DEOBANDIS ABROAD:
SUFISM, ETHICS AND POLEMICS IN A GLOBAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

BRANNON D. INGRAM - Deobandis Abroad: Sufism, Ethics and Polemics in a Global Islamic Movement

(Under the direction of Carl W. Ernst)

This dissertation examines contemporary Islamic debates about the ethics and legality of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) within a globally influential movement based at the Islamic seminary (*madrasa*) known as Dar al-`Ulum Deoband in northern India. Two overarching, and interrelated, questions motivate this dissertation. What are the historical origins of Deoband's critique of Sufism? And how is this critique variously appropriated and contested in the contemporary world? To this end, it reconstructs the contours of Deoband's engagement with Sufism in the works of its founders and how this critique traveled through the Deobandi network to South Africa, home to the most prominent Deobandi *madrasas* outside of South Asia and wide participation in the Sufi devotions that the Deobandis have most vociferously critiqued.

The first and second chapters explore how Deobandis conceived Sufism exclusively as ethical reform (*islah*) of the self and argued certain devotional practices (especially celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and of Sufi saints' death anniversaries) are illicit innovations (*bid`a*) in Islam. The third chapter reconstructs how Deobandi thought and institutions took root in South Africa, attending to the circulation of Deobandi writings within South Africa and the founding of South African Deobandi *madrasas*. The fourth chapter demonstrates how Deobandi students position themselves within an imagined 'Deobandi' network and how they seek to embody and internalize the ethics of Sufi practice. The fifth and sixth chapters assess the reception of Deobandi critiques of Sufism in the South African public sphere, particularly in the context of Muslim politics, society and popular media during and after apartheid.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lindsay, I dedicate this to you. We both took on the biggest projects of our lives at precisely the same time, and yet emerged relatively unscathed.

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A note on orthography

For transliteration of Urdu and Arabic texts, I have kept orthographical standards fairly simple: I have used ` to represent the *`ayn* and ' to represent the *hamza*. But as the *lingua franca* of Muslim textual discourse in South Africa is English, locally published texts transliterate terms from the Urdu and Arabic using a wide variety of standards (or none at all). This presents special orthographical dilemmas. Thus, throughout South Africa words such as *salat* are typically rendered *salaat*. Dar al-`Ulum becomes 'Darul Uloom'. Spelling for the *mawlud* festival, central to this research, is especially vexing: 'mawlud', 'mawlood', 'moulood', and 'mouloud' are all in common use. Ashraf `Ali Thanawi's name can be rendered 'Thanvi', 'Thanavi', 'Thanwi' or 'Thanawi', all equally legitimate spellings. Sufi is commonly written 'Soofie'. The orthographic traditions of the Cape only compound the difficulties. Names such as Jamal al-Din are often written 'Gamieldien'; `Abd al-Qadir becomes 'Abdulkader' or 'Abdulkader'; Ali becomes `Alie'. Qasim can be spelled 'Cassim'. *Masjid* may be spelled 'masjied'.

My *modus operandi* throughout this dissertation has been to uphold my own standard for words that I transliterate from the Urdu (for example, I use '*mawlud*' and 'Thanawi'), while retaining spellings as they appear in South African English-language publications, in both titles and quotations. Thus I will write Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, but if I am quoting a text that spells his name differently, I will of course spell it as it appears in that text.

… Such refined ideas, being somewhat disproportioned to vulgar comprehension, remain not long in their original purity; but require to be supported by the notion of inferior mediators or subordinary agents, which interpose between mankind and their supreme deity. These demi-gods or middle beings, partaking more of human nature, and being more familiar to us, become the chief objects of devotion, and gradually recal that idolatry, which had been formerly banished by the ardent prayers and panegyrics of timorous and indigent mortals …

- Hume, "Flux and Reflux of Polytheism and Theism" (1757)

INTRODUCTION

In mid-February of 2009, I was staying in the spartan guest quarters of the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, the renowned *madrasa* north of Delhi named after the ancient city where it was founded in 1866. Despite its modest size, at least by Indian standards, Deoband is a bustling center of trade, its bazaars teeming with life late into the night. The circuitous paths leading through the bazaar towards the *madrasa* are lined with scores of shops selling Urdu books, prayer rugs, Qur'ans, perfume, with the occasional food stall or internet café. At the juncture of several of these lanes stood a dormitory for the Dar al-`Ulum's alumni and guests, where I was staying during my sojourn for research in Deoband.

The rooms had multiple beds, and this night I shared mine with some Sri Lankan Muslims undertaking preaching tours for the Tablighi Jama`at, now the world's largest Muslim pietist organization, one that grew directly out of Deobandi teachings. The Tablighis retired early, and so I wandered into the courtyard where a group of young men were sitting in a circle chatting in Bengali. Curious about my presence, they summoned me towards their circle and made a place for me to sit. In this conversation, as with many to come, I had to give an account of myself. What was I doing there? Why had I traveled seven thousand miles from the United States for the sole reason of researching Deoband? As with so many conversations I would have over the course of my research, politics came up almost immediately.

Deobandi students are all too aware of the hyperbolic, alarmist accusations against their institution in the media. They are all too aware of the conferences, the 'think tanks', the research agendas, the 'policy papers', in short, the entire Western bureaucratic apparatus that has brought Deoband and *madrasa* students everywhere under critical scrutiny. One need only consider the very title of a recent paper, "Deobandi Islam: The Religion of the Taliban," to get a palpable sense of these claims.[1] As I sat with these alumni from Bengal, one of the first questions to arise concerned the Taliban. A student who insisted on speaking to me in English asked me, "Do you think we are part of the Taliban? People come here and do not want to know about us because of the scholars that come from here. No, they want to know about what the Taliban does, so so many miles away. Look, let me show you." He proceeded to draw a large circle on the floor with his finger. "This space here is everything this school has done. Now take just the smallest point in this circle," he said, pointing to an imaginary, arbitrarily chosen dot in the circle. "There is the Taliban." So it is part of Deoband, I asked? Not just an aberration? "Sure, fine. But you must look at the whole circle."

This dissertation is about the whole circle. Deoband's connections to the Taliban are part of the *why* of this dissertation,[2] but it is not part of the *what*; this dissertation considers, above all, Deoband's role in the evolving history of South Asian and, by extension, global Sufism in the modern era. Readers hoping for a diagnosis of Deoband as a 'fundamentalist' political movement will be disappointed.

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[1] Published by the Defense Language Institute. See www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2001/ Deobandi_Islam.pdf. (Last assessed 13 November 2010)

[2] One of the only scholars, to my knowledge, who has done extensive work on Deoband's connections to the Northwest frontier province of Pakistan, and ultimately the Taliban, is Sana Haroon. See "The Rise of Deobandi Islam in the North-West Frontier Province and Its Implications in Colonial India and Pakistan, 1914-1996," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18, 1 (2008): 47-70. Haroon argues that "the 'Deobandi' religious politics inherited by Pakistan in 1947 were not Deobandi at all." Not all of the so-called 'Deobandis' exerting their influence on Pakistani politics at this time were graduates of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, and many who were graduates were not involved in politics. 'Deobandi' was "a transferable and inheritable title, conferred and assumed on and by any scholar or would-be scholar that aligned himself with another Deobandi, or, after 1920, with the [Jamiatul Ulama-i Hind] … Hence 'Deobandi' did not refer to a pedagogy but to a system of allies mutually descended from an increasingly distant institution with which they maintained as close a relationship as they could." Pg. 58.

The Dar al-`Ulum Deoband emerged in 1866 in wake of a sharp decline in Muslim political power in British India. Its founders aimed to reverse a perceived moral and intellectual decline among India's Muslims. As the *madrasa* gained prestige, Deobandi graduates founded other *madrasas* with similar curricula; today, the Deobandi network boasts thousands of *madrasas* around the world. This unassuming *madrasa* is the central node in an intricate network bound by people, texts, institutions and ideas. As the network has expanded, it has carried certain ideas with it. This dissertation is about one of them, namely Deoband's globally consequential, and globally contested, critique of Sufi piety.

As Deoband's network expanded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its scholars embarked on a critical interrogation of Sufism. But unlike the Wahhabi movement, their contemporaries in the Arabian peninsula, Deobandis did not aim to destroy Sufism completely; in fact, as I will argue here, Deobandi scholars defined Sufism as essential to their reformist mission and sought to refashion Sufism solely as an ethics of the self while 'purifying' it of controversial devotional practices, principally the celebration of Muhammad's birth (*mawlud*), beloved by Sufis for centuries, and of Sufi saints' death anniversaries (`urs), believing them to be practices that bordered on 'worship' of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi saints.[3] Investigating how this ambivalence emerged in the history of the Deoband movement and how it plays out in a political and social context outside of South Asia are the dual goals of this dissertation. Hence a simple query animates my project: what happens when this Deobandi ambivalence, this contestation and debate over Sufism, travels into new social and political contexts beyond South Asia? To what extent is it mobile? Is mobility tantamount to *portability*? In other words, what forms of

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[3] Esther Peskes has attempted to argue to the contrary that Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab was not as dogmatically and resolutely anti-Sufi as contemporary scholars have interpreted him to be. See Esther Peskes, "The Wahhabiyya and Sufism in the Eighteenth Century," in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds. *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: Brill, 1999. Scott Kugle, in a rejoinder to Peskes, remains unconvinced. See his *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007, 280-281. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, besides the Wahhabis, the Fara'izi movement in Bengal was also stridently anti-Sufi. This simplistic anti-Sufism was appropriated in the twentieth century by some Muslim nationalists in South Asia, Maududi foremost among them. See Marc Gaborieau's essay, "Criticizing the Sufis: The Debate in Early-Nineteenth Century India," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 452-453.

contestation does it meet? What accommodations does it make? To this end, it follows the

Deobandi critique of Sufism to South Africa, home to the among the largest numbers of Deobandi

madrasas outside of South Asia and wide support for the very Sufi practices that Deobandis have

most fiercely contested.[4] In short, it seeks to gauge the how these critiques change across space

and time.

A study of how critiques are received must also necessarily be a study of how they are

mediated; to the extent that the Deobandi ambivalence towards Sufism is a mobile one, it travels

as a bundle, a package of beliefs, practices and dispositions. This dissertation consciously

attempts to avoid reifying these critiques as they travel. Deobandi discourses surrounding Sufism,

ethics and the 'self', as we will see, are mediated as they travel via specific texts, to be sure, but

are also discussed in mosques, on radio stations, in public lectures, and in public preaching

'assemblies' (*majalis*). This dissertation, therefore, views "religion as a practice of mediation,"

and submits that it is not sufficient merely to reconstruct the textual history of debates about

Sufism; we must discern how those debates are mediated, and how they are debated publicly,

beyond the purview of texts.[5] And given Deoband's impact on global Islam, this purview

encompasses tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Muslims, consciously or unconsciously,

willingly or not.

Deoband's critique of Sufism is a matter of utmost importance for some Muslims, a

matter of choosing between salvation and damnation, and a matter of utter triviality for other

Muslims, a fruitless theological cavil at best and at worst, a stifling distraction from more

pressing matters. At the heart of the debate is defining what Sufism *is*, how it is practiced, who

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[4] Beyond South Asia, South Africa, Malaysia and the United Kingdom have comparatively large numbers of Deobandi *madrasas*. South Africa boasts at least ten large Deobandi Dar al-`Ulums, but this number does not include numerous smaller *madrasas* for young male and female students that are affiliated with the larger ones, or directed by their personnel. However, it is difficult to gauge precisely how many 'Deobandi' *madrasas* exist in a given location, and partly depends on how one defines them.

[5] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction," in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, media, and the public sphere*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 7.

gets to define it and under what authority. A contestation over Sufism is a contestation over Islam itself, by virtue of Sufism's paramount importance in the lives of countless Muslims. At the same time, this dissertation considers not only debates *within Deoband* about Sufism, but equally, debates among other Muslims *about Deoband* - its ideologies, its origins, and the legitimacy of its claims to represent Sunni Islam.

Why Deoband? Why South Africa?

This dissertation is one of a small handful of book-length studies on Deoband in English, and the only extended study of Deoband outside of South Asia.[6] But why is Deoband important beyond the realm of South Asian geopolitics? The scholars, students, ideas and texts emanating from the *madrasa* at Deoband and from its affiliated institutions around the world, taken as a whole, constitute arguably the most influential intellectual trend within Islam outside of the Middle East of the last two centuries. Deoband has shaped contemporary Islamic debates on normative piety and, more broadly, the very parameters of acceptable belief and practice. Indeed, the great historian of the modern Islamic world, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, once declared: "Next to the Azhar of Cairo, [Deoband] is the most important and respected theological academy of the Muslim world."[7]

There are at least three ways in which this dissertation contributes to a more nuanced conversation about *madrasas* in general and Deoband specifically. First, when 'Deoband' appears in popular media it is often in reference to its alleged antagonism to Sufism and Sufi shrines. Deobandi scholars are widely known for their condemnation of Sufi devotional practices, yet are

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[6] Barbara Metcalf's *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, remains the authoritative study of Deoband, despite being almost three decades old, and her omission of early twentieth century political engagements by Deobandi `ulama' has been critically discussed in Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Besides Metcalf's study, Zia ul-Hasan Faruqi's *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963, is another noteworthy, though outdated, examination of Deoband in the context of early twentieth century Indian politics. The literature on Deoband in Urdu is, predictably, voluminous.

[7] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1946, 295.

far less often known for their own Sufi piety. Reports by news agencies concerning recent

bombings of Sufi shrines in Pakistan, some of which have labeled the bombers specifically as

'Deobandi', accentuate this ignorance of Deobandi Sufism.[8] Unfortunately, the focus on

contemporary Pakistani geopolitics skews these reports. To take a recent example, coverage of

the Nishtar Park *mawlud* bombing in Karachi and the bombing of the Data Ganj Bakhsh Sufi

shrine in Lahore cited an alleged Deobandi hostility to Sufism, suggesting not just that

Deobandis' critique is culpable for this violence (and perhaps in some limited ways, it is) but that

Deobandis are antagonistic to Sufism as a whole. As the British newspaper *The Guardian*

recently concluded, "Sufism is offensive to Muslims from the more ascetic Wahabbi [*sic*] and

Deobandi sects, who consider worship of any saint to be heretical, and that the only access to God

is through direct prayer."[9]

Pausing a moment to unpack this claim is worthwhile. The so-called Deobandi 'sect'

would proudly challenge the notion that Sufism is somehow 'offensive' to their religious

sensibilities; as this dissertation will make abundantly clear, Deobandis define Sufism as

absolutely *essential* to their understanding of Islam. At the same time, the Sufis whose practices

are in question would fiercely contest the notion that their reverence of the saints amounts to

'worship'. Here *The Guardian* unwittingly repeats one of the least accurate accusations that some

Deobandis level towards Sufis: that Sufis indulge in 'grave worship' (*qabr parasti*). One would

be extremely hard-pressed to find a single Sufi who would readily admit to 'worshipping' graves.

On the other hand, the newspaper all too easily lumps Deobandis in the same category with

'Wahhabis'. This is doubly ironic; first, as Wahhabis have historically criticized Sufism *as such*

rather than, as Deobandis have, a limited number of Sufi devotional practices, and second, as

Deobandis have actively sought to distance themselves from Wahhabis. Deobandis have in fact

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[8] For example, Rania Abouzeid, "Taliban Targets, Pakistan's Sufi Muslims Fight Back," *Time*, 10 November 2010.

[9] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/02/suicide-bombers-kill-dozens-pakistan-shrine (last accessed on 17 November 2010).

actively criticized Wahhabis' rejection of *taqlid*, commitment to one (and only one) of the traditional Islamic legal schools.

Yet the notion unwittingly peddled in *The Guardian*, that of 'mystical' Islam perpetually in conflict with the 'law', a notion now thoroughly embedded in Western liberal views of Sufism as a 'moderate' alternative to 'Islamism', is rooted in a much older Orientalist dichotomy between the legal scholar and the Sufi - or in the words of a well-known advocate of this view, 'doctor and saint'.[10] Perhaps in some ways this dichotomy is being 'spoken to power' in current global polemics and counter-polemics, in South Africa as much as in Pakistan. At the same time, Orientalists largely ignored the *`ulama'* - and especially, as in this dissertation, *`ulama' as Sufis* – and considered them outmoded relics of Islam's medieval past. This approach to the *`ulama'* ignores how they are 'custodians' of a tradition that is "constantly imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended and modified."[11] Or as Fuad Naeem argues, "A preference for originality over 'tradition' led to an overemphasis on modernist figures, on the one hand, and Islamist or 'fundamentalist' figures and movements, on the other, often combined with a tacit supposition that the *`ulama'* and Sufis represented 'medieval' discourses that would not long survive the triumph of modernity."[12]

Secondly, and more broadly, this dissertation is also a contribution to the study of *madrasas*, those much-maligned and poorly understood institutions of traditional Islamic learning. One recent study puts the number of Deobandi *madrasas* in Pakistan alone at approximately 7000, as of 2002.[13] Though some landmark studies have emerged in recent years,

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[10] See Ernest Gellner, "Doctor and Saint," in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

[11] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 10.

[12] Fuad Naeem, "Sufism and Revivalism in South Asia: Mawlana Ashraf `Ali Thanvi of Deoband and Mawlana Ahmad Raza Khan of Bareilly and their paradigms of Islamic revivalism," *The Muslim World* 99, 3 (2009): 435-451, at 436.

[13] Tariq Rahman, *Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 190-191.

the scholarship on contemporary *madrasas* remains thin.[14] This study presents contemporary

Deobandi *madrasas* not as radical 'terrorist factories' but as sober, traditionalist institutions that

combine scholarship in the great medieval commentaries on Qur'an, *hadith* and law with a

dynamic mobility that has seen Deobandi *madrasas* move across the globe. Historically, in fact,

far from facilitating militancy, *madrasa* networks were engines behind Islam's global

cosmopolitanism, networks that compelled students to travel across continents long before the era

of 'globalization'.[15]

What is Deoband's importance in the history of the *madrasa* as an institution? As the

central node in a vast *madrasa* network, Deoband is part of an educational tradition that dates

back centuries, even as the founders of Deoband altered the nature and structure of the *madrasa*

curriculum to accommodate the exigencies of colonial India. The first *madrasa* is believed to

originate in Khurasan in the tenth century, spreading to Baghdad by 1063, to Cairo in the 1170's,

and eventually to India by the early thirteenth century.[16] In time, the *madrasa* became the most

recognizable and near-ubiquitous institution of medieval Islamicate society. By the thirteenth

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[14] Examples of this literature include: Mumtaz Ahmad and Matthew J. Nelson, eds. *Islamic Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan: Trends in Tertiary Institutions*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2009; Arshad Alam, "The Enemy Within," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008): 605-627; Masooda Bano, "Beyond Politics: The Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, 1 (2007): 43-68; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Closed Doors: (Not) Accessing Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* in Britain," *Fieldwork in Religion* 1, 1 (2005): 7-33; Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld, eds. *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dini Madaris in India Post-911*, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2006; Robert Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; Jamal Malik, ed. *Madrasas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?* London, New York: Routledge, 2008; Farish Noor and Yoginder Sikand, eds. *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008; Ali Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008; Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers*, New Delhi: Penguin Asia, 2005; Marieke Winkelmann, *From Behind the Curtain: A Study of a Girls' Madrasa in India*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005.

