The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Muslim Organizations in South Africa during the Struggle against Apartheid

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of the Iranian revolution in 1979 on Muslim communities in South Africa, a socio-political context that is profoundly shaped by the struggle against apartheid. The contribution of the Muslim community to this struggle has only been observable with the emergence of Muslim organizations with different orientations. This essay discusses whether these organizations have been influenced by the events of 1979 in Iran and in what way. It focuses on two specific organizations, Al-Jihaad and Qibla, both with a Shiite background and militant leanings who, for these reasons, have mainly been left out of my discussion. The article suggests that although the revolution has made a visible impact, it would seem that the two organizations have either not regarded an Islamic republic as a solution for South Africa, or they have not been able to offer a clear method of how to convert their revolutionary ideologies into action.

Introduction

The Iranian revolution in 1979 is said to have had a most profound impact upon the Muslim world. Its effects upon Islamic revivalism throughout the world have been discussed repeatedly and from various viewpoints. However, most approaches towards an understanding of the impact of the Iranian revolution have lacked a proper assessment. The majority of scholarly writing on the revolution has largely failed to place it in its historical context or to compare its influence upon various societies throughout the Middle East, Asia and Africa

(Esposito 1990: 2). For this reason, an international conference in Washington, D.C., in February 1989, ten years after Khomeini's proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was set up to take a different approach. In this meeting "experts from Iran, Europe, Africa, and the United States (ibid: vii)" focused on the question of the export of Iranian revolutionary ideas and whether or not these ideas shaped Islamic resurgence movements in other countries. One year later, scholars published their findings in a book entitled, *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, which focused on Islam in different parts of the world but placed emphasis on countries in which Islam is the dominant religion or which continue to experience the rapid growth of Islam and Islamic revivalism. The book therefore, includes research on countries of the Middle East (such as Iraq, Egypt or Lebanon), of Asia (like Afghanistan and Malaysia) and finally two African countries, namely, Sudan and Nigeria.

This article, however, aims to look at the impact of the Iranian revolution on a country with a "non-dominant minority Muslim situation" (Tayob 1995: xii), namely, South Africa. The Muslim community in South Africa has, in twentieth-century history, been profoundly shaped by apartheid and the struggle for freedom. A struggle that was not undertaken by the whole Muslim community but rather by various Muslim organizations which, as Ursula Günther and Inga Niehaus (2004: 122) have observed, were "a minority within the Muslim minority". These Muslim organizations adopted different attitudes and ideologies in accordance with their religious orientations. Some were relatively progressive, some more orthodox and some that favoured a primarily Islamic approach (Günther & Niehaus 2002: 72). Most of the Islamic-oriented organizations, however, came into existence in the 1980s, according to Le Roux and Nel (1998: 4), who argue: "Since the advent of the Iranian revolution and the war in Afghanistan a number of militant but clandestine Muslim organizations have emerged in South Africa." Although many scholars mention the deep impact of the Iranian revolution on Muslim organizations during the struggle against apartheid, almost none of them have gone beyond merely stating it.[1] This article, therefore, aims to discover whether the Iranian revolution really had a profound impact on the emergence of Muslim organizations and how it shaped their role in the struggle against apartheid. Although I am going to look at Muslim organizations in general, I want to focus my attention on two organizations with clear militant aims, Qibla and Al-Jihaad. Little has been written about both groups and their leadership, and the fact that we find plenty of material about other Muslim organizations involved in the struggle against apartheid, but very little about militant groups like Qibla or Al-Jihaad has been explained by Günther and Niehaus (2004: 103):

> Most of the studies on the MYM and Call of Islam were written by former members of these organizations now work-

ing in the academic field, whereas this is not the case for Qibla and Al-Jihaad.

Although Qibla and Al-Jihaad do not represent mainstream organizations, and thus have been considered as playing a minor role in the Muslim struggle against apartheid (Günther & Niehaus 2004: 104), they will provide us with the clearest example of the impact of the Iranian revolution on South African Muslim organizations. The first part of this essay gives a brief introduction to the Iranian revolution and discusses the export of its revolutionary ideas to the Muslim world. The second part then refers, specifically, to the South African context. A short historical reconstruction of Islam in South Africa will lead into an introduction of Muslim organizations within the struggle against apartheid. Finally, I present the two Muslim organizations, Al-Jihaad and Qibla, and their religious and political outlook in the struggle for freedom in South Africa and discuss the impact of the Iranian revolution on them.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran – An Overview

