A Parallel Mode of Being: The Sanūsīyyah and Intellectual Subversion in Cape Town, 1800-1840 Part One[1]

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Introduction

Shaykh 'Abdullāh ibn Qādī 'Abdus Salām (1712-1807), more commonly known in Cape Town as Tuan Guru or "Esteemed Master" is generally acknowledged as the personality mainly responsible for the formal establishment of Islam in Cape Town.[2] This "High Priest"[3] of the Muslim community established South Africa's first Muslim school (*madrasah*) and mosque. But his literary and intellectual legacy was of even greater significance: it was a legacy that provided impetus for the development of written Afrikaans[4] and which, more profoundly, shaped the worldview of the Cape Muslim community for the centuries to come. This worldview is contained in Tuan Guru's transcription of a classic text on Islamic belief, entitled the *Ummul Barāhīn* (The Demonstrative Proofs), together with one of its commentaries. The *Ummul Barāhīn* was authored by a North African scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (1435/36–1490) and thus was also known as the *Sanūsīyyah* (lit.*Sanūsi's*). The commentary transcribed by Tuan Guru is that of a student of Shaykh Sanūsi's, Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Malāli. An English translation of this transcription has recently been published.[5] The transcription of the *Ummul Barāhīn*, though, is only one component of Tuan Guru's massive compendium of Islamic knowledge - often called the M*'arifat ul-Islām* (Knowledge of Islam) – which in addition consists of *ḥadīth* (Prophetic sayings), *fiqh* (Islamic law), supplications, amulets and transcriptions of parts of the Qurān.[6] The focus of this two-part essay is not on these more pietistic sections of the compendium, but on the theological *Ummul Barāhīn* and its commentary, hereinafter referred to as the 'transcription' or 'text'. Part one deals with the implications of its contents, while the second part contextualises its transmission in nineteenth century Cape Town.

What did the transcription mean to those who held its perspective and for the way they related to those who did not? By juxtaposing a debate regarding the reasons for rapid Islamic conversion in the early nineteenth century with an analysis of the content of the transcription, this section of the paper suggests that the transcription oriented the Muslim slaves and free blacks in a fully coherent, rationally enunciated and self-sustaining worldview that, on the one hand, provided cognitive grounds for their beliefs while, on the other, shielded them from arguments that may have been advanced by Christian missionaries and, more significantly, dissolved the temporal power of their colonial "masters" by locating it within a wider ontological sphere. This self-sustaining ontology necessarily implies a mode of being, a mode of relating to reality that ran parallel, as it were, to these other modes, not being dominated by them and indeed, since "true", to be privileged over them.

The Transmission of the Transcription in Cape Town[7]

Of course, such assertions assume that the text indeed held sway over Cape Muslim thought in the first half of the nineteenth century – the period of rapid conversion – and thus it is an assumption that needs to be grounded. According to Achmad Davids (1985), the *Ummul Barāhīn* was the textual basis for the worldview of the early Cape Muslim community. This community institutionally emerged from 1794 onward, with Tuan Guru's establishment of Cape Town's first mosque and *madrasah* (Muslim school). Davids (1985: 40-45) asserts that Tuan Guru, a prince and religious scholar of the island of Tidore in the Moluccas, was banished by the Dutch to Cape Town in 1780 for allegedly conspiring with the English against them. Captured as a "State Prisoner" he was interned at Robben Island until 1793 where he wrote the compendium. Upon his release from Robben Island, the Tuan industriously set about organising and educating the then relatively small Muslim community, who were largely composed of slaves but included exiled notables and convicts as well.

The compendium, and the *Ummul Barāhīn* in particular, constituted the foundational text of the *madrasah*. The *Ummul Barāhīn* became locally known as the "twintagh siefaats" (twenty attributes) in Cape Muslim Afrikaans, this referring to the number of attributes the text describes to be necessarily predicated of God. Davids notes that the *Ummul Barāhīn* proved most popular and convenient for rote learning, and several copies were transcribed, with Malay translations, from the original compendium as handbooks and readers for students at the *madrasah*.[8] Davids (1991: 68), who had two copies of such manuscripts in his possession and had seen several others states that they constitute "...the most extensive examples of the literary exploits of the Cape Muslims prior to emancipation". In fact, Davids (1991: 37) attributes the "phenomenal success" of the Dorp Street *madrasah* - which attracted increasing numbers of students with each

passing year and was being replicated in a growing number of other *madāris* (Muslim schools) - to the theological/philosophical base provided by Tuan Guru's teaching of the *Ummul Barāhīn*. Regarding the determinative role it plays in the Cape Muslim worldview he comments:

> Its basic philosophical position still forms the approach to aqida (the Islamic belief system) and became the subject of several Arabic-Afrikaans and Afrikaans (in Roman script) publication [*sic*] in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century. (Davids 1991: 39)

And:

> ...the Sanusiyyah remained the main teaching subject of the madaris in Cape Town until well into the 1950's-1960's, when we as children were required to memorize its concepts without fully comprehending them. (Davids 1991: 68)

It is indubitable, by the mere fact of its inclusion in the compendium and what we know of the character of traditional Islamic instruction that within the well-organized, standardised, system of Islamic education that prevailed in Cape Town in the first half of the nineteenth century, the commentary of the *Ummul Barāhīn* was taught in tandem with its text. [9] It was required that the text be memorised, forming the content of students' *koples boeke* (memorisation workbooks).[10] However, in traditional Islamic instruction, the teacher's oral commentary explicates an often, concentrated text - as is indeed the *Ummul Barāhīn*. Tuan Guru's transcription of the commentary was very likely aimed as a guide for future teachers, serving them well for the large part of the nineteenth century when the compendium was used as a basic reference on religious issues in Cape Town.[11]

Further evidence of the sway of the text is its initiation of a vital tradition of *aqidah* studies in Cape Town, manifested initially in the *koples boeke* already mentioned, later in the Arabic-Afrikaans literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and continuing up to the present day in English and standard Afrikaans. Thus some of the contributions listed by Hans Kahler (1988) in his survey of Arabic-Afrikaans literature and that explicitly discuss this subject include the following:

- *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif fī bayān al-Tawḥīd al-Kubrā* The Book on what is well known in regard to the explanation of the great unity of God]. By 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Marḥūm al-Sayyid 'Abbās, 1325/ 1907, transcribed from another book lithographed in 1896.
- *Kitāb al-riyād al-Bad'īyah fī usūl al-dīn wa b'd furū al-Sharī'ah* : The book of the wonderful garden regarding the principles of religion and some

branches of Islamic law. Translated by 'Abd al-Raqīb ibn al-marhūm 'Abd al-Qahhār 1317/1899.

- *Al-Rawḍ al Azhar fī fiqh al-akbar* [The radiant garden in greater jurisprudence]. By Isma'īl ibn Muḥammad Ḥanīf 1338/1919.
- *Risālat fī Aqā'id al Tawḥīd* [Treatise on the doctrine of belief in the oneness of Allah]. According to Shaykh Behardien, Cape Town by Imām Abū Bakr ibn al-Imām 'Abd Allāh 1338-39/1921.

The African Studies library at the University of Cape Town, in fact, holds an early twentieth century manuscript that is a direct Afrikaans translation of the *matn* (text *sans* commentary) of the *'aqīdah* transcribed by Tuan Guru. It is untitled but begins as follows:

> Dit is en translate van die kitaab Sunusi in Ilmutougied bij Abdurrakieb Bin Abdulkahaar." Dated 1st mugarram 1331 [about 1914].[12]

It may conceivably be speculated that it was translated to continue, or revive, the Tuan Guru legacy in this respect. More recently, we have Amien Fakier's *Akiedatoel-Moesliem: a kietaab oor Tougied* (1982), which also draws upon the Sanūsi legacy. The imbibing of the text was almost certainly facilitated by the long-lasting Imām-murīd relationships particularly characteristic of nineteenth century Cape mosques (see Tayob 1999). The *murīd* – a word which technically refers to a Sufi initiate but which evolved in the Cape context to mean a student of a particular Imam and a member of his congregation - would normally be attached to the Imam and his mosque for the duration of his or her lifetime. This would have provided the scope for repeated and amplified explanations of what is, admittedly, a rather difficult text. Furthermore, and not to be underestimated, key notions of the text were filtered through into the daily pietism of the community. Thus commonplace expressions such as "dunya se goedes" ("worldly things") and "dit was uitgesit" ("it was predestined to happen") cathartically reflect the text's teaching on the insignificance of this world and the need to be constantly conscious of God's omnipotence, and in their function as catharsis, reinforce these teachings.

Conversion to Islam in Cape Town circa 1800-1840

The rapid expansion of Islam in Cape Town from about 1800 to 1840 is well known and its rapid growth was one of the most striking features of early nineteenth-century Cape Town. Although Muslims had formed a significant part of the Dutch settlement, it was only in the early British period that a distinctive and sizeable Muslim community began to emerge. From less than a 1000 in 1800, the number of Muslims in Cape Town grew to 3000 in 1822 and doubled to over

6000 by 1840. This growth was the result not just of natural increase, but of conversion, especially among the slave and labouring classes of the town (Worden et al. 1998). Explaining this sudden burst has been fertile ground for scholarly speculation. In an extensive essay, Robert Shell has argued that Islam was so successful in this period because it catered for social exigencies:

> I will argue that economic marginality, racial exclusion, status, gendered notions of religion and marriage choices, a need for community identity and a communal respect for the dead far outweighed any cognitive factors for conversion to a monotheistic religion. I would like to suggest that at the Cape, mundane social pressures, status anxieties and an expressed need for a religio-ethnic identity rather than intellectual responses prompted religious conversion. (Shell 1993: 410-411)