[15] According to one assessment, new restrictions on the transnational movement of *madrasa* students threaten this cosmopolitanism, as some countries have rendered it increasingly difficult for foreign students to enter for *madrasa* study. See Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand, and Martin van Bruinessen, "Behind the Walls: Re-Appraising the Role and Importance of Madrasas in the World Today," in Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand and Martin van Bruinessen, eds. *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008, 21.

[16] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 8-9.

century, the *madrasa* had developed into what one scholar has termed an "educational charitable complex," incorporating mosques, Sufi *khanqahs*, and even hospitals.[17]

Traditionally, *madrasas'* principally oral mode of learning centered around the memorization of key texts.[18] This does not mean that these texts were somehow frozen; instead, as Michael Chamberlain has elegantly expressed it, they were "enacted fortuitously in time," and could thus be invoked to serve various needs in various contexts.[19] In the medieval *madrasa*, there was no set curriculum, no slate of exams; students who mastered a given text would get an *ijaza*, a certificate permitting them to transmit specific texts in turn. Indeed "medieval Muslims themselves seem to have been remarkably uninterested in *where* an individual studied. The only thing that mattered was with *whom* one had studied," a system that "remained throughout the medieval period fundamentally personal and informal, and consequently, in many ways, flexible and inclusive."[20] Since they did not charge tuition, *madrasas* typically depended on charitable endowments (*awqaf*) to sustain themselves, and often the *madrasa* would include a tomb-complex devoted to the pious benefactor and his or her family. These tombs would become the objects of local pilgrimage and devotion, ironic given Deobandis' later mission to oppose tomb-based devotional Islam.

Deoband changed all of this. Establishing, for the first time in Islamic history, what one scholar has called an Islamic "curriculum," Deoband's founders pioneered a fixed program for all

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[17] Said Amir Arjomand, "The Law, Agency, and Policy in Medieval Islamic Society: Development of Institutions of Learning from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, 2 (1999): 263-293, at 264.

[18] For the role of orality in Islamic learning, see among other works, Dale Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, and Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, especially 19-43.

[19] Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 143; quoted in Jonathan P. Berkey, "Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity," in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. *Schooling Islam: the culture and politics of modern Muslim education*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 47.

[20] Jonathan P. Berkey, "Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity," 43.

students, a slate of exams to gauge students' progress, formal graduation ceremonies, a central library, salaried faculty, and relied on individual donations rather than political or courtly patronage.[21] The fact that the *madrasa* did not depend on the caprice of external patrons allowed it to be, according to Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "disembedded" from traditional social networks. This contributed to its mobility, allowing the Deoband 'model' to be replicated by other *madrasas* as early as six months after its initial founding.[22] Yet this dissertation will demonstrate that mobility is not necessarily the same as *portability*; even though a Deobandi curriculum may be relatively fixed, whether in a *madrasa* in rural India or urban South Africa, the ideologies that travel with Deoband encounter complex forms of resistance and contestation.

Third, this project self-consciously seeks to expand the existing parameters of what constitutes 'Islamic studies'. This discipline is still defined in the view of many within and outside of the field as "the study of classical Arabic texts such as the Qur'an and the foundational texts of Islamic law." In the views of Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, it remains "somehow convenient to gloss over the need to document and trace multiple varieties and regional variations of Islamic religiosity in later and recent history."[23] This dissertation is borne of a conscious desire to move the study of Islam beyond the domain of the Middle East geographically, the classical era historically, and Arabic textually. From the predominant vantage point of 'Islamic studies', even India is on the 'margins' of the Muslim world, despite boasting well over a millennium of Islamic history and one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. South Africa is, to be sure, even more on the 'margins'. But this project will show that to be on the margins is not

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[21] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 68. For a detailed discussion of these pedagogical innovations, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 92-95. The *madrasa* at Saharanpur, some thirty kilometers from Deoband, was the first *madrasa* to be founded along the Deobandi 'model', roughly six months after Deoband was founded in 1866.

[22] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf `Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2008, 9.

[23] Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, "Introduction: Toward a Post-Orientalist Approach to Islamic Religious Studies," in Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, eds. *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2010, 13-14.

necessarily to be *marginal*; in fact, Deoband is its own center, one from which nodes in a larger network fan out across the globe, and the Muslims of South Africa are particularly well-connected with global discourses in contemporary Islam, despite their negligible numbers.

Why, then, South Africa? I knew from the initial stages of planning that I wanted to be among the first to research Deoband outside of South Asia. I could have conducted this research in any number of countries beyond the subcontinent that have a distinct Deobandi presence: Malaysia, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, even the United States. But South Africa stands out among all them for several reasons.

First, as Dietrich Reetz has observed, "The longest interaction between the Deoband school and foreign Deobandi networks exists perhaps with its branches in South Africa."[24] South Africa is by no means the only country in southern Africa where Deobandis have settled, but it is by far the most significant.[25] One figure states that 199 South Africans graduated from the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband between its founding in 1866 and 1976, when the source was published, the largest number of any country outside of South Asia besides Malaysia, with 445 students. And the number would be far higher if we were to include South Africans who graduated from Deobandi *madrasas* inside South Africa itself, or from Deobandi *madrasas* in South Asia other than the original Dar al-`Ulum Deoband.[26]

Second, while South Africa has few Muslims relative to its total population, South Africa is uniquely situated as a site for this research for many reasons.[27] To begin with, South Africa's

[24] Dietrich Reetz, "The Deoband Universe: What Makes a Transcultural and Transnational Movement of Islam?" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, 1 (2007): 139-158, at 153.

[25] Deobandi scholars have also brought their critiques of Sufism to Mozambique (see Liazzat J. K. Bonnate, "Muslim Religious Leadership in Post-Colonial Mozambique," *South African Historical Journal* 60, 4 (2008): 637-654, especially 640-641) as well as Reunion (see Marie-France Mourrégot, *L'islam à l'île de la Réunion*, Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

[26] Muhammad Faruq, *Afriqah aur Khidmat-i Faqih al-Ummat*. Deoband: Maktabah-yi Nashr al-Mahmud, 1990, 144.

[27] According to the 2001 census, Muslims constitute roughly 1.5% of its nearly 50 million inhabitants. Statistics South Africa, *Census 2001: Primary Tables South Africa*, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2004,

Muslims maintain a presence and visibility that is far out of proportion to their marginal numbers; they engage with South African society and politics to a degree for which the designation 'minority' does little justice.[28] And unlike the minority Muslim populations of, say, continental Europe and North America, Muslims in South Africa have had a documented, continuous history in South Africa for nearly three-and-a-half centuries. South African Islam thus does not fit the standard taxonomies that divide the Muslim world into neat geographic units; South Africa's Muslims are a small minority living in a modern, secular and democratic republic defined in no small way by its historical links to Europe, yet its Muslims face a vastly different array of challenges from those faced by European Muslims. Furthermore, its Muslims are clearly 'African' but are quite different culturally, ethnically and linguistically from the Muslims typically grouped within the rubric of 'sub-Saharan Africa'.[29] And South Africa's geography and history have resulted in a remarkably diverse array of Muslims coming to its shores, from locales as diverse as the Indonesian archipelago, the Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa, and today, from many other parts of the Muslim world. In short, South African Islam stands at a nexus of global flows: European, African, Middle Eastern, South Asian and Southeast Asian. South Africa is, at once, intimately connected to South Asia in particular - in terms of the movement of people,

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24 – 25. See also Jurgens Hendricks and Johannes Erasmus, "The New Religious Landscape of South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 121 (2005): 88-111 for numbers on religious communities in this census.

[28] This general point has been made well by Tamara Sonn, "Muslims in South Africa: A Very Visible Minority," in Yvonne Haddad and Jane I. Smith, eds. *Muslim Minorities in the West*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002. As for political participation, Abdulkader Tayob notes that as of 2007, 18 out of 350 members of parliament were Muslim (4.5%), 2 out of 26 ministers (7.6%), 2 out of 22 deputy ministers (9%), and 15 out of 210 Cape Town city counselors (7%) – in every sense, then, vastly out of proportion to their numbers. See his "Islamic Politics in South Africa between Identity and Utopia," *South African Historical Journal* 60, 4, (2008): 583-599, at 589.

[29] The complexity of South Africa's Muslims serves as a corrective to older, problematic approaches to understanding Islam on this continent. Stark dichotomies between 'Islam in Africa' and 'African Islam' – the former implying an importation of a timeless, unchanging 'Islam' and the latter implying processes of indigenization – are untenable. For a classic statement of this dichotomy, see Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997. And for a powerful critique of this approach, see Benjamin F. Soares, "Notes on the Anthropological Study of Islam and Muslim Societies in Africa," *Culture and Religion* 1, 2 (2000): 277-285, especially 279-280.

ideas, and goods - and yet sufficiently removed from it to generate numerous compelling issues regarding the way South African Muslims of South Asian origin define themselves *as* South Africans.

Who or what is a 'Deobandi'?

This is not an easy question to answer. Deoband is first and foremost a *place*: a town of some 150,000 residents approximately one hundred miles north of Delhi. The historic *madrasa*, Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, is named after the town that hosts it. But 'Deobandis' do not carry cards that identify them as such, even though many of Deoband's critics speak as if they do. A 'Deobandi' can, of course, be a graduate of the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, but many other *madrasas* and institutions are linked to the original Deoband *madrasa* through relationships between teachers, students, alumni and patrons, what Metcalf describes as Deoband's "concentric circles of influence."[30] For the most part this 'link' is informal and unofficial, rendering it difficult even to estimate the number of 'Deobandi' *madrasas*, though in recent decades, the Deobandi *madrasas* in India, at least, have attempted to organize into an official body.[31]

It is important to differentiate between Deobandi individuals (`ulama', *muftis*, students, alumni) and Deobandi institutions (*madrasas*, *jama`ats*, `ulama' councils). One of the major assertions of this dissertation is that Deobandi thought is so internally diverse, on issues ranging from *mawlud* to the legitimacy of political alignments with non-Muslims, that this diversity gives the lie to the common misconception that 'Deoband' is a uniform, monolithic ideology. This is

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[30] Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 235.

[31] Deobandi scholars concerned with standardizing curricula created the Rabita Madaris Arabiyya (Association of Arabic Schools) at Dar al-`Ulum Deoband in 1994. The RMA claimed 1152 affiliated *madrasas* in India as of March 2004, but to my knowledge, similar efforts to establish an official body for Deobandi *madrasa* networks do not exist elsewhere. See Dietrich Reetz, "Change and Stagnation in Islamic Education: The Dar ul-`Ulum Deoband after the Split in 1982," in Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand and Martin van Bruinessen, eds. *The Madrasa in Asia*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008, 82.

especially important insofar as Deoband's critics are invested in maintaining this misconception because it serves their rhetorical ends.

Throughout this dissertation, I will speak of Deoband's 'network' of *madrasas* that spans the globe. Unfortunately, especially in the past decade, when describing Muslims the word 'network' has become irredeemably loaded with a connotation I hope to avoid.[32] By no means is a graduate of any of these *madrasas* necessarily and automatically labeled a 'Deobandi'; in fact, some students and faculty whom I interviewed eschewed this designation outright, not out of disrespect to their *alma mater* but because they insist their worldview cannot be limited to a single ideological mantra. As one interviewee put it, "I am not a 'Deobandi'. I have not seen Deoband with my own eyes. I am a student of the *din*."[33] This is, of course, its own sort of rhetorical positioning; there is a profound tension within Deoband between acknowledging the unique contributions that this movement has made to contemporary Islam, on the one hand, and believing that it is not really a 'movement' at all, on the other, since its adherents believe it to be nothing more than Sunni Islam *per se*. As one South African polemic has it, Deoband's detractors, especially those of its historic rivals, the Barelwi movement (pejoratively called 'grave worshippers' here), "convey the impression that the Ulama of Deoband are a new group or a sect which has arisen recently, *hence they refer to the Ulama of the Sunnah as the 'Deobandi Movement'*. Deoband is merely the name of a town in India where the famous Darul Uloom is located. If the Deobandi Ulama's beliefs and teachings are unacceptable to the grave-worshippers then in actual fact their dislike is for the beliefs and teachings propagated by the Sahaabah since [Deoband's] beliefs and teachings are in fact the Shariah of Islam which was handed to the Ummah by the Sahaabah of Rasulullah."[34]

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[32] Indeed, when describing Muslims, words such as 'network' are all too often accompanied by foreboding qualifiers such as 'shadowy' or 'stealth'.

[33] Interview with Ismail Alie at Qasimul Uloom, Cape Town, 22 September 2009.

This positioning manifests itself as a constant slippage in Deobandis' own works, a tacking back and forth between identifying Deoband's profound importance and assimilating it to Sunni Islam *tout court*. Even in the authoritative history of the school, the author asserts confidently that "Deobandism" (*Deobandiyat*) "is neither a legal school (*mazhab*) nor a sect (*firqa*), though its opponents attempt to present it as a school or sect to the masses, but rather is a comprehensive register and complete 'edition' of the ideology (*maslak*) of the Ahl-i Sunnat wa-l Jammat."[35] Yet the very fact that this history presents Deoband as an 'ism' (*Deobandiyat*) foregrounds the tension in how to talk about it as a phenomenon without reifying it.

A further complication in defining 'Deoband' is that some organizations, most notably the Tablighi Jama`at but additionally various political organizations active in India and Pakistan, have grown directly out of Deobandi teachings or have been founded by Deobandi scholars. The Tablighi Jama`at is now the world's largest Muslim pietist movement, with tens of millions of followers. While the Tablighi Jama`at may not be a 'Deobandi' organization in the strictest sense of the word, its founder, Muhammad Ilyas, studied with three of the most prominent early Deobandi scholars: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Mahmud al-Hasan, and Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri.[36] The Tablighi Jama`at is indisputably linked at every level with Deobandi *madrasas*, in South Asia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Yet not everyone involved in the Tablighi Jama`at has a formal relation to a Deobandi *madrasa* or other institution, even as they participate in the ideological projects of Deoband.

Defining 'Deobandi' too rigidly, then, denies it its elasticity, yet defining it too loosely recapitulates how these terms are bent and stretched in a Procrustean manner within polemical

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[34] Young Men's Muslim Association, *Who are the People of Sunnah?* Benoni, South Africa: Young Men's Muslim Association, 1987, 4. (emphasis added)

[35] Sayyid Mahbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband*. Deoband: Idarah-yi Ihtimam-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, 1977, 24.

[36] Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi-Jama`at (1920-2000)*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002, 126-127.

discourses, such that individuals and institutions that have no historical relation to Deoband whatsoever can be branded as 'Deobandi' on account of certain views. Amidst such slippery discourse, we must be especially wary of reifying the very terms that we seek to critically analyze. This wariness should not, however, lead us to deconstruct 'Deoband' *ad infinitum* and regard it, as one recent author has, as merely a "fictional unity … a complex series of intersecting and overlapping *dispositifs*, as assemblages or formations of power."[37]

Aside from these conflicting perspectives on what 'Deoband' is, there remains one of the Deobandis' own, rather technical, definitions, this one culled from the Urdu mission statement of the *madrasa*'s own website:

> The Dar al-`Ulum is Muslim in terms of religion (*dinan*), Ahl-i Sunna wal-Jama`a in terms of sect (*firqan*), Hanafi in terms of school (*madhhaban*), Sufi in terms of temper (*mashraban*), Maturidi Ash`ari in terms of theology (*kalaman*), Chishti in terms of the Sufi path (*sulukan*), albeit combining all the Sufi orders, Wali Allahi in terms of intellect (*fikran*), Qasimi in terms of its fundamental principles (*usulan*), Rashidi in terms of its branches (*furu`an*), and Deobandi in terms of its lineage (*nisbatan*).[38]

In other words, Deobandis define themselves as: a Sunni Muslim movement, Hanafi in law and Ash`ari in theology, embracing Sufism as a defining trait but the Indian Chishti tradition in particular, indebted to its precursor Shah Wali Allah intellectually, to its founder Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi for its very existence, and to the pioneering scholar Rashid Ahmad Gangohi for its specific legal proclivities. Those who adhere to this view can claim the title of 'Deobandi' without any controversy. Yet perhaps it will come as no surprise that not all Deobandis adhere uniformly to every facet of this official description.

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[37] Najeeb A. Jan, "The Metacolonial State: Pakistan, the Deoband 'Ulama, and the Biopolitics of Islam," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, Department of History, 2010, 21.

[38] "'Ulama'-yi Deoband ka Maslak wa Mashrab," http://darululoom-deoband.com/urdu/aboutdarululoom/3 .htm (last accessed 10 January 2011). It is rather odd that Rizvi's *Tarikh* expressly rejects the use of the word 'sect' (*firqa*) to desribe Deoband, yet this official definition on the *madrasa*'s website apparently sees no problem with using this loaded term.

Sufism, Ethics, Polemics

Throughout this dissertation, I will draw a distinction between what I call Deoband's 'constructive project' and what I call their 'critical project'. The former encompasses a re-alignment of Sufism with an ethics of the self, but this is possible only after purging the self of negative ethical traits. This act of internal purgation is analogous to the process of purgation on a societal level, but the substance of the two is different. The internal purification (*tazkiya al-nafs*, purifying the lower self) is rooted in classical Sufi vocabularies of selfhood, but its external counterpart is a distinctly modern affair, carried out in print via scores of polemical treatises, some consisting of erudite legal argumentation in Arabic and Urdu, written largely for an scholarly audience of other `*ulama'*, and some consisting of simplified, condensed versions of these arguments in English and other languages, written for a rapidly expanding Muslim public (and it is these shorter pamphlets and tracts that become especially important in the South African context).

These public polemics are predicated on the idea that Deobandi scholars knew their success in reforming Sufism would be nominal if limited to the discursive plane of intra-`*ulama'* debate. They sought a way to reach mass audiences of literate Muslims directly. Composition of pamphlets and tracts was one method of executing this vision, but I will posit later that the Tablighi Jama`at ultimately became a far more effective method for achieving it, insofar as it translated Deobandi teachings on Sufi ethics into a regime of quotidian discipline and practice (and even distended the social boundaries of Sufism itself, such that one need not be a Sufi to be a Tablighi). The first two chapters will address some of the Deobandis' scholarly polemics, while the latter two will address their public ones. Before proceeding, though, I want to be clear about how I am using these three crucial terms: Sufism, ethics, polemics.

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Sufism

A central contention of this dissertation is that Deobandis purged Sufism of its devotional elements and recast Sufism as ethical self-formation.[39] Deobandis would doubtless object to this claim; for them, these allegedly illicit devotional practices were never part of Sufism, but were mere accretions that formed around the veneration of Sufi saints. This dilemma invokes a problem with how to define 'Sufism', since Sufism itself is - and perhaps always has been - an internally contested, incessantly debated entity. Sufism is in fact one of the preeminent sites of contestation over belief, practice, authority, and space within Islam in the last two centuries, a struggle over what Sherali Tareen has called "competing normativities."[40]

For my purposes here, I will propose that 'Sufism' be understood as a tripartite entity, consisting of three intersecting, mutually constitutive domains: *literary*, *interpersonal/ institutional*, and *ritual/devotional*. The literary level is familiar to most, encompassing of course the great canons of Sufi poetry, but equally, the innumerable treatises on traversing the Sufi path. The interpersonal and institutional level concerns relations between Sufi masters and disciples, initiations into Sufi orders, and the inculcation of Sufi ethical virtues through study with, and sitting in the presence of, Sufi masters. Finally, the ritual/devotional level concerns the multiple forms of devotional piety that especially coalesce around the veneration of Sufi saints (*awliya'*) at their tombs. What will become clear as this dissertation proceeds is that Deobandis embraced the first two dimensions of Sufism but firmly rejected the third. Their interrogation of Sufism was, in other words, an internal critique of Sufism *by Sufis*.