Historical Background

Shiite belief has been the basic principle of Islam in Iran since Islam became a state religion in the sixteenth century. However, throughout the history of Islam, the Shiites have always been the minority against the Sunni majority. The division into Shiite and Sunni branches dates back to the early years of Islam, when the dispute about the leadership and the legitimate successor of Mohammad within the young Muslim community arose. One group (which later became Sunni) rejected the idea of a designated heir, whereas others believed that Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and cousin, was chosen to be the right successor. Thus, this group formed the Shia, the party of Ali, claiming that the religious and political leader (*imam*) of the Muslim community should always come from the family of Mohammad. However, the Sunni soon gained majority within the Muslim community. As a result the Shiites have always lived under Sunni caliphate rule (Esposito 1990: 18). Nonetheless, there is not just one Shiite belief in Islam or in Iran. The dominant branch in Islam, as well as in Iran, is the Twelver Shiism, which constitutes the belief in a line of twelve *imam*s who are considered to be the only legitimate leaders of the Shiite community. The final *imam* is said to have gone into seclusion in 874 and a messianic waiting for him to restore peace and justice for Shiite Muslims emerged. While waiting for the *Mahdi* to return, the rule was split up between the *Shah* as embodiment of the temporal rule and the *'ulama*, the religious leaders, guardians and interpreters of religion. Although Shiite belief regards temporal rule as illegitimate, it came to be accepted in practice.

The Revolution: Preconditions and the Final Event

The twentieth century in Iran was shaped by a growing discontent within the *'ulama* with royal absolutism. The pro-western Pahlavi dynasty, starting in 1925, introduced "modernizations" which were regarded as a great offense by the Iranian people, especially Muslims. When Muhammad Reza Shah, the son of Pahlavi, became too westernized and autocratic, tensions increased. However, it was mainly the secular opposition (Marxists and liberal nationalists) that arose in demonstrations, while the *'ulama* generally supported the government in the attempt to wipe out these groupings. But when the *'ulama* realized the growing state interference in religious domains and when issues like land reform, women's suffrage and pro-Israeli policies were taken up by the government, it turned against the state (Mohsen 1988: 88). Their displeasure went so far, that a *fatwa* (legal opinion) was formulated and released by various religious figures who met at Al-Azhar in Cairo. It called "on Moslems of the world to begin their *jihad* (holy war) against the Shah" (Mohsen 1988: 88, citing Hamid Enayad 1982: 50). With the appearance of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as a spokesman for the *'ulama*, who openly attacked the person of the *Shah* from his domicile in Qom and called on the "'commanders of the great Iranian army, its respectable officers, and its noble members' to join him for the 'salvation of Islam and Iran'" (Mohsen 1998: 92), tensions between the state and the *'ulama* grew. The government could not accept such an attack and Khomeini, along with other leading Ayatollahs, was arrested. When the Iranian regime realized that it was not able to silence Khomeini and that he was gaining support rapidly, they decided to exile him. He was forced to go to Turkey in 1965. From there he went to Najaf, Iraq, and stayed until 1978 before moving to France from where he increased his criticism of the current government and made preparations for a take-over.

Others, including students, professors, modernists, secularists, Marxists and liberals, joined the *'ulama* at various times in its criticism and thus the opposition went from strength to strength. As Dr. Ali Shariati, a religious thinker, reformist and anti-Westernist who was educated at the Sorbonne, exhorted: "Come friends let us abandon Europe; let us leave behind this Europe that always speaks of humanity, but destroys human beings wherever it finds them" (cited in Esposito 1990: 23). The opposition soon became a mass movement for which, as Esposito argues, "Shii Islam proved to be the most viable, indigenously rooted vehicle", because "it provided a sense of history and identity, common symbols and values, strong religio-political leadership, and organizational centers (ibid: 24). Focusing on the martyrdom of Ali's son Husayn, the rightful successor, who died in the battle of Karbala in 61/680, provided the opposition with religio-political meanings for oppression, suffering and the struggle against injustice. Nevertheless, we have to take into account that the revolutionary ideas and ideologies which were formed by the clergy, as well as lay ideologues, had strongly been influenced by leaders of movements like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat-i-Islami whose ideas and

writings had been reinterpreted by the opposition within its own context. Political protests started in 1977, but the government took brutal revenge and their killings led to the escalation of an already highly volatile situation. The opposition, which had at first responded to the killings with the closing of universities and mosques, and a call for prayer, now took up violence and fought back. The struggle reached its climax on Black Friday, September 8, 1978 in Teheran, when symbols of Islam and banners of Khomeini and Shariati were hoisted everywhere and mass demonstrations filled the streets. Violent actions increased until December and led to the defeat of the *Shah*, who without any American support left Iran on January 16, 1979. Khomeini returned from his exile on February 1, 1979 and proclaimed the Islamic Republic.[2]

