

# Islamic Education in South Africa Meeting the Demands of Change and Uncertainty

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## MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN AFRICA

“Muslims and Islam in Africa” is an online publication of Bayreuth University, Germany. It is a result of a research project on sharia debates in selected African countries, funded by Volkswagen Foundation see: [www.sharia-in-africa.net](http://www.sharia-in-africa.net). It has a multi-disciplinary approach and covers current research in the field of Muslims and Islam in Africa. There are no specific requirements as to the language of publication and to the length of the contributions.

Contributions to this series may be submitted directly to the editors. Acceptance is decided upon by the editors and the academic advisory board.

“Muslims and Islam in Africa” is hosted by the private website [www.sharia-in-africa.net](http://www.sharia-in-africa.net)

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## **Introduction**

Education has been a fundamental feature of modern societies; the cornerstone of their stability, economic development and general welfare. Education in Islam, for different reasons, forms the cornerstone of its culture and civilization. Founded by revelation and transmitted in the spoken and written word, Islamic civilization is unconceivable without its own ideas of learning, teachers and learners (Qadi al 2006). These two rich and varied traditions have been brought into contact with each other, forcing an inevitable reaction. From the earliest contacts between the Ottoman Empire and Europe to the most recent minority communities in the West, Muslims adopted a range of positions. Sometimes, some Muslims rejected the forms and content of modern schools, perceiving them to be tainted by their carriers and their Western European source. At other times, Muslims have found value in certain aspects of modern education. Often, the new education was accommodated as a necessity that could not be avoided. Modern education was useful for economic and political reasons, while Islamic education served communal and personal religious needs (Reese 2004; Kadi and Billeh 2006; Hefner and Zaman 2007).

In the following essay, I wish to focus on the emergence of Islamic schools in South Africa since the 1980s. Not all Muslim learners in the country attend these schools. In fact, those who do are in the minority as Muslim learners also attend state and independent schools. However, the schools represent a new development in the encounter between Islamic learning and modern education. A closer look at these schools presents an opportunity to understand the motivation and success of these schools. Moreover, they also help us to deepen our understanding of the ideals of Islamic and modern education that are expressed in these schools. The research was mainly conducted at the end of 2006, when 25 interviews were conducted in Cape Town, Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal with principals and head teachers of Islamic

educational institutions. Also, a list of schools and higher Islamic education institution was compiled.<sup>1</sup>

There are two inter-related frames of inquiry for examining the significance of these schools. Firstly, they emerged as part of the greater Islamization trend of the 1970s and 1980s. The founder of the first such school was inspired by a vision to integrate Islamic and secular subjects and sciences into a greater project of Islamization. However, the turn to identity and authenticity was not a unique feature of Islamic schooling. Islamic schools were part of a general trend towards the decentralization of schooling worldwide, and in the South African context in particular. Plank and Sykes pointed to several motivations for this trend. In addition to choices made by parents for cultural reasons, they also pointed to the emergence of neo-liberalism and perceived state inefficiencies that lent greater support for decentralized schooling (Plank and Sykes 1999). In South Africa, the crisis of the apartheid state also created motivations for parents who could afford to do so, to seek other forms of schooling. Moreover, the fall of apartheid, and particularly tense negotiations that ushered the new democracy, ensured the right of minorities to own schooling (Carrim 1998; Berger 2003). Muslim schools after the 1980s may then be examined for any innovation that they may have introduced into previous Islamic schools. Moreover, they should not be dissociated from the significant changes taking place at the end of apartheid and during the post-apartheid period with regard to privatization and decentralization of schooling from the state.

This article suggests that Islamic schooling is part of a long process through which Muslim communities provided Islamic and secular education in the country. Although

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<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted by the author with the assistance of Armin Cassiem and Mohammad Groenewald. The former conducted most the interviews in Cape Town, while the latter compile the list of institutions. Their assistance is hereby acknowledged with appreciation.

there have been attempts to integrate these streams, the two traditions have been maintained for their separate functions, goals and values. This latest trend of Islamic schooling emphasized the value and importance of secular education. Islamic schools were important for Muslim identity, which in South Africa was informed race and class. The schools socialized Muslims in racial enclaves, but ensured their place and participation in the secular spheres of society.