Shell (1993) divides the process of conversion into two broad categories, "cognitive" and "domestic" conversions. Cognitive conversions occurred outside the family threshold, for example: a potential convert may have adopted the dress of a Cape Muslim; or claimed to have been a "Malay" to obtain a favoured job; or have been attracted via a mosque; or Muslim funeral. However, even these "cognitive" conversions, Shell (1993) claims, were an amalgam of other reasons generally related to social status, inclusion and identity. In contradistinction, domestic conversions all occurred within the family household through the adoption of slaves, and later, orphans who in turn adopted Islam and entered the family network as well as via intermarriage between Muslim and non-Muslim. For Shell (1993), domestic conversions were the more important. Most slaves of Muslim owners converted to Islam. Shell (1993: 433) quotes Reverend Elliot, writing in 1829, as follows:

> The case is widely different with a slave who becomes a convert to Muhammedanism; he immediately becomes a *real*, not a nominal member of an extensive Society, every member of which recognizes his claim to a full and ungrudging share of all the privileges, and charities of brotherhood. It is not in the Mosque alone that he feels himself a social being; in every house inhabited by a Musselman he finds a home and a brother, and in every assembly whether convened for purposes of religion or festivity, he takes his place with confidence among free men, and in the general flow of kindly feeling, almost forgets his bonds.

But Islam also attracted slaves of non-Muslim owners due to, on the one hand, their exclusion from Christianity and, on the other, to the attractions of a genuine

Islamic universalism. Thus both types of slave conversion contributed considerably to the spread of Islam at the Cape Colony in the first third of the century.

Even more significant in the assimilation process was the next stage: education in *madrasahs*, or Islamic schools. Shell notes that, in the 1820's, a school conducted by an Imam had 370 pupils who were taught the Quran and Arabic. "Another, larger" one had 491 students in 1825. Taken together, "these schools alone had more black pupils than all the other educational institutions in the Cape Colony put together" (Shell 1993: 436). Besides these large schools, there were many other smaller institutions run by elderly retired Imams. As noted by Shell, about eighty entries of "Malay Schoolmasters" can be found in the street directories of the period 1809 to 1890, confirming the wide distribution of these schools (see Shell 1993: 437). He writes:

> Muslim education encouraged conversion in many ways: first, the madressah system was open to all children, regardless of race or religion, thereby drawing hundreds of otherwise excluded children into the Islamic circle; second, *imams* conducted the lessons in a language – Afrikaans – which appealed to the largest linguistic pool at the Cape, and finally, the Islamic schools offered an alternative education for many people hostile to, or suspicious of, the ruling Christian order. (Shell 1993: 443)

Conversion to Islam was assisted by the indifference of white slave owners to their slaves becoming Muslim. This was because in Protestantism, unlike Catholicism, Christian slaves had legal claims to be considered free. Thus owners at the Cape feared losing their property so, in fact, they preferred their slaves to be Muslim. Shell (1994: 302) has elaborated the point in his *Children of Bondage*:

> The spread of Islam at the Cape, then, accelerated in 1770 with the enactment of specific legislation that prohibited the buying and selling of Christian slaves. As the domestic market became the only source of slaves after 1808, legislation curtailing the transfer of Christian slaves had sharper effects. Slave owners...consequently neglected [the education of their slaves] completely. Despite a considerable global missionary effort, only a handful of slaves were baptized each year. On the other hand, the number of male Muslim slaves increased rapidly....[It] is suggested that the rapid spread was caused by the slave owners, who believed that the adoption of Islam by their slaves would further distance them from Christianity and freedom. Muslim slaves would prob-

> ably remain sober, and would certainly remain marketable. In an economy based on wine and slaves, such considerations were important.

Finally, in contrast to Christian slaves buried in "inferior" graveyards or in shallow graves made by their owners, the relatively elaborate Muslim burial rites "provided a more dignified spectacle than the austere and thoroughly perfunctory Calvinist burial" (Shell 1993: 452-453). In Shell's view, then, conversion to Islam occurred for mostly practical reasons. There is little evidence of the occurrence of purely cognitive conversions. Islam filled the gap created by the social and legal limbo status of slavery at the Cape where Christian rites of baptism, marriage and internment were denied to slaves, and its impressive network of social, educational and religious institutions attracted many individuals in an economically or socially marginal position:

> Islam at the Cape did offer...*all* people of mixed origins and insecure status, a place in a stable and self-assured community. For a wide range of urbanizing people, slaves and free, Islam at the Cape offered first an authentic universalism, a cradle-to-the-grave range of social services, then an identity, and then an intellectual inspiration. (Shell 1993: 457)

Shell's suggestion that Islam found success because it formed a parallel community, is amplified by Andrew Bank who writes:

> Islam developed as an urban underclass religion distinct from the religion of the ruling class....It was a religion that gave increasing number of Cape Town slaves access to an alternative worldview, supported by alternative social and cultural networks. By the late slave period a cohesive and rapidly expanding Islamic community had emerged at the Cape, offering potential sanctuary from social and ideological domination by the master class. (Bank 1991: 110)

And:

> The spread of Islam in the post-abolition period should therefore be seen primarily as a region-specific response to the social milieu in which slaves and free blacks at the Cape found themselves. It is this notion of a firmly locally-based religion of the underclasses, which only came to emerge in a coherent and collective form in the late eight-

> eenth century, that informs the picture of Islam in this analysis. (Bank 1991: 112)

For Bank (1991: 113), this "region-specific" success of Islam was inherently tied to its socio-economic location: being a strongly community-oriented religion, the urban rather than rural context was more conducive to its spread; the religion of the ruling class was ineffective in imposing its hegemony and the "fragmented ideology" of the city's ruling class gave ample scope for sub-cultural development; the occupational mobility of urban slaves allowed them greater freedom to attend ceremonies, partake in rituals etc; and the slaves were increasingly brought into contact with free inhabitants in the economic sphere, which spilt over in other spheres. The result was that this urban-centred religion of the underclass became increasingly syncretistic and creolised, particularly after 1808 when the cutting off of fresh imports from the East further enhanced Islam's residency nature at the Cape.

Shell's general point, then, with regard to the communal nature of Islam's attraction can be sustained. But Shell has definitely under-stressed the importance of purely cognitive factors, as Mason (2002) has pointed out. For Mason (2002: 6), who otherwise agrees with Shell's general tenor "arguments which touch only on pragmatic concerns ignore evidence that conversion had as much to do with the sacred as with the profane." In particular, the "ratiep" ceremony - a mystical ritual involving the piercing of the body by swords and other sharp objects widely practised by Cape Muslims in the 19th century was "a discipline of body, mind, and spirit which enabled adepts to transcend the mundane world of the flesh and directly experience an alternative, superior, spiritual reality (Mason 2002: 7). According to Mason (2002), Sufism was a vital part of Islamic practice in the 18th and 19th century "and must be incorporated into a fully satisfying explanation of Muslim conversion." Mason contests Shell's claim that monotheism was 'not clearly understood' by Muslim converts at the Cape and that, instead, conversion was 'accelerated by magical practices and syncretistic mysticism quite unrelated to monotheism'and offers the following counter-argument to Shell:

> The subtleties of high theology might well have been beyond the grasp of poorly educated slaves and Prize negroes. But the shaykhs within the *tariqa* and the emerging Quranic schools ensured that at the very least all the converts understood the fundamental teaching of Islam: Your God is one God. There is no God but Him. He is the Compassionate, the Merciful. (Mason 2002: 17)

Furthermore, Mason (2002: 18) recognises that the transcription of the *Ummul Barāhīn* by Tuan Guru lay at the heart of school curriculum which led in turn to

the stress on the 'rational unity of God'. The existence of student notebooks dating from the first decade of the nineteenth century containing this transcription must have meant that, "Muslim converts at the Cape were ...well drilled in the fundamentals of Islamic monotheism" (Mason 2002: 18). Mason's dissent is important because it is linked to a fundamental question that is begged by Shell's analysis: what was it that sustained this impressive community? Or, to put it differently, why did the community gel so formidably at this particular juncture in its history? Mason's reference to the "ratiep" suggests that members of the Muslim community felt that their beliefs provided a direct access to ultimate realities. He furthermore brings in an aspect of the issue that is neglected by Shell, namely, the existence of Tuan Guru's manuscript and its subsequent derivatives - "the "koples boeke"- a reading of which shows a clearly defined, cognitively grounded worldview for the Muslim community in the period under discussion. With the proliferation of the manuscript having been established, this worldview, by its very existence, must be taken into account in any discussion on conversion. Indeed, the work of Achmat Davids (1995) has directly linked the conversion of slaves to the worldview propounded by the transcription.

According to Davids (1995), the emergence of Islam at this time resulted from a conflict of interest between Muslim slaves and Muslim Free-Black owners, with Tuan Guru himself being a slave owner. Free blacks owned slaves, not necessarily to manumit them, but as an economic investment since they could only own landed property with the permission of the governor. Such investment became an established tradition by the end of the eighteenth century. This created a need for a matrix that would accommodate slaves, giving them comfort in their subjugation and enough space for social mobility, while at the same time, protecting the rights of their Free Black owners. This matrix was provided for in the theological-philosophical basis founded by Tuan Guru as expounded in the *Ummul Barāhīn*. According to Davids (1995: 58-59):

