resistance against apartheid, therefore the purely Islamic motivation for his involvement in the struggle was accentuated and consistently mentioned.⁹¹ It seemed to be crucial.

Yet all those who knew him both Muslim and non-Muslim, will undoubtedly vouch for the Imam's commitment to Islam. Nothing motivated him except Islam ...⁹²

At hindsight, many critics of the Imam feel that he was so obsessed with human rights and to change the status quo that he cooperated and allowed himself to be used by other ideological forces also working for change but from a platform diametrically opposed to Islam. There is no reason or evidence to believe that the Imam compromised his Islamic principles within the broader framework of the liberation movement.⁹³

Imam Haron was the only person to fill the vacuum when Muslim organizations were in need for a role model from their own ranks in order to mobilize and politicise the community.⁹⁴ The unfolding struggle in general and the increasing repressions at the time might have hampered critical reflection on the recent history of the Muslim community. This could have contributed to an underplaying of the *ulama's* hegemony in setting the tone for the earlier view that there was no need for resistance. It is remarkable that the *ulama's* hegemony in the sense of their monopoly of interpretation and definition of religious matters was questioned. There must be other reasons why the issue of the Muslim complacency was not raised.

The Muslim community embedded the martyrdom of Imam Haron in the context of the political struggle in general and of Muslim history in South Af-

rica in particular. This happened more implicitly than explicitly by mentioning him together with either significant heroes of the struggle against apartheid such as Steve Biko or by bringing him into line with the famous Muslim dissidents of the past such as Sheikh Yusuf or Tuan Guru.⁹⁵ However, it brought the importance and the continuity of Muslim martyrs in South Africa to light. The line of Muslim martyrs serves to construct a persistent Muslim identity of resistance against oppression and therefore to distract from the complacent and silent past. The importance of Imam Haron as a martyr serves to emphasise Muslim resistance and their contribution to the struggle for liberation.

The political activism of an individual motivated by religious reasons was appropriated by almost the entire community.

Imam Haron and Steve Biko have become symbolical figures in the liberation of Blacks in South Africa. Their martyrdom also represents the martyrdom of other Blacks ...⁹⁶

[T]o this very day Imam Haroon [sic] is recognized by the Muslims of South Africa as the only worthy successor of the pioneers and martyrs of Islam who were exiled to the Cape from East Indies during the early years of Dutch rule.⁹⁷

The martyrs of Islam always played an important role in consolidating and fostering the community, especially in an 'alien' or 'hostile' environment. Simultaneously they contributed to the creation and maintenance of an identity that includes self-estimation and honour regardless of political or social circumstance.⁹⁸ The bringing into this line of Imam Haron suggests on the one hand a continuity of Muslim resistance against the ruling oppressors and offers the possibility of identification on the other.

The history of Muslims in South Africa also shows beyond doubt that Muslims are not and will never be the handmaidens of the oppressors and exploiters.⁹⁹

The unfolding struggle gave the Muslim organizations a clearer image. It is remarkable that the more politically motivated and the more differentiated the organizations were the less they focussed on Imam Haron as such during the commemoration meetings. They rather turned them into political gatherings where political issues were debated.¹⁰⁰ The way the Imam was referred to in order to mobilize the Muslim community for the liberation struggle changed according to the needs of the Muslim organizations.

Conclusion: Imam Haron, a Candle Bringing Light Where Shadows Had Been

[...] Imam Haroon [sic] became the candle illuminating the dark shadows of oppression in which the African masses found themselves and embodied a glimmer of hope for their eventual salvation from inhumanity, oppression, exploitation and became an example par excellence for the struggling youth of Azania.¹⁰¹

Imam Haron illuminated not only the dark shadows of oppression but also the dark shadows of a complacent and a-political Muslim past, which overlapped partly with the crucial years of apartheid. Despite the fact that he was part of a broader group of politically conscious people of various political orientations, the 'invention' of his memory insists on his individual commitment to the struggle for justice and on his purely Islamic motivation. These elements reveal that he was de-linked from his socio-political context. This facilitated the creation of the image of a Muslim acting on individual capacity, inspired uniquely by Islamic principles. Such a person could easily be appropriated by the various Muslim organizations that were in need of role models during the awakening of the Muslim consciousness, particularly if one takes into consideration the persistent hegemony of the a-political *ulama*. Role models became important to stabilize, consolidate and unify the Muslim community in order to mobilize them for an Islamic inspired struggle against oppression. There is no doubt that the *ulama* was not able to produce such a role model.

