A Parallel Mode of Being: The Sanūsīyyah and Intellectual Subversion in Cape Town, 1800-1840 Part Two

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Abstract

The second part of this essay seeks to locate the transmission of the *Ummul Barāhīn* (The Demonstrative Proofs) within the socio-political context of the Cape at the turn of the nineteenth century. Whereas the previous section argued that the spectacular growth of Cape Islam in this period was rooted in the ontology of the text (see Rafudeen 2005), this part examines the ways in which this ontology found social expression. It does this by providing an overview of the slaves and free-blacks – the classes to whom the text was addressed – locating the role of the text in the formation of a distinct Muslim community extracted from these classes and, finally, exploring the modalities of its transmission which were underpinned by the ethics of the master-disciple relationship drawn from classical Islam. It suggests that while the subversion of ruling class hegemony precipitated by the text took place in covert, intellectual terms – in terms of a change in *mindset* – its social concomitants were no less revolutionary for that.

The Slaves

In 1798 the population of slaves at the Cape numbered 25 754 in comparison with the combined total of 21 746 burghers and free blacks (Armstrong 1979). However, the number of Muslim slaves who arrived at the Cape was negligible. Slaves of Indian (including Ceylon) and East Indian origin were normally brought

as private slaves on return fleets. They were often sold at the Cape but their numbers were always small due to space on these fleets being at a premium. Most Cape slaves were specifically acquired from Madagascar and, to a lesser extent, from the East African coast: Mozambique and Zanzibar, Delagoa Bay and Dahomey. Slaves of East Indian origin were thus almost incidental to the slave trade. However, their importance was out of proportion to their numbers, owing to the fact that many of them were skilled artisans and domestics (Armstrong 1979: 76-78). In spite of this, an ambivalent attitude was clearly evident towards East Indian slaves by both Cape residents and authorities. While on the one hand their perceived skills propelled them, in the colonial mindset, to the top of the slave hierarchy,[1] on the other, they were feared as potentially violent subversives and an underlying threat to Cape society.[2] In 1767, in reaction to a series of violent crimes by Indonesian slaves, the Council of Policy forbid export of Buginese and other Eastern slaves to the Cape. In 1784 this prohibition was repeated but the confiscation of slaves occurred very rarely, suggesting that the practice of sending slaves to the Cape was overlooked by officials both at Batavia and the Cape. In 1787 prohibition again promulgated and, in 1788, Heeren XVII urged Cape authorities to keep each newly arrived ship under very close scrutiny so as to better enforce the ban (Armstrong 1979). Furthermore, the panic caused by Soera Brotto, who killed seven people in his rampage in 1786, led to the regulation that slaves would only be permitted in town after dark if they carried a lighted lantern. As Edna Bradlow (1992: 11) comments:

> The issue of this regulation is one of the clearest indications as to the way in which slaves were immediately associated with actual or potential wrongdoing.

Indeed, that the undercurrent of hostility was mutual is indicated by the fact that most slaves who dared to speak of the incident appeared to have approved of Brotto's actions (see Bradlow 1992: 15). The hostility had its roots in the brutal nature of Cape slavery and the number of petty restrictions placed on them: they could not gather in groups of more than three, for example, and were subject to tortuous punishment in the event of transgressions (such as decapitation of limbs, being broken on the wheel and scourging). Many, of course, also had to suffer brutal treatment by their masters. Armstrong does not quantify the frequency of such brutality but it must have been at least relatively regular, given the phenomenon of slave escapes. Slave escapes were regular features of Cape life, and there were hundreds of escapes throughout the VOC period. Overwork and harsh treatment are often cited as reasons for escape. Indonesians featured prominently as leaders of large (10-20 members) escapes - no doubt contributing to their subversive reputation. On the other hand, many other slaves simply had to accommodate themselves to the system, most probably because of the lack of viable alternatives

- most escapees were caught and food was a problem (Armstrong 1979: 101-107).