> Tuan Guru's philosophical theology provided the matrix for slaves and the Free Blacks to function together as a religio-cultural entity without threatening their respective stations in life. At the same time, this theological philosophy provided for the slaves, a possibility of social mobility and a fair degree of protection from the harsh treatment of their Free Black slave-masters....Using the Ash'arite philosophical concepts such as *taqdir* [predetermination], *iradah* [the will of God], *iktisab* [acquisition], Tuan Guru managed to wave [sic] a system of social relations, in which the slaves and their Free Black slave-owners could now harmoniously exist. In terms of this system of social relations, it was possible for a slave to be appointed as an *Imam* of a congregation

> or an assistant *Imam* of a mosque. Differences between men were not measured in terms of social position or material possession, but differences in the acquisition of degrees of piety (*taqwah*)....Tuan Guru's application of the Ash'arite system protected the interests and needs of both the slaves and their Free Black slave masters, and provided the impetus for the rapid growth of Islam as the slave religion in Cape Town.

Elsewhere he notes:

> It is the author's contention that the *Sunusiyyah* or *twintagh siefaats* provided the slaves with an understanding of a rational unitary God, which Christian missionaries with the concept of Trinity could not penetrate. (Davids 1994: 55)

While this last statement is admissible given that arguments from the text could be used against Trinitarian position, Davids's analysis is otherwise problematic: the content of the text simply does not sustain his extrapolation into the social sphere. There is no textual linkage available, even by way of allusion, between the highly theoretical concepts contained in the manuscript and Davids's system of social relations. Moreover, the concepts presented by Davids here do not represent the main thrust of the text which, as we will now explore, establishes the ontological relationship between God and the human being, necessitating an orientation of perspective rather than structural relationships.[13]

What kind of perspective did this text then impart? An analysis of the text with this concern in mind delineates it into three parts, dealing with, respectively, the manner of apprehending reality, the structure of reality, and the approximation of that reality.

Epistemology

The manner of apprehending reality is demarcated within the categories admitted by reason and cannot be apprehended outside of these. These categories are necessity, possibility and impossibility. Necessity implies that which must fall within this apprehension, possibility that which may or may not fall into it, and impossibility that which cannot fall within the manner of apprehending reality. In the words of the text itself translated by Rafudeen (2004):

> Know that rational judgment [*al-ḥukm ul-aqlī*] is restricted to three categories: necessity [*al-wujūb*], impossibility [*istiḥāla*] and possibility [*jawāz*]. Necessity is that which reason can-

> not conceive of being non-existent. Impossibility is that which reason cannot conceive of being existent. Possibility is that which reason can conceive of being either existent or non-existent. (Rafudeen 2004: 12)

Part of the commentary on this passage runs as follows:

> The meaning of judgment [*ḥukm*] is the establishment or negation of a datum [*amr*]. Whenever reason establishes a datum, it cannot rationally negate it and its being is a necessity. Whenever reason negates a datum, then it cannot rationally establish it, and its being is an impossibility. Whenever reason judges a datum capable of either existence or non-existence, then it's being is a possibility. The nature of the three categories can be clarified by using an example. Necessity is like describing a body [*jirm*] as being either in motion or stationary because it must be described by one of the two, and not by both simultaneously. Impossibility is akin to describing a body as being neither in movement nor stationary because reason does not admit that a body can be absent of both of these. Possibility is equivalent to describing a body by only one ... of these qualities [*mu'īn*] for reason can admit that a body be perpetually in motion or that it be perpetually stationary. (Rafudeen 2004: 12-13)

These categories form the necessary epistemology for the structure of reality in Islam. One's faith in God and His Messengers occurs via the knowledge of these three categories. The commentary quotes Islam's foremost dialectical theologian[14] as follows: "The faith which we are required to have is a self-analysis (*ḥadīth un nafs*) related to knowledge of these three categories" (Rafudeen 2004: 14). Such an epistemology inducted Cape Muslims into a rich intellectual, international tradition that stretched back to the ancient Greeks. Shaykh al-Sanūsī, the North African author of the *Ummul Barāhīn*, was famed for his works on *'aqīdah*, or the Islamic tenets of belief, which he wrote at basic, intermediate and advanced levels of elucidation. The rationally enunciated, considered distillation of the Ash'arî creed as represented in Shaykh al-Sanūsī's writings has had a far-reaching impact on the Islamic world, inspiring numerous commentaries. The impact of his writings, as Bencheneb[15] points out, are evident in West Africa where the *Ummul Barāhīn* and its commentaries flourished under the Fulani name *Kabbe* in Morocco and Egypt, where his various works constituted standard, graded textbooks of *'aqīdah*. This is also the case in South East Asia where the *Ummul Barâhîn*, also called there the *al-Durra*, together with its commentaries were taught

in the *pesantren* (Islamic schools/colleges) accompanied by an interlinear Malay or Javanese translation and which was undoubtedly the origin of its instalment in Cape Town.