Imam Haron's memory suggests a continuity of the Muslim struggle against oppression. This is an historical transfiguration rather than experienced reality. Furthermore it reveals the Muslims' relation to their recent past. The tradition of Malayism and therefore of complacency is not part of the Muslim legacy, on the contrary the memory of Imam Haron is utilized to eliminate this blind spot and substitute it with the image of the persistence of Muslim opposition against oppression. In this sense it suggests cohesion of the Muslim community as well.

Rashied Omar's statement "Imam Haron saved us from rejecting Islam"¹⁰² summarises both implicitly and explicitly several elements revealing the meaning of the Imam's memory. The legend of Imam Haron, including the invented parts, seems still to be important; and even the more differentiated perspective of the 1990s did not deconstruct it. From an outside perspective it supports the image of the Muslim contribution to the liberation struggle in South Africa as having been far out of proportion to their numbers. However, this image has to be contested without minimizing the Muslim contribution. It is a projection and a generalisation, because it was only a minority within the Muslim minority that was actively involved. In this context it is notable that the political activities of

the Imam, i.e. his close contacts to the PAC and other secular movements, do not play an important role in the myth.

One would like to consider what would have happened if Imam Haron had been perceived as a political activist rather than as a Muslim martyr. Such an approach might offer a key to the issue of Muslim identity. Any identity or relation to the past that is based on blind spots will break down sooner or later due to shortcomings in the legitimacy of its foundations. Therefore it is crucial to face all elements of the past and to integrate the shadows. Otherwise the darker side will continue to reappear and to disturb. This might be the new challenge Imam Haron's legacy poses to the Muslim community.

Notes

- ¹ *Voice of the Revolutionary Youth* 1990: 2; see also Hendricks (1988: v).
- ² I would like to thank Christine Anthonissen for her critical comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- ³ It is not possible here to describe in great detail the different strands in the Muslim struggle for a just society in South Africa. For further reading see e.g. Esack (1988) or Tayob (1995). In this context it must be sufficient to emphasize that the perception of the Muslim contribution to liberation consists in having been far out of proportion to their numbers. However, this perception or claim is contested. It was only a minority within the Muslim minority who were actively involved. Furthermore this perception includes only the last 15 years of the struggle for liberation. The 1960s and early 1970s are left aside. Yet, this period holds some keys for a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the Muslim struggle on the one hand and the image of Imam Haron as the most prominent Muslim victim in the struggle on the other.
- ⁴ Omar's BA Honours thesis is an exception, but his contribution is unpublished. He focusses on the inability of the Muslim leadership "to exploit the changing conditions generated at particularly the funeral" and proves that the Imam's death in detention was not a catalyst in conscientizing and politicizing the Muslim community. See Omar (1987: iii).
- ⁵ These interviews are part of the research project *Islam and the South African Transition Process*. The project is part of a broader research programme at the university of Hamburg entitled *Change (Umbruch) processes in African Societies and the ways to cope with them*. They have been conducted by the author of this article, two of them together with my colleague Inga Niehaus.
- ⁶ Due to different historical and geographical roots the Muslim minority in South Africa is divided into several communities belonging to various ethnicities, language groups and social classes. consequently the communities follow different religious orientations. For further details see Da Costa (1992: 73-74). These different cultural and ethnic backgrounds served as a basis for the 'racial classification' of the apartheid ideology: Muslims with Indonesian or Malay origins were classified as 'Coloureds' or

'Cape Malays' in contrast to those with Indian or Indo-Pakistan origins who were classified as 'Indians'. The cultural background as well as historically rooted different social statuses shaped and still shape the corresponding religious institutions, rituals and symbols.