The 'sober' Sufism advocated by Deobandi scholars has an ancient pedigree in Islam; as

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[39] One could perhaps usefully compare this purging of Sufism of its devotional elements with a similar process that has transpired in Iranian contexts, in which Sufi orders have been frowned upon but 'Sufism' itself has been recast as 'gnosis' (`*irfan*). See Nasrollah Pourjavady, "Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism," in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds. *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, 621.

[40] Sherali Tareen, "Normativity, Heresy and the Politics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam," *The Muslim World* 99, 3 (2009): 521-552, at 525.

we will see, what distinguishes the Deobandis' approach to Sufism is its engagement with

modern apologetics over Sufism, defending Sufism as a whole from its detractors, and a firm

belief that bringing a 'purified' and 'sober' Sufi piety to the Muslim masses is essential to

rejuvenate the Muslim body politic in the contemporary world.

A few brief examples will suffice to suggest the scope of Deobandis' premodern Sufi

antecedents. For instance, Abu Nasr `Abdallah al-Sarraj's (d. 988) *Kitab al-luma' fi-l tasawwuf*

grounded Sufism in the Qur'an and the (then) nascent *shari'a* law,[41] while Abu Talib al-Makki (d.

996), a *hadith* scholar, privileged a conservative, ascetic Sufism in his *Qut al-qulub*.[42] `Abd al

Rahman al-Sulami's (d. 1021) *Tabaqat as-sufiyya* secures a distinctly 'sober' pedigree for the

Sufis of eleventh century Khurasan, privileging Sufis descending from Junayd al-Baghdadi.[43]

Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038) followed on the heels of Sulami with a biographical

compendium, *Hilyat al-awliya'*, which essentially sees the narrative of Sufism from the vantage

of a legal traditionalist, including two of the founders of Sunni Islam's orthodox legal schools,

Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi`i, among the Sufi saints.[44] Isfahani was not

so much a Sufi who wanted to make Sufism palatable to Islamic legal scholars, but a legal scholar

who simply saw no contradiction between Sufism and Islamic law as it existed then. Similarly,

the work of `Abd al-Karim Qushayri (d. 1072) and `Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1073) reinforced the status

of Sufism as an expression of the ethos of the *shari`a*. Hujwiri explicitly states that Sufism

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[41] Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 67-69.

[42] The secondary bibliography on Makki is limited. On Makki's traditionalism, see John Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 2004, as well as W. Mohd Azam, "Abu Talib al-Makki: A Traditional Sufi," *Hamdard Islamicus* 22, 3 (1999): 71-79.

[43] See Jawid Mojaddedi, *The biographical tradition in Sufism: the* tabaqat *genre from al-Sulami to Jami*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, 9-40.

[44] See Jawid Mojaddedi, *The biographical tradition in Sufism: the* tabaqat *genre from al-Sulami to Jami*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, 41-68. As Mojaddedi points out, the selectivity of the *tabaqat* genre reveals specific predilections of each compiler, and the 'Sufi' biographies that Isfahani relates are mostly from the earliest generations of Muslims, long before any coherent, self-conscious 'Sufism' emerged, thus grounding Isfahani's own vision of 'Sufism' in the lives of the pious ancestors (*salaf*).

embodies Qur'anic ethics and includes founders of the Sunni legal schools, including Shafi`i, Abu Hanifa and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, in his biographies *as Sufis*. Qushayri, a Shafi`i legal scholar, grounds his Sufism in the teachings of the 'sober' Junayd, just as one of the co-founders of the Deoband *madrasa*, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, would eight centuries later.[45]

Just as Deobandis were by no means the first Sufis to align Sufism with Islamic legal discourses, nor the first to cast Sufism in the language of Islamic ethics**,** they were also not the first to embark on a critique of Sufism. Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) is usually credited with composing the first full-scale critique of Sufism and Sufis. In his *Talbis Iblis*, Jawzi faulted Isfahani for including the pious ancestors (*salaf*) in his Sufi narrative. Al-Jawzi was principally concerned with purging Sufism of libertine currents (*ibaha*), yet substantively Jawzi's critiques are hardly different from some Sufis' own critiques, such as those of Sarraj and Hujwiri. If Jawzi was primarily concerned with critique of 'licentious' Sufi practices, his disciple Ibn Taymiyya was primarily concerned with critique of Sufi metaphysics, particularly that of Ibn Arabi.[46]

At the same time that discourses articulating Sufism in Islamic legal language began to emerge, popular Sufi devotions were also emerging - practices that Deobandis would critique in British India centuries later. Sufism became a central fixture of medieval Muslim civilization, mediating between people and institutions in the absence of a strong caliphal presence. This context gave rise to mass-participation in Sufi practices; the first organized mass pilgrimages (*ziyarat*) to Sufis saints' tombs date from the early thirteenth century, coinciding tellingly with the emergence of the first 'orders' in Sufism,[47] with those founded according to the teachings of Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi (d. 1168) and `Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166) being among the earliest.

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[45] See, for instance, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, Deoband: Dar al-Kitab Deoband, 2005, 155-156, where Gangohi relates sayings of Junayd and Tustari regarding the nature of Sufis' companionship with God, but he relies on Junayd throughout his treatise.

[46] Alexander Kynsh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, 89-92.

[47] Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, *Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, 12-14.

Popular Sufism, in any case, especially the intercession of saints, became the *bête noire* of Sufism's critics, from the thirteenth century to the present day.

Yet, beginning in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one can discern a sort of crescendo in both the number and strength of accusations against Sufis across the Muslim world.[48] "While these currents of dissatisfaction with Sufism had long been present in the *umma*," one author notes, "they were to grow substantially from the middle of the eighteenth century, giving rise to a greater variety of self-questioning among Muslims as well as attacks from outside the Islamic world."[49] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anti-Sufi polemics and Sufi counter-polemics became both more frequent and more intense. The technologies of print and the use of mass media aided Sufis' detractors, who typically cast Sufis as partly responsible for the loss of Muslim political power in the contemporary era. They accuse Sufis of having forsaken the *sunna*, contributing in no small part to the impotence of Muslims morally and politically. European Orientalists, unwitting rhetorical allies of the Sufis' critics, reiterated the distinction between Sufism and the Law, lauding the universal 'spirituality' of the greatest Sufi poets (Rumi, Hafez, and the like) in juxtaposition to the dry, Semitic 'legalism' of the Qur'an and Shari`a.[50] More recently, contemporary Western discourses on Sufism have, in a far more subtle way, propped up Sufism as an ecumenical, irenic antidote to the militant, exclusivist claims of Islamists.[51]

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[48] A substantial literature on contestations within, and over, Sufism has emerged in recent years. See especially Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and anti-Sufis: the defense, rethinking and rejection of Sufism in the modern world*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999, as well as the essays collected in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds. *Islamic Mysticism Contested: thirteen centuries of controversies and polemics*, Leiden: Brill, 1999.

[49] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, ix.

[50] See especially the first chapter of Carl W. Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

[51] See Rosemary Hicks, "Comparative Religion and the Cold War Transformation of Indo-Persian Mysticisms into Liberal Islamic Modernity," in Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair, eds. *Secularism and Religion-Making*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ethics

A central contention of this dissertation is that Deobandi understandings of Sufism emphasize, above all else, the agency of the individual self in ethical self-formation. By 'self-formation' or 'self-fashioning', I do not mean to imply that Deobandi or Sufi 'selves' are stable entities, or that - despite Sufi claims to the contrary - an individual self can ever become 'perfected' (*kamil*). Above all, 'self-fashioning' is premised not on the notion that "belief, discussion or persuasion … transforms a person, but practice - action, repetitive behavior, and physical habits. It also points to a process, an on-going practice, the fulfillment of which in this life is impossible."[52] The self, then, is a project. The goal of fashioning the self, which always takes the Prophetic *sunna* as the ultimate reference point, is never complete; rather, one approaches that goal asymptotically, rather like the way a curve approaches a line.

This self is made and re-made through an engagement with the ethical traditions of Islam. What do I mean by 'ethics' in this context? What I do *not* mean is the humanist ethics of the Western Enlightenment that sought to deduce universally normative values through the rational faculties, most salient in the philosophy of Kant. Of course, the subjects of this dissertation believe their values to be universally normative; but they derive those values from participating in a *tradition*, not from a deductive intellectual process. 'Ethics' here does not suggest rarefied, abstract speculation about the 'good' or the 'good life' - though Muslims in general, and Deobandis in particular, have certainly engaged in copious speculation on what the 'good' is. Here 'ethics' denotes a discourse which one accesses through the study of the Qur'an and the Prophetic *sunna* and by observing and imitating the pious exemplars of the Sufi tradition, who were its living embodiments. It is an ethics based not just on assenting to metaphysical claims

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[52] Barbara Metcalf, " 'Remaking Ourselves': Islamic Self-Fashioning in a Global Movement of Spiritual Renewal," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 710-711. Metcalf speaks specifically of the Tablighi Jama`at, who adapted Deobandi approaches to ethical self-fashioning and translated them into a regime of 'practical' moral reform that does not necessitate that one must become a Sufi at all. I will comment more later on ways that the Tablighi Jama`at achieved this adaptation.

about truth, but equally on embodying pious dispositions in accord with the Prophetic model - or more precisely, how that Prophetic model has been filtered through centuries of commentary. It is an '*imitatio Muhammadi*', as Annemarie Schimmel put it, yet never *mere* passive imitation, since these pious dispositions must be actively internalized.[53] They direct the demeanor of the body as much as they do the deliberations of the rational mind.

Multiple scholars in recent years have called for a resuscitation of Aristotelian virtue ethics, a trend beginning especially with Alisdair Macintyre. Macintyre found a powerful critique of Enlightenment ethics in the work of Nietzsche, yet ultimately preferred Aristotle over Nietzsche in his project to re-establish ethics as an embodied virtue that grows organically out of specific moral traditions; in Macintyre's powerful phrase, we are waiting not for Godot, but for St. Benedict.[54] For the Deobandis, the *akhlaq-i hamida*, the 'noble virtues' of Sufism, provide the vocabularies of subjectification, to invoke Foucault's terminology, through which the self is realized. These vocabularies are by no means limited to Deobandis, of course; in a different context altogether, Charles Hirschkind has described how sermons "evoke in the sensitive listener a particular set of ethical responses, foremost among them fear (*khauf*), humility (*khusho'*), regret (*nadm*), repentance (*tauba*), and tranquility (*itmi'nan* or *sakina*). As elaborated within classical Islamic moral doctrine, these are the affective dispositions that endow a believer's heart with the capacities of moral discrimination necessary for proper conduct."[55] Each of these dispositions is cultivated in Deobandi Sufism. Pursuit of the 'noble virtues' is comparable to how Pierre Hadot described Stoic "spiritual exercises," especially the pursuit of "self-mastery."[56] Such

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[53] Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 90.

[54] Alisdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 3rd edition, 2007, 263.

[55] Charles Hirschkind, "The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt," *American Ethnologist* 28 (2001): 623-649, at 627. Hirschkind, however, does not comment on how this moral discourse is grounded in Sufism.

subjectification, with specific reference to Sufism, is "the production of a morally and socially bounded individual self through a process of inward reflexivity,"[57] yet for the Deobandis such mastery is never in the abstract: mastery of the self is not a means, but an end towards freeing one from the constraints of this world, constraints that distract human beings from the sole reason they were placed on this earth, namely, to worship God and express thankfulness (*shukr*) for his beneficence. Saba Mahmood sees this form of subjectivity not merely "as a private space of self-cultivation, but as an effect of a modality of power operationalized through a set of moral codes that summon a subject to constitute herself in accord with its precepts."[58] In the case of Deobandis' Sufi ethics, the cumulative power of their own 'tradition' exerts itself upon this discourse of self-transformation and self-perfection.

      To show how individual Deobandis *live* the ethics of the Prophetic model, it is important to note the Sufi terms that most nearly approach this notion of a lived, embodied ethics. The terms that Deobandis, and Sufis generally, use are crucial here, especially *akhlaq* and *adab*. *Akhlaq* derives from the semantic root that connotes 'creation' and suggests humans' 'created nature'. This view sees human beings as fundamentally good when they are attuned to the highest ideals for which God created them, especially worship. In Deobandi discourses, one reads often of 'ethical reformation' (*akhlaq ki islah*). With its semantic connotations of 'disciplining', an apposite notion is *adab*, connoting 'civility' and the collected wisdom found in a tradition, that is, its best habits and norms. The Deobandis have called *adab* the essence of Sufism, as in Rashid Ahmad Gangohi deeming *adab* the "most fundamental" aspect of Sufism or as in Zafar Ahmad Uthmani's declaring that Sufism is "entirely *adab*."[59]

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[56] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Arnold I. Davidson, ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 82-89.

[57] Paulo G. Pinto, "The Limits of the Public: Sufism and the Religious Debate in Syria," in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, eds. *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 186.

[58] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 28.

The ethical tradition of which Deobandis see themselves as an extension is grounded in Sufism broadly, and the Sufi legacies of the Indian subcontinent specifically. The notion that ethics are at the core of Sufism did not emerge in the nineteenth century; far from it, this idea has its roots in early Sufi history. As the eleventh century Sufi al-Qushayri stated, "Sufism means to take on every sublime moral characteristic from the life of the Prophet and to leave behind every lowly one."[60] What is more, even then Qushayri was preoccupied with justifying Sufism to its nascent critics, as Deobandi Sufis would centuries later but for entirely different reasons and in entirely different contexts, as we will see.[61]

Polemics

Classical rhetorical theory has often differentiated between *publics* (dispersed, rational) and *crowds* (present, emotional).[62] In this view, rational individuals deliberate over the merits of an argument, as opposed to crowds where mob sentiments prevail. This classical notion of publics is based on "bourgeois norms of individualism and rationality of classic liberalism, with a nation of citizens each pursuing their own self-interest, conversing, debating and deciding independently without regard to loyalties or obligation."[63] In the Kantian formulation, the 'public' is a sort of liminal space where "ideas are presented on their own merits by self-reflective moral subjects

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[59] See Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, Lahore: Idarah Islamiyyat, 1984, 155 and Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, *Sufism and Good Character: prophetic guidance on the spiritual path*, Santa Barbara: White Thread Press, 2004, 7. Both of these treatises are discussed below.

[60] Abul Qasim al-Qushayri, *Sufi Book of Spiritual Ascent*, trans. Rabia Harris, Laleh Bakhtiar, ed. Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1997, 280.

[61] Jawid A. Mojaddedi, "Legitimizing Sufism in al-Qushayri's 'Risala'," *Studia Islamica* 90 (2000): 37-50. Mojaddedi analyzes how Qushayri subtly manipulates the Sufi biographies (*tabaqat*) genre to include Sufis who legitimized Sufism's 'traditionalist' credentials. The selection of biographies also reinforces the strength of his systematic statement of Sufism's stations (*maqamat*), insofar as there he relies on statements from the same Sufis he includes among the biographies.

[62] A seminal source for this dichotomy is Gabriel Tarde's 1901 essay "Le Public et al foule." See "The Public and the Crowd" in Gabriel Tarde, *On Communication and Social Influence*, Terry N. Clark, ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 277-294.

[63] Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience: crowds, publics, individuals*, New York: Routledge, 2008, 15.

rather than as emanating from authorities such as preachers, judges, and rulers. Authority is vested in the public sphere itself."[64]

With these assumptions embedded in the very notion of 'publics', how do we account for agonistic, polemical discourses in the public sphere? And how do we account for publics formed, in a distinctly un-Kantian fashion, by the moral suasion of polemicists? The word 'polemic' stems etymologically from the Greek *polemos* meaning 'war' or 'battle.'[65] It became an inherently agonistic mode of discourse typical of the 'pamphlet wars' of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe.[66] It is a form of rhetorical "retrenchment, the hardening of partisan identities and ideas, a sort of discursive calcification."[67] But we must also attend to ways that polemics are not just battles between hostile interlocutors, but interpellate audiences beyond the dichotomous model of addresser and addressee, as polemics aim not only "to convert the object of attack but to convince a wider audience that the case is so."[68] With reference to this discursive feature of polemics, Lander proposes that polemics are "polarizing but also pluralizing," to the extent they polarize interlocutors but also open up the space of polemic to incorporate mere 'bypassers'.[69] Polemics also address, in Warner's words, "onlookers." The audience for polemic is multifarious and amorphous; "the agonistic interlocutor is coupled with passive interlocutors; known enemies with indifferent strangers; parties present to a dialogue situation with parties

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[64] Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, "Muslim Publics," in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, eds. *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006, 6.

[65] Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print and Literary Culture in Early Modern England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 11.

[66] See Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad, "Introduction: Western Esotericism and Polemics," in Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds. *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007, vii-xii, and T. L. Hettema and Arie van der Kooij, eds. *Religious Polemics in Context*. Leiden: Uitgeverij van Gorcum, 2004.

[67] Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic*, 11-12. (emphasis added)

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] *Ibid.*, 34.

whose textual location might be in other genres or scenes of circulation entirely."[70] This feature

of polemical discourse will be crucial for understanding how Deobandis' polemics were variously

appropriated, rejected and/or simply ignored by a sizeable population of the Muslim public of

South Africa.

Several scholars have adapted the concept of polemics for analyzing public religious

discourse in modern South Asia, forms of discourse in which the Deobandis participated widely.[71]

It may not be an exaggeration to state that South Asian communal identities were formed largely

through polemics. Such 'boundaries' are of course always in flux, even if the polemicists

themselves present them rhetorically as fixed. Paraphrasing Mary Douglas, Appadurai has noted

how "moral and social taxonomies find abhorrent the items that blur their boundaries."[72] I suggest

this is all the more true of boundary-making between historical rivals such as the Deobandis and

Barelwis, who share nearly identical legal and theological proclivities. In fact, their starkly

different visions of Sufi devotional piety distinguish the two far more than anything else.

In the South Asian context, the term 'polemic' roughly corresponds to the term

munazara, 'disputation', derived from an Arabic root meaning 'to look at' or 'evaluate'. The

munazara was typically a person-to-person debate, held at a certain time and place and before an

audience, such as a noteworthy *munazara* that took place between Muslim `ulama' and Christian

missionaries at Agra in April 1854 over the nature of revelation.[73] These are not debates that one

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[70] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2004, 90-91.

[71] See especially Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Imagining Community: Polemical Debates in Colonial India," in Kenneth W. Jones, ed. *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992; Marcia K. Hermansen, "Fakirs, Wahhabis and Others: Reciprocal Classifications and the Transformation of Intellectual Categories," in Jamal Malik, ed. *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860*, Leiden: Brill, 2000; and Jamal Malik, "Encounter and Appropriation in the Context of Modern South Asian History," in Jamal Malik, ed. *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

[72] Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, 44.

[73] Avril A Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993, 226-262.

or another of the interlocutors would 'win',[74] but the agonistic tone of these public forums would presage later debates between Hindu revivalist groups such as the Arya Samaj, the Ahmadis, and others. These competitors in a crowded discursive field included the Barelvis, the Ahmadiyya movement, and Christian missionaries.[75] Each group became an entity against which Deobandis defined themselves rhetorically through the medium of polemic - the Barelvis because of their support for shrine-based Sufism, the Ahmadis for their incendiary claim for the continuation of prophecy after Muhammad, and Christian missionaries because of their schools that Deobandis believed corrupted Muslim society. In short, Deobandis constructed their identities gradually *in opposition to* competing claims to normative Islamic authority, especially as it concerned Sufism. The polemics that I examine in the final two chapters are mostly textual in nature, though there were several high-profile public debates that could be properly called *munazaras*, even if that term was not specifically used to describe them.