Shaykh's Sanūsi's work represented a distilled, mainstream manifestation of approximately four centuries of vibrant dialectical argument waged between various theological factions. These ranged from proponents of unfettered free will to determinists, or from those who proposed the primacy of reason to uncompromising traditionalists.[16] Such arguments, as well as the corollary scrutiny of the foundations on which they rested, occurred within a context of Muslim interaction with Greek discussions of logic and systems of thought such as Neo-Platonism. Whether conscious of it or not, Cape Muslims were provided with an epistemology, even though it may have been stated in a basic manner, the intellectual pedigree of which had already been hewn by centuries of debate, forming an effective, resilient underpinning to their worldview.

Ontology

Once the demarcations relating to the structure of reality have been put in place, that reality is then described. In short, that reality is God and things only acquire any value in so far as they are conscious of this Reality. A striking saying quoted in the commentary and attributed to the Holy Prophet, the Salutations and Peace of Allah be upon him, encapsulates this worldview: "The value of the world with Allah is that of a corpse (*jīfah)*" (Hendricks, no date: 50). The text applies the categories of rational thought to God and states that He *necessarily* partakes in the following attributes: Existence, Beginninglessness, His Absolute Distinction to all that which is created, unqualified Self-Subsistence, Oneness (*Waḥdānīyyah*) - that is, there is no other like Him in Being, Attributes and Acts – Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Seeing and Speech (Hendricks, no date: 15-27).[17] The opposites of these attributes are *impossible* to ascribe to God. That which is *possible* for God is His choosing to do or leave that which falls within the realm of possibility, such as creating human beings, for instance. In other words, that which is necessary - the opposite of which is impossible – only pertain to His Being, or Essence, and His Attributes. That which is possible, and not necessary in itself pertains to His Acts and all of creation is viewed as nothing but His Acting. His Acts in turn are manifested in the world in terms of bodies and accidents which are defined as follows:

> By body is meant that which is established in itself and occupies space, such as a human being, for example and other such created entities. Each one of these is termed body. These entities gather in bodies, that is, in quantities [*maqādir*] which occupy space. .... The meaning of accident [*'arḍ*] is a

> thing that subsists via a body and cannot be established in itself. These ... are things like colours, tastes, scents, voices, movement, and pause. All of these are accidents, it being impossible that they are established in themselves as they need a body for their establishment. It is therefore known that all of creation is either designated as a body or an accident and [it is further known] that existents are related to space. (Hendricks, no date: 29)

These definitions, when tied to the concepts of essence, attributes and doer [or cause], leads to the following designations within reality:

> [T]he self-sufficient category is independent of an essence or doer, this [category] being the Being of our Protector, Glorious and Honoured. The [second] category is in need of an essence and a doer and is the category of accidents, namely, characteristics established through bodies as their independence from the latter is impossible. The [third] category is that which is in need of a doer but is not in need of an essence by which it must become established ... these being bodies. The [fourth] category is present in the essence and *does* need a doer and these are His Attributes, Glorious and Honoured. (Hendricks, no date: 29)

The second and third categories naturally relate to the way creation is organized in terms of normal human perception. This perception is connected to the law of cause and effect – the law of nature. But causes in themselves cannot produce effects. They appear to produce effects because it is the "habit" of God to create in that way. However, in reality He is the Sole Cause and He produces the effects. Here we have the famous Asharite concept of atomistic causation: there is no inherent link between cause and effect, and each moment an atom in creation is being created and annihilated by the creative and annihilating activity of God. The text and the commentary are worth quoting in full in this regard:

> *Text*: And it is also deduced ... that nothing in creation can have an effect on anything else for if this was not the case then it would be necessary for that effect to be independent of our Protector, Most Glorious, Most Honoured and this is impossible. He is the One on which all that is other than He depends, completely and under all conditions. This scenario applies if you believe that anything created can bring about an effect through its very nature. If you hold that it

brings about an effect through a power which Allâh places in it, as many of the ignorant assert, then this is also impossible because then our Protector, Most Honoured, Most Glorious, is dependent on effecting an action via a mediator- which is absurd given what you know of the necessary Independence ... of the Most Glorious, Most Honoured from all that is other than Him.