- ⁷ Interview with Sheikh Faik Gamieldien (Muslim Judicial Council), 14.8.2000, Cape Town. *Hidjra* is the Arabic term for exile. It is of symbolic importance for Muslims because it alludes to Mohammed's exile to Medina, that went down in history as the year one of the Muslim calendar. Transliteration of Arabic terms or names in South Africa is adapted to the pronunciation of Afrikaans, the mother-tongue of the majority of South African Muslims. In the perspective of English-speaking persons it might seem to be incorrect, yet one should consider it just as another way of transliteration to be precise from a South African perspective. This article will consistently make use of the South African transliteration. The particularity of the South African perspective explains the different versions of some terms or names. I will not comment on this.
- ⁸ Omar (1987: 82). See also Hendricks (1988: 17). He mentions Sheikh Shakier Gamieldien and his influence on the Muslim community: "his religious rules became gospel to a large sector of the Muslim community. He opposed Imam Haron's radical stand against the State".
- ⁹ Interview with Ali Gierdien, 17.7.2000 and 1.8.2000, Cape Town. See also Omar (1987: 40).
- ¹⁰ Interview with Faik Gamieldien, 14.8.2000, Cape Town. Both, Gierdien and Gamieldien, are members of the MJC. The fact that they didn't hesitate to mention this less enlightened period of the MJC's history should be regarded as an indicator that the MJC, or at least some of its members, concerned themselves with the history of the organization and therefore with the complacency of the major part of the community they belong to. As we shall see later, this concern will reach its limits quite fast.
- ¹¹ *Muslim News*, 31 July 1964, editorial. At the time *Muslim News* reflected exactly the *ulama's* viewpoint.
- ¹² The various influences that led to that early commitment to the "now proverbial silence of the sixties" (Jeppie 1991: 4) will be discussed in the context of the ideological background that shaped Imam Haron's political consciousness.
- ¹³ See Omar (1987: 24), where he refers to an interviewee.
- ¹⁴ *Call of Islam*, 31st March 1961. *Baasskap* is a pejorative Afrikaans term used to refer to white hegemony. Ali Fataar even used it as a synonym to the notion *Herrenvolk*. See the interview with Ali Fataar, 11.7.2000, Cape Town. See also the comments of Esack (1992: 169). He considers this circular as "the first attempt to organize Muslims as a sector of South African Society against social and political oppression, as distinct from what was construed as purely religious persecution." He also mentions Imam Haron as one of the prominent figures of this attempt.
- ¹⁵ *Muslim News*, 31 March 1961.
- ¹⁶ *Muslim News*, 28 April 1961.
- ¹⁷ Esack (1988: 498). See also Jeppie (1991).

- ¹⁸ Such organizations included the Muslim Youth Movement, founded in 1970, the Muslim Students Association (MSA), founded in 1974, Qibla, founded in 1980 and Call of Islam, founded in 1984. Call of Islam can be regarded as an off-shoot of the MYM for reasons of dissent on the political commitment and on the issue of affiliation to non-Muslim anti-apartheid organisations or bodies. Qibla is not an off-shoot of a former organization despite the fact that it recruited a lot of members from both the MYM and the MSA. These members were not prepared to follow the ideological shift from Islamism to contextualism that the MYM and the MSA underwent. According to their ideological orientation young people joined either Qibla which proclaimed a purely Islamist ideology or Call of Islam which stood for contextual ideology with a radical flavor in that it affiliated to non-Muslim secular liberation organizations and movements. The discourse of alliances with non-Muslim liberation movements was crucial. This issue brought to light the religious and political divisions on the one hand and the diversity among the Muslim organizations on the other. The question of whether to ally with others or not cannot be separated from the dilemma of the sustainability of Islamic values and goals within the struggle when confronted by secular movements. For further details see Tayob (1990).
- ¹⁹ Interview with Sheikh Faik Gamiendien, 14.8.2000, Cape Town.
- ²⁰ Interview with Sheikh Abdul Hamied Gabier, 3.8.2000 and 4.8.2000, Cape Town. Yusuf da Costa, who knew Imam Haron personally, confirms this statement. He even goes further: Imam Haron was not a *hafiz*, on the contrary this should be regarded as part of the myth. See interview with Yusuf da Costa, 22.10.2001, Cape Town.
- ²¹ It was and still is common that appointed Imams join the MJC. Walji (1987: 55), is the only one to mention that Imam Haron joined the MJC only two years after having been appointed. Unfortunately he informs the reader neither about his sources nor about the reasons for this although it seems to be quite exceptional.
- ²² See e.g. CDA 1994: 15 ff. An impressive example for the outspoken and courageous positions of Imam Haron is Farid Sayed's compilation of pronouncements documented in *Muslim News*. See Sayed (1994).
- ²³ Imam Ali Gierdien, quoted in Monro (1977: 10).
- ²⁴ For the following I refer to Allie (1994); Booley (1994); CDA (1994); Dessai & Marney (1978); Haron (1993; 1994a; 1994b); Monro (1977); and Omar (1987).
- ²⁵ The term *progressive* is used in the sense of a progressive counterpart to the traditional and established *ulama*. The CMYA later decided to change its name to Ibadur Rahman Study Group in order to avoid further harassment by the Security Branch. See Omar (1987: 35), the only biographer mentioning this harassment and the change of name. Almost parallel to the foundation of the CMYA, the Muslim Youth Movement of Cape Town was formed.
- ²⁶ It is worth emphasizing that only Dessai & Marney (1978: 25), stress explicitly the fact that Imam Haron used the pilgrimages for political purposes as well.
- ²⁷ This is true for the majority of the writings about Imam Haron as far as Muslim authors or organizations are concerned. Omar (1987) and Dessai & Marney (1978), are exceptions for different reasons. Omar's approach is neither in line with the biographical ones nor with the more apologetic or politically inspired writings focussing on the martyrdom. Dessai/Marney complete the biographical writings because they