Chapter summary

The first two chapters inquire into the origins of the Deobandi critique of Sufism in the Urdu works of its founding scholars and argue that these scholars bifurcated Sufism, recasting it exclusively as the ethical reform of the self while consigning popular Sufi practices to the realm of 'cultural' accretions. The first - What Sufism Is Not: Sufi Devotions and the Origins of the

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[74] Indeed, sometimes 'winning' was hardly the goal; rather, arousing the communal sentiments of one's audience - 'preaching to the choir' - was more important than 'debating' a point with an opponent. Metcalf speaks of Deobandis debating with representatives of the Arya Samaj, who insisted on carrying out the 'debate' in Sanskrit. The fact that the Deobandi `ulama' could not speak Sanskrit was immaterial, as the Arya Samaj were interested only in firing up their own supporters in the audience. Barbara D. Metcalf, "Imagining Community: Polemical Debates in Colonial India," in Kenneth W. Jones, ed. *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, 236.

[75] On the Barelwis, see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870-1920*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. On the Ahmadiyya, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. For a perspective on Christian missionary work, see H. J. A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860-1920*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007. The role of Deoband's founder in interreligious debates is recounted in Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, *Mubahisah-yi Shahjahanpur*, Karachi: Dar al-Sha'at, 1977.

Deobandi Critique - shows how Deobandi scholars argued that certain Sufi practices were impermissible 'innovations' (*bid`a*) in religion and that it was the duty of traditional Islamic scholars to intervene directly to educate Muslims on these moral dangers, what I call Deoband's 'critical project'. Their writings posed questions that shook the foundations of Sufi piety in colonial India: does Sufis' reverence towards the Sufi saints (*awliya'*) detract from the reverence that Muslims believe is due solely to God? Does their veneration of the Prophet Muhammad border on deifying him or on ascribing to him divine qualities of omniscience or omnipresence? Do certain practices - for example, making pilgrimages to the gravesites of past Sufi masters on the anniversary of their deaths - violate Prophetic norms (*sunna*)?

While the first chapter reconstructs how Deobandis sought to purge Sufism of these controversial elements, the second - What Sufism Is: Deobandi Sufism and the Ethics of the Self - details how they aimed to reassemble Sufi piety solely as ethical self-formation, what I call their 'constructive project'. First, they reduced the Sufi path largely to the process of divesting oneself of base ethical qualities (*akhlaq-i razila*) and embodying 'noble' ones (*akhlaq-i hamida*); accordingly, they viewed Sufi saints purely as moral exemplars, and strictly rejected the more traditional view of Sufi masters as sources of divinely inspired knowledge or as conduits for intercession with God. Secondly, their treatises and manuals for Sufi students reframed Sufism's place in Islam in apologetic terms; seeking to justify Sufism in terms of the Qur'an and Prophetic norms (*sunna*), Deobandis wrote from a liminal space between criticizing some Sufis for indulging in contested practices and criticizing 'modernists' and 'Wahhabis' who dismissed Sufism as such. They saw Sufism, ethics and Islamic law as overlapping, mutually constitutive domains of piety.

The third chapter - How a Tradition Travels: Deobandi Scholars, Texts and Institutions in South Africa - reconstructs how Deoband took root in South Africa institutionally and ideologically, roughly between the 1920's and 1970's, focusing on the founding of Deobandi *madrasas* and the formation of a Deobandi discourse, highlighting the reciprocal relation between

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the formation of the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa and the growth of Deobandi thought. It also attends to the relative lack of a local awareness of 'Deoband' as a distinct identity or 'brand' during this period; as we will see in the final two chapters, this 'branding' of Deoband emerged in the volatile context of Muslim anti-apartheid politics. Next, I outline the roles that two Deobandi scholars of the Indian subcontinent, Muhammad Masihullah Khan and Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, played in linking subcontinental Deoband with South African Deoband, and conclude with a brief overview of Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa.

The fourth chapter - Locating Deobandi Sufism: The *Madrasa* and the *Majlis* - shifts from texts to ethnography. Through my fieldwork at Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville *madrasa* near Johannesburg and at Deobandi public sermons (*majalis*) on Sufism, I explore how South African Deobandi students imagine themselves as part of a larger network and tradition, how they seek to embody and internalize the ethics of Sufi practice, how these orientations to 'Deoband' and Sufism inform the daily lives of students, and how Deobandi scholars translate their Sufi ethics into everyday discourses of piety. Here, Deoband's 'constructive project' - reassembling Sufism as ethics - takes on a tangible form.

While the first four chapters trace how the Deobandi critique of Sufism emerged in colonial India, how that critique traveled to South Africa, and how it informs local Deobandi *madrasas*, the final two chapters examine the public reception of their critiques among South African Muslims, historically and contemporaneously.

The fifth chapter – Deoband in Public: Polemics and Apartheid Politics – assesses the reception of Deobandi critiques in the context of Muslim anti-apartheid politics. Here I focus, first, on polemics and counterpolemics between Deobandis and Barelwis, principally during the 1980's, a period that coincides with the mass mobilization of Muslims against apartheid; and secondly, I examine a series of public confrontations between Deobandis and their interlocutors. Understanding the public reception of Deoband's critique of Sufism is impossible without attending to these confrontations, in which many Muslims roundly dismissed Deobandi critiques

as 'Indian' theological quibbles that were, at best, irrelevant to the task of liberating South Africa. After Deobandi scholars criticized Muslim activists for mobilizing against apartheid alongside activists of other faiths, and even justified this position in terms of their Sufi ethics, a growing number of Muslims lambasted Deobandis for their alleged 'collaborationist' stance towards the apartheid regime.

The sixth and final chapter – New Rivalries, New Rhetoric: Sufism, Media and 'Heritage' after Apartheid – locates shifts in debate about Sufi devotional piety in the context of new forms of religious media and post-apartheid rights discourses. As Sufi practices were debated on radio and in television, the debates brought new participants into their purview, participants who were not historically partisans to this 'Indian' debate, and the specificities of the historical Deobandi/Barelwi polemic gave way to a broader discursive field, one in which, for example, Salafi critiques of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebration were as, if not more, relevant as Deobandis' critiques. The explosion of post-apartheid religious media (Islamic radio and television) enabled new forms and structures for debating Sufism publically, at the same time that new discourses of 'cultural rights' informed how the Cape's Muslims, in particular, defended local celebrations of the Prophet's birthday and the visitation of local Sufi saints' tombs as an indelible feature of local 'heritage', most salient in how Muslims invoked the post-apartheid constitutional protection of heritage to defend local Sufi saints' tombs from destruction by developers.

CHAPTER ONE

What Sufism Is Not: Sufi Devotions and the Origins of the Deobandi Critique

Hajji Imdadullah al-Makki, one of nineteenth century India's greatest Sufis and the mentor to an entire generation of Deobandis, once quipped: "Every person sees a different color in me, though in fact I have no color. I am like the water which appears to take on the color of the bottle in which it is filled."[1] This suggests several things. It signals a certain elasticity, a mutability at the heart of Deoband; it marks, as we will see, an ambivalence within Deoband towards the legacy of Hajji Imdadullah and, by extension, the Indian Sufi heritage that he represents. But perhaps most of all, it suggests how Deobandis past and present have turned towards their origins as a source of guidance, in a way surpassed only by their turn for guidance towards the earliest generations of Muslims - the wisdom forged in the era of the Prophet and his Companions. For this reason, we begin with the origins of Deobandi critiques of Sufism in the works of its founding figures.

The internal disputes that transpired between the luminaries of early Deoband point to a penchant in the Deobandi tradition for debate and robust intellectual exchange - hardly conforming to their contemporary critics' view of Deobandis as uniformly ideological.[2] At the

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[1] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, Karachi: Maktaba al-Shaykh, 1976, 258.

[2] In fact, Mahmud Hasan Gangohi's *The Limits of Difference* (*Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*), discussed in the third chapter, is devoted almost entirely to showing how Deobandi `ulama' continued to respect one another

same time Deobandis have often projected an image of ideological cohesion in its polemics and

counter-polemics with the Barelwis and other ideological rivals in nineteenth century British

India. This spirit of debate animated an ongoing conversation within early Deoband over what

constitutes permissible and impermissible belief and actions, centering on practices held dear by

the Sufis of the Indian subcontinent for centuries. Deobandis were by no means the first to contest

or question the validity of these practices; however, the force of their critique reverberates today

on a global scale.

Various currents of nineteenth century Indian Islam converge in the founding of the

Deoband *madrasa*, emanating from an array of influential characters: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (d.

1831), the *jihadi* rebel and charismatic leader of a fledgling frontier state; Muhammad Isma`il (d.

1831), Sayyid Ahmad's tireless campaigner and literary propagandist; Hajji Imdadullah al-Makki

(d. 1899), arguably the most important Sufi of late colonial India, who mentored a generation of

Sufis and leaders but whose lack of legal training as an `alim compromised his status in the eyes

of some early Deobandis; Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905), co-founder of the Deoband *madrasa*

and an expert legalist, whose sober Sufism and unflinching conservatism shaped Deoband's ethos

into the present; and finally Ashraf `Ali Thanawi (d. 1943), the endlessly prolific visionary of

early twentieth century Deoband, who synthesized legal conservatism and Sufi ethics in a body of

work that is largely responsible for making Deoband a global phenomenon.

Many Deobandis have made critical interventions into the discourse on Sufism and Sufi

devotional practices. I chose these five figures for several reasons. First, Sayyid Ahmad and

Muhammad Isma`il incited the drive towards purifying Indian Muslim society of illicit Sufi

practices that the founding figures of Deoband channeled into their movement for ethical and

educational reform. While not Deobandis as such, many Deobandis treat these two as Deobandis

avant la lettre. Second, Imdadullah was the Sufi master of both Gangohi and Thanawi, and

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despite major internal differences and disputes, particularly over the Tablighi Jama`at and the extent to
which Deobandi `ulama' should be involved in politics, if at all.

exerted a profound influence upon Gangohi, Thanawi and scores of other early Deobandis, even as he was, strictly speaking, unaffiliated with the workings of the *madrasa*. Third, Gangohi and Thanawi had differing interpretations of Imdadullah's legacy; in drawing the parameters of acceptable norms Gangohi was far more strict, Thanawi more flexible. If Thanawi's is, in some ways, a mediating position between the elastic, conciliatory ontology of Imdadullah and the unyielding ontology of Gangohi, we will see that most contemporary Deobandis, whether in South Africa or elsewhere, also position themselves in this intermediate space.

In this chapter I will show, firstly, how a strict, minimalist interpretation of doctrine of *tawhid*, the 'unicity' of God, animated Deobandi thinking on *shirk* ('association' of God with worldly entities, tantamount to polytheism) and on the boundaries of *bid`a*, heretical innovation in religious matters. Within Deobandi discussions of *tawhid*, *shirk,* and *bid`a*, entire practices and, indeed, ways of life cherished by Sufis came under critical scrutiny: does the degree of reverence held for the Prophet Muhammad in *mawlud* festivals threaten to deify him? Should we accord the Prophet superhuman knowledge of 'unseen' things? Does the *mawlud* implicitly regard the Prophet Muhammad as omniscient or omnipresent? Do the powers accorded to Sufi saints in the grave border on quasi-divine?[3] Is the Sufi grave itself, with its magnetic pull on the hearts and emotions of the unlettered masses, a threat to moral order? In this chapter, we will examine the origin of these critiques within early Deobandi circles. In subsequent chapters, we will also examine the effectiveness of these critiques, which are inseparable from Deoband's public persona, defined as much by their detractors as by Deobandis themselves.

I then trace the origins of Deoband's reformist impulse to the work of Muhammad Isma`il (d. 1831), who sought to purge Indian Muslim society of what he claimed were illicit

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[3] As Engseng Ho stated in his study of grave-pilgrimage networks in the Indian Ocean sphere, "The grave is a productive starting point because it is a particularly dense semiotic object … As a compound of place, person, name, tombstone, and text, the grave enacts a passage from silence to vocalization." For this very reason, Ho explains, Ibn Taymiyya opposed visiting graves because they create "powerful dynamics of signification with the potential to create communities based not on revelation but on something autochthonous and incipient in the grave complex." See Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 25.

cultural accretions, especially surrounding Sufi devotional practices that, in his view, have

poisoned the Muslim body politic. As we will see, early Deobandis such as Gangohi referenced

Muhammad Isma`il's works and urged his followers to read them. Next, the bulk of this chapter

parses the views of Imdadullah, Gangohi and Thanawi on the *mawlud*, the celebration of the

Prophet Muhammad's birthday, and on the `urs*, the celebration of the death anniversary of a Sufi

saint, drawing principally on Imdadullah's *Decision on Seven Controversies* (*Faisala Haft

Mas'ala*) and *The Brilliance of Hearts* (*Ziya' al-Qulub*), on Gangohi's collected *fatwas* (*Fatawa-

yi Rashidiyya*), and on Thanawi's *The Reformation of Customs* (*Islah-i Rusum*) and *Heavenly

Ornaments* (*Bihishti Zewar*). I single out these two popular devotional practices deliberately, as

these two forms of piety are among the most hotly contested in contemporary South African

Islam and, therefore, set the stage for understanding the contours of contemporary debates beyond

South Asia, among 'Deobandis abroad'.

Sayyid Ahmad, Muhammad Isma`il and the Roots of Deobandi Critique

One could conceivably trace Deobandi discourse on *bid`a* and *shirk* back to Ahmad

Sirhindi (d. 1624)[4] or even to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).[5] But it is Shah Wali Allah (1703 - 62),

whom Deobandis claim as the earliest precursor of their movement. In the work of Wali Allah,

we can see a gradual evolution from openly accepting certain practices at the tombs of saints that

later Deobandis would condemn, to a relatively strict condemnation of the 'heresies' of tomb-

based Sufi festivals. His early writings, especially *Al-Qawl al-Jamil* and *Intibah fi Salasil Awliya'*

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[4] Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), often called by the honorific title *mujaddid-i alf-i thani* ('reviver of the second millennium'), is widely revered in the subcontinent as one who 'preserved' orthodoxy from the innovations of Akbar's court. The standard work on Ahmad Sirhindi remains Yohanan Friedmann's *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: an outline of his thought and a study of his image in the eyes of posterity*, McGill: Queen's University Press, 1971. Friedmann restores the centrality of Sufism in the life and writings of Sirhindi while dismantling the older historiographic tropes that Sirhindi saved 'orthodoxy' from Akbar. According to Friedmann this notion emerges only in 1919, with the nationalist historiography of Abul Kalam Azad.

[5] The bibliography on Ibn Taymiyya is substantial. On his critique of Sufism, see the discussion in Alexander Knysh's *Ibn 'Arabi in the later Islamic tradition: the making of a polemical image*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 87 - 112.

Allah, describe the etiquette of entering a Sufi saint's tomb in great detail, suggesting that he had few, if any, reservations about visiting these sites.[6] His description of concentrating on the image of a deceased Sufi saint (*tawajjuh*) from the same period resonates, as we will see below, with Imdadullah's own descriptions of this practice:

> If the godly man is still alive, the disciple should sit down in front of his; and if the former is dead, he ought to crouch down at his grave. Next, he should purge his mind of all possible distractions, and then lead after a while his spirit to that of the godly man so that in the end he becomes closely united with the latter's spirit and he himself is merged into him. After having come to his senses again, he will discover in his soul all qualities that constitute the nature of the spiritual affiliation with this godly man.[7]

Yet in later life, he roundly rejected "what people have devised in the matter of shrines, taking them as grounds where *melas* [fairs] are held," which "belongs to the worst heresies."[8]

Shah `Abd al-Aziz (d. 1823 or 4), Wali Allah's son and intellectual successor, also held a comparatively lenient view of visiting Sufi saints' tombs, believing it permissible to make pilgrimages to them, so long as one does not specify a date for the `urs and make the pilgrimage in large numbers, or circumambulate the tombs, for this, he says, will resemble the worship of idols, presaging Gangohi's similar judgment some decades later. But strikingly, Shah `Abd al-Aziz *does* believe that the Sufi saints have powers of intercession to speak to the deceased saints and even to ask for their intercession; to do so, he recommends, one need only go to the gravesite, put one's fingers on the grave near the head of the Sufi saint, and after a litany of Qur'anic

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[6] J. M. S. Baljon, "Shah Waliullah and the Dargah," in Christian W. Troll, ed. *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, 189-190. Waliullah describes the etiquette of visiting a tomb as the following: "The visitor should first recite the Fatiha whilst performing to *rak'as*. Next he should squat on his heels with his face turned towards the dead and his back towards the Ka'ba and recite the *Surat al-Mulk* ... After that, he should exclaim *Allahu akbar*, should profess *la ilaha illa llah*, and should recite the *Surat al-Fatiha* eleven times. Then he must approach the dead calling out twenty-one times *Ya Rabb* (Oh Lord), and pronounce *Ya Ruh* (Oh Spirit), driving this forcefully into the heavens, and repeat *Ya Ruh*, driving it now forcefully into his heart, until at last he may gain relaxation of mind and inner light. Finally, he should wait to see whether an effusion of beneficence from the inhabitant of the grave may flow upon his heart."

[7] *Ibid.*, 190.

[8] *Ibid.*, 195. Exploring the reasons for this shift is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the gradual transition suggests that reformist critiques of Sufism certainly predate the invectives of Muhammad Isma`il.

invocations, say "Your holiness! Will you also help us with your prayers and intercession

(*shifa`at*)?"[9]

It is clear, then, that reformist critiques of Sufi devotions predate the powerful movement of Sayyid Ahmad and Muhammad Isma`il, albeit with qualifications (Muhammad Isma`il would not have approved of Shah `Abd al-Aziz even limited acceptance of saintly intercession). Moreover, Sayyid Ahmad and Muhammad Isma`il were by no means the only ones advancing these critiques; similar claims arose, for instance, out of the work of Khurram `Ali Bilhauri, whose *Nasihat al-Muslimin* of 1823 suggested that "In the same way that the heathens worship the idols, Muslims started worshipping the tombs of the saints whom they believe to be as powerful as Allah."[10]

But Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (d. 1831) and his literary propagandist, Muhammad Isma`il Barelwi (d. 1831), were the most immediate antecedents to the Deobandis' reformist project.[11] Beloved of a whole generation of early Deobandis, Sayyid Ahmad was born in 1786 in the town of Rai Bareilly in Awadh. He studied in Delhi, and from an early age he began to attract a loyal following of Muslims anxious about the perceived downfall of the Indian Muslims' political and social influence. A preaching tour of the Ganges delta valley from 1818 to 1821 solidified his influence. He then went on the *hajj* with some 600 disciples from 1821 to 1824, departing from Bengal, and began raising the call to *jihad* against the Sikhs upon his return to India.[12] In 1831

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[9] S. A. A. Rizvi, *Shah `Abd al-Aziz: Puritanism, sectarian polemics and jihad*, Canberra: Ma`rifat Publishing, 1982, 190-192.

[10] Marc Gaborieau, "A Nineteenth-Century Indian 'Wahhabi' Tract Against the Cult of Muslim Saints: *Al-Balagh al-Mubin*," 198.

[11] The name 'Barelwi' signifies Sayyid Ahmad's place of origin – Rai Bareilly – and has no relation at all with the Barelwi movement, Deoband's principal competitors in the South Asian context.