Commentary: ... That is, it is inferred from "Dependence" that creation cannot produce effect [*ta'thīr*]. Effect is specifically reserved for eternal power. ... For if creation could produce an effect then that act would not depend on Him, the Most High and He would depend on the one who brings about the effect - which is impossible. He is the one upon whom all that which is other than Him depends. Therefore [to claim] effect from what is other than the Most High's Power is absurd [*bāṭil*]. Thus [is known] the invalidity [of the beliefs] of the *Qādarīyyah*[18] who assert the effect of originated power in acts. And thus is known the invalidity of the *Ṭabā'īn*[19] sect, who assert that effect is through inherent nature [*tabā'i*] and materiality [*amzajawīyah*] and so forth, for example, that food fills, water quenches, purifies and cleans, that fire burns, that clothing covers the private parts ['*awrah*] and guards against heat or cold - there being countless such examples. Whosoever believes ... that an effect is truly produced through the inherent nature of its causal phenomenon, then such a one is an unbeliever - there being no difference of opinion amongst the scholars with regard to such a verdict. Whosoever believes that an effect is not truly produced by the inherent nature of the causal phenomenon, but by a power that Allâh, the Most High lodges in this phenomenon, and if He so wished, He could remove it and there would then be no effect from this phenomenon, then [with regard to such a view] there is unanimity that such a person is an innovator, but there is a difference of opinion on whether he is an unbeliever. And many of the common believers hold this latter view. But the believer with true faith does not see any effect being produced by causal phenomena, whether [claimed] through their inherent nature or through a power that Allah, the Most High, has lodged in them. Neither [does he see any effect] in our Protector's -Glory be to Him, Most High - ...

> habitual manner of creation [*ajrā al 'ādah*] - this being the manner upon which He creates things, these latter not being created through their cause. Through the grace of Allah, this [explanation] will save many of those who [would have otherwise] perished in the next world. And through Allah comes success. (Hendricks, no date: 55-57)

The implications for Cape Muslims are clear. Since what is required is to know God as He is, and since the world in itself has no value in the sight of God, and given that its workings are nothing but the manifestation of His acts, their "masters" temporal authority and worldly dominance was, in terms of ultimacy, irrelevant. The "masters" effective power was illusory and, indeed, since cut off from knowing God as He is, their reality was skewed compared to the temporally subjugated who had via this worldview, like in the *ratiep*, access to ultimate realities. Furthermore, the *Ummul Barāhīn* not only oriented their own worldview but also subsumed that of their "masters" within its ontological orbit.

The Approximation of Reality

The will of the absolutely transcendent, all-sustaining God is made known through His Prophets who are distinguished from other human beings by their quality of *'ismah*" (divine protection from error) which is why they are capable of being followed. This capability is specifically associated with the inherent and inextinguishable nature of four qualities necessarily possessed by them:

> As for the Messengers, on them be Salutations and Peace, they necessarily are truthful, faithful to their commission and [undertakers] of the propagation of that with which they are ordered through His communication. It is impossible for them, Salutations and Peace be upon them, to have the opposites of these attributes, namely falsehood, faithlessness - through doing a thing which they have proscribed, whether this proscription is of the nature of forbidding or detestation - or hiding anything of that which they have been commanded to propagate to the creation. (Hendricks, no date: 44)[20]

This recognition of these qualities means that whatever knowledge they communicate with regard to commands, prohibitions, religious law, verities of the next world etc. must be accepted:

> From our utterance "Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah" is derived belief in the rest of the Messengers, and the Angels, on them be Salutations and Peace, as well as the Heavenly Books and the Last Day for he, the Salutations and Blessings of Allah be upon him, came to affirm all of these. (Hendricks, no date: 57)

It is significant, particularly given its Cape context, that a hierarchy of human beings is established by the text on the basis of their approximation of this knowledge of the Prophets:

> Similarly, a Prophet, when he is sent by Allah, the Most High, to confirm the *Sharī'ah* of another from among the Messengers, is like a scholar ['*ālim*]. And if he, Salutations and Peace of Allah be upon him, had said "like the Messengers [*rusul*] of Banī Isrāīl" it would have been thought that a scholar comes with a new legislation, which is not the case. He, the Salutations and Peace of Allah be upon him, said: "A scholar to his people is like a Prophet to his nation [*ummah*]." Understand this secret to which he, Salutations and Peace of Allah be upon him, has pointed. In it is a pointer to the superiority of knowledge and its people and that the station of knowledge is a noble one. (Hendricks, no date: 59)

Such statements (and it is a point elaborated at length in the text[21]), of course, provide a key to understanding the respect accorded to the Imams - the agents of the conversion process - in 19th century Cape Town. The role of Imams in this period as both the spiritual and temporal guides of the community is a well-documented phenomenon[22] and the text here provides at least a partial indicator as to the source of their authority.

Part Two of this article will be published in the next edition of the Journal for the Study of Religion, Volume 18, 2 (2005).

Notes

1 A draft version of this part of the paper was presented at a seminar held at the Department of History, University of the Western Cape on the 14th September 2004. I would like to thank the participants, especially Drs Andrew Bank and Susan Newton-King, for their valuable feedback.

2 According to Worden et al. (1998: 123) "...he presided over the shift from a hidden and mystical form of Islam to a more open and public practice of the faith."

3 Where he was named as such in the 'Memorial' of one Ansoen, also known as Jan van Bougies. See Shell (1995).

4 This development is discussed in Davids's (1989) groundbreaking paper entitled, "The Words Slaves Made: A Study of the Culture, Languages, Schools and Literacy of the Slaves in Cape Town and their Influence on the Development of Arabic Afrikaans".