introduce the reader to Imam Haron's political network both in South Africa and abroad. Concerning the non-academic writings about Imam Haron it is noteworthy that almost all of them refer mainly to Haron (1994b), Hendricks (1986) and Omar (1987), but without either adopting or even mentioning Omar's critical perspective. Non-Muslim articles about the Imam do not raise the issue of PAC-membership at all.

²⁸ See Dessai & Marney (1978), Omar (1987) and the interviews.

²⁹ This led to the decision to change the name of the organization. See above and Omar (1987: 35). They were observed both before and after Imam Haron's detention and death. See Haron (1994b: 80).

³⁰ See Haron (1994b: 76 ff.), amongst members of the Coloured People's Congress was Barney Dessai, one of the authors of *The Killing of the Imam*. See also Omar (1987: 18) and Davids (1996: 19).

³¹ See Omar (1987: 19), furthermore the Interview with Ali Fataar, 11.7.2000, Cape Town.

³² Haron (1994b: 76), he mentions his father's close contacts to the PAC and his firm support of the organisation. Though, some pages further, i.e. p. 80, he states that it is difficult to find out more about the Imam's involvement with the PAC. See also Haron (1994a: 4-5). He even mentions that the PAC strengthened their contacts with the Imam (1994a: 5).

³³ Fataar leaves it open in the interview, 11.7.2000, Cape Town. Whereas during his lecture he gives the impression that there was no membership. See Fataar (2000). His report is one of the examples of contradictory statements.

³⁴ Interview with Farid Esack, 4. and 7.7.2000, Cape Town.

³⁵ It is beyond my knowledge when the book was banned by the South African government, but several copies circulated freely within the Muslim community. For a long time this was the only text that gave further information about Imam Haron. The banning might be a reason that Dessai's and Marney's perspective did not have an impact. Another reason might be the focus of the book that emphasized the interrogation and the torture; this aspect covers more than half of the book and probably stirred the emotions of the readers. It is the fictional part of the book and the authors rely on "a letter smuggled out of his prison by Haron" and "the collective experience of South African detainees. References are made ... to facts, or the police version of them, which emerged at the inquest into Haron's death, and also to the experience of others." See Dessai & Marney (1978: 53) and Streek (1992). Further investigation will show that the discourses on the PAC membership and the purely Islamic motivation reflect the need for a role model guided and inspired by Islamic values.

³⁶ See e.g. Dessai & Marney (1978: 31ff). They even report that the harassment and the surveillance had started long before his pilgrimage in 1968, furthermore that the Security Branch observed him closely since 1960, (ibid. :37, 43).

³⁷ He was arrested under the Terrorism Act, Subsections six and seven of Section Six of Act 83 of 1967. See Monro (1977: 8), and Haron (1994b: 79).