The Export of the Revolution

The transformation from monarchy to Islamic Republic was completed in March 1979 and a new constitution was set up by the end of the year making it clear that the clerics now had complete authority. The years after the revolution were shaped by the consolidation of power, the institutionalizing of the revolution at home and the question of export. For instance, which methods of export should be applied? Must an actual export of the revolution and Khomeini's ideology through means of propaganda take place or should Iran just offer a model for other countries and thereby inspire them to revolutionary actions? The export of the revolution was soon based upon the *Qur'an*, which orders Muslims to propagate God's message throughout the world. The final goal was an "extension of Pax Islamica". In this context, the spread of Islam was not reduced to Shiite belief, but understood so as to unite Sunnis and Shiites to liberate all oppressed Muslim communities in the world. Khomeini primarily aimed to unite Muslims everywhere in the struggle against the West and "to enjoy the restoration of Muslim pride and power in a world long dominated by foreign superpowers" (cited in Esposito 1990: 30). He was supported by Iran's leading Ayatollahs, as well as by President Ali Khamenei, who in 1980 called for the "creation of Islamic governments in all countries" (cited in Esposito 1990: 30). The Islamic revolution inspired Muslim communities all over the Gulf states and, moreover, it came at the right time. During the second half of the twentieth century, Islamic resurgence was emerging throughout the Muslim world, which meant re-emphasizing Islamic values, traditions, practices, symbols and figures.

In fear of their rule, the governments of Gulf states started to concentrate on Islam again with opponents re-adopting the Islamic approach in the hope of gaining mass support. Since the Islamic resurgence movements saw their main goal in opposing Western ideas and secular rulings, the Iranian revolution fit in well because it was viewed, first of all, as being an Islamic act. Thus it received its main credits and attention for being the first successful, Islamic inspired political revolution. But when proclamations of an aggressive expansionist policy

increased, governments now began to fear that the Shiite minorities within their own countries would stand up and fight. However, except for some Shiite threats, like car bombings in Kuwait in 1983 or fights between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces, the Shiites could not gain power in those countries:

> Pockets of Shii militancy in the Gulf states did not translate into significant revolutionary movements as regimes used a carrot-and-stick approach, addressing socioeconomic grievances while increasing security and prosecuting dissidents. (Esposito 1990: 35)

A great contribution to the export of the revolution was made by students, especially those who were right-wing with an idealist approach. In following Khomeini and taking his call for the export of the revolution very seriously, they organized and sponsored an international conference in Teheran that sixteen liberation movements from all over the world attended. Others understood the export more radically and considered the use of force, which led to the so-called second revolution, namely the hostage crisis in November 1979 and the fall of Mehdi Bazargans' government. After these events, the principle of "neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic" (Ramazani 1990: 44), and the export of the revolution, was ultimately anchored in politics. However, only after the third revolution, the fall of president Bani Sadr in 1981, were these words followed up with action (ibid.). The Islamic Revolutionary Council was established that acted as an umbrella body for various revolutionary and Islamic liberation movements from the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states. The council's goal was to accomplish the, "mission stated in the Book, of holy war in the way of God and fighting to expand the rule of God's law (*Sharia*) in the world" (ibid: 45):

> We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed peoples of the world. On the other hand, all the superpowers and all the powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. (Ramazani 1990: 50, citing *Daily Reports – Middle East and North Africa*, Nov.20, 1979)

The question remained whether the revolution was to be exported through means of an armed struggle or whether it should be a peaceful export. Attempts in both directions were made. The main targets for a forcible export of the Islamic revolution were regions such as the Persian Gulf, especially countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as well as the Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia. Also,

in countries such as Afghanistan and Lebanon, Iran was accused of forcible intervention (Ramazani 1990: 53). One could also argue that the Iran-Iraqi war had to do with the export of the Revolution. The question of whether Iran really just fought Iraq in self-defense or whether it extended the fight to impose its revolutionary ideology on Iraq seems to me most challenging to address, especially when we consider Khomeini's statement that: "We exported our revolution to the world through the war" (Ramazani 1990: 50). But a solution to this question would go beyond the scope of this article. Arguing for a peaceful export, with Iran presenting itself as an example to the world, one might want to look at the great effort that was put into post-war reconstruction and the attempt to build up an economically strong and socially popular Iran. The opening up to the West, especially France, Britain and West Germany, and at the same time the growing support for liberation movements throughout the world (although as Ramazani (1990: 50) argues, the support was directed mainly towards the Afghan Mujahidin, as well as Iraqis and Lebanese movements), all have to be considered as methods for a peaceful export. Furthermore various groups of people had an impact on the peaceful propagation of the revolution abroad. In this regard, it is important to mention Iranian students, especially athletes, who were sent into a foreign country to set an example of true Islamic behaviour. In addition, foreign religious leaders were educated in revolutionary thinking at international conferences sponsored by Iran. And, finally, one has to consider the achievements of the Organization for the Propagation of Islam, which was established in 1981 with the aim to export the revolution with the pen. By publishing books in Arabic, English, French, German, as well as Hindi, Kurdish and Urdu, and through releasing movies and videos they wanted to let "Islam and the revolution speak for itself" (Ramazani 1990: 79). This last statement leads us to the main conclusion we can draw from all these examples: the revolution was first of all an Iranian and Shii movement which was propagated and exported within that context and thus was less acceptable for other countries in terms of transmitting it into their own situation (ibid: 77).