Slaves at the Cape were divided along urban and rural lines. Many urban slaves belonged to the Company and their numbers remained under a thousand throughout the period of 1661 to 1793 since its economic needs were quite constant (port activity, occasional construction work). Private urban slaves would be employed in domestic service, as artisans and street vendors. It was the burghers, who controlled arable farming in the growing agricultural economy of the South Western Cape, that were in most need of slaves. In 1750 burgher slaves surpassed that of the Company by ten to one and, in 1793, by almost thirty-to-one (Armstrong 1979). Despite the spectacular growth of Islam within Cape Town itself, the urban/rural divide of Cape slavery meant that the text, with its concomitant educational structures, could not reach the bulk of the slaves. Upon their arrival to the Cape, the diversity of the population and the need for cross-cultural communication eroded the traditional cultures and languages of the slaves, even in the case of a relatively large group such as the Madagascans. Two lingua franca emerged at the Cape: some slaves used a form of creolized Portuguese which persisted throughout the Company period while most masters and slaves conversed in a form of evolving Dutch which developed into Afrikaans. Armstrong (1979) notes that communal identities based on the slaves' traditional languages and cultures were rapidly eroded. A point, I believe, explains why alternative community formations, particularly those that were very distant from that of their masters and its associated brutishness, were sought. It was, as such, a community formation that was being developed among the Muslims, creating a ready "market" for transmission of the text (Armstrong 1979: 84).

The Free Blacks

Tuan Guru belonged to the class of free blacks, comprising East Indian political exiles, slaves manumitted in Cape Town and Asian convicts. The emergence of the free blacks should be seen as part of the wider structural changes in society that the Cape had undergone by 1795. As Elphick and Shell (1979) point out, during the first decades of Company, Khoikhoi, Europeans and slaves formed distinct groups in terms of religion, culture, physical appearance and legal status. By 1795 a number of processes had eroded the boundaries, including: the incorporation of the Khoikhoi into European dominated society as wage labourers subject to Dutch law (as distinct from earlier to traditional authorities); the conversion of slaves to Christianity or Islam; miscegenation or intermarriage between groups; the manumission of slaves and the consequent emergence of the free blacks; and cultural exchanges among the groups (Elphick and Shell 1979). The growth of Islam was accelerated by the general European indifference to converting the Khoikhoi and slaves. An average of only 15 slaves per year were baptized throughout the Company period. After 1770, colonists could not sell

their Christian slaves and had to give these slaves their freedom if they purchased it - thus they would generally not baptize them (Elphick and Shell 1979). Islam took advantage of slaves virtual exclusion from Christianity and proselytized among them, resulting in its spectacular growth in the nineteenth century. Conversion to Islam was also encouraged, as Elphick and Shell explain:

> ... due to the ministry of Muslim *imams* who, unlike the Christian clergy, identified with the black population and performed marriages and funerals which the slaves could not obtain in Christian churches. (1979: 123)

The result was that by the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> ... there was a flourishing Muslim community in Cape Town which included both slaves and free blacks (with wealthier members of the latter forming the leadership), and which enjoyed some contacts with the great centres of Islam. (Elphick and Shell 1979: 125)

So much so, that the Cape Muslims hosted Mirza Abu Taleb Khan of Persia in 1799, who in turn mentioned meeting a Shaykh Abdulla, a native of Mecca, who had married and settled in Cape Town (Elphick and Shell 1989).

Another marker of some social fluidity at the Cape was miscegenation and intermarriage. This was particularly so in urban Cape Town where there was more interaction between female slaves and the Company's soldiers. Overall, inter-racial relationships remained relatively limited[3], indicative of the closed nature of society at the Cape, particularly in the rural areas, and did not pose a threat to European dominance. Manumission in South Africa was low and remained so between 1715 and 1791 indicating a lack of openness in society. It proceeded at an average rate of 0.165 percent cent per year of the slave force (Brazil and Peru were 6 times higher). While this was the reason the colony only developed a small overall free black population, the rate of manumission was far higher in Cape Town than in its rural districts- only 29 of 609 private manumissions occurred outside the Cape district (see Elphick and Shell 1979: 135-136,144). This again is a mark of greater social fluidity in the urban area where the free blacks formed a visible and important presence. Furthermore, Indian and Indonesian slaves were manumitted in numbers far exceeding their proportion in the slave community. There were economic reasons possibly behind this: the Cape Colony was labour-intensive and the bulk of artisans were Asians while Madagascans (of whom only 2% were manumitted) were rural labourers. Of course, such manumissions had a domino- effect with those manumitted tending to free other Asians, especially among relatives, friends and co-religionists