³⁸ See e.g. Haron (1994b: 80), Dessai & Marney (1978: 130, 138f), quoting the

findings of Magistrate Kuhl.

- ³⁹ Robert Sobukwe (PAC), quoted in Haron (1994a: 4), and CDA (1994: 26).
- ⁴⁰ See CDA (1994: 21), see also *Muslim News*, 17 October 1980. An informant reported on the *ulama's* attitude in 1969: "Most of them said they did not want to be involved with this matter or that they did not want to be quoted on political matters." In 1980 the newspaper had accomplished a tremendous shift of its political or rather a-political stance of the 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. they no longer settled for complacency and silence and adopted the line of the Black Consciousness Movement. For further details see Haron (1993) and the interview with Farid Sayed, 4.8.2000, Cape Town. This shift explains why such a quotation was possible. However, it is important to mention here that this shift is not related to the resurgent popular interest in the Imam Haron legend. It took place before the Muslim community rediscovered the Imam as a martyr.
- ⁴¹ *Cape Times*, 30 May 1969.
- ⁴² *Muslim News*, 31 May 1969, editorial.
- ⁴³ *Muslim News*, 6 June 1969, editorial, entitled "Editor Detained".
- ⁴⁴ See the first editorial of *Muslim News*, 16 December 1960. See also Haron (1993: 213).
- ⁴⁵ See also Hendricks (1988: 46). He attributes the silence of the community to the influence of the clergy.
- ⁴⁶ Omar (1987: 49-50), see also p. 40 where Omar emphasizes the dominance of the conservative clergy concerning the political or rather a-political discourse within the community.
- ⁴⁷ See Dessay & Marney (1978: 140-141), quoting the recorded notes of the doctor who examined the body.
- ⁴⁸ Even women attended the funeral although this was not common at all. See Omar (1987: 55). See also the photographs published in the special edition of *Muslim News*, 3 October 1969.
- ⁴⁹ This is the assessment of M D Arendse, the Labor Party leader. See Omar (1987: 7, 57). He refers to *Post*, 5 October 1969. See also CDA (1994: 9).
- ⁵⁰ *Muslim News*, 3 October 1969, special issue.
- ⁵¹ Omar (1987: 60), he refers to an interview with Mr. Abe Adams, 18 January 1987.
- ⁵² See e.g. Omar (1987: 60), and *Deaths in Detention*.
- ⁵³ For the findings of the inquest see Qibla (1982); for the reporting see *Cape Times*, 11 March 1970 and 16 March 1970; for further details see Omar (1987: 66f).
- ⁵⁴ See e.g. Omar (1987: 60); *Cape Times*, 10 July 1970; Haron (1994a: 6); CDA (1994: 39f). The latter gives further details to Taylor's efforts to bring the truth to light. She continued her investigations until 1975. At that stage she had a dossier that would have been able to prove that Imam Haron's death was caused by an assault of members of the Security Branch, if by coincidence this dossier would not have disappeared with her UCT lecturer who was her assistant.
- ⁵⁵ See e.g. *Cape Times*, 23 September 1971, Lapsley (1995), Lubbe (1987: 120f). The Open Slavery, 66.