The South African Context

In order to discuss the possible impact of the Islamic Revolution in South Africa, we need to understand that Islam in South Africa has many faces and is shaped by its very own context. A brief overview of the history of Islam in South Africa, with a special emphasis on the 20th century and the struggle against apartheid, will elucidate this specific context.

The History of Muslims in South Africa – An Overview

Muslims in South Africa come from very different cultural backgrounds. The first Muslims that arrived at the Cape during the 17th century were slaves from

the Dutch colonies of Java and Malaysia. From then on, the Cape of Good Hope became a designated place for slaves as well as for political exiles from Indonesia, South East Asia and India (Mahida 1993: 1). During that time the foundation of a long lasting educational tradition for Muslims was laid by *Imam* 'Abd Allah ibn Qadi 'Abd al-Salam, better known as Tuang Guru (1712-1807). Among his important contributions to the development and institutionalization of Islam at the Cape was the establishment of a mosque and the implementation of the so-called mosque-*madrassah* (mosque-school) complex in South Africa. Due to this emphasis on education, the first printed *kitab* (textbook) in Arabic-Afrikaans emerged in 1856 (Moosa 1995: 133). After 1860, indentured Indian laborers and later merchants and traders from Indian states came to settle in the northern and eastern parts of the Cape (Günther & Niehaus 2002: 71). With the arrival of Abubakr Effendi (1835-80), a scholar of Kurdish origins, the Hanafi school of Islamic law, with a liberal and rational approach, was introduced to the Muslim community in South Africa. Islam at the Cape prior to then had been an area in which the Shafi'i school, a profoundly traditionalist school, dominated because most of the Muslims in this region came from Southeast Asia where the Shafi'i school was the leading principle of the four prominent Sunni legal schools. Thus, with Effendi, a rivalry between Hanafi and Shafi'i thinking arose and led to great dispute within the community. A third wave arrived from Africa, primarily from Malawi and Zanzibar. Most of them were freed slaves who were employed by whites in public works and in private sectors (Mahida 1993: 28). Another group of Muslims that emerged in South Africa before the twentieth century were the converts.

Starting in the nineteenth century, people within the Malay population and, from 1950 onward among the black population of the townships, converted to Islam. As Ebrahim Moosa (1995: 134) has argued, "because of its egalitarian spirit, Islam became an attractive option for the underclass and dispossessed". The demonstrated diversity of ethnic backgrounds became the basic principle for apartheid classifications between "Coloureds" or "Cape Malays", which referred to Muslims originally coming from Indonesia or Malaysia, and "Indians" for all those from India and Indo-Pakistan (Günther & Niehaus 2002: 70). By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Muslim community was well established at the Cape and had set up religious and political centers supported by the '*ulama*. A number of Muslim organizations also began to emerge, which differed tremendously in their political or social objectives and religious orientations depending on their different cultural backgrounds (Moosa 1995: 142). Thus today, in South Africa, we are faced with a Muslim community made up of a variety of congregations. "There are progressive, reformists, orthodox and Islamist orientated communities and organizations" (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 72). Whereas progressive groups are influenced by socialist ideology and show a clear political commitment, liberal Muslims present a more academic and less activist

approach. The reformists call for religious reforms, the orthodox, which constitutes the mainstream *'ulama*, refer to conservative traditionalism and the term "Islamist" describes the organizations of contemporary Muslim fundamentalism (ibid: 72f).