(Rafudeen 2001: 52). In fact, at the Cape a quarter of manumitting owners were free black, in contrast to Brazil where only 2% of this class manumitted other slaves. Given that the free black population was very small - 352 in a population of 8 088 freeburghers in 1770, Elphick and Shell conclude that "free blacks liberated their slaves many, many times more freely than did the Europeans" (1979: 138-140). It was then these processes of conversion, miscegenation and manumission that helped form small but visible status group of free blacks:

> Manumission brought the group into being; conversion and miscegenation further shaped its character. (Elphick and Shell 1979: 145)

The group participated, together with Company officials, some burghers and slaves, in the partially blended culture of the urban Cape- a culture that betrayed marks of *Indische* (Eurasian) influence, as seen in widespread use of Low Portuguese, in Cape Dutch architecture and Cape cuisine. However, conversion to Islam also meant that some of the more specific Asian traits characteristic of the East Indian elite were kept. Again, in the southwestern Cape arable regions were more rigidly attuned against admixture and the culture was more firmly European based. Elphick and Shell (1989) argue that by late 18th century, cultural cleavages were no longer between ethnic or status groups but between regions. It may also be added that the economic marginality of free blacks in Cape Town was, in part, based on their inability to penetrate the agricultural sector:

> ...the retreat of the free blacks to Cape Town, and their failure to participate in the town's leading wholesale trades, was of crucial importance in the shaping of the entire colony. For the free blacks were left behind in a society where agriculture and intercontinental commerce provided the only avenues to great wealth. (Elphick and Shell 1989: 224)

It is clear that the geographical transmission of the text was shaped by the urban/rural divide that existed at the Cape. Emanating as it did from the class of free blacks, a group that was to remain proportionately small and confined to the urban Cape, and operating in "one of the most closed and rigid slave societies so far analysed by historians"(Elphick and Shell 1979: 145). Its only space for operation was the relative socio-cultural fluidity provided in Cape Town itself.

The Formation of the Cape Muslim Community

The majority of Eastern slaves and free blacks who congregated in Cape Town were Muslim. According to Yusuf da Costa (1990), the spatial limitation of most

Muslims to Cape Town set assimilatory social processes into motion. Assimilation was encouraged by the following factors: active Muslim participation in labour market of urban area; the organizational structures of a common religion; common languages among different national groups; a local system of predominantly religious education. Muslims participated as craftspeople, fishermen, retailers, stevedores, builders and tailors, thus forming the unskilled to skilled labour pool of the economic engine that drove Cape Town. Muslims also participated in the same communal organizational structures through extensive Sufi networks, common communal rituals such as the recitals on the 3, 7th and 40 nights after someone has deceased; the Friday congregational prayer; and communal ceremonies and festivities such as social gatherings when going to Mecca. With regards to language, Malay and Portuguese Creole were common to a large number of Afro-Asian immigrants. Malay was a common trading language of the region stretching from New Guinea to Madagascar. But after 1807, forced immigration from the East came to an end. The rapid urbanization of people from rural areas increased, and within this milieu, Afrikaans emerged as common language at Cape. Finally, local religious education had three aspects: the establishment of special Islamic schools, the growth of an indigenous literature, and the establishment of links with Muslim countries for educational purposes. The growth of the free black population was the main reason for the establishment of schools (da Costa 1990). They had, according to da Costa (1990: 65-66), "the education, personal autonomy, accommodation, and free time permitted by urban occupations, to organize religious schools." Tuan Guru and a group of religious teachers had established the first school. By 1807, that school had 372 students, 491 by 1825, and by 1861 there were two large schools and several smaller ones. The literature of the growing community comprised mainly of transmissions from Arabic. Works were used as textbooks and assisted considerably in protecting Islamic doctrines from adulteration:

> ... these works gave uniformity to the teachings of the religion because they formed the printed reference for an increasing literate community, and had the effect of public behavior regulation. (da Costa 1990: 67)