- ⁵⁶ Omar (1987: 420; he refers to *Cape Times*, 4 June 1969.
- ⁵⁷ *His Militancy Shook the Complacent Muslims*.
- ⁵⁸ Dessai & Marney (1978: 38), only these authors mention explicitly that Collins and Imam Haron knew each other well. The memorial service was attended by diplomats, representatives of liberation movements of South Africa and men and women from Britain and abroad.
- ⁵⁹ Omar (1987: 62). Omar is the only one to mention the reaction of the UN.
- ⁶⁰ Omar (1987: 60). He states that "the protest over the death on detention of the Imam has probably been one of the most vociferous issues the *Cape Times* has ever reported." He refers to the editions from September 1969 to October 1971.
- ⁶¹ The former congregation of Imam Haron was the exception that confirmed the rule. See also Omar (1987: 42, 47 & 63). Omar emphasizes their concern about both the Imam's detention and his death, and the commemoration of the latter.
- ⁶² Ahmed Cassiem, 1999, quoted during the commemoration of Imam Haron, 29 September 2001 in Cape Town. Ahmed Cassiem is the leader and ideological father of Qibla.
- ⁶³ However, it is remarkable that the Imam's congregation consistently held commemorations. The *Cape Times* issued editorials to commemorate the Imam's death in detention. See Omar (1987: 60).
- ⁶⁴ See Omar (1987: 56-57). Although there was a "natural" explanation, namely that there were workers on the roof, this was interpreted as a special message. See also Davids (1996: 16).
- ⁶⁵ This was even reported in the special edition of *Muslim News*, 3 October 1969.
- ⁶⁶ See Davids (1996: 16). He mentions that historians' representation of Imam Haron do not comment on the earthquake, although there is a historical parallel: after the death of Hazrat Hamza, a companion of prophet Mohammed, the earth responded. In a mystical context the numbers 7, 40 and 100 are of great importance. This is true for all sorts of mysticism. The earthquake caused considerable damage in the Western Cape. It was an event that was widely discussed and that still is present in the memory of the people; it was considered to be exceptional in any case. See the *Cape Times*, 30 September 1969.
- ⁶⁷ Even if one takes into consideration that Imam Haron was a very popular local leader and member of the local rugby and cricket clubs the number of mourners is still remarkable. See Walji (1987: 55).
- ⁶⁸ Omar (1987: 75f) stresses that the community was divided on the event: a small group supported the priest, the al-Jihaad movement and some local Sheikhs protested against his fast and reproached the priest for desecrating the Muslim shrine as well as the silent majority. This is but another example of the complacent attitude of the Muslim community, that worried more about religious details than about the destiny of one of their leaders.
- ⁶⁹ See e.g. the *Cape Times*, 23 September 1971, the newspaper reported on this regularly.
- ⁷⁰ See Dessai & Marney (1978: 127). It is noteworthy that the close personal and political association between Canon Collins and Imam Haron is not mentioned

explicitly in the writings about Imam Haron, except by Dessai & Marney (1978: 38).

⁷¹ See Omar (1987: 80) and the issues of *Muslim News* from 1975 onwards.

⁷² See e.g. Omar (1987: 80); Allie (1994). Besides commemorations and reports in Muslim newspapers and circulars the mid and late 1980s witnessed the emergence of numerous papers on Imam Haron.

⁷³ Jeppie (1991: 3). I want to direct attention to a critical statement on the next page of the article: "Imam Haron was killed and buried in the now proverbial 'silence of the sixties'." We do not know whether this contradiction happened by coincidence or reflects the widespread and rarely contested discourse concerning the impact of the Imam's death. However, one can assume that this academic article contributes to the consolidation of the mentioned discourse. Jeppie states on the same page "In the genealogy of 'progressive Islam' in modern South Africa Imam Harun [sic] certainly looms large. Muslim memory has undoubtedly appropriated the figure of Imam Harun [sic] as a solitary historical actor without support." However, Jeppie does not go further with deconstructing how and why the figure of the Imam had been appropriated.

⁷⁴ CDA (1994: 3). See also Lubbe (1986: 25), he also uses the expression "turning point in the history of Muslims in South Africa".

⁷⁵ *Risalatuna*, 1, 5, November 1986. *Risalatuna* is one of the mouthpieces of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM). I want to stress that the number is incorrectly given. Imam Haron was held in detention for 123 days. See also *Inqilaab*, 10, July 1982, editorial, 3, referring to the Imam's death as a significant milestone. *Inqilaab* is the mouthpiece of the Muslim Students' Association (MSA).

⁷⁶ *Muslim Views*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September/October 1986, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Even Haron's article on *Muslim News* does not raise the issue that the paper avoids to question its own past in respect to the dark side of this past. See Haron (1993).

⁷⁸ *Muslim News*, 17 October 1980.

⁷⁹ I already mentioned the vacuum of a progressive leadership. It was filled in the 1980s by young Muslims returning to South Africa after having studied Theology and Islamic Sciences abroad, such as Farid Esack and Ebrahim Moosa or with charismatic leaders like Ahmed Cassiem, to mention but a few. They formed a counterpart to the *ulama* and contributed to the ideological shifts within the Muslim organizations and therefore to the politicization and engagement of Muslims in the struggle.