The Emergence of Muslim Organizations, their Development and their Political Involvement in the Struggle against Apartheid

Although I want to focus on two specific organizations in this article, namely Qibla and Al-Jihaad, a brief overview of the main Muslim organizations and their contribution to the struggle according to their religious orientations, will be helpful to show the underlying conditions in which Al-Jihaad and Qibla have developed and maintained their "radical" approach. This then will lead to a consideration of how and why the events of 1979 in Iran have influenced their thinking and acting. The majority of Muslim organizations only emerged in the 1970s, especially after the Soweto uprisings in 1976, which led to an increasing political consciousness in general (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 73). Until then, Muslim communities were rather conservative and not yet concerned with politics. According to Tayob (1995: 99), one reason was that Muslims tried to avoid even more repressions by the apartheid regime and aimed for negotiations with the government in order to maintain their interests rather than direct political action. Günther (2002: 90-93), in addition, argues that the hegemony of the *'ulama* was the main contributing factor to that political silence. Especially in Natal and Transvaal, where it dominated religious life within the communities and persuaded Muslims against an active involvement in politics. Nevertheless, a few organizations emerged quite early under Afrikaner nationalist rule, like the Cape Muslim Youth Movement, established in 1957, and al-Jihaad, established in 1960. Both organizations were founded in District Six, possibly as a response to forced removals in that area (Günther & Niehhaus 2004: 105).

Amongst the first emerging organizations in the 1970s were the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) founded in 1970, and the Muslim Students Association (MSA) founded in 1974. In the beginning, both understood themselves mainly as a progressive counterpart to the *'ulama*, the dominating ideological power which presented a rather orthodox and traditional approach to Islam. The *'ulama* mainly consisted of members of the Muslim Judicial Council, established in 1945, which was to provide the Muslim community with a legal body "in order to guarantee the Islamic principles and the purity of the religion" (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 73) for the entire Muslim community in South Africa. In the years after 1976, resistance against the apartheid regime increased. Reasons for this were negative economic developments, such as unemployment and inflation, as well as increasingly repressive decisions taken by the government (Günther & Niehhaus 2004: 104). Another, even more influential development that shaped the active involvement of the Muslim community, was the rise of Islamic resur-

gence movements all over the world. South African Muslims started to adopt these international trends and turned increasingly towards the Muslim heartlands and the international *umma'*. This was, amongst other things, recognizable in articles published in local Muslim newspapers which started to focus more on international issues. Also, approaches from within the international Muslim community towards the rather isolated South African Muslim community were observable. Saudi Arabia, for example, beckoned with financial support and guaranteed special assistance for South African Muslims who wanted to take the *hajj* during the time of apartheid. Other Muslim heartlands sent scholars to educate the youth from the MYM and MSA in modern Islamic thinking. International Islamic resurgence literature was translated into English and spread among the youth of the newly emerging organizations (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 74). This provided the MYM and MSA with modern, Islamic educational means for challenging the traditional *'ulama* thinking and helped them to offer the Muslim community a new understanding of Islam. In the late 1970s this new understanding became the ideology of Islamism "the propagation of the perfect Islamic state with the major objective being to establish an Islamic value system" (ibid: 75). Nevertheless, as Günther and Niehaus (2002: 75) argue, one cannot find any practical political action coming from those two organizations at that time. Even the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 did not have any impact on them in terms of taking up the fight against the apartheid system. Neither the MYM nor the MSA considered the revolution or a theocratic state to be a model for South Africa. Yet they viewed the Islamic revolution as a most significant event, as a "symbol of victory of Islam" (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 75). As Ebrahim Moosa (1995: 149) states: "for the first time, Muslims found a point of reference for their religious and moral struggle".

However, two events in the 1980s, namely, the implementation of the Tricameral Parliament in 1983 and the elections in 1984, became the key impulse for the MYM and MSA as well as other Muslim organizations to enter into a politically active phase. In rejecting the elections, the organizations identified themselves clearly with the oppressed and, for the first time, committed to the fight against apartheid. In an article in the *Sunday Times Extra* dating from August 26, 1984, a number of Muslim organizations, the MYM and MSA included, made their position clear:

> The New Constitution entrenches racial division in this country and promotes standards of justice which when applied differ radically from one group to another. The disparity in education and also in health services, housing, pension, social welfare and inequality are violations of the principles of justice in Islam. In the light of the above violations of Islamic principles, we call on Muslims to reject

> the New Constitutional dispensation and abstain from voting. (Mahida 1993: 127)