Thus different Afro-Asian groups were made to interact on the basis of the same teachings to a large degree. The evidence of contact with overseas Muslims dates quite early. In 1820 and 1821 a number of Arabs from the island of Joanna in the Mozambique Channel visited Cape Town to provide further instruction in Islam and sent them the Quran and other books (da Costa 1990). In fact, according to Ajam (1986), in 1856 several Cape Imams stated to a Justice of the Peace that they had received their education in Mecca. In 1822, one of the Imams was even known to have knowledge of Hebrew. These processes, according to da

Costa (1990), ensured the diffusion of orthodox Islam at the Cape and, via religious awareness, the assimilation of different national-origin groups among Muslims there. Furthermore, free black Muslims were also the major bearers of the Asian cultural tradition and it was this tradition, intermingled with elements of European and African cultural traditions, that became known (wrongly, as da Costa points out) Malay culture. It is evident from da Costa's analysis that the transmission of the text formed the intellectual component in the gamut of assimilatory processes. As such, it may be inferred that it subtly underpinned the direction of these processes (to the extent they could be directed), and informed the standard by which their possibilities and constraints could be measured. Thus, the pietistic content of the compendium directly informed the communal rituals of the community. The transcribing of parts of the text through "koplesboeke" contributed to the solidification of Afrikaans as the lingua franca of this community. The universality of its theological component no doubt eased the process of racial assimilation while the induction into a living tradition of Islamic learning enhanced the need for contact with other parts of the Muslim world.

Adil Bradlow has located such processes within the wider Cape socio-political dynamic and writes:

> The infrastructural matrix [initiated by Tuan Guru] fostered new sets of social relations within the town, prevailing these as an alternative to the prevailing configuration of social relations. It is in this sense that the process of Islamisation came to embrace a subtle challenge to the hegemony of capitalist social relations within the town. (1988: 132)

For Bradlow (1988: 133), the spectacular growth of the Muslim community in the late-1830's was the result of a "dialectic between community formation and state repression, a process of growth that was to leave almost two thirds of the town's non-settler population as adherents to the faith at the time of Emancipation in 1838." The process of the community's institutionalisation was a result of a complex series of historical factors in the last decade of the eighteenth century, which led to fundamental changes in the nature of both the practice of Islam and the structure of the Muslim community. Whereas prior to this period Bradlow characterises Islam at the Cape as underground, mystically based and *tariqah* driven, the changes resulting "partly from the collapse in the functioning of the apparatus of the colonial state, the widened scope for such construction that this process offered, the transition to British rule, and partly from impulses internal to the process of Islamisation itself ", led to a more overt, formal, institutionalised form of the religion (Bradlow 1988: 141). He does not suggest that the new social relations developed in the Muslim community formed a complete break

with previous forms. There is a continuation of earlier processes, "but at a different level of emphasis. It is, indeed, inconceivable to imagine such a process of institutionalisation occurring had not solid foundations been laid earlier" (Bradlow 1988: 143-144). These continuities found themselves condensed within the personality of Tuan Guru who himself was immersed within the mystical tradition of Islam. At another level, though, he did see the mystical practice of Islam as a separate form of activity from other dimensions of Islamic practice:

> ... the integration of mystical philosophy with the more mundane concerns of fiq [sic] and shari'ah indicate that he acknowledged the importance of temporal matters in the lives of his followers. (cited in Bradlow 1988: 145)

Under Tuan Guru's leadership the Awwal mosque became more than just a place of worship,

> ... it was to become the focal point of an expansionist impulse that not only sought to regularise the practice of Islam but also to popularise its message among the inhabitants of the town. (Bradlow 1988: 146)