[12] Muhammad Hedayetullah, *Sayyid Ahmad: A Study of the Religious Reform Movement of Sayyid Ahmad of Ra'e Bareli*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970, 44 and 115-118. There are numerous Urdu biographies of Sayyid Ahmad, many verging on hagiography. See, for example, Abul Hasan `Ali Nadvi, *Sirat-i Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*, Lucknow: Majlis-i Tahqiqat va Nashriyyat-i Islam, 1977, and Ghulam Rasul Mahr, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*, Lahore: Kitab Manzil, 1954-1956. His main treatise, *Taqwiyyat al-Iman*, was translated into English soon after its appearance by the Indian British authorities, concerned about its

Sayyid Ahmad and his compatriots were killed at Balakot fighting against Sikh armies under

Maharaja Sher Singh. For his followers, his death only amplified his mythic status, and through

aggressive printing in Urdu, the movement of Sayyid Ahmad reached a popular audience;

Muhammad Isma`il's works were read out loud to throngs of Muslims in small villages across

North India.[13] About one of these, *Taqwiyyat al-Iman*, one report stated in rather hyperbolic

terms, "six million copies have been printed and distributed, benefiting tens of millions of

persons. This is a unique honor for the book; no other human writing, it can be safely asserted,

has achieved such popularity."[14] The British were unsurprisingly circumspect about his

movement. "The whole object of his career," reports one British study of 1832, published just a

year after Sayyid Ahmad's death, "was to rouse and unite Mahommedan feeling in support of his

own views of fanaticism and aggrandizement."[15]

Both Sayyid Ahmad and Muhammad Isma`il, like Gangohi and Thanawi after them,

participated in the centuries-old discourse on Sufism in the subcontinent at the same time that

they made critical interventions into it. Sayyid Ahmad and Muhammad Isma`il claimed initiations

impact on popular Muslim sentiments in the subcontinent. See Mir Shahamat Ali, "Translation of the Takwiyat-ul-Iman, preceded by a Notice of the Author, Maulavi Isma`il Hajji," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 13 (1852): 310-372. This was later reprinted as Mir Shahamat Ali, *Support of the Faith: English Translation of Shah Isma`il Shahid's Taqwiyat-ul-Iman*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1969.

[13] For a discussion of the impact of print on this movement, see Marc Gaborieau's "Late Persian, Early Urdu: The Case of 'Wahhabi' Literature (1818-1857)," in Françoise Nalini Delvoye, ed. *Confluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, and the same author's "Sufism in the First Indian Wahhabi Manifesto: Siratu'l Mustaqim by Isma`il Shahid and `Abdu'l Hayy," in Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Delvoye Nalini and Marc Gaborieau, eds. *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2000. Interestingly, the French ethnographer Garcin de Tassy was well aware of the work of the Indian 'Wahhabis' and even seemed to sympathize with the rising reformist movement of Sayyid Ahmad. Writing in 1838, he stated, "One must say that probably in no country the Muslim religion is more in need of reform than in India. Surrounded by idolaters, the Muslims adopted most of their usages. The antique simplicity of Islam gave way to festivals and pagan ceremonies; ignoble masquerades defile the observances of the cult of the disciples of Mahomet." See Marc Gaborieau, "Muslim Saints, Faquirs and Pilgrims in 1831 According to Garcin de Tassy," in Jamal Malik, ed. *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 151.

[14] Mir Shahamat Ali, *Support of the Faith: English Translation of Shah Isma`il Shahid's Taqwiyat-ul-Iman*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1969, xxi-xiv.

[15] J. R. Colvin, "Notice of the Particular Tenets Held by the Followers of Syed Ahmad, taken chiefly from the 'Sirat-ul-Mustaqim' a principal Treatise of that Sect," *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 11 (1832): 479-498, at 480.

into multiple Sufi lineages, including the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, and Chishti orders. Sayyid Ahmad

claimed multiple Uwaysi initiations (initiations by way of dreams or visions) from prominent Sufi

shaykhs, including such luminaries as `Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Baha al-din Naqshbandi, and Qutb al-

din Bakhtiyar Kaki. The movement's first manifesto was the treatise *Sirat al-mustaqim*,

consisting of the teachings of Sayyid Ahmad on various Sufi subjects, written first in Persian by

Muhammad Isma`il and Muhammad `Abd al-Hayy, and later translated into Urdu.[16]

Muhammad Isma`il composed numerous treatises, the most important being

Strengthening of the Faith (*Taqwiyyat al-Iman*), written around 1824.[17] Its central argument is

simple but has immense and complex repercussions for the religio-political imaginary of South

Asian Muslims: *tawhid*, the absolute unity of God, is diametrically opposed to *shirk*, associating

another person or thing in any way with God. *Sunna*, the morally sanctioned path of right belief

and conduct articulated in the words and deeds of the Prophet, is diametrically opposed to *bid`a*.[18]

Muhammad Isma`il conceived of *bid`a* in three ways: first, as a practice that directly opposes or

invalidates *sunna*; second, as a practice done with same intent or regularity of the *sunna* but not

part of it - in other words, creating a kind of false or counter-religion alongside the *sunna*; or

third, making anything obligatory that is not explicitly condemned.

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[16] The *Sirat al-Mustaqim* contains, among other things, a theory of the 'path of sainthood' (*rah-i wilaya*t) compared to the 'path of prophecy' (*rah-i nubuwat*) and a detailed analysis of *zikr* techniques in the Qadiri, Naqshbandi and Chishti *silsilas*. The Urdu translation of the Persian is still widely read; for a recent Deobandi edition, see Muhammad Isma`il, *Sirat-i Mustaqim*, Deoband, Dar al-Kitab Deoband, n.d. See Marc Gaborieau, "Sufism in the First Indian Wahhabi Manifesto: Siratu'l Mustaqim by Isma`il Shahid and 'Abdu'l Hayy," in Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau, eds. *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000. The text gave considerable anxiety to British authorities who were already predisposed to question the loyalty of their Muslim subjects in India, an anxiety evident in J. R. Colvin, "Notice of the Particular Tenets Held by the Followers of Syed Ahmad, taken chiefly from the 'Sirat-ul-Mustaqim' a principal Treatise of that Sect," *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 11 (1832): 479-498.

[17] Marc Gaborieau, "Late Persian, Early Urdu: The Case of 'Wahhabi' Literature (1818-1857)," in Françoise Delvoye Nalini, ed. *Confluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, 177.

[18] Muhammad Isma`il, *Taqwiyyat al-Iman ma`a tazkir al-Ikhwan*, Multan: Kutub Khana-yi Majidiyya, n.d., 11-12.

He identifies four fundamental forms of *shirk*: association with God in knowledge (*ishrak fi-l `ilm*), association with God in power (*ishrak fi-l tasarruf*), association with God in worship (*ishrak fi-l `ibadat*), and association with God in matters of custom or everyday life (*ishrak fi-l 'adah*).[19] Each of these forms of what Muhammad Isma`il considered *shirk* would later shape early Deobandi thought. 'Association' with God in knowledge informed debates about whether the Prophet Muhammad has knowledge of the 'unseen' (*`ilm-i ghaib*). 'Association' with God in power led into debates about whether there are theoretical limits to God's sovereignty, namely whether God could produce additional prophets of Muhammad's stature or even tell a lie, and whether to suggest that God is somehow *incapable* of doing so is itself akin to denying his limitless omnipotence. The latter two categories are the most salient here; 'association' with God in worship and in customary practices covered those Sufi practices that bore a dangerous similarity to the worship accorded solely to God, or customary practices that resembled acts sanctioned by the *sunna* - such as the reverence bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad during the *mawlud* or in the act of granting him salutations, or upon the Sufi saints during their death anniversary festivities.

Muhammad Isma`il articulates a stark and radically polarized vision of divine sovereignty in which human beings, including all prophets and Sufi saints, are utterly powerless before God's majesty, thereby undercutting the very possibility of saintly intercession between God and humankind. One is easily reminded here of Carl Schmitt's notion of sovereignty as "he who decides on the exception."[20] The sovereign, in this vision, is the sole power capable of deciding on the exception to otherwise immutable rules and laws. The sovereign by definition transcends the law, simultaneously dictating the law and exempt from it. Schmitt himself identified his notion of sovereignty as a kind of secularized theology.

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[19]*Ibid.*, 12-15.

[20] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005, 5.

The state of exception, Schmitt writes, is "analogous to the miracle."[21] In a similar sense

Muhammad Isma`il submits that God is so powerful that he could instantaneously and

miraculously upend and subvert every law of the universe and every article of Islamic faith

and replace them with an entirely new system. He could replace the Prophet Muhammad with

another Prophet, or create scores of new Prophets: "Verily the power of this Shah of Shahs is

so great that in an instant, solely by pronouncing the command 'Be!' God can create millions

of prophets, saints, djinn, and angels equal to Gabriel and Muhammad, or in a single breath,

can turn the whole universe upside down and bestow upon it a wholly new creation."[22]

Beyond the realm of the *sunna*, properly circumscribed, exists the impure and corrupting

domain of 'culture'.[23] Muhammad Isma`il names three broad cultural domains that distract

Muslims from the *sunna*: the conventions of one's parents, the teachings of Sufi *pirs*, and the

secular rule of kings. But the customary practices of Sufis are particularly assailed here.

Muhammad Isma`il's project is a drive towards 'purification', towards demarcating a strict

boundary between the human and the divine with no commerce between the two, between what

has agency (God alone) and what does not (all else).[24] For Muhammad Isma`il, *shirk* is, in a

sense, mis-assigning agency. It is the assumption that dead saints have agency, or that the amulet

crafted by a Sufi *pir* for curing an illness has agency, that astrological predictions exercise agency

over the future, and so on.

For Muhammad Isma`il, these customary practices impinge on the sphere of the *sunna*.

They threaten to corrupt it, or more sinisterly, to imitate it, to create a faux-*sunna* alongside the

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[21]*Ibid.*, 36.

[22] Muhammad Isma`il, *Taqwiyyat al-Iman ma`a tazkir al-Ikhwan*, 29.

[23] I have chosen the word 'culture' here to translate several words in Urdu that each have distinct connotations: '*adat*, from the Arabic root 'to return to', suggesting habit or convention; *rivaya*, derived from the Persian root 'to go', suggesting something that is current, tolerated or widely accepted; and *rasm*, meaning 'to mark, trace or delineate', connoting established usage or law.

[24] Compare the discussion of "purification" in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 10-12.

true one.[25] Practices within this rubric of 'culture' vary widely, ranging from marriage rites to veneration of the dead and to the customs of naming children. In the *Taqwiyyat al-Iman*, Muhammad Isma`il particularly execrates the cultural practices that Indian Muslims have adopted from Hinduism. "Contemporary Muslims of Hindustan have adopted countless new paths," he writes, "sacrificing an animal at the birth of a daughter, naming a child after a saint, leaving flags at the graves of saints, tying bracelets around the groom's wrist at weddings, and the like." In the *Tazkir al-Ikhwan*, he devotes an entire chapter to enumerating the worst offenses: singing, taking pride in one's family lineage, Hindu customs in weddings, the prohibition on widow remarriage, reciting poems of lamentation, and excessive embellishment on clothing or the body. "So do not follow new paths and customs," he enjoins, "but follow only the noble path trod before by the Prophet and his companions. They chose the best and the firmest practices and customs, and in this manner made their inner selves exceedingly pure and holy."[26]

Ultimately, Sayyid Ahmad's military exploits were unsuccessful. Some followers continued to fight against the Sikhs and later the British; some, on the other hand, broke with the *jihad* movement but continued their critiques of Sufi devotional practices, such as Karamat Ali of Jaunpur.[27] From 1857 onward, after the catastrophic blow that the British dealt to resistance throughout the subcontinent, the movement was forced to be on the defensive, especially as

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[25] Muhammad Isma`il, *Taqwiyyat al-Iman ma`a tazkir al-Ikhwan*, 15-16. A good example is the following litany of practices: "The observance of the following rites is prohibited for any being other than Allah: prostration, bowing down, standing with folded arms, spending money in the name of an individual, fasting out of respect to his memory, proceeding to a distant shrine in the dress of a pilgrim, and calling aloud his name while going along, or doing other absurdities. Also, one should not slay cattle purposely while on pilgrimage, go around the shrine, make prostration before it, carry animals for sacrifice, make vows, cover the grave with a sheet, utter prayers while standing at its threshold, ask for the accomplishment of other wishes concerning this and the world to come, kiss any particular stone … light lamps around it … prepare things for the ablution of its visitors, consider the water of the place sacred, sprinkle it over the body, and carry it away for absent friends, leave the shrine to walk backwards with one's face towards it, hold the jungle around it in respect, refrain from slaying any animals found nearby or from cutting trees or grasses growing there … Should anyone in any way observe these or honors any entity other than Allah, he shall certainly be guilty of *shirk*."

[26] *Ibid.*, 72.

[27] Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008, 135-138.

supporters in Afghanistan and elsewhere abandoned the movement. The movement was finally

snuffed out with 1863 Ambala campaign, with the so-called 'Wahhabi' trials following soon

afterwards.[28] A split in the movement emerged in 1860's between those who thought all legal

schools were equally valid and those who thought they were all equally useless; the latter group

formed one of Deoband's archrivals, the Ahl-i Hadith.[29] However, in many ways, even though the

military aspect of the mission dissolved, in some ways it was channeled into the reformist project

of Deoband. In his *masnavi*-style poem, *Jihad al-Akbar*, Hajji Imdadullah uses militaristic

language to describe the struggle against the 'lower self' (*nafs*). Imdadullah, of course, had fought

in the 1857 rebellion against the British, and his poems seem to internalize the military struggle

that had failed.[30]

Perhaps no early Deobandi internalized this reformist mission more than Rashid Ahmad

Gangohi. In the *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, Gangohi praises Muhammad Isma`il's *Taqwiyyat al-Iman*

in no uncertain terms: "*Taqwiyyat al-Iman* is a magnificent, utterly true work, strengthening and

reforming the faith (*quwwat o islah-i iman*), and the entire meaning of the Qur'an and hadith is

contained in it."[31] Gangohi uses Sufi appellations to extol Muhammad Isma`il, declaring him one

of the 'friends of God' (*wali Allah*) and averring that the *Taqwiyyat al-Iman* contains the "essence

of Islam" (`ayn-i Islam).[32] Despite his unqualified praise, other *fatwas* in the collection reveal just

how controversial Muhammad Isma`il's propositions were. Several people requesting them

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[28] One of the key texts that emerged out of British anxieties about 'Wahhabi' ideological penetration of the subcontinent was W. W. Hunter's *Our Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* London: Trubner and Company, 1871. Hunter sets out to diagnose the "chronic conspiracy within our territory" and begins with Sayyid Ahmad's movement and Muhammad Isma`il's manifestos, even calling the *Taqwiyyat al-Iman* the "Kuran of the sect." See pg. 53. Hunter's link between the Wahhabi movement in Arabia and the 'homegrown' Wahhabi movement in India was that Sayyid Ahmad allegedly fell under the spell of Wahhabi thought while in Mecca and returned "a fanatical disciple of Abdul Wahab," though Hunter offers no evidence of this. See pg. 61.

[29] Freeland Abbott, "The Transformation of the Jihad Movement," *Muslim World* 52, 4 (1962): 288-295.

[30] Nile Green, "Breathing in India, c. 1890," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008): 283-315, at 297-298.

[31] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, Karachi: Educational Press Pakistan, 1985, 83.

[32] *Ibid.*, 78.

inquired whether it was permissible to call Muhammad Isma`il an 'unbeliever' (*kafir*),[33] and in

fact several prominent `*ulama'* under the guidance of Fazl al-Haqq Khairabadi (d. 1861) did

exactly that.[34] Gangohi, expectedly, condemns declaring Muhammad Isma`il an unbeliever with

the justification that he is a saint (*wali*). He echoes his intellectual predecessor in still other ways,

defending the controversial notion that God is capable of lying (*imkan-i kizb*) and that God could

create other prophets on par with Muhammad (the notion of *imkan-i nazir*), offering the

explanation, like Muhammad Isma`il, that God is capable but would never do so.[35] And like

Muhammad Isma`il he steadfastly denies that Muhammad had 'knowledge of the unseen' ('*ilm-i

ghaib*), a staple of Sufi perceptions of the Prophet as a man of unparalleled knowledge of this

world and the next.[36] Gangohi endorses as well the polarized vision of divine sovereignty found

in the *Taqwiyyat al-Iman*. In clarifying the meaning of a passage from *Taqwiyyat al-Iman* in

which Muhammad Isma`il likens the difference between God and humankind as that between a

king and a member of the lower castes (*chamar*, a tanner) Gangohi makes a similar comparison: a

potter can create the pot but also has the power to break it at will.[37]

A story is widely told of Sayyid Ahmad's sojourn in Deoband long before the *madrasa*

was founded there in 1866. Sayyid Ahmad happened upon Deoband *en route* to the northwest to

wage *jihad* against the Sikhs, and upon reaching the very spot where the *madrasa* was later built,

a trash dump at the time, Sayyid Ahmad proclaimed, "Here I smell the fragrance of knowledge

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[33] *Ibid.*, 79.

[34] Fazl al-Haqq Khairabadi was, like Sayyid Ahmad and Muhammad Isma`il, a disciple of Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz. Khairabadi defended the notion of saintly intercession against Muhammad Isma`il's assertions that believing in intercession was tantamount to *shirk*. He also vilified Muhammad Isma`il for his alleged slandering of the Prophet Muhammad. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008, 80-81.

[35] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 113.

[36] *Ibid.*, 100-101, 103.

[37] *Ibid.*, 84.

(`ilm ki khushbu*).*"[38] The veracity of the tale is largely irrelevant; what it signifies is a mythology that links the advent of Deoband as an intellectual institution to the reformist impulse with which Sayyid Ahmad energized the Muslims of north India. In some ways, Sayyid Ahmad's political *jihad* was channeled into an intellectual and moral *jihad*. Ultimately, Muhammad Isma`il's strict interpretations of *tawhid* and *shirk* appealed to Indian Muslim scholars who had recently suffered the indignities of England's severe reaction to the unsuccessful 1857 revolt. The British may have demonstrated their superior might politically and militarily, but India's Muslims could still prevail spiritually, and strengthen the Muslim body politic in the process of doing so.

Mawlud: How Ought One Love the Prophet?

Among the most contentious issues that early Deobandis addressed in this 'moral *jihad*' was veneration of the Prophet Muhammad on his birthday (*mawlud*). This has been a controversial issue within Islamic history since at least the thirteenth century, and remains so today; arguments for and against *mawlud* proliferate in *fatwas*, in scholarly studies, and on polemical websites.[39]

Mawlud festivities did not exist in the era of the Prophet Muhammad; the earliest documented celebrations of the *mawlud* are from the twelfth century, though they may have existed prior to this.[40] Marion Holmes Katz's extensive study of *mawlud* shows that form of devotional piety was intimately linked to Sufi practices, especially musical assemblies (*sama`*),

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[38] Sayyid Mahbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband*, Deoband: Idarah-yi Ihtimam-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, 1977, 40.

[39] For instance, an impassioned defense of *mawlud* in recent years is Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani's *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine, Volume 3, The Prophet: Commemorations, Visitation and His Knowledge of the Unseen*, Mountain View, California: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 1998.