Furthermore, the foundation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, which functioned as an umbrella body for various liberation movements, became a milestone in the process of self-identification of Muslim organizations. The question of whether or not working together with non-Muslim and secular organizations would have a negative effect on promoting specific Islamic goals led to tensions between the organizations. The MYM adopted a rather neutral stand, which kept them from committing to any political ideology. They stated that the struggle of Muslims against apartheid was a distinctive one and had to be separated from any other liberation movements. At the same time, the MYM abandoned its original aim to "Islamize" the society and shifted to a more contextual Islam, emphasizing a South African understanding of Islam in accordance with "the South African political realities of oppression and resistance" (Günther & Niehhaus 2004: 107). Only through a clear identification with the South African context would the Muslim community be able to remove oppression and eradicate apartheid. During that time, two other Muslim organizations emerged: Qibla, founded in 1980 with a radical, even militant approach to Islam, and the Call of Islam, seceding from the MYM in 1984, mainly because of new orientation towards working together with non-Muslim organizations in the struggle. Although both organizations showed a more activist and radical commitment to the struggle and recruited members of the MYM who were no longer satisfied with its goals, they differed from each other deeply. Qibla, from the beginning, identified itself with the Islamic revolution and made the establishment of an Islamic state its main goal. In this, it rejected the possibility of a democratic government and objected to any associations with non-Muslim movements or secular organizations.[3] Thus it displayed more radically one of the important features of the MYM, Islamism (Günther & Niehhaus 2002: 77). The Call of Islam, in contrast, presented itself as a democratic, progressive movement in a clearly South African context which supported and committed itself to alliances with secular liberation organizations (ibid: 77). As Farid Esack, one of the founders of the Call of Islam, emphasized:

> For us it is not a question of taking friendship of non-Muslims. People are suffering. We are part of that people who are suffering and together we are going to get our freedom. (Cited in Günther & Niehhaus 2004: 109).

The Call of Islam was a product of Muslims such as Ebrahim Rasool, Imam Hassan Solomon and Farid Esack, who were part of both the MYM and the UDF. When they were demanded by the MYM to decide between those two, they left

the MYM, but stayed senior members of the UDF which granted support to their newly established Call of Islam (Esack 1988: 490). Though emphasizing the South African experience of Islam, Esack (1988: 491) states that the writings of the Iranian scholar Ali Shariati circulated among its ideologues and even literature of the Mujahedin i Khalq in Iran was read and discussed.

Al-Jihaad, Qibla and the Impact of the Iranian Revolution

Although Qibla and Al-Jihaad have both been deeply influenced by the events of the Iranian revolution and especially by its leading character, Ayatollah Khomeini, and both sympathized with Shiism and engaged in the armed struggle against apartheid, they did not work together but rather opposed each other. According to Günther and Niehaus (2004: 109), reasons were that Qibla held loose connections with the PAC as well as the Black Consciousness Movement and rejected affiliations with mainstream liberation movements whereas "Al-Jihaad supported the ANC (African National Congress) and did not hesitate to join the United Democratic Front (UDF) after its inception" (Günther & Niehaus 2004: 109). Being one of the earliest South African Muslim organizations established during the apartheid era, Al-Jihaad, originally aimed to take part in the Arab war against Israel but never accomplished this goal. According to Le Roux and Nel (1998: 6) the movement, which centered mainly on its founder Ismail Joubert who later became known as Tatamkhulu Afrika, had unsuccessfully tried to become a significant organization for militant Islamic fundamentalism in South Africa. Though Joubert managed to receive large funds annually, in particular from Saudi Arabia, Iran and Libya, the organization never really flourished in that sense. With the Iranian revolution, a new impetus was given to the organization and most of the membership was drawn to Shiism. Leader of Al-Jihaad, Ismail Joubert explained the conversion as follows:

> And we began to get Shi'a propaganda material out of Tehran and I violently resisted this attempt to convert us to Shi'ism. I used to write very rude letters back, until the revolution arrived. That wonderful moment – well to me it was a wonderful moment – when the people of Tehran took to the streets in its hundreds of thousands with nothing, no weapons. And the soldiers just stood abashed. They did not know what to do. And the Shah's soldiers… that was just a tremendously inspiring moment that I decided that any sect there is you want to call it that, that is going to inspire people to that extent, must have something in it. So then I began to study that material that they sent us, Shi'i material and I discovered that I approved of this, I liked it. So I secretly, in 1982, when the Iraqi wars was already going on, remember they went on

> until 1988, it started in 1980 and went on for 8 years, I thought no, I'm becoming a Shi'a. (Interview carried out by Inga Niehaus, May, 2001, Cape Town)