His school offered an alternative to people hostile to, or suspicious of, ruling Christian order and "was the first school to develop outside the structure of ruling class hegemony" (Bradlow 1988: 146). Bradlow asserts that the Tuan's establishing of a mosque also encouraged the creation of a religious hierarchy. He suggests this structure was more than just a religious body. The "Belal" acted as a sort of policeman: upon his recommendation people transgressing the law, getting drunk or committing offences were either punished or, in extremis, excommunicated and forbidden to associate with faithful. The Imam had the power to allow or refuse association with faithful. But the Imam in turn was subject to a Qadi or "chief priest". The source of the Qadi's power was his spiritual headship of the community and his jurisdiction to appoint Imams and other office bearers. Thus the positions of Qadi and Imam were highly coveted and rivalry for these positions was to become a source of tension in community. Thus a rudimentary political structure –more than just religious- appears to be in place.[4] Bradlow (1988: 158) offers the following summary of the structural changes in Muslim community:

> At one level, these changes were manifest in the establishment of institutional structures such as a mosque, a school and the weekly jum'ah prayers. At another, and arguably more significant, level, these changes were expressed in the

> creation of a new pattern of social relations, which gradually superimposed themselves over the tariqa-based relations of shaykh and murid. At the pinnacle of the new pattern of social relations was the Qadi, who through his various representatives, attempted to reshape the general pattern of Islamic practice in accordance with the formalised precepts of the shari'ah.

In this new system of social relations, the slaves were treated well and equally and were provided with opportunities for social mobility, even rising to the position of Imam. They were furthermore not to be sold against their will. The institutionalisation of Islam presented a challenge to the authorities. They were particularly alarmed at the apparent zeal of the 'ulama in communicating their message. Bradlow quotes contemporary observers who comment on the "superior activity, zeal and address of his (the convert's) priests" and quotes one as follows:

> It is for the Christian a humbling fact that wherever a Mahomedan colony exists, there also exists a Mahomedan missionary establishment, and whenever you meet a musselman you meet a zealous missionary of the Koran. (1988: 164-165)

But, as Bradlow notes, the success of the 'ulamā was predicated on the offering of basic human necessities such as rites of marriage and internment, which were not as easily available to them under Christianity. This itself was "symptomatic of the significantly different manner in which the 'ulama related to and articulated the predicament of the town's underclasses" (1988: 166-167).[5] Bradlow's importance lies in his critical conceptualisation of a discussion that has tended to locate the Muslim community in a narrower "cultural" sense, as a self-contained entity within the wider fabric of Cape society. In contrast, he forcefully locates the growth of Islam as a socio-political critique of that very society, challenging colonial hegemony by its construction of an alternative set of institutions, educational structures and socio-political relationships. At first sight, Bradlow may be criticised for reading too much into the available evidence, for example, seeing the hierarchy of the mosque as an alternative political structure. Such criticism is valid to a degree, particularly if these and other measures are seen as *conscious* alternatives. The evidence at hand simply does not permit a view that the community set up its alternatives as a challenge to the state and ruling class hegemony[6] (though neither does it necessarily gainsay this position). But Bradlow's conceptualisation of the issue is nevertheless valid and crucial particularly if we take into account the worldview of the community, which was informed by the theological component of the text - as already discussed. To recap: this worldview,

with its own notions of Being, causality, time and space, inducted slaves and free blacks into the "great" tradition of Sunni Islam- one easily comparable to the great Protestant/Enlightenment traditions of their political overseers- and one in which they clearly found intellectual and spiritual satisfaction. It is at the level of worldview where their mastery of their temporal overseers was established, since they had access to reality as it really was and knowledge of a scheme of existence that really mattered. In this scheme the proper awareness of God- and the due cognisance of causality, time and space in relation to this awareness- was everything. The temporal world was valueless in so far as it was cut off from this awareness. Lacking this type of awareness, their temporal "masters" were lost and floundering. The alternatives mentioned by Bradlow must be seen as products of this worldview. They were perhaps not socio-political challenges in themselves but these new institutions and sets of social relations arose as a result of the drive to teach and communicate its vision. It was this vision which, as per Bradlow's conceptualisation of the discussion, profoundly changed the social fabric of Cape society, allowing a numerically marginal number of exiles and private slaves to mould their religion integrally upon the urban Cape landscape.