[40] Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 5.

and narratives of the Prophet's birth often centered around the mythology, sacred to Sufis, of the Prophet Muhammad's existence as the primordial Light (*nur*) alongside God prior to creation.[41]

Deobandi scholars of the nineteenth century were by no means the first to criticize *mawlud* festivities; even in the twelfth century, one critic bemoaned "the taking of hashish, the gathering of young men, the rejection of the singer if he has a beard, the singing of [songs] arousing longing for worldly pleasures," and so on.[42] In the sixteenth, the legal legitimacy of *qiyam* - standing in honor of the Prophet - was debated, with critics denying its legal legitimacy but supporters asserting it as a natural display of love and emotion for the Prophet.[43] One of the greatest premodern treatises on *mawlud* was surely Jalal al-Din Suyuti's (d. 1505) *Husn al-Maqsad fi 'Amal al-Mawlid* (*The Good Intention of Celebrating Mawlud*), which defended the *mawlud* as a 'good innovation' (*bid`a hasana*) provided that it remained within certain normative parameters.[44] Naturally, Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) opposed the practice, but his views on *mawlud* and other alleged innovations did not become entrenched in the Hijaz until long after his death; even in the late nineteenth century, as Deobandis such as Gangohi were issuing *fatwas* against the practice of standing in reverence of the Prophet (*qiyam*) during the *mawlud*, a Hanafi *mufti* of Mecca issued a polemic in support of *mawlud*, insisting remarkably that *not* standing for the Prophet was sinful.[45] *Mawlud* remains eminently contested across the Muslim world, with renowned institutions such as al-Azhar issuing their own edicts on the practice.[46]

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[41] *Ibid.*, 12-15.

[42] *Ibid.*, 76.

[43] *Ibid.*, 130-131.

[44] N. J. G. Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West until the 10th/16th Century*, Leiden: Brill, 1993, 49. Kaptein translates the entirety of Suyuti's *fatwa* on pages 48-67.

[45] Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 171. This sort of claim is precisely what riled the Deobandis the most, and while rare, these claims do corroborate Deobandis' accusations that some consider standing in respect of the Prophet to be mandatory.

Understanding Deobandis' views on the *mawlud* require understanding how Hajji

Imdadullah attempted to intervene in these debates, and how later Deobandis adopted a stricter

stance than his. Born in 1817 to a scholarly family in Thana Bhavan, Hajji Imdadullah traveled to

Delhi in 1833 to study in the circles of Maulana Mamluk `Ali and Maulana Muhammad Ishaq

Dihlawi, a pupil of Shah `Abd al-'Aziz.[47] He took his Sufi initiation from Nasir ad-din Dihlawi,

grandson of Rafi` al-din Dihlawi, who was a son of Shah Wali Allah. Nasir al-din, a *khalifa* of

Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi, initiated Imdadullah into the Naqshbandi order. Another *khalifa* of

Sayyid Ahmad's, Mianji Nur Muhammad Jhanjhanawi (d. 1845), initiated Imdadullah into the

Chishti Sabiri order.[48] Imdadullah took up arms against the British in 1857 and fled to Mecca in

1859, whence he continued to teach students from afar and where he lived out the rest of his life,

until his death in 1899.[49] From Mecca he maintained a prolific correspondence with his Sufi

pupils back home and frequently received them in Mecca during the *hajj*.

Even though he seemed unperturbed by Muhammad Isma`il's incendiary work,

Imdadullah was in fact firmly within the spiritual lineage of Sayyid Ahmad and his movement;

Imdadullah's Sufi master, Hazrat Mianji, was the pupil of Hazrat Shah `Abd al-Rahim who made

a Sufi pledge (*ba`iat*) to Sayyid Ahmad directly.[50] Imdadullah mentored virtually all of the

earliest Deobandis, including the co-founders of the Deoband *madrasa*, Muhammad Qasim

Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, even going so far as to conceive his relation to

Nanautawi in terms of Rumi's relation to Shams Tabriz: "Allah Ta'ala grants to some of his

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[46] Aviva Schussman, "The Legitimacy and Nature of Mawlud Al-Nabi (Analysis of a Fatwa)," *Islamic Law and Society* 5, 2 (1998): 214-234. The Azhar *fatwa* commended the practice as a natural expression of love for the Prophet Muhammad, provided it remains within a set of legal and performative restraints.

[47] Latifullah, *Anfas-i Imdadiyya*, Karachi: Idara Nashr al-Ma'arif, 1995. 50.

[48] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, 37-38.

[49] Barbara Metcalf, "Imdadu'llah Thanawi," in Marc Gaborieau, ed. *Dictionnaire Biographique des savants et grands figures du monde musulman périphérique, du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, Paris: Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le monde musulman périphérique, 1984, 13.

[50] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 232-235.

servants who are not technically `*ulama'* the tongue [of another]," explained Imdadullah. "Thus

the tongue granted to Hazrat Shams Tabriz was that of Maulana Rumi, who elaborated upon the

knowledge of Hazrat Shams Tabriz in great detail. Similarly I have received Maulana

Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi as my tongue."[51] By all measures, it seems he remained aware of

his status as a non-`*alim*; Muhammad Zakariyya tells a story that once when Hajji Imdadullah

was discussing issues amongst `*ulama'*, he said to them: "Brothers, I am ignorant. You are

`*ulama'*. In my heart is only what has alighted there, and I have explained it thus; if there is any

error in it, anything in conflict with the Qur'an and the *sunna*, please do not hesitate to tell me.

Otherwise, on the Day of Judgment, I will say 'I told them to explain it but they did not clarify

the matter'."[52] A similar anecdote reveals much about how Gangohi viewed his Sufi master

Imdadullah. Once a certain Muhammad A'la Ambetwi had just returned from the *hajj* and said

that Hajji Imdadullah gave him permission to attend a *sama`* musical assembly. When Gangohi

heard this, he said, "This must be incorrect. But if he is stating the truth, the Hajji Sahib is

incorrect. In such matters it is Hajji Sahib's duty to consult us. And in matters regarding the

reformation of the self, it is our duty to follow Hajji Sahib."[53] The episode is revealing for

comprehending not just Gangohi's view of Imdadullah, a Sufi but not an `*alim*, but of Deoband's

view of the relation between Sufism and the `*ulama'* generally.

Imdadullah realized that a number of practices popular among Sufis had become

contested in his time, and sought to intervene in these debates with his *Decision on Seven

Controversies*.[54] Imdadullah ranks the seven disputed issues covered in his treatise according to

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[51] *Ibid.,* 259. This story is also recounted in Sayyid Mahbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband*, 35.

[52] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 263.

[53] Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, *Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*, Meerut: Maktaba-yi Mahmudiyya, 1990/91, 121.

[54] Imdadullah's *Faisala Haft Mas'ala* covers seven 'controversies' of his day, roughly in order of the urgency with which he called for a resolution of the respective conflicts: *mawlud*; the practice of customary *fatiha*, transferring merit to the dead; `*urs* and *sama`*; calling on something or someone other than God; performing a second congregational *salat*; and finally, *imkan-i nazir* and *imkan-i kizb*, whether God can create additional prophets and whether God can tell a lie, respectively. While they do not all directly entail

the degree of controversy, placing *mawlud* first. We will see later on that *mawlud* remains, even today, the most contentious of devotional practices in contemporary South Africa, among Deobandis and others. Imdadullah begins his analysis of *mawlud* by noting that there are inherent virtues in remembering the Prophet's birthday; the main point of contention for the `*ulama'* is the practice of standing in respect of the Prophet (*qiyam*) during a certain point in the *mawlud*. Because of the contentious nature of *qiyam*, some `*ulama'* maintain that *mawlud* as a whole must be prohibited as an improper innovation, but significantly, Imdadullah tells us "most permit it."[55]

Imdadullah took the task of combating such innovations (*bid`a*) seriously. He is credited with stating, "I never refuse to accept initiation (*bai`at*) from anyone, because they could be influenced by someone who commits *bid`a*. Then God would take me and ask, 'He came to you and you rejected him. For this reason he has been taken away."[56] A crucial part of his analysis of *mawlud* is his definition of *bid`a*: "bringing into the religion (*din*) that which is not part of it."[57] He follows this definition with a simple observation: honoring the Prophet on any occasion is praiseworthy, and even appointing a special time to honor him is acceptable and may earn one merit; however, believing it blameworthy *not* to participate is reprehensible. This will foreshadow the Deobandis' criticism that some participants in *mawlud* festivals put pressure on others to attend, even suggesting that they *must* attend as a matter of personal religious duty to their beloved Prophet.

Yet Imdadullah helped shape later Deobandi views that the worst transgressions arise from *insisting* on certain practices and criticizing those who do not participate, illustrating this point with his analysis of standing in respect of the Prophet Muhammad:

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controversies within Sufism, they do entail theoretical debates over God's power and the intercessionary powers of saints and prophets that are essential to understanding reformist discourses on Sufism in the last two centuries.

[55] Hajji Imdadullah, *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya,* Karachi: Dar al-Sha'at, 1977, 78.

[56] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 261-262.

[57] Hajji Imdadullah, *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya,* 78.

> Some criticize those who do not stand in respect of the Prophet during *mawlud*.
> This is incorrect. In the view of the Shari`a, standing is not essential, and
> according to the jurists, even a praiseworthy (*mustahabb*) action becomes
> reprehensible (*ma`siyat*) when it is demanded … [Moreover] it is plainly
> objectionable to believe that one cannot attain merit (*sawab*) if a date for the
> *mawlud* is not appointed, or if standing in respect of the Prophet is not
> performed, or if sweets are not arranged. Such a belief is a transgression of the
> limits of the Shari`a, just as it is reprehensible to regard an accepted (*mubah*) act
> as *haram*. In both cases there is a transgression of limits.[58]

Some claim that the *mawlud* will not have the same salutary effect if the congregants do not stand

in respect of the Prophet. Ultimately - and this is a crucial point - this is an "internal" (*batin*)

matter that involves the personal belief of individuals and attempting to resolve it in one way or

another leaves us in the "realm of conjecture."[59]

In defending *mawlud,* Imdadullah cautions against those `ulama' who would ban entire

practices based on some contingency, such as "preachers using weak *hadith*" or the "mixing of

men and women." This is, he says, a bit like "burning one's rug because of a single flea."[60] (In

contemporary disputes over *mawlud*, Barelwi scholars put forth a similar defense of the practice,

as we will see.) To believe that Muhammad graces the assembly with his presence is no different;

contentious as it is, it provides no basis for rejecting *mawlud* as a whole. While some critics of

mawlud even brand those who say Muhammad's light (*nur*) graces the assembly as unbelievers,

Imdadullah suggests not only that this is possible in terms of both intellect and revelation, but that

in some instances it has actually taken place. The difficulty, though, is ascertaining when and

under what circumstances. Moreover, one need not posit Muhammad's "knowledge of the

unseen" (*'ilm-i ghaib*) to suggest that Muhammad's spirit could be present at the assembly.[61]

Imdadullah sums up his argument by evoking his own personal experience; he professes

to attend the *mawlud* regularly as a means for acquiring divine blessings (*barakat*). In fact,

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[58] *Ibid.*, 78.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] *Ibid.*,79.

[61] *Ibid.*, 79-80.

differences over issues such as *qiyam* are like disputes over the branches of law (*fiqh*), not its essentials, and both sides can marshal evidence from the legal sources to bolster their respective sides; thus divergent opinions should be treated no differently than differences between, say, Hanafi and Shafi`i schools of law.[62]

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Imdadullah's Sufi pupil, came to strikingly different conclusions.[63] Born in 1829 in the north Indian village of Gangoh, Gangohi was a Sufi of the Indian Chishti order.[64] He went to Delhi in his youth to study *hadith* with Shah `Abd al-Ghani (d. 1868).[65] Both Gangohi and the co-founder of Deoband, Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877), studied Sufism at the feet of Hajji Imdadullah.[66] According to one source, Gangohi progressed from the status of a pupil to one qualified to initiate others in a mere forty days, after which he returned to Gangoh where he sought to eliminate devotional practices at the tomb of his ancestor, the Sufi saint Shaykh `Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537).[67] According to some sources, he fought alongside his master Imdadullah at Shamli during the 1857 revolt, spent six months in a

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[62] *Ibid.*, 80.

[63] For an overview of Gangohi's contribution to Deoband's interrogation of Sufi devotionalism, see my article "Sufis, Scholars and Scapegoats: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905) and the Deobandi Critique of Sufism," *The Muslim World* 99, 3 (2009): 478-501.

[64] Muhammad 'Ashiq Ilahi, *Tazkirat al-Rashid*, Karachi: Maktaba Bahr al-`Ulum, 1978, 40-62. The Chishti order has two branches: the Nizami branch and the Sabiri branch. The Nizamiyya stems from Nizam al-Din Awliya' and the Sabiri branch stems from 'Ala al-Din `Ali Sabiri, both pupils of Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkar. The historical record on the Nizami Chishtis is far more profuse than that of the Sabiris. The most important Sabiri Chishti prior to the nineteenth century was `Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, ancestor of the Rashid Ahmad Gangohi who is the subject of this article. In the nineteenth century, Hajji Imdadullah al-Makki, the latter Gangohi's master, became the single most influential Sabiri master since `Abd al-Quddus. See Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, 118-119.

[65] Muhammad `Ashiq Ilahi, *Tazkirat al-Rashid*, 88-96.

[66] *Ibid.*, 40.

[67] Sayyid Mahbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Dar al-`Ulum Deoband*, 127. Another account seems to contradict this one, suggesting Gangohi was not technically a *khalifa* at all; according to *Imdad al-Mushtaq*, Imdadullah designated two kinds of successors, those on whom he bestowed authority to initiate others (*khilafat*) and those he permitted to propagate religion on his behalf (*tabligh-i din*). Gangohi was part of the latter group. See Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love,* 119-120. These conflicting accounts may not be easily resolved, and point to the extent to which the legacies of the early Deobandis remain contentious.

British jail, and began a career teaching *hadith* after his release.[68] Although not officially

involved with Deoband until 1879, when he became chancellor (*sarparast*), from the outset

Gangohi was intimately involved with shaping the mission and curriculum of the school, insisting

on rigorous studies in the 'transmitted' sciences (*manqulat*) and deemphasizing the 'rational'

sciences (*ma`qulat*), such as logic and philosophy.[69]

Gangohi's views on the *mawlud* are gleaned mostly from his collection of *fatwas*.[70] On

the issue of the *mawlud*, Gangohi is stricter than both Imdadullah and his contemporaries; indeed,

he declines even to offer systematic reasoning for his decision to reject the practice outright.

Several *fatwas* from Gangohi's collection attest to this:

> Question: Is the *milad* festival permissible or not in the form in which it is known
> and customarily practiced in this age, including standing in praise of the Prophet
> (*qiyam*), the burning of censers of frankincense, the use of singing troupes and
> appointing a specific day for the festivities?
>
> Answer: This festival, which did not exist in the era of the Prophet Muhammad,
> in the era of the pious Sahaba, in the era of the Followers or the Followers of the
> Followers, or in the era of the *mujtahidin*, which was invented some 400 years
> later by a king whom most historians regard as immoral (*fasiq*), is an assembly of
> evil innovation (*bid`a zalala*). Previous `ulama' have already written about its
> illegality and nowadays many *fatwas* have been printed on the subject. There is
> no great need for a detailed rationale (*dalil*) [for this verdict]. The rationale for
> ruling it illegal is simply that it was not practiced in the first generations of Islam,
> and that great evils are witnessed during it.[71]

A similar *fatwa* offers a few additional reasons to reject *mawlud*, including standing up to honor

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[68] *Ibid.*, 128-129. However, Metcalf notes that stories of Gangohi's and Imdadullah's valiant struggles
against British rule only appear in sources after 1920, suggesting a nationalist bent in Deobandi
historiography. See Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 82.

[69] Barbara Metcalf, "Rashid Ahmad Gangohi," in *Dictionnaire biographique des savants et grandes figures
du monde musulman périphérique du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, 21-22. For a detailed discussion of the Dars-i
Nizami curriculum that Deoband adapted, see Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, New
Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005. I return to the Dars-i Nizami in some detail in the fourth chapter.

[70] His *fatwas* reveal the extent to which Sufism was an ongoing point of contention for the Deobandis;
nearly half deal directly with devotional aspects of Sufism, such as visiting saints' tombs (*ziyarat*),
visualizing one's *shaykh* (*tasawwur-i shaykh*) as a meditative practice, celebrating the death anniversary
(`urs*) of a saint, creating and using protective amulets (*ta`wiz*), listening to musical assemblies (*sama'*),
and so on.

[71] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 114.

the Prophet and certain practices' resemblance to Hindu religious piety:

> The customary *mawlud* gathering is *bid`a* because a mix of reprehensible matters is extremely detestable (*makruh tahrimi*). Standing in respect of the Prophet especially gives it the burden of being a *bid`a*, and having children sing songs brings about discord (*fitna*). The custom of reading the Fatihah [during the *mawlud*] is also *bid`a*, in addition to resembling actions of the Hindus. Muslims' imitation (*tashabuh*) of other peoples (*qaum*) is prohibited … It is not permissible to attend such merry-making events that contravene the Shari`a, and any money [earned or spent in the preparation of the *mawlud*] is *haram*.[72]

One individual who sought a *fatwa* states that Shah `Abd al-`Aziz participated in *mawlud* and `urs and wants to know if the sort of *mawlud* and `urs sanctioned by that great predecessor to the Deobandis remains legitimate. Gangohi responds without acknowledging Shah `Abd al-'Aziz at all, mentioning only that `urs once was permissible but no longer remains so.[73]

In Gangohi's *fatwas*, the detail of his response was in proportion to the detail of the inquiry to which it responds. And in the case of a short inquiry, Gangohi typically offered a terse response that illustrates his tendency to condemn a practice with minimal reasoning: "Question: According to sound *hadith*, is participating in a *mawlud* gathering acceptable if it is free of standing in respect of the Prophet, or not? Answer: Holding a *mawlud* gathering is not permissible in any condition."[74]

Once some people asked Gangohi if it is possible to give a lecture on the birth of the Prophet Muhammad without invoking any of the deviant customs associated with the *mawlud* festival. Gangohi replied that this is indeed possible, to which they requested that he demonstrate what such a '*mawlud*' would look like. Gangohi agreed, so he sent Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri to a home where the interested parties gathered. Muhammad Zakariyya describes the gathering:

> After the *mawlud* began, Khalil Ahmad read the *ayat* 'The Messenger has come to you' and explained it. He then explained some statements and deeds of Hazrat 'Abd al-Quddus [Gangohi] and the *bid`a* therein and exposed the false Sufis of today. After expounding on some events and details of the Prophet's birth from

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[72] *Ibid*., 115.

[73] *Ibid*., 115-116.

[74] *Ibid*., 130.

> *Tarikh-i Habib Allah* then the *mawlud* was finished … Many were very
> displeased towards the owner of the house, saying 'You invited us to your home
> and then you disgraced us'. But in reality, this *mawlud* was beneficial. Some of
> the people present thought that those who reject the *mawlud* reject every aspect
> of it, but many were disabused of this notion.[75]

This short anecdote is striking for what it reveals regarding Gangohi's view of a 'proper' *mawlud*:

one leading the *mawlud* should read some verses of the Qur'an, discuss some narrations about the

Prophet's birth, and explain why certain Sufi practices are *bid`a*. In a sense, the Deobandi critique

of Sufism is here embedded didactically in the very structure of the *mawlud*.