Joubert also emphasized the exclusiveness of his movement, being "the first and only Shi'ite fundamentalist movement in South Africa loyal to the Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran" (Le Roux & Nel 1998: 6).[4] However, the emergence of Qibla in 1980 set an end to this exclusiveness. Esack argues that although the ideology of the Islamic revolution was adopted, Al-Jihaad stayed a Muslim organization within a clear South African context and therefore did not entirely view the Islamic revolution as a model for a solution for South Africa (Esack 1988: 489). In terms of the organization's present status, there is not much written about the current activities or organizational structure of Al-Jihaad and most researchers in that field claim the organization to be inactive (Le Roux & Nel 1998: 6). Although the name Al-Jihaad appears frequently in the available literature, I soon discovered that most of the time the organization is described as a small group of Shiites influenced by the Iranian revolution (though no one mentions, how) that are active in largely, black-populated informal settlements, but which have never really accomplished anything. A reason why the organization has not been explored more thoroughly might be its already mentioned affiliation with the newly established UDF in 1983, its supposedly active engagement in the ANC's armed struggle and its support of the present ANC government. Certainly among members of Qibla who view the ANC as being influenced, and even controlled by Western capitalists and therefore reject its rule, a pro-ANC opinion is not seen in a favourable light (ibid: 8). Thus, Al-Jihaad's close connection to the ANC might have led to its neglected and marginalized position within Muslim fundamentalist movements but as I have argued earlier, quoting Günther and Niehaus, militant Muslim organizations such as Qibla and Al-Jihaad have not yet spoken up for themselves.

Established in 1980, Qibla came to be Al-Jihaad's main opponent. As I have already shown, it was also deeply inspired by the Iranian revolution, but in contrast to Al-Jihaad it believed that the revolution could be applied to South Africa and a transformation into an Islamic state was possible (Le Roux & Nel 1998: 7). In doing so, it even adopted and underlined its Shiite understanding of Islam for this new, Islamic republic. Thus it stood its ground against the local *'ulama*, who declared the Shias as *Kafir* (unbelievers in the means of Islam) and did not hesitate to take up the armed fight against the anti-Shia lobby which emerged in the 1980s in the Western Cape (Esack 1988: 484). As Qibla had affiliated itself with the PAC which organized military training for its members in Libya, Iran and Sudan, it was able to be part of the armed struggle against apartheid. Furthermore, through this political affiliation, Qibla developed close relations with Iran which, after the Islamic revolution, financially assisted Mus-

lim fundamentalist groupings in South Africa that were ideologically supporting it (Le Roux & Nel 1998: 7). Only when Qibla started to support Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, even with a Muslim force, Iran stopped its financial aid, but supposedly took it up again after the Gulf War ended and a growth of interest in Iran was recognizable again (ibid: 7). This interest in Iran was due to the main goal of Qibla to "assist pro-Islamic fundamentalist countries in their attempts to establish an Islamic republic in South Africa based on the principles of the Sharia and the teachings of the Quran" (ibid: 8). Iran offered the "living example" and was viewed as a guide, spiritually as well as politically, for liberating the Muslim community. Nevertheless, this liberation was, according to Esack (1988: 484), not primarily understood within the struggle against apartheid:

> For a large number of Qiblah supporters the idea of 'neither East nor West: Islam is the best' meant an obsession with Iran and an escape from any kind of commitment to the struggle against apartheid, given that they perceived the struggle as being tainted by its non-Islamic elements.

However Qibla has, like Al-Jihaad, never accomplished its main goal (Le Roux & Nel 1998: 9). Different reasons for this can be suggested. First of all, besides repeating its slogan "One solution, Islamic revolution", the question of how to convert the ideas of an Islamic revolution into the South African context remained unanswered by Qibla. Another reason seems to be that most of the Muslims involved in the struggle regarded Qibla as too radical, especially when they realized that its militancy was also being directed against other organizations within the Muslim community:

> At the first Call of Islam rally on17 July 1983, tens of placard-waving Qiblah members attempted to disrupt it, chanting '*marg Bar Munafiqin*!' 'Marg Bar Shorawi!' (Persian for 'Death to the hypocrites', 'Death to the Soviets'). Qibla had correctly calculated that the successful emergence of the Call of Islam would threaten their hegemony – albeit limited – over nascent radical Muslim politics and that the Call of Islam could draw Muslims into the national democratic movement. (Esack 1988: 487)

With regard to the question of leadership, Qibla as well as a few other liberation movements, such as the Cape Action League (CAL) and AZAPO, rejected the personality cult that arose around prominent, political activists such as Nelson Mandela or Allan Boesak, and called for a shared leadership instead of the valorization of an individual leader. Paradoxically, it promoted Ahmed Cassiem

as the revolutionary leader *par excellence* and the rightful successor of Imam Haroon, the editor of *Muslim News* and the first person to organize the South African Muslim community in the struggle against apartheid who, subsequently, died as a Muslim martyr after four months in detention (Naude 1992: 18). Critics have argued that Qibla promoted Cassiem as the next Haroon in a desperate need for a cult figure to keep its supporters within the Muslim community (Esack 1988: 488). With its headquarters in Athlone it had, like Al-Jihaad, drawn most of its members from "coloured" and black communities around Cape Town. According to Le Roux and Nel, current membership numbers are unknown, but it is assumed that though Qibla started as a mass movement, it has never really been able to sustain its membership or even increase it. After Qibla kept silent about the killing of Irani pilgrims by the Saudi police in October 1987 it vanished into thin air (ibid). One of its members, namely, Cassim Christianson, broke away from Qibla in 1984/5 and together with Muhammed Shabazz Cloete, a former representative of the PAC in Iran, formed the Islamic Liberation Movement of Azania (ILMA), which reportedly has created a South African branch of Hizbollah (ibid.: 9), but evidence for this claim has yet to be offered.