### **Islamic and Secular Education in Historical Perspective**

The new Islamic schools were part of a broad array of Islamic educational institutions founded in South Africa. The first of these go back to the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century when mosques were founded in Cape Town. The first school was established by the famous Tuan Guru, the first Imam of the first mosque in the Cape. The school became very popular, and soon served close to 500 young students. This tradition continues into the present, and has generally been known as *slamse skool* (the school of the Muslims). The teacher was called a *khalifa*, and denoted someone, male or female, who transmitted Quran literacy, basic theology, knowledge and practical application of religious duties (prayer, fasting), and some history of Islam (Ajam 1989, 77, 85; Davids 1980). Similar such schools were also established by Indians who arrived later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were called *madressa*, and the term has been specifically reserved for religious education to distinguish it from modern, secular schooling.

Such basic Islamic education has developed extensively over the last one hundred years. Particularly, from the 1960s and 1970s, these primary religious schools adopted modern instruments of learning such as syllabi, examinations and grading. The adoption of such instruments has been more systematic among middle-class Muslims of Indian origin, led by Indian religious scholars who were already exposed to it in the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, they have also established various competing educational

movements (Metcalf 1978; Randeree 1978). Religious leaders in Cape Town are equally effective, but they have adopted these systems randomly (Davids 1980, 23).

Higher Islamic education can also probably be traced back to the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well. Such teacher-student networks are recorded by Davids, and they continue unabated today. In the Cape, in particular, they have developed into adult education offered by Imams and religious leaders on a variety of subjects. However, an institutional history of such education may be briefly mapped. Achmat Ata'ullah, the elder son of the famous Ottoman emissary to the Cape, Achmat Effendi, apparently established the first higher Islamic education institution in Kimberly in 1884. More generally, students from the Cape went to Mecca and then Egypt to pursue specialized studies. Indian communities invited Imams from Indian institutions, and later, South African students themselves went to these institutions. Since the 1970s, a large number of institutions have been established in South Africa, but the flow of students to international institutions continues.

A third and equally important stream of education has been the provision of modern, often called secular education, within Muslim societies. And this is the focus of this article. The first such schools were established at the end of nineteenth century, the demand being driven by the discovery of rich mineral deposits. Such developments pushed the country on a path to rapid industrialization and modernization. Muslim children and students were slowly being exposed to these new schools, and to subjects and methods that originated in Europe. Missionaries were the main channel through which these opportunities were provided to non-whites in the country. Given the racial and discriminatory policies at the time, the state's provisions were highly inadequate and discriminatory. More importantly, the attempt by the communities to establish such schools for themselves is remarkable. Ajam has documented the rise of such schools in

Cape Town from 1913. They were called Moslem Mission Schools that followed the Christian Mission Schools in name, and a total of fifteen such schools were founded until 1956 (Ajam 1986; Ajam 1989). They provided a place for Muslim teachers who had qualified at teachers' colleges, and for Muslim children to avoid the dominant Christian ethos at both state and missionary schools. The newly arrived Indian communities also built such schools, almost as they arrived from 1860s on. A committee in 1928 found that 10000 out of 30000 children attended 50 institutions established by Indian trusts and benefactors (Calpin 1949, 72; Maharaj 1979). Indian religious communities sometimes established separate schools, and provided space for religious education in the afternoons or weekends. Muslims followed this pattern, and established a number of such so-called state-aided schools. The communities provided buildings, while the state provided the teaching infrastructure. The communities were free to develop religious education.

Education has been an important part of the history of Islam in South Africa. It covers many different levels and includes a very wide range of institutions. Both Islamic and secular education institutions were well-established, and both were entrenched as separate streams. There have been regular calls for improvements, and even integration (Tayob 1995, chapter 3). However, the underlying structure is a highly effective system of informing young Muslims of their place in the Muslim community, and in the broader South African economy and polity. The Islamic schools that are the subject of this article should be located in this rich and extensive history.

### **New Islamic schools**

From the 1980s, a new type of Islamic schooling was introduced, first in Cape Town and in the rest of the country. Such schools have proliferated throughout the country since the 1990s. In 2006, there were 74 such schools with a school population of over 44 000

students. The Association of Muslim Schools (<http://www.ams-sa.org/>) represented these schools at governmental level, and also with other independent schools. In order to get a better understanding of these schools, I would now like to present short sketches of three schools. Two of these are based in the Cape Town, one being a well-established and well-endowed schools and the other based on a lower economic scale. The third school has been chosen from the administrative capital of the country (Tswane/Pretoria) to explore its different religious ethos. The more detailed accounts reveal the peculiarities of Muslim schools in the country, identifying some of the sources of their strength and sustainability. Moreover, they reveal important features of the consolidated Islamic schools serving both religious and secular needs.