The Modalities of Transmission

A detailed discussion of the Muslim educational context in early nineteenth century Cape Town which casts valuable light on the nature of textual transmission is provided by Ajam (1986). Of course such a context was integrally tied to the wider socio-political dynamic where Dutch colonists, by their indifference to Islam and their exclusion of non Christian elements from political life at Cape, allowed Islam to develop "as counter-culture and an opposite pole attracting the demeaned and deprived" (Ajam 1986: 42).[7] It is implied that formal religious instruction in the Muslim community went beyond communication to mean the acculturation of newer and younger members of society by the older. In fact, the role of the "Malay priests", most of whom were Free Blacks, went beyond that of mere teachers and they performed the same role as the "ziekentrooster" did for the Dutch. Furthermore, by being taught at Imam's homes, the children were exposed to their teacher's family and the operating of Islam within a family context. In this process of acculturation, the Muslim schoolmaster, unlike his Dutch counterpart, had "enviable latitude" in that he had no clearly defined status and no hierarchy to direct his activities. Of course, it is clear here that Ajam (1986) means the formal status and hierarchy that was dictated by the VOC authories. As was seen, there was clearly a knowledge-based hierarchy[8] that evolved in the Muslim community and one which, by this very fact, meant social mobility. Such mobility, together with the close relationship developed between teacher and student, could only have facilitated the diffusion of the text. He suggests that Tuan Guru's establishment of the school was originally met

by official indifference because "as long as non-Christian elements of Cape Town observed the Dutch laws, scrupulously obeyed authority, and were not conspicuous in their religious expression, they seemed, for the official records, of no importance" (Ajam 1986: 46). Indeed, he argues that the political elite might have seen the Muslims as serving the moral order of society and hence not followed through with any meaningfulness in the instructions to teach slaves principles of the Christian religion and to oversee that no school was run without a license. Hence, Islamic education contributed to the moral tone of society along with religious instruction offered by other communities (Ajam 1986). Such a view does not, I believe, contradict the assertion of socio-political critique offered by the worldview of the text. The worldview operated at a metaphysical level and its critique subtle, hidden from the Dutch by its complexity and relatively alien language (Malay with a strong Arabic bent, and later, an Afrikaans hidden in Arabic characters). Its institutional forms, communicating as they did this metaphysical vision, would have appeared relatively innocuous to them. This combination of seeming innocuousness coupled with subtle critique, is neatly encapsulated by two statements presented to a commission on slavery in 1830, both quoted by Ajam (1986). On the one hand, there is a statement at the commission outlining the educational objectives of Muslim community: to be conscious of God, of reward and punishment, to follow prescribed religious duties and ensure their families do so, to obey authority, work industriously, not to drink or commit crimes (Ajam 1986: 55). On the other, the following quote hints that the ultimate order of existence is the inverse of the present social one: "...the Priests endeavour to make Slaves believe that although their bodies are held in Slavery, yet their souls are free, and they must trust in God to make them free when they die." (Ajam 1986: 52). Ajam notes the importance of the use of the vernacular in the success of Muslim schools:

> Vernacular education was building on the existing cultural base brought to the learning situation rather than have the base supplanted by a foreign language and new culture specifically as first the Dutch and later the British schoolmasters attempted in the schools functioning at the pleasure of the Bible and School Commission since 1809. (Ajam 1986: 56)

Muslim teachers readily adopted the evolving Afrikaans vernacular that was replacing the use of Malay and other languages. Thus, as Davids (1989) points out, there is first hand evidence of student notebooks dating from mid-1850's that are written in Arabic scripted Afrikaans.[9] The system of Arabic-Afrikaans writing and elements of its literature is to be traced to the school of Tuan Guru. It would appear that the school trained its students in the writing of Arabic characters. Up to 1815 the medium of instruction at this school was Malay. That

this school (and not Abu Bakr Effendi's in the 1860's) was the genesis for Arabic-Afrikaans writing among Cape Muslims can be seen by the many Malay words that were used in Arabic-Afrikaans works as opposed to Arabic and Turkish ones. Further, the Malay system of Arabic spelling was generally used, not the Turkish one. Thus it was Tuan Guru's school that laid the ground rules for the system of Afrikaans spelling in Arabic. By the time the *Bayan ud Dīn* was written in manuscript form and circulated in 1869, " a definite system of Arabic-Afrikaans spelling was already operative" (Davids 1989: 31-34).