5 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abdus Salām (2004). *The 'Aqīdah of Tuan Guru*, translated by Auwais Rafudeen.

6 Housed in the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, under the title "N.E. RAKIEP COLLECTION". Its contents are described as "Text in Arabic with interlinear Malayu, 613 pp. (bound)." But the collection also includes "Text in Malayu (Arabic script) 186 pp. (bound)" which is another work by Tuan Guru dealing with mystical symbolism. The collection was donated to the Library by a descendent of Tuan Guru, Mr Rakiep, in 1985.

7 This section is an extract from my introduction to the *'Aqīdah*. See Rafudeen (2004).

8 The historical significance of the compendium and its role as precursor to an important Cape literary tradition is outlined in Davids (1991: 37-39 and 67-68).

9 For a description of the *madrasah* system, see Davids (1994).

10 Davids has lodged a copy of a *koples boek*, dated 1806, at the National Library of South Africa. It is a direct transcription of Shaykh Sanūsī's *matn* together with Malay translation. See the Achmat Davids Collection [manuscript], Shelf no. MSB 789 (1.2) NLSA, Cape Town.

11 Where it was cited as such during a Cape Supreme Court litigation in 1873. See Davids (1991: 39).

12 The manuscript is located at African Studies library, University of Cape Town, Shelf. No. BAA 439.3624 Abdu.

13 Davids analysis was cursory and most probably inhibited by the language barrier. He in fact was keen to have this work translated by those who were conversant with Arabic. See Morton (n.d.)

14 i.e. Shaykh Abū-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-ʿAshʿarī (260-324/ 873-935), the original systematizer of Sunni dialectical theology.

15 For a concise description of the life, works and influence of Shaykh al-Sanūsī, see Bencheneb (1997: 20-22).

16 See Hendricks (no date: 1-5) for a useful background to the orthodox distillation.

17 Very significantly, the structure of reality is not merely asserted, but "proved". Each assertion concerning the Being and Attributes of God are provided with proofs based on reason and which to a degree are cumulative. For example, the author's argument for God's attribute of existence- will show the sophistication and nature of these proofs.

"Text: The proof for the necessary existence of the Most High is the origination [*ḥudūth*] of the world.

Commentary: ...Proof [*burḥān*] is clear evidence. Origination is the existence of the

world after its non-existence. Every existent besides Allâh, the Most High, is [termed] the world. The world...is everything that exists of that which is created, and it is evidence for [there being] the Fashioner, Most High. Text: This is because if it did not have an Originator but originated by itself, then it must be commanded by one of two equally applicable rules [*amrain*]: it can either be the same as its cause [or] preponderant over it [by] having no cause - [both of] which are impossible.

Commentary: After you know that the origination of the world, which is that which is other than Allâh, is a proof for the existence of the Fashioner, Most Glorious, Most Honoured, and that this evidence cannot be annulled except through the negation of the world by itself, the author [then] argues the impossibility of the existence of the world by itself. He says that if it came into existence by itself then it arose from one of two equal possibilities [before it], namely existence or non-existence - these being equal [possibilities] in relation to its possessor and there being no[17] preponderance of one over the other. By this is meant that existence and non-existence are of equal weight - the world can admit either of existence or non-existence in equal proportions... without preponderance [*tarjīḥ*] [of one over the other]. If the world could create itself, then it is necessary something equal [existence or non-existence] be preponderant without a cause, and this is impossible. Then it is necessary that the creator of the world be other than it. That other is Allah, the Most High. Thus the impossibility of the existence of the world by itself is made clear to you. Rather, it is in need of other than it in the designation of its existence as against non-existence due to this being equal to it, in the designation of its specified space as against all other spaces, in the designation of its specified time as against all other times, in the designation of its specified measure [*miqdār*]...as against all other measures, in the designation of its specified quality as against all other qualities. All of these things are equal [in possibility] because their existence is equal to their non-existence. Their specified measure is equal to all other ranges. Thus, their particularisation and preponderance points to one who gives them preponderance over other than them and that is Allâh, Most Honoured, Most Glorious." Ibid. pp. 36-37.

18 Early Islamic proponents of unfettered human free will.

19 The "Naturalists".

20 In line with the rigour of the text, a proof is provided for the necessity of each of these qualities. In the case of truth, for example, the proof is the evidential miracle that each Prophet was provided with: "The proof of truth being obligatory upon them, Salutations and Peace be upon them, is that if they were not truthful, then it necessarily follows there is falsehood in the information concerning their affirmation by Him, Most High, Most Glorious, Most Honoured, through unambiguous miracles." Such a deduction, of course, is absurd since it would mean that God lies - which, as the commentary makes clear, is impossible with regard to His Being, therefore necessitating the truthfulness of the Messengers and the information they have communicated. See Hendricks (no date: 46).

21 See ibid. pp. 59-61.

22 See also, Jeppie (1996).

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