Ashraf `Ali Thanawi offered the most systematic early Deobandi treatment of the

mawlud. Thanawi was born in 1863 in Thana Bhavan, a small north Indian town not far from

Deoband. His father managed the estate of a wealthy landowner in Meerut but wanted a religious

education for his eldest son and sent Thanawi to the *madrasa* at Deoband, where he began his

studies in 1878.[76] Thanawi made his first *hajj* pilgrimage in 1884, where he took on Hajji

Imdadullah as his Sufi master, and later settled at the Sufi lodge at Thana Bhavan where

Imdadullah had lived and taught his disciples before his post-1857 exile.[77] From Thana Bhavan,

Thanawi met with hundreds of disciples in person, maintained a prolific correspondence with

many more via post, issued *fatwas* and wrote numerous scholarly treatises on topics ranging from

law, ethics, Sufism and even women's rights. Above all, Thanawi sought to chart a public role for

the twentieth century Indian *`ulama'*, and conceived of educating the masses on the rights and

wrongs of Sufism as an integral part of that pursuit.

Reform of Customs (*Islah-i Rusum*) is a short treatise that Thanawi wrote in order to

expose the dangers of numerous widespread customary practices in his time. Thanawi begins

Reform of Customs with the admonition that "in this age, most Muslims see … that carrying out

necessary and compulsory religious duties has not been lost, but customs (*rusum*) have been

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[75] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 294-295.

[76] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf Ali Thanawi*, 14-15.

[77] *Ibid.*, 25.

given a no less equal status."[78] The first chapter advises readers to abstain from seemingly innocuous activities such as dancing and singing, chess-playing, and the use of fireworks, and warns readers not to trim the beard, wear 'English' hair styles, or sport trousers below the ankles. The second chapter, following a slightly different tack, examines impermissible habits surrounding events in everyday life, such as birth, marriage, circumcision, and so on. Here I will concentrate on the third chapter, in which Thanawi goes into great detail in analyzing the problems with certain customary practices, but also offers a sort of hermeneutic basis for his critiques.

His analysis of *mawlud* is particularly germane to the shape of later debates within Deobandi circles. For Thanawi, there are three kinds of *mawlud*: the first is completely permissible, the second completely impermissible, and the third, an intermediate form, is permissible within certain parameters. From this, Thanawi extrapolates several general propositions about the boundaries of *bid`a* and *sunna*.

The first kind of *mawlud* assembly, Thanawi tells us, is permissible without any reservations whatsoever. This is a case in which some individuals gather "by chance" to discuss the life, birth, and virtues of the Prophet Muhammad. "The Prophet explained his own life and perfections in this way," says Thanawi. They have not been forced or compelled to gather for this *mawlud*, and they do not engage in any prohibited acts.[79]

The second kind of *mawlud* is the polar opposite of the first: in this gathering, "sweet-voiced" boys sing fabricated tales, bribes and other forms of *haram* money is exchanged, the organizers spend enormous sums for food and lighting in the pursuit of local fame and prestige. Moreover, participants pressure others to attend and ridicule those that do not, often skip the

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[78] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Islah-i Rusum*, Delhi: Jasim Book Depot, n.d. 3.

[79] *Ibid.*, 108.

compulsory daily prayers, and believe the Prophet Muhammad to be literally present at the

gathering.[80]

Significantly, while Thanawi concedes that not all *mawlud* gatherings of this type contain

every one of these iniquities, he insists that such a gathering is completely impermissible if even

one of them is present. We have already seen how, with Gangohi, the presence of one impurity

infects the whole: "This type of assembly is impermissible because of these unlawful elements,

and participating in it is also unlawful. Nowadays most *mawluds* are of this type. If perhaps not

all of these unlawful elements are present, by necessity, some of them are, and a single unlawful

element renders the whole unlawful, as is obvious."[81]

The third kind of *mawlud* is described as follows:

> There is neither the informality of the first kind nor the forbidden elements of the
> second kind. Although this form also has stipulations, they are *halal* and
> permissible (*mubah*). For example, the stories told are sound (*sahih*) and reliable,
> the storyteller is trustworthy and is not seeking fame, and the money involved is
> *halal* as well. There are no decorations and money is not wasted. The dress of the
> participants and the ablutions are in accordance with the *shari`a*, and if by chance
> something contrary to the *shari`a* happens then the lecturer refuses it on the basis
> of 'commanding the good' and explains necessary rules in accordance with the
> situation. If there is poetry, it is not set to music and its subject matter remains
> aligned with the *shari`a* and is not excessive. There is no hindrance in
> completing the required acts of worship, and the intention of the organizer is pure
> and only for the sake of seeking blessings and love for the Prophet … The
> attendees do not consider the Prophet to be omnipresent and a knower of the
> unseen (*`alim al-ghayb*). This assembly, in which such caution is taken, is rare.[82]

Thanawi leaves his true judgment on this final type of *mawlud* somewhat ambiguous. He states

that it is neither completely permissible nor completely impermissible.

Next, Thanawi presents his hermeneutic framework for these verdicts. In other words, he

asks, what are the theoretical constraints that Islamic law places upon events such as the *mawlud*?

These theoretical observations inform Deobandi reasoning about Sufi devotional practices at

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[80] *Ibid*., 108-109.

[81] *Ibid*., 112.

[82] *Ibid*., 112-113.

almost every level. We will see these arguments rehashed in contemporary polemical works, albeit without the nuance with which he presents them here.

First, it is expressly forbidden to "consider an unnecessary matter necessary or to act on it with the same or higher degree of persistence that one accords to necessary and obligatory acts, or to consider it blameworthy to forego this action or to censure those who do."[83] The *shari`a* forbids "restricting, stipulating, specifying, or making necessary" any particular belief or action if it simulates or mimics the normativity of the law. This is a succinct formulation of the same principle that appears in both Imdadullah and Gangohi: to perform any action with the same degree, consistency or intentionality that one is expected to grant *sunna* acts is prohibited. For example, Thanawi relates a *hadith* in which Ibn Ma`sud observed the Prophet occasionally leaving his prayer from the left side, even though he had said leaving from the right side was recommended. The point, Ibn Ma`sud says, is that one ought not extrapolate from something merely recommended that it is a commandment.[84]

Secondly, Thanawi reasserts the principle of a metonymic relation between an illicit part and otherwise licit whole; even one violation of the *shari`a* renders an otherwise legitimate action reprehensible. "A permissible (*mubah*) action," he writes, "in fact, even a praiseworthy (*mustahabb*) one, becomes unlawful and prohibited if combined with an unlawful action."[85] Thanawi offers the example of attending a dinner when invited; a *sunna* and even a praiseworthy act in principle, it becomes repugnant if *haram* activities take place.

Thirdly - perhaps the most important point for understanding Deobandi social interventions into Sufi practices - "As it is a commandment to save other Muslims from harm, if the elect (*khawass*) engages in some unnecessary action that corrupts the belief of the masses (`*awamm*) then this action will become reprehensible and prohibited for the elect as well. The

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[83] *Ibid*., 113.

[84] *Ibid*., 113-114.

[85] *Ibid*., 114.

elect should abandon such an action."[86] The inference here is that the elite, who are supposed to understand the rationale behind what is prohibited and what is accepted, must be cautious regarding what they say and how they conduct themselves in public view. We have seen how both Gangohi and Thanawi advanced the importance of protecting the masses from their own ignorance.

The fourth principle introduces a temporal relativity into what is permissible: that which was appropriate for past generations may no longer be appropriate for contemporary ones: "It is possible for something that was once lawful is no longer to be regarded as such; for, at that time there was no reason to deem it reprehensible, but now a reason to deem it reprehensible has arisen. Or something that is permitted in one place may be prohibited in other."[87] In some ways, this is the most surprising of Thanawi's claims; to what extent does this introduce a dangerous relativity into the normative maintenance of the *shari`a*? Could Sufis in other locales argue along these lines that *shari`a* allows, say, the death anniversary celebration of a Sufi saint even if there are compelling reasons to prohibit it in the subcontinent?

The fifth and final point concerns one of the most oft-cited justifications for a particular action in terms of *shari`a*: whether it has some 'benefit' to the masses. Thanawi approaches this logic with extreme caution. "If an action contrary to the *shari`a* has some benefit or public good (*maslaha*)," he argues, "but attaining this benefit or good is not necessary in terms of the *shari`a*, or there are other means of it, or these actions are done with the *intention* of attaining the benefit, or after seeing the benefit then the masses will not stop such an action - then it is not permissible."[88]

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[86] *Ibid*.

[87] *Ibid*., 116.

[88] *Ibid*. For a discussion of *maslaha* within discourses of the *`ulama'*, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman's "The 'Ulama of Contemporary Islam and their Conceptions of the Common Good," in Armando Salvarore and Dale F. Eickelman, eds. *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Leiden: Brill, 2004. For a more general assessment, with attention to contemporary debates, see Felicitas Opwis, "Islamic Law and Legal Change: The Concept of *Maslaha* in Classical and Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory," in Abbas Amanat and

So, for example, if someone attends a lecture on the Prophet's life and teachings and, say, feels an urgency to donate food, money or clothing to the poor, or perhaps even becomes so emotionally overwhelmed that he or she stands up, there is no harm in this *so long as* it does not become a habit and one is not doing it solely for the 'benefit' of aiding the poor but only for the pleasure of God. It is not that Thanawi opposes helping the poor, to be sure, but doing so *for that reason* is objectionable, since the only motive for such a gathering should be worship. And one ought not appoint a time for it, nor insist that others do it; it must be a purely spontaneous thing.[89] Motives for pursuing any such action must be solely for God's satisfaction. Thanawi rejects the utilitarian calculus of 'social goods'. In subsequent polemics, we will see Deobandis reject arguments for the *mawlud* based on the principle of *maslaha*, especially those that claim *mawlud* increases love for the Prophet among the masses or that `urs attracts non-believers to Islam. For the Deobandis, there can be no ulterior motive for honoring the Prophet or the Sufi saints.

Grave Danger: Commemorating Sufi Saints' Death Anniversaries

In the collected sayings (*malfuzat*) of Mahmud Hasan Gangohi - a pupil of Muhammad Zakariyya and one of the Deobandi scholars most instrumental for taking Deoband to southern Africa - someone asks him about the proper etiquette of visiting the grave of one's parents. Mahmud Hasan replies:

> When one goes to the grave, he should think of the high positions they held, the buildings they owned and the houses they once owned. They possessed orchards and cars. Some of them had children; some had extensive knowledge, and today all of them are in their graves. They had not taken anything of the world along with them into the grave. The only thing that they had taken along was their actions. If their actions were good then they will be in a good condition, and if their actions were evil then they will be in a miserable condition. May Allah Ta`ala shower His mercies on these people. Reflect over this in order that your love for the world decreases.[90]

Frank Griffel, eds. *Shari`a: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

[89] *Ibid*., 118-119.

This excerpt from Mahmud Hasan's teachings encapsulates the Deobandi approach to gravesites. Visiting graves is for one purpose, and only one: namely, to remind the living of the reality of death, to prompt reflection on the evanescence of this world and the eternity of the next. The early scholars of Deoband recognized the deep and subversive attraction that gravesites held for the Muslim masses. They were by no means the first to critique the practice of making pilgrimages to tombs; Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Jawzi were among the most vocal critics in the Islamic middle period.[91] Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab devoted a sizeable portion of his *Kitab al-Tawhid* to the condemnation of visiting graves for any purpose other than to be reminded of the reality of death.[92] Yet Deobandis' critiques are especially powerful, and have reverberated beyond scholarly texts into popular polemics, and are perhaps at least partially at the root of contemporary violence at Sufi gravesites in the subcontinent.

Hajji Imdadullah's discussion of `urs is brief. The contention concerns whether the *shari`a* sanctions setting aside a specially appointed day for Muslims to come together at the tomb of a saint to honor him.[93] Besides giving an opportunity for pleading for the mercy of the dead, Imdadullah explains how `urs provides a means for Sufis to meet one another and for Muslims to find potential Sufi teachers. He submits that this is clearly a social good (*maslaha*).[94] Citing a *hadith*, "Do not make my grave a site for an Eid," he says some `ulama' argue that it is forbidden to have fairs and festivities at the tomb and to decorate it with pomp and display. These `ulama' believe that the purpose of visiting tombs is recollection of the afterlife, but the meaning

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[90]Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, *Malfuzat-i Faqihulummat*, Durban: Madrasah Talim al-Din, 2010, 279-280.

[91] See the discussion in the fifth chapter of Christopher Taylor's *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Leiden: Brill, 1999.

[92] See Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, Riyadh: Dar as-Salam Publications, 1996, 82-87, as well as the discussion in Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: from revival and reform to global jihad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 66-69.

[93] Hajji Imdadullah, *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya*, 82.

[94] *Ibid.*, 82.

of this *hadith*, explains Imdadullah, is *not* that gathering at a tomb is forbidden, otherwise the caravans to Madina for visiting the Holy Cemetery would also be forbidden: "The truth is that visiting tombs, whether individually or in a group, is permissible, as well as conveying merit upon the dead through Qur'an recitation or [distributing] food, and it is established that this is a social good (*maslaha*)."[95]

In the distant past, for Gangohi, celebrations such as `urs may have been permissible when Muslims' collective morality was more secure, but today the 'corruption of the time' (*fasad al-zaman*) dictates a stricter demarcation of permissible and impermissible acts.[96] In one *fatwa* responding to a query about the legality of `urs, Gangohi writes that many things that were once permissible must now be forbidden.[97]

Stories describe Gangohi's repugnance at the `urs festival. In one such story, Gangohi felt powerless to stop the `urs taking place at the tomb of his own predecessor, `Abd al-Quddus Gangohi. When the `urs was being held in Gangoh, he would become ornery. One of Gangohi's most beloved students, Muhammad Salih Jalandhai, had come to visit him in Gangoh, but accidentally came during the `urs. Gangohi snubbed him, and Jalandhai was nonplussed as to why he received such treatment. When he finally realized the `urs was the reason behind Gangohi's irritability, Jalandhai said, "Master! I have no attraction to following `urs and the like. By God! I did not come to Gangoh for this reason and I had no idea that `urs is being celebrated here nowadays." Gangohi replied, "Although your intention was not to participate in the `urs, there were two men on the road coming to the `urs and you were the third. According to the Prophet, whoever supports a gathering is among them."[98]

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[95] *Ibid.*, 82-83.

[96] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 220.

[97] *Ibid*., 115-116. See also pg. 131 for a similar judgment on `urs.

[98] Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 289.

Thanawi, likewise, believed that the most pernicious popular devotions are those that surround gravesites. On the surface, there is some utility in visiting graves in general, as visiting tombs reminds the visitor of his or her own mortality.[99] But Thanawi knew all too well the emotional tug of the dead and its threat to *tawhid*. In *Heavenly Ornaments* (*Bihishti Zewar*), Thanawi lists tomb-based devotions first in his catalogue of impermissible innovations, which, he explicitly states, is arranged in order of their danger to public moral order:

> To hold fairs with great to-do at graves; to light lamps at graves; for women to go to graves; to offer shawls to cover the grave; to build a permanent monument at a grave; to revere graves excessively in order to please elders; to kiss or lick *ta`ziyas* or graves; to rub their dust on your face; to circumambulate them; to prostrate yourself or perform the canonical prayer in front of graves; to make offerings of candies, pudding (*halwa*), sweetcakes, and so forth; to keep *ta`ziyas* and flags and salute them or offer them *halwa* and cake.[100]

Thanawi is firm in that one cannot attend `urs gatherings without being adversely affected by the moral corruption that pervades them; even if one attends with the best of intentions, it will introduce in them a "propensity towards sin" (*mailan-i ma`siyat*).[101]

Thanawi lists off several other factors that, combined, shape his judgment against `urs. He submits that among the worst kinds of `urs are those that entail musical assemblies (*sama`*), and that these are "never, ever permissible according to the statements of the great Sufi masters."[102] Thanawi also rejects the common practice of traveling to a tomb for the sake of fulfilling some oath.[103] Covering tombs with shrouds or decorating them with lights is equally repugnant, as is making offerings of food or other items near the shrine.[104] But what of those who

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[99] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Islah-i Rusum*, 122.

[100] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, and Barbara Daly Metcalf. *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf `Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar: A Partial Translation with Commentary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 74.

[101] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Islah-i Rusum*, 121.

[102] *Ibid*., 122.

[103] *Ibid*., 123-124.

[104] *Ibid*., 125.

make the argument that shrine-based offerings actually benefit the poor, who are able to partake of the food offered? Thanawi rejects this notion immediately as a "ruse" (*hila*) since, he submits, the real intention of those who offer such things has nothing to do with feeding the poor; their intention is solely to glorify the shrine and its saint. If they really want to feed the poor, why do so at a Sufi shrine? The same logic, as we saw previously, informed his views on *mawlud*.

Besides the presence of morally corrupting forces, the real dangers are, as with the *mawlud*, in appointing some time or place for the `urs with such regularity that it intrudes on the normative space of the *shari`a*, and in believing that the saints are able to intercede with God on behalf of those who visit. If the sense of intercession (*tawassul*) that one has in mind when visiting a tomb is that saints have some direct leverage over the mechanics of the universe, this is a polytheism no different from the idol worship that God sent down the Qur'an in order to abolish.[105] But what if the sense of intercession is not about the saint's power, but rather about the saint's *knowledge*? The masses visit these tombs with the expectation that the saint will be able to bestow on them some insight into the future, for example, whether their children will reach a certain age. This, too, is deeply problematic for Thanawi. If one implies that the saint is essentially omniscient, then this is plainly *shirk*. But if one implies, by virtue of the proximity that the saint has to God, that somehow God conveys this knowledge to the saint, perhaps that is not *shirk*, says Thanawi, but such a view is unnecessary. In the latter case, why not just go directly to the source of such knowledge - in other words, to God?[106]

This encapsulates the particular theology and ontology to which Deobandis ascribed; they actively sought to flatten the hierarchies of the medieval Sufi cosmos, so that individual Muslims could, at least in theory, commune directly with God without any mediators. For centuries, Sufis had varied roles in the spiritual lives of their pupils, but Deobandis opposed the role of what Arthur Buehler called the 'mediating shaykh'. As the "sole intermediary between Prophet and

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[105] *Ibid*., 126.

[106] *Ibid*., 126-127.

disciple," the mediating shaykh stands in contrast to the 'directing shaykh', who guides "the daily

lives of initiated disciples." As Buehler explains, "While the activities of a directing-shaykh

enable disciples to arrive near God themselves, the mediating-shaykh 'transmits' the disciples'

needs to Muhammad, who then in turn intercedes with God."[107]

Kelley Pemberton has argued that Deobandis "sought to undercut the intercessory role of

the Sufi *shaykh* by making access to fundamental texts, teachings, and tenets of Islam available to

all, and simultaneously encouraging the idea that on the basis of such knowledge each individual

must develop the ability to make informed decisions about what constituted 'correct' and

'incorrect' matters of faith, rather than relying solely upon the dictates of spiritual guides."[108] I

believe she is correct for the most part, but I would qualify her claim by noting this replacement

of the Sufi *shaykh* with the morally edifying *text* is a process that reaches its zenith only with the

Tablighi Jama`at. Overall, with the Deobandis, the mediating role of Sufi *shaykhs* disappears

entirely, while the directing role is amplified dramatically, to the extent that the Sufi master's

primary role becomes perfecting the ethical lives of their pupils.[109] It is to this ethics, and its roots

in the Qur'an and the Prophetic model, that we now turn.

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[107] Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998, 12.

[108] Kelley Pemberton, "Islamic and Islamicizing Discourses: Ritual Performance, Didactic Texts, and the Reformist Challenge in the South Asian Sufi Milieu," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 17 (2002): 55-83, at 72.