- Middle Class Cape Town: Indian school<sup>2</sup>

In 1973 Mawlana Ali Adam, his brother-in-law, Mawlana Yusuf Karaan, and a businessman, the late Sulayman Bayat, considered the idea of a “school for Muslim(s)” girls in response to the crisis in public schools in apartheid South Africa. The founders were concerned about the moral deterioration in the schools, as “looser trends and downward morals were creeping in”. This was a few years before the 1976 school uprisings, which increased the crisis in education. The idea was brought to life in 1983, by which time the needs could no longer be doubted. Fear of moral standards and behaviour had particularly increased, as the uprisings and boycotts against apartheid had created a lot of time and space wherein pupils and students were totally unsupervised. The school was formed to prevent what was perceived as a decline in moral propriety.

In addition to the moral purpose identified at its foundation, one of the founders, Mawlana Ali Adam, introduced a distinctive religious motivation for the school. He had

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<sup>2</sup> Mawlana Ali Adam (interview 5 December 2006) with Armien Cassiem.



studied ten years in Lucknow (India) under one of the illustrious teachers of Islamic revivalism, Mawlana Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi. Unlike more traditional scholars, Nadwi advocated the teaching of secular and religious subjects in Muslim schools. Islamiyya has over the years justified its existence by pointing to this philosophy of Islamization, promoted by a number of International Islamic Conferences of Education since the 1970s. Islamiyya hosted one of these international conferences in the 1990s. It was also instrumental in the foundation of a research institute International Board of Educational Research and Resources (IBERR) which tried to give the Islamization curriculum some concrete foundation. Teachers were “encouraged” to Islamize subjects. With the philosophy of Islamization, the school hoped to produce “thinkers, not scholars of fiqh.”

Since its foundation over 25 years ago, the school has grown in the number and infrastructure. It has moved to a new site for which it secured a healthy donation from the Qatar government. The latter gave the school R3.5m of its budget of R5.5m, which represents 63% of the total budget. It has successfully completed a number of years of successful matriculation. Its enrolment in 2006 was over 1000 learners and 70 teachers.<sup>3</sup> The school’s fees were prohibitive for the very poor, even though quite low for independent schools. In 2006, the fees were set at R10000 per annum (in comparison with R20 000 (or more) at similar independent schools). Most of the children at the school come from either Indian and Coloured backgrounds. In 2006, Islamiyya had only five children of indigenous background. The principal founder hope that it would eventually be a school exclusively for the latter.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.zmo.de/muslime\\_in\\_europa/ergebnisse/niehaus/index.html](http://www.zmo.de/muslime_in_europa/ergebnisse/niehaus/index.html)H (Accessed December 7, 2009)

- Coloured School: Dar al-Arkam<sup>4</sup>

The school was founded in 1992 by group of people in response to “problems at the public school” in the sprawling township of Mitchell’s Plain. The enrolment in 2006 roll was 300 learners, with 16 teachers (including the principal). The school was closely connected to the Portlands Mosque whose Imam, Shaykh Ebrahim Gabriels, played a leading role in its formation. His function was clearly devoted to the religious curriculum, while professional teachers under the leadership of Gatim Kafaar focussed on secular education. The latter had moved to another Islamic school on a subsequent visit in 2009. The school was first located in a community centre, then moved to classrooms on top of the Foodland Supermarket complex in Rocklands, Mitchell’s Plain. Like Islamiyya, the school was also launched with a group of grade eights girls. After four years, the school became co-educational and boys who were based at the Rocklands Mosque were incorporated into the school. Over the years, funds were raised and a new school built in 2002. The school premises were vested in a Trust, and the school was supported by prominent businesses in Cape Town including Karibu Furnisher and Flywell Travel. Even though there were other smaller companies in support of the school, finance and resources were the biggest challenge. It has not received international funding, except a donation of \$500 from a Saudi visitor. The fees were R3200 pa (less than 1/3 of Islamiyya). Even these were too high, and only 15 learners paid full fees in 2006. Learners who could not afford the fees were exempted from paying. The school tried creative ways of fund-raising, but complained about the lack of support from more established, middle-class communities. They had not been able to persuade their very successful graduates to contribute to this school.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gatim Kafaar (interview 22 Nov 2006) with Armien Cassiem.