The close teacher-student relationship, alluded to by Ajam (1986), profoundly affected the nature of textual transmission and, by extension, the Cape leadership model. As elaborated by Tayob (1999: 28), the Cape Imām, though he had many other duties, was most importantly seen as a teacher. Teaching was not merely the transmission of knowledge but also created and consolidated a worldview "that placed the teacher, the student, and the materials in their proper cosmological relations." A concomitant close relationship developed between the Imam (who doubled as the teacher) and his congregation. Followers belonged to a particular mosque to *soembaai* (pray) there, and went to other mosques only on rare occasions. Followers of the Imam were called *murids* – a seeker who attached himself to an accomplished spiritual master. Its usage in the Cape context, as was mentioned previously, did not necessarily denote this Sufi intent, but its use aptly describes the deep commitment of the congregant to his or her Imam (Tayob 1999: 29-30). The relationship was cemented by the Imam's overseeing of Muslim rites of passage: birth, *tamat* (ceremony on completion of the Quran), marriage and death. As Tayob (1999: 31) comments:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, teaching, ritual service and community loyalty were important components in the mosque discourse in the Cape. The Imām created a conceptual worldview through education, and provided support in the form of ritual service, to which most members in the congregation responded with loyal commitment.

It is evident from Tayob's analysis that the transmission of the text took place within the classical Islamic framework of *adab*[10]. In this framework *adab* denotes a sense of profound respect for, above all, teacher, but also the occasion and the manner in which the text is imbibed. In fact, the content of the text plays a subsidiary to this manifestation of respect. "*Al-adab fauqa 'ilm*" ("Respect is superior to knowledge") goes a community maxim.[11] In this framework the teacher is ideally seen as the embodiment of what this knowledge seeks to bring about: a spiritual transformation that results in being, like the teacher, an embodiment of Islamic virtues. Hence the higher regard for the teacher than what is taught, a regard which will also allow the flow of *barakah* (spiritual blessings) from the

teacher to the student. The clear Sufi orientation of Cape Muslim society in that period also allows a more esoteric interpretation: the ideal teacher is the *al-insan al-kāmil* (the perfect human being), a light that reflects the Light of the Prophet (the Salutations and Peace of Allah be upon him). Clearly, the text transcends its intellectual dimension. Ultimately it is a text that must be lived through cogitation and reinforcement of its theological component through the often-repeated recital of its litanies, under the guiding hand of the teacher, of course. Under such guidance the text is not simply transmission, but *being*.

Conclusion

The perspective of the *Ummul Barāhīn* – taught and proliferated among Muslims in nineteenth century Cape Town - provided a locus for understanding the physical and structural oppression to which they as an underclass were subjected. As such, the text can be seen as a coping mechanism in withstanding - and, indeed, a form of resistance against - this oppression. But such coping and resistance, while crucial, is only retroactive in the case of the *Ummul Barāhīn*, given its independent international precedents. Fundamentally, to its Muslim slave and free black adherents the *Ummul Barāhīn* was held to be *true* – it reflected the real nature of existence and structure of reality *as is*. As such, the mode of being it imparted represented an autonomous, self-governing approach to reality, reinforced by a powerful, sophisticated defence of its perspective, whose ontological focus – covering as it did causality- could subsume other, even if temporally dominant, positions within its ambit. The transmission of the text comprised both a macro and micro context. At the macro level, its transmission was circumscribed by the urban/rural divide at the Cape, being mainly confined to the town itself. In spite of this limitation, as well as the originally small numbers of Cape Muslims, the transmission utilised the disaffection and alienation felt by the slaves, the relative social fluidity of the urban landscape and the effective use of the vernacular to carve a niche for the text, and in the process, offer its socio-political critique of Cape colonial society. The critique was subtle, offered at the level of worldview, of life orientation, and was not immediately obvious to the somewhat wary settlers and authorities. The vision of the text manifested itself in various religious institutions, outwardly becalmed, but which became instruments that changed the very nature of the urban Cape fabric.