⁸⁰ For further details to the concept and the meaning of martyrdom and sacrifice see the following verses of the Qur'an: 2:154; 2:193; 3:169-171; 4:74; 4:75; 4:95; 8:60; 22:39; 43:23; 90:4. See also the title of Hendricks' booklet "From martyrdom comes life" or the currently used slogan "martyrdom is victory". See e.g. Voice of the Revolutionary Youth (1990: 2) and the pamphlets of Qibla. There is no doubt that the perception of the Islamic revolution in Iran had an influence on the perception of the concept of martyrdom amongst South African Muslims. However, it would be beyond the scope of this article to analyse the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the Muslim organizations.

⁸¹ *Muslim News*, 21 September 1979, supplement entitled *Tribute to a Martyr*. The shift

from a "humble man" to a martyr was accomplished. See above.

⁸² *Muslim News*, 24 September 1982.

⁸³ All the circulars, commemoration papers and pamphlets emphasise the martyrdom and sacrifice of the Imam. It is the major focus concerning the perception of the Imam. Simultaneously they fully mention the list of bruises and injuries that led to the Imam's death. In fact the element that makes him a martyr. The annual repetition of commemoration events indicates the importance to maintain the image of Imam Haron as a martyr.

⁸⁴ This becomes even more evident if one takes into consideration the above mentioned discourse whether to affiliate with non-Muslim organizations or not.

⁸⁵ *Muslim News*, 21 September 1979, supplement entitled *Tribute to a Martyr*.

⁸⁶ *Muslim News*, 24 September 1982. This is a statement of the South African Students' Association.

⁸⁷ Another example is the play that was written on and performed at the theatre in Cape Town. See Allie (1994), Spaans (1994) and Verdal (1994).

⁸⁸ Booley (1994: 37). The eulogy *pbuh* means *peace be upon him*. Rhetorically this statement is revealing, because the first part pretends a certain criticism with the effect that the attention of the reader is attracted. The coincidence is presented as striking, the mentioning of the 13th anniversary of the appointment even emphasizes the coincidence, that at least unconsciously this statement is a contribution to the creation of a legend. And this is but one example. In this context it is notable that the number is wrongly given, probably unconsciously because of the mystical character of the number 13.

⁸⁹ Booley (1994: 37). He even mentions the rumblings after 7, 40 and 100 days.

⁹⁰ *Muslim Views Achiever of the Year 1993*, special edition.

⁹¹ Even the Imam's son, Muhammed Haron, emphasizes consistently the purely religious motivation of his father's activities. One can assume that this contributed to intensify the image of a martyr. He states, for example: "Since he was a moderate, his life should not be interpreted as that of a 'revolutionary'. The Imam was no revolutionary" (Haron 1986: 249).

⁹² *Muslim News*, 25 September 1981, *Muslim News*, 24 September 1982, *Muslim News*, 21 September 1984.

⁹³ *Al-Qalam*, undated.

⁹⁴ It would be interesting to investigate in detail the Imam's legacy for each organization. Unfortunately this is beyond the scope of this article.

⁹⁵ See e.g. *Muslim News*, 16 September 1983.

⁹⁶ *Muslim News*, 21 September 1979. See also the foreword of Dessai & Marney (1978: X). The author states: "He was the Muslim leader who became one of the principal victims of the regime. [...] Since then (after his death in 1969, U.G.) attention has been concentrated on a very similar fatality - the death of Steve Biko."

⁹⁷ *Muslim News*, 21 September 1984.

⁹⁸ Davids (1996: 18), stresses the meaning of historical role models, the history of the founders of the Muslim community in the Cape who were perceived as exceptional.

See also Haron (1994a: 2).

⁹⁹ *Muslim News*, 25 September 1981.

¹⁰⁰ See the reports in *Muslim News* on the gatherings from the mid 1980s on, e.g. the issue of 11 October 1985. It is important to notice in this context that the government declared the State of Emergency in 1986.

¹⁰¹ *Voice of the Revolutionary Youth* (1990: 2).

¹⁰² Statement of his speech during the Imam Haron Medal Award, 1st June 2000, University of Cape Town.

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