<sup>5</sup> Shamila Abrahams (interview 22 May 2009) with Abdulkader Tayob.

The school was first called Mitchell's Plain Islamic High, but in 2005 "Islamized" to Darul Arkam, in reference to the home in which the early Muslims in Mecca congregated. Since the name-change there was "greater interest in the school." The schools wants to create "vice-gerents of Allah", and to "to educate learners wholesome in academics and Islamic education". It wants to "promote [the] Islamic point of view, denying gays any rights." Islamic morals and values were high on school's agenda. The day started with a prayer (*du'ā*) and *ḥadīth*. Each class was expected to spend a lot of time reciting the Quran. It had to complete one full recitation (*khātam*) per month. All Islamic dates were celebrated on the calendar, including the *Moulood* (the Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad) and the 10th Muharram (first month in the Islamic calendar). The school joined the activities and festivals organized by all Islamic organization, and the principal took boys on 3-day trips with the Tablighi Jamaat. It had also adopted some welfare institutions in the area, and invited them to meals on religious occasions.

The secular educational programme of the school was closely connected with schools in the greater Mitchell's Plain. The school has good relations with other schools in the area. The principal was previously a teacher at a local school for 15 years, and knew "90% of principals." This support was important for this school. In 2006, for example, the school was part of the Learning Schools Project to promote Grade 12 writing successful June and September examination for the final matriculation. In short, secular education was very important and connected with the schools in the area.

- Middle Class Indian School in Gauteng: Tswane Islamic School<sup>6</sup>

My third vignette comes from a different region, and religious background. This school, like the others, was unique. However, it represented Islamic schools that have proliferated in wealthier communities in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal. Moreover, it also

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<sup>6</sup> Yusuf Abed (interview 5 December 2006) with Abdulkader Tayob.

represent schools that came from a very different theological background than the two examined in Cape Town. The school in question was founded in 1990 in Laudium with 160 learners.<sup>7</sup> When the name of the city was changed to Tswane, the school also changed its name from Pretoria Muslim School. This is one of 4 or 5 Islamic schools that have been established in the last 20 years in this suburb. The schools in Laudium are highly sectarian, each following a different religious group. There is one Deobandi school, one Barelvi, and two with more or less theological leanings in between. Each school was founded by leading merchant families. This particular school was closely connected to the Deobandi and Tablighi Jamaat revivalist groups, and was materially supported by the Dockrat family.

The head of Islamic Studies was Yusuf Abed. Born in Pretoria (Marabastad), he is the son of a *madressah* teacher. He went twice to Pakistan to pursue higher Islamic education. He first went there to memorize the Qur'an, returned for a brief period, and then returned to complete a higher course of study (the *Alim Fazil* certificate in Islamic sciences). On his return, he taught first at his father's *madressa*. He was invited to join the Islamic school as a teacher, and then later also appointed as one of the *imāms* at the mosque adjoining the school.

The school first followed the Lenasia Muslim Association syllabus on Islamic Studies. Later, when the Jamiat Ulama introduced its own syllabus, the school changed its syllabus. There does not seem to have been a problem with the earlier syllabus of the Lenasia Muslim Association. The use of syllabi with a set of published books was well established in the region. The choice of syllabus reflected the identity of the school, and its close association with the Deobandi Council of Theologians (Jamiatul Ulama). The syllabi devoted considerable amount of time to the recitation and memorization of the

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<sup>7</sup> Laudium was a previously designated Indian area of Pretoria, and maintains its racial character.

Quran. It then also covered the basic teaching of *deen* (*fiqh*) which Muslims ought to know in order to perform the essential duties of the religion. The time devoted to these subjects declined as the learners proceed to higher levels in school. There was very limited exposure to history, but special attempts were made to inform students of the crises in Muslim countries. The learners also participated in general charity drives in the city.