This quiet social revolution, though, was ultimately the end product of an individual one, at the micro-level so to speak, that located the transmission within the teacher-student dynamic dictated by a quasi-Sufi ethos. It was in this 'context within a context' that the vision offered by the text was made palpable, spurring the need for its diffusion in broader society. The introduction of Tuan Guru's compendium into historical discussion highlights, at the very least, I believe, the very practical problem of language barriers. In addition, the compen-

dium is part of a collection that also houses a book on mystical symbolism by Tuan Guru, written in Malay.[12] Davids (1989: 69) has also alluded to two other works by the Tuan, the *at-Thilmisani* and *Talil ul Ghairah*, both of which he took as mainly legal writings. Further, as is well known, Tuan Guru's work helped spawn a legacy of Afrikaans writings in the Arabic script, one that spanned the whole of the nineteenth century. There is little doubt that if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of Islamic conversion in the period under discussion, and, indeed, a greater appreciation of the intellectual culture of the slave and free black classes in general, a more exhaustive examination of the documents in question needs to be undertaken.

Notes

1 Robert Semple, who lived at the Cape from 1798 to 1803, describes them as "the king of the slaves." He continues: " He knows well that from his class are formed the house-painters, the musicians, the ingenious workmen of the Cape. He is proud of this distinction, and glories in the name of Malay" (cited in Lenta 1999: 111).

2 This ambiguity is well revealed by McKenzie in her study on Samuel Hudson's attitude to Muslims at the turn of nineteenth century Cape Town. As she says: "Despite his sympathetic description of Muslim festivals and religious leaders, he reveals an anxiety of Muslim slaves at the Cape in his images of treacherous slave murderers, amok runners and female poisoners." (McKenzie 1993: 102)

3 And, as noted by Elphick and Shell (1979), was much less than one would expect if there were no preference of racial endogamy among the European community.

4 I believe that Bradlow's take on the seemingly contradictory evidence of Imam Ahmad and Imam Muding presented to a commission of enquiry in 1830 is a mistake. In contrast to Imam Muding's assertion, Imam Ahmad denied that any member of the ulema used flogging as a means of punishment in the community. Imam Ahmad stated that "we do not consider ourselves authorized to inflict any punishment but that of expulsion". According to Bradlow he was placating members of Commission. However, I believe it is an indication of the Imam's nuanced view of *usul al fiqh* (principles of Islamic Jurisprudence) since *Hadd* punishments cannot be applied in a non-Muslim environment. (See Bradlow 1988: 156- 160).

5 Bradlow (1988) asserts that the institutionalisation of Islam could also take on conservative and collaborationist character as indicated by struggles between Tuan Guru and his followers on the one hand, and Frans van Bengalen and Jan van Bougies on the other. They sought to establish their own mosque in attempt to gain power base in order to challenge Tuan Guru. Unlike Tuan Guru, Bradlow asserts that they sought official permission which they eventually got in trade off for formation of two artillery regiments. Such an analysis is problematic and terms, I think, from seeing the institutionalization as a *conscious* challenge to the government. The available evidence on the issue, furthermore, does not convey such political overtones. Most tellingly, the inauguration of the regiment was marked by the presenta-

tion of a dagger – signifying leadership - to Tuan Guru by Janssens in 1803 who for reasons of age passed it on to Frans van Bengal. (See Shell 1995: 12.)

6 This is the thrust of the position I adopt in Rafudeen 2001: 37-84.

7 J. L. Cilliers (1997: 159-160) comments that European concerns with wealth, status and their sense of superiority helped Islam's growth here. Overseas visitors complained about the "irritating love of gain" that they found at the Cape. Further, the chairs of the members of the Reformed congregation were arranged according to their social status.

8 A position supported by Ajam 1986: 70.

9 In this article, however, Davids also retracted an earlier claim that the oldest book in Afrikaans was the Islamic text "*Al Qawl al Matin*" [The Firm Word], also called the "Gablomatiem", written by one Ahmad al-Ish-muni and printed in 1856. This book appears, in fact, to have been in Arabic. (See Davids 1987)

10 For a discussion on *adab* (see Attas 1995: 16).

11 It finds an echo in the Sufi maxim: "Respect is half the path".

12 Housed by the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, under the title "N.E. Rakiep Collection".

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