Conclusion

If we look at the work of Esposito, his colleagues and the countries they have taken into consideration in assessing the impact of the Iranian revolution we can, first of all, conclude that although Khomeini and his followers preached the export of the revolution as a worldwide mission, it was mainly undertaken in regions such as Northern Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The direct access to these countries was obviously less complicated than to countries far away from the heartland of Islam. Nevertheless, though the revolution was exported into these regions, sometimes through peaceful propaganda and exemplary behavior, and other times through forceful intervention and war, it was difficult for other countries to embrace the message. The main reason for that was the particular Iranian and Shii context in which the revolution took place. Thus, as Esposito concludes, the export of the revolution neither led towards a repetition of the event itself nor to the establishment of an Islamic Republic anywhere else (Esposito 1990: 4ff). In terms of South Africa, however, the impact of the Iranian revolution cannot easily be disputed and some researchers have at least mentioned it. From the available literature I have been able to draw the conclusion that though a deeper influence has only been sporadic, an overall recognition and acknowledgement of the revolution, its leaders and their achievements can be observed within the Muslim organizations during their struggle against apartheid. In my understanding, the main organizations, such as MYM or Call of Islam, have not viewed the Iranian revolution as anything else but an outstanding symbol for the power of Islam. For Qibla and al-Jihaad, the case was slightly different. For both

of these militant, fundamentalist movements, the Iranian revolution had a deeper impact. Qibla, on the one side, emerged as a Shii movement in the 1980s, one year after the event and thus was able to base their ideology mainly on those revolutionary ideas. For Qibla, as I have argued, the revolution was understood as a possible solution, even as a model for South Africa to convert to. This attitude justified their relatively militant approach to the struggle against apartheid. Though regarding the establishment of an Islamic republic as the ultimate goal, Qibla was never really able to offer a method within the South African, and especially within the apartheid context, to achieve that goal. Losing itself in contradictions over issues such as leadership and the personality cult, as well as adopting a radical, militant approach (the actual delivery of the *Jihad*) and taking action against other Muslim organizations, combined, caused a loss of support for Qibla who became virtually silent after 1987.

Al-Jihaad, on the other side, started out as a Sunni organization and rejected Shiism. But its leader, Ismail Joubert, was so deeply moved by the outcome of the Iranian revolution and by the power of the Shiite belief that he converted to Shiism, with half of the organization following his example. Although funded by Iran afterwards, they did not fully want to adopt the model of the Iranian revolution for South Africa. Its close connection to the ANC and UDF kept their fight against apartheid within a South African context and thus reduced their support within the militant Islamic fundamentalist organizations. Therefore although both Al-Jihaad and Qibla used the idea of Islamic revolution as an inspiration for their struggle against apartheid it would seem that neither of them gained much support or achieved great victory with this approach. In conclusion, the Islamic revolution had an impact on Muslim organizations within South Africa, especially those with a militant, fundamentalist agenda such as Qibla and Al-Jihaad, insofar that it gave them an impulse towards a more active involvement in the struggle. But the influence did not reach as far as being a solution for a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious shaped South Africa in the context of the struggle against apartheid.

Notes

1 See for example Esack 1988; Günther & Niehaus 2002 and 2004; Le Roux & Nel 1998; Moosa, 1995.

2 For a more detailed insight into the events before and during the Islamic revolution, and its socio-economic as well as religiopolitical preconditions, I refer to the comprehensive work by Milani Mohsen (1988) *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*. Boulder, London: Westview Press.

3 Nevertheless Le Roux and Nel (1998: 7) as well as Günther and Niehaus (2004: 109) mention a connection to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian

Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) for military training reasons. But Ahmed Cassiem, the founder of Qibla strongly rejects such an assumption.

4 It is interesting to note that in his interview with Inga Niehaus in 2001, Tatamkhulu Afrika admits that his confession of Shiite belief to the group and his call upon them to become Shiite caused a split within the organization. "Half of us vanished, refused point blank to become Shi'a. So once again we were reduced to about fifteen people." This statement shows that the influence the Iranian revolution might have had on Al-Jihaad was not inevitably connected with a conversion to Shiite belief. Regarding Tatamkhula's statement about the size of the membership, furthermore, sheds some light on the organizations inability to fulfil their goals.

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