The school was part of a larger centre. The mosque Dar al-Salam occupied a central role and place in the complex. Interestingly, there was also a separate building for an afternoon *madressah* that catered for the religious education of children who attended private schools or local government schools. The larger centre was also the location for a higher Islamic institute. The latter no longer functioned. The principal teacher, Ml. Farhad Docrat, had taught Islamic sciences in what appeared to be a *salafi* approach to Islam.

## **Analysis of Schools in Islamic and Cultural Perspectives**

Given the complex location of Islamic schools in South Africa, the following analysis is divided into a number of key points. I begin with an examination of the place of culture in South African schools, and how the Muslim schools fit therein. Islamic schoolings and culture cannot be dissociated from issues of race and class in South African schools, and they have a distinctive story to relate on this complex South African situation. I then move to a closer examination of the religious dimension of Islamic schools, bringing out the aspirations for an integrated education of Islamic and modern education, but the reality of a bifurcated tradition that seems to hold sway. I conclude with a reflection of the distinctive nature of these Islamic schools that have emerged since the 1980s.

Islamic schools were clearly motivated and informed by culture, but their context in late apartheid and post-apartheid contexts needs further elaboration and reflection. They should be put alongside well-established and privileged groups in South Africa who took a particular approach to the challenges of education in the country. The privileging of culture needs critical scrutiny within state schools and within independent schools. Islamic schools shared commonalities and differences with these.

It is well known that apartheid ideology was based on a system of racial discrimination on the basis of which white privilege was built and perpetuated. It is less well known how apartheid was justified on the basis of some kind of cultural anthropology. Races were considered to be distinctive cultural groups who needed to be kept apart from each other, and allowed to develop on their own. White culture was obviously the most advanced, and destined to hold hegemonic power over the other groups. With the decline of the apartheid state structure, the preservation and privilege of white culture was given a different justification in the education system. From 1990 when the Afrikaner nationalist government announced the unbanning of political parties opposed to the state, to the final South African Constitution of 1996, various parties put forward the rights of white to preserve their culture (Henrard and Smis 2000, 30-32; Churchill 1996; Fedderke et al. 2000). The final political settlement entitled public schools to preserve significant power on how to maintain the ethos of the schools. Moreover, the Bill of Rights in the final constitution granted everyone the right to establish independent schools (Chapter 29). This was confirmed in the Schools African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996: South African Schools Act) in Section 46 (3)(b) that clearly outlawed racial discrimination, but remained silent on cultural discrimination. Moreover, sections 18 through 33 of this outlined and dramatically increased the power of governing bodies at public schools. Through these bodies, the privilege and preserve of white education of the past has been continued after apartheid (Penny et al. 1993; Carrim 1998; Henrard

2001). The right to culture has turned out to be a means of preserving privilege in both government and independent schools.

In a quantitative study of independent schools, Du Toit reports that since 1990, independent schools have increased significantly in South Africa (du Toit 2004). In 2002, there were 1287 independent schools with 391,248 learners. Of these, 61.1% registered after 1990. Of these, under half (565) were religious schools. Another interesting feature is the high number of girls in independent schools in du Toit's study (17:1). And the number of African learners is higher than other groups at the top-fee schools, indicating the preference of the middle classes for independent schooling.

Islamic schools must be located within these developments, with due regard for their differences from more privileged white public and independent schools. Even though they have not been specifically identified in the literature, their proliferation and development seems to converge with culture-specific schools and their privileges. The Schools Act of 1996 made provision for only two types of schools: public and independent schools. All previous state-aided schools had to choose between becoming public schools or independent schools status. Muslim state-aided schools seem to have opted for become independent schools, with the support of paragraph 48 which ensured or some state subsidy. It seems that this provision by itself increased the number of Islamic schools in Indian Muslim areas. The following figures for Islamic were collected towards the end of 2006, and they reveal some interesting trends. There were a total of 74 independent Islamic schools. Using du Toit's figures, they formed a very small percentage of the total number of independent schools (5.74%), but higher than the total number of their proportion in the population as a whole (1.5%). Even more significantly, they constituted a larger percentage of independent schools (12.8%) based on religion. Although we did not get specific numbers of girls in Muslim schools, we did get an

impression that girls were over-represented. The early foundation of two school mentioned above confirm this concern.

Muslim Schools (2006)				
Province	Number of Schools	Number of Teachers	Number of Students	Teacher/Student Ratio
Western Cape	22	331	8417	25
Gauteng (TVL)	24	860	21000	24
Kwazulu Natal	28 <sup>8</sup>	700	15000	21
	74	1891	44417	23

These numbers indicate that Islamic school fit very much within the profile of independent schools. Indeed, Islamic schools have embraced the concept of independent schools in terms of the 1996 South African Schools Act. They are very active in the association representing independent schools. Some of the leaders in the Association of Muslim Schools hold places on these national bodies. The secretary general of the Association of Muslim Schools, Rashied Chopdat, was an office bearer of the national association of independent schools in 2006. Muslim schools also represent aspirations of middle classes for independent schools, and to maintain the racial profile of schooling. These aspirations only need partial qualification. The majority of learners in Islamic schools come from Gauteng, while the Western Cape had the fewest number of

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ams-sa.org/about-ams/kzn-region/64-kzn-school-list.html> H. December 7, 2009.



learners. The Western Cape has about half of the Muslim population in the country, but only 19% of the total number of learners at Islamic schools. The Kwazulu-Natal province also has a larger number of Muslims than the Gauteng, but the number of learners is significantly lower than Gauteng. Fataar's specific study on schools in Cape Town confirms this class basis of Islamic schools (Fataar 2005).

The class basis of Islamic schools needs some qualification. There was a definitely a tendency to provide education outside of the state schools to families who were able to afford it. However, an examination of the fees at the schools indicates that they were offering independent schooling at rates much lower than other independent schools in the country. Fees at Islamic schools were supplemented with fun-raising activities on a large scale. Sometimes, the fees that they charged were much lower than fees charged by former white public schools. These latter schools largely maintained their cultural ethos, and charged higher fees, with the support of well-organized school governing bodies. Muslims who could afford to do so, and were able to obtain entrance, sent their children to these schools, or to other more established independent schools. Fataar's study confirmed this lower middle class status in particularly Cape Islamic schools. He counted twelve schools in Cape Town in 2005. Nine of these schools were based in working-class, former coloured townships, and one is in a black working-class township.

On the question of race, however, Islamic schools seemed to be perpetuating previous racial categories. Although concerned about the issue, they are hardly crossing the racial lines. At most, in Cape Town, one or two schools were bringing Indians and Coloureds together. It became clear in interviews that they were providing quality schooling for those who have fears, real or perceived, about the problem of schooling in late and post-apartheid times. Moral alarm, and deeply entrenched racial attitudes had a great deal to do with the proliferation of Islamic schools after 1990. Indian and coloured

schools were exposed to rapid changes in terms of demography and cultural diversity. Black African students who belonged to a different religion, class and educational background, were joining the schools. Middle and lower middle classes, and with them many teachers, moved out. They moved either to previously white schools if they could afford it, or to Islamic schools. In 2006, the secretary-general of the Association of Muslim Schools told me that one of the biggest challenges at Islamic schools remains attitudes towards race. This is not surprising, given that the very motivation for Islamic schools was driven by racial and cultural considerations. Sometimes, as with the Islamiyya School, there was a desire expressed to introduce Islamic schools to the black African communities. Also, in Fataar's study, an attempt was made in Cape Town to found a school in the black township. The latter closed down due to a dispute in management between the Imam on whose premises the school was founded, and its middle-class funders. These non-racial aspirations contradicted the overwhelming trend that the schools preserved the established racial profile of Muslims in the country.

Clearly Islamic schools were offering education, within a cultural ethos. Cultural Identity was writ large over the questions of race and class. And it is the ethos that needs some closer attention. Many, but not all, the schools justified their existence on the delivery of a good integrated Islamic education. The Islamization of education was promoted by the Association of Muslim Schools as the distinguishing mark that set them apart from earlier Muslim schools that maintained bifurcation. In the view of the founders of the new schools, Islam had its own method and approach to culture and civilization, and thus also education. A comprehensive Islamic vision was supposed to justify these schools, which should then be translated in each subject and curriculum. Earlier attempts at bringing Islamic and secular education, in this view, had led to a bifurcation.

Islamization clearly has helped in connecting Islamic schools with similar national networks in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America, and to a lesser extent some Gulf countries.<sup>9</sup> Mawlana Adam was a recognized leader in this field, and so was Edris Khamissa, a prominent English teacher from Port Shepstone who held a number of posts in Durban and Cape Town. However, my research revealed that the ideological foundation was not as strong as the global connections seemed to indicate. In interviews with Adam and Khamissa, they indicated that Islamization was not clear. Khamissa said it only provided a good broader vision but not clear guidelines in the classrooms (Khamissa). Adam told us that the project of IBERR was too demanding and required too much of money and human resources (Adam): “We are Islamising, but very slowly, almost unseen, because we cannot be unrealistic, they have to write those exams. We should be very cautious when Islamising.” These exams referred to the secular curriculum followed at the school, particularly the final matriculation examination that would qualify students to enrol at higher educational institutions. The teaching of secular subject was a top priority. One of the areas that suffered, ironically, was the development of the idea of Islamization. In further interviews with schools, most teachers conceded that it meant that classes began with a prayer and ended with one. Examples were taken from the Qur’an, to make a point in science and history. Outside Cape Town and a few individuals in the country, Islamization played hardly any role in the conceptualization and framework of schooling.

If Islamization had not yielded too many results, its prominence on websites and conferences obscured a more successful continuity in what the schools did provide. And this would include both secular and religious education. This generation of Islamic schools was fully committed to excelling at providing modern secular education.

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<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Edris Khamissa (21 November 2006); Ali Adam (5 December 2006); RAshied Chopdate (27 November 2006); Zafar Ahmad (30 November 2006).

Islamiyya, like other Muslims schools, was “a symbol of success in education ... producing the best results in the country.” (Adam). The results presented by these schools at final matriculation examinations were usually very good, if not excellent. They have featured in successive national public surveys as providers of quality education (secular education). And they pride themselves on their record, doing everything to keep themselves in the top performing schools. Some schools go out of their way to keep their excellent track record. In one school in Pretoria, for example, school owners encouraged learners to take a lower level Matriculations examination to ensure a 100% pass rate. Such attempts reflected a desire to show case the school among other excelling schools.

The Pretoria (Tswana) and Mitchell’s Plain schools also suggested the continuity of older patterns of religious tradition in their respective regions. Mitchell’s Plain was closely connected with the Imam and the school, and its religious activities reflected this institution. Tswana appears to have an identity as a Deobandi school, but also revealed the continuity between the old pattern of secular/Islamic education divisions, and their persistence. Looking back at my interviews, I realized that the schools were not really doing anything new with respect to Islamic thought. At most, they were providing a space and time when both Islamic and secular subjects could be brought together in one institution.

Comparing the Islamic schools established in early 20<sup>th</sup> century and those after 1980, one aspect of their relation with the broader society becomes clear. The first wave of Islamic schools, were often established in the face of great odds. In the Cape, Muslim parents sent their children to obtain secular education at Muslim schools so that they could avoid the Christian hegemony of existing schools. Similarly, Indian parents built schools for the department so that children could have access to secular education. In

both cases, the schools represented the desire of parents to be integrated into the society and the economy. In contrast, the new Islamic schools were deliberately chosen by parents to withdraw from the society on cultural grounds. Muslim learners were trained to be part of the capitalist economy and even of the political society, but they viewed the confluence of cultures and the challenges of identity that it represented, with great alarm. The schools represented a distancing of the Muslims from the broader society in cultural aspects.

## **Conclusions**

The proliferation of Muslims schools since the 1980s has accelerated with the crises and challenges of public schooling in South Africa. Islamic schools were affected by the way in which culture rights were promoted and entrenched in the post-apartheid constitution, and in the South African Schools Act of 1996. I have argued that the right to culture was often a way in which previous privileges were maintained and developed. Islamic schools were not able to maintain their privileges within public schools, and took the route of independent schools. Their class basis largely converged with the class basis of other independent schools. However, they seem to be providing independent schooling at reduced rates, supporting the aspiration of lower middle class families. However, the cultural profile was similar to the racial profile found in Carrim's study in Gauteng schools. Islamic schools reinforced apartheid racial categories in spite of being explicitly Islamic. On the question of the convergence of modern and Islamic education, Islamic school were less successful in bringing about integration. They were entrenching the bifurcation of cultural education and secular pursuit. Secular education was, in fact, more important than an integrated Islamic education, while identity, racial and religious, pervaded the ethos of the schools.

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