[109] Their ideological rivals, the Barelwis, embraced the mediating role of Sufis, hence their continued emphasis on the reverence of Sufi saints' and the tomb as a site of that reverence. However, the Barelwis did not dispense with the directing role of their shaykhs; in Barelwi Sufism, direction and mediation coincide. Moreover, the Deobandi antagonism towards human-divine mediation within Sufism - a doctrine that Wahhabi thought takes to its logical extreme - also gave rise, it would seem, to their antagonism towards the Ahmadiyya and what Friedmann has called 'prophecy continuous'. As Friedmann shows, the Ahmadi notion of continuous prophecy, so repugnant to Deobandis and others, grew out of middle-period Sufism. With Deoband, the scope of revelation narrows, so that the Qur'an and *hadith* are the only remaining divine or divinely inspired sources of knowledge, whereas classical Sufism retains the notion that God still 'speaks' as it were to his saints (*awliya'*), through the revelatory modes of *ilham* or *wahy*. See Yohanan Friedmann's *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

CHAPTER TWO

What Sufism Is: Deobandi Sufism and the Ethics of the Self

The Deobandi projects of reforming the self and reforming society are interwoven at every level, and Deobandis mobilized the ethical vocabularies of Sufism to advance both. This chapter begins by briefly placing Deobandis' emphasis on ethical reform in the context reformist currents in the broader Islamic world. The dominance of 'reform' (*islah*) as a term and concept is something relatively novel in South Asian Islamic history, particularly in discourses on Sufism; the absence of an entry for '*islah*' in a major nineteenth century Indian dictionary of Islamic 'technical terms' (*istilahat*), published just a few years prior to the founding of Deoband, suggests the relative novelty of Deobandis' use of the term.[1] Deobandis' invocation of *islah* is linked to the broader currents of 'reform' and 'renewal' (*islah* and *tajdid*) that pervaded the Muslim world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but I will stress how the connotations of 'reform' in Deobandi discourses differ distinctly from its connotations in Middle Eastern contexts.

In continuity with the previous chapter, this chapter examines the works of Hajji Imdadullah, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, and Ashraf `Ali Thanawi to discern how early Deobandi scholars reconceived Sufism in terms of its grounding in Islam's sacred texts, which I posit here is at least partly an apologetical effort to defend Sufism against increasingly vocal critics during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when these three figures were composing their

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[1] See Muhammad A'la ibn `Ali Tahanawi's *Kitab Kashshaf istilahat al-funun*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862.

treatises. Imdadullah is significant not only in the contrasts and continuities between himself and later Deobandis, but equally in that he is scarcely concerned with 'defending' Sufism against its critics. I also show that, unlike Gangohi and Thanawi, he also sees the grave as a legitimate, and even beneficial, site for carrying out Sufi devotional rituals. Gangohi's tone is more defensive, and he endeavors in his *fatwas* to explain the mutually reciprocal and overlapping nature of Sufism and *shari`a* and the importance of Sufism in the purification of the self. Thanawi, finally, is the most systematic in presenting Sufism in all its mutual imbrications with the *shari`a* and ethics, as well as a full-scale defense of Sufism as not only legitimate in terms of Islamic legal normativity but quite literally *essential* for each and every Muslim.

Finally, the last section of this chapter provides a transition between the textual plane of Deobandi works on Sufism to the social plane of their very public polemics against illicit devotional practices. Deoband's critical and constructive projects were implicitly public from the beginning, with Gangohi taking advantage of new readerships in his *fatwas*. These scholars debated the roles of the *`ulama'* among Muslim publics and how to implement their vision for reform. This debate about how to engage with Muslim publics informs subsequent Deobandi approaches to educating these publics and the roles of public assemblies (*majalis*) for shaping ethical lives, debates that will become supremely important for understanding South African Deobandis.

Purifying the Self, Purifying Society: *Islah* and *Tajdid*

Islah, typically translated as 'reform', is an ubiquitous term in Deobandi writings on Sufism. Thanawi's *The Reform of Customs* (*Islah-i Rusum*), discussed below, is a prominent example, but the word occurs throughout the work of Gangohi and others. One of Thanawi's collected works of reformist treatises, for example, is titled *The Reformist Program* (*Islahi*

Nisab).[2] The scope of reform includes not just the social, as in Thanawi's call to reform customs, but also the self, as in Gangohi's call to reform the heart (*islah-i qalb*).[3] Indeed, both senses capture the Deobandi reformist belief that the moral health of the individual is inseparable from the social health of the Muslim body politic.

The semantic root, *s-l-h*, resonates with some of the most positive and cherished values in the Qur'an, connoting peace and reconciliation (*sulh*), what is right and proper (*salah*), and what is sound, virtuous or devout (*salih*). The Qur'an aligns *islah* closely with the Prophetic mission through history; the Prophet Shuayb, for instance, tells those to whom he was sent that he has come to implement *islah* on behalf of God. Not all who do *islah* are prophets; the Qur'an repeatedly praises the '*muslihun*', those who work towards *islah*.[4] Generally, '*islah*' connotes acts of correction, restoration, and improvement, but I choose to translate it as 'reform' because of how it is used in Deobandi discourse, namely in the sense of 'reforming' customs or Sufi devotions that have become corrupted, decadent or immoral.

'Reform' is a loaded term that demands clarification. Parsing precisely what 'reform' means in various contexts is difficult. As a case in point, Fillipo and Caroline Osella recently attempted to distinguish between several broad, activist trends of the last two centuries: 'Islamic modernism', according to their view, "refers to projects of change aiming to re-order Muslims' lifeworlds and institutional structures in dialogue with those produced under Western modernity;" 'Islamism' "insists upon Islam as the heart of all institutions, practice and subjectivity - a privileging of Islam as the frame of reference by which to negotiate every issue of life," and finally, 'reformism' denotes "projects whose specific focus is the bringing in line of religious

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[2] Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Islahi Nisab: Tashih-i 'aqa'id o 'A'mal, tahzib o tamaddun-i islami*, Lahore: Maktabah-yi Rashidiyya, 1977.

[3] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, 99-100.

[4] John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," in John L. Esposito, ed. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, 33.

beliefs and practices with the core foundations of Islam, by avoiding and purging out innovation, accretion and intrusion of 'local custom."[5]

Global movements such as Deoband blur the boundaries of this tripartite division: while they fit only marginally within the rubric of 'Islamic modernism' as defined here, and while they are principally a 'reformist' institution according to this definition, Deoband evinces even distinctly 'Islamist' impulses. The *`ulama'* of Deoband and its offshoots, such as the Tablighi Jama`at, would eagerly assert that Islam is, at least ideally, the core of all their "institutions, practice and subjectivity."[6] Another problem arises when the Osellas juxtapose 'reformism' with 'traditionalism'. The juxtaposition is immediately qualified; they point out that 'reform' and 'tradition' are not stable categories, of course; but Deoband is an institution that is *simultaneously* both reformist and traditionalist. One could say Deoband is as much a reformist movement within a traditionalist framework as a traditionalist movement within a reformist framework.

A few key ideas have animated transnational Muslim discourses on *islah*: a belief that worship had to be 'restored' to its 'original' and uncorrupted form; the elimination of practices that did not seem to have any origination during the era of the Prophet and his immediate successors, such as the recitation of the Qur'an at tombs or the Prophet's *mawlud* celebration; transcending the divide between the various schools of Muslim law; and overcoming the historic

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[5] Fillipo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Introduction: Islamic Reformism in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008): 247-257, at 248.

[6] Throughout this dissertation, I am examining how the uniquely *Deobandi* form of Sufism is articulated and transmutated in various texts and contexts. The Osellas' article criticizes the problematic but all too common juxtaposing of 'good' Sufi Islam and 'bad' reformist Islam, noting how this sort of rhetoric (1) re-inscribes the dichotomy between scripturalist and local Islams, which does not do justice to ways that both 'reformists' and 'traditionalists' reference and engage with scripture; (2) suggests that 'reform' and 'tradition' are stable categories, rather than rhetorical positions formed in the context of polemics and public debate; (3) implies the particularism of Indian practices that are not at all particular to South Asia, and (4) implies Sufi practices are marked by fluidity and openness while reformist practices are marked by closed-mindedness and lack of creativity. As the Osellas put it, "In South Asia as elsewhere much ethnographic work celebrates *sufi*-inspired forms of Islam as tolerant, plural, authentic and so on, against a maligned Other of reformist Islam. The latter is often regarded as a threat to what are argued to be culturally specific forms of South Asian popular Islam." See Fillipo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Introduction: Islamic Reformism in South Asia," 249.

divide between Sunnis and Shi`as.[7] Though Deobandis initiated one of the most important calls

for 'reform' (*islah*) in the previous two centuries, academic discussions of *islah* almost invariably

focus on reformist movements in the Middle East; South Asian movements, and Deoband in

particular, have received very little scholarly attention. As a concept in modern Islam, *islah* has

been associated above all with the Salafi movement of the Middle East, and particularly with the

names of Jamal al-Din Afghani, Rashid Rida, Muhammad Abduh and other nineteenth and

twentieth century reformers associated with the Salafi movement.[8]

Yet the Deobandis too, as we will see, made frequent use of this concept in their writings,

and disagreed with the Salafis on numerous points. The fact that Salafis and Deobandis could

press the same concept into the service of vastly different ends points to the flexibility and

polyvalence of '*islah*'. This is no place for an exhaustive comparison, but some of the differences

are as striking as the similarities. To take one example, Salafis abhorred commitment to a single

legal school (*taqlid*) as a servile dependence on past scholars, and advocated returning directly to

the scriptural sources to form independent legal judgments (*ijtihad*).[9] Deobandis have regarded

adherence to a single Islamic legal school as a fundamental part of their ideology (*maslak*) and

typically regard 'modernist' opposition to *taqlid* - as in Abduh's call to "liberate thought from the

shackles of *taqlid*"[10] - as anathema. To take another example, for its exponents in the modern

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[7] A. Merad, "Islah," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. The *Encyclopedia of Islam* entry for *islah* lists such factors as: the influence of Wahhabism, greater access to printing, reactions to encroaching Western culture, reactions to the liberalization of Ottoman society, and others. In the subsection for "India-Pakistan," Aziz Ahmad mentions none of the traditionalist `ulama', concentrating instead on the subcontinent's counterparts to the Middle East's reformist intellectuals-namely Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal and similar figures. One senses that the traditionalist `ulama', whether of Deobandi or Barelwi inclinations, are simply off the radar because their version of *islah* does not conform to the standard one.

[8] See Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010 for a recent introductory study of Muhammad Abduh.

[9] For the *Salafi* approach to *taqlid* and *ijtihad*, see, among other studies, the introduction to Roel Meijer, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 4-6.

Middle East, *islah* was typically an outwardly political project. What is striking about the

Deobandi approach to *islah*, on the other hand, is how overwhelmingly apolitical it strives to be,

concentrated almost exclusively on the self rather than politics or society writ large. Of course,

some Deobandis have become intimately involved in politics;[11] what I wish to underscore here is

that their use of '*islah*' is almost always in the context of their works on reforming individual

morality, works that are implicitly, if not explicitly, apolitical.

Deobandi scholars have largely avoided invoking a term that is nearly synonymous with

islah in especially Middle Eastern contexts: *tajdid*, 'renewal'. There are at least two reasons for

this. First, the term *tajdid* is closely linked to an important concept in Deobandi thought, that of

the *mujaddid*, the 'renewer' who, according to a well-known *hadith*, would arrive at the

beginning of every Islamic century to renew the global community of Muslims.[12] Deobandis

widely claimed Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) as the 'renewer' of the second millennium, while Shah

Wali Allah later presented himself as the *mujaddid* of the twelfth Islamic century. In fact, *tajdid*

and *ijtihad* often went hand in hand; the advocate of *tajdid* has generally "claimed the right to

make his own judgment based directly on an independent analysis of the Qur'an and Sunna. The

mujaddid has not felt bound by the interpretations and ideas of the teachers and schools that

emerged after the times of the Prophet and his companions."[13]

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[10] Quoted in Albert Hourani, *Islamic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 140. See also Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2010, 117-121.

[11] The prominent example, of course, being Husain Ahmad Madani. See Barbara Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2009. I am personally unaware whether Madani used the term '*islah*' in his own works, but Metcalf's study does not mention *islah* at all.

[12] The *hadith* in question is found in the *Sunan* of Abu Da'ud: "Truly, God will send to this *umma* at the turn of every century one who will renew religion" (*Inna allah yab'ath li-hadhihi al-umma 'ala ra's kul mi'a sana man yujaddid laha amr diniha*). Ella Landau-Tasserson, "The 'Cyclical Reform': A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79-117, at 79. A thorough study of premodern Arabic sources on the *mujaddid* traditions, this article does not address *tajdid* and the *mujaddid* in the Indian subcontinent at all, unfortunately.

[13] John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," 37.

A second reason may be that *tajdid* was associated, like *islah*, with sweeping Islamist political projects that the Deobandis abhorred, for example in its use by Syed Abu A'la Maududi (d. 1979). Maududi mobilized the language of *tajdid* towards his view that "the Islamic system of law … needs for its enforcement in all its details the coercive power and authority of the state."[14] As Seyyed Vali Nasr has stated, "In Maududi's formula, although individual piety featured prominently, in the final analysis, it was the society and the political order that guaranteed the piety of the individual."[15] Deobandis inverted this approach; one had to reform the individual to reform society, a principle that becomes especially salient in the Tablighi Jama`at. For Maududi and others who advocated *tajdid*, one reformed society first, and reformed selves would follow.

Deobandis saw the defense of both *taqlid* and Sufism against the attacks of Salafis and Ahl-i Hadith as part of the same broader traditionalist program. In fact, Thanawi's nephew, Zafar Ahmad Uthmani (d. 1974), composed a massive, 21-volume work - *I`la al-sunan* - to do just that. While most of the volumes focus on defending Hanafi jurisprudence from the attacks of the Ahl-i Hadith, the final volume on Sufism demonstrates the extent to which Deobandi recast Sufism as ethics.[16] Defining Sufism as "entirely *adab*,"[17] Uthmani regards it as a "branch of the Sacred Law [*fiqh*]" and conceives it entirely in terms of *adab* and *akhlaq*. "Good character traits may be present in some cases by innate disposition and nature. More commonly, however, they must be acquired by accustoming oneself to performing good works, observing those of good works and

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[14] Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 57.

[15] *Ibid*., 56-57.

[16] The very fact that an English translation of the final volume of *I'la al-sunan* was titled *Sufism and Good Character* points to this. See Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, *Sufism and Good Character: prophetic guidance on the spiritual path*, Santa Barbara: White Thread Press, 2004. For a discussion of the *I'la al-sunan* generally, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 41-49.

[17] Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, *Sufism and Good Character*, 7.

keeping their company. They are the worthy associates and brethren in godliness, for natures

acquire both good and bad from the company one keeps."[18]

Hajji Imdadullah: Sufism before Apologetics

Deobandis like Zafar Ahmad Uthmani were all too aware that Sufism was under attack in

other parts of the Muslim world from Salafis and Ahl-i Hadith alike, and became among the most

ardent defenders of Sufism's place in Islam, at the same time that they endeavored to reform it

from within. Today, an explosion of Deobandi literature has emerged that opposes Salafi Islam

not just because of its rejection of *taqlid*, but also because of its antipathy to traditional Sufism.

The impulse to defend traditional Sufism against these external attacks runs through nearly all of

the Deobandi discourses on Sufism. Hence a common trope cycles throughout their works: that

Sufism cannot be separated from, and is coterminous with, the *shari`a*. This view that Sufism is

not only compatible with Islam as a whole, but is positively *integral to it*, is one that is repeated

so often by Deobandis that it becomes, in a sense, apologetical in tone.

It is easy, at first glance, to gloss over the *shari`a*/Sufism equation in the writings of

Gangohi and Thanawi, which I will examine below. However, we can appreciate the significance

of this equation by noting its absence in the work of Hajji Imdadullah. Imdadullah did feel

compelled to 'defend' Sufism in the way that his successors did. He did not *theorize* Sufism, or

Sufism's relationship to *shari`a*, in a way that is as explicit as it is in his successors' work. His

essays make little effort to 'justify' Sufism in terms of the Qur'an or *hadith*. As we will argue

below, the effort to do so for Gangohi and Thanawi hinges at least partially on their wider, more

directly public audiences, whom they believed it was their duty to guide and direct, such that the

average Muslim could become, in the words of a later Deobandi, a "perfect believer" (*mu'min-i

kamil*).[19]

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[18] Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, *Sufism and Good Character*, 30.

Written in Mecca after the abortive 1857 revolt, Imdadullah's essay "The Brilliance of Hearts" (*Ziya' al-Qulub*) is a manual for the performance of Sufi *zikr*. Defining *zikr* as "remembering God and forgetting all else, drawing the heart near to the presence of God,"[20] the bulk of this treatise offers detailed accounts of postures and ways of regulating the breath. The basic technique articulated here is the regulation of the breath (*pas-i anfas*), defined as "drawing in the breath and exhaling the breath, silently or loud, while performing *zikr*, saying 'ila Llah' during the inhale and 'la ilaha' during the exhale."[21] Means of controlling the breath are linked closely to the anatomy of the human body, suggesting Imdadullah's attempts to incorporate new 'modern' knowledge of human physiology into these meditative techniques.[22] As with later Deobandi writings on Sufism, eradicating negative moral traits from oneself is key to Imdadullah's essay, which he describes as a manual for curing "diseases of the heart" such as jealousy (*hasad*), greed (*bukhl*), pride (*ghurur*), and spite (*kinah*).[23] Imdadullah recognizes, however, that each spiritual illness demands a unique cure, hence the *zikr* formulas enumerated here can be prescribed for specific ailments. From the outset Imdadullah notes that the *zikr* techniques of the various Sufi orders have begun to merge in some ways, prompting him to draw on multiple lineages here and entrusting the Sufi masters to tell the difference when necessary.[24]

Three aspects of this text are relevant to understanding later Deobandi understandings of Sufism, especially the works of Gangohi and Thanawi that I will examine subsequently in this

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[19] Manzur Nu'mani, *Islam kya hai*, Lucknow: Kakori Offset Press, 2008, 11.

[20] Hajji Imdadullah *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya,* 13.

[21] *Ibid.,* 18-19.

[22] *Ibid.,* 23. The 'heat' generated by retention of the breath, says Imdadullah, actually dissolves the "fat" (*charbi*) and "moisture" (*rutubat*) gathered in the heart, which he compares to Satanic "whisperings". Scott Kugle sees evidence here of Imdadullah's position at the cusp of Western scientific medical knowledge and classic Islamic views of the body. See his chapter, "Body Revived: The Heart of Hajji Imdadullah," in *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

[23] *Ibid.,* 9-10.

[24] *Ibid.,* 8.

chapter. First, as I have mentioned, there is a direct continuity between Imdadullah's focus on purging the self of negative qualities and later works. And yet, secondly, unlike later texts by Gangohi and Thanawi, this essay is not at all concerned with the defensive apologetics of defining how Sufism relates to *shari`a*. Third, Imdadullah sees no potential trouble in allowing *zikr* to take place in the precincts of Sufi tombs. For instance, the latter half of this treatise focuses substantially on *istikhara*, sleeping or meditating, in a mosque or often in the precincts of a tomb, for the purpose of gaining knowledge and guidance in the form of the veridical dream (*ru'ya*). Reformists have typically rejected this technique even though Sufi icons such as Ruzbihan Baqli advocated it.[25] Moreover, this practice has a long pedigree in Chishti Sufi circles; Shah Kalimallah Jahanabadi of Delhi (d. 1729), often credited with 'reviving' the Chishti *silsila* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by making it more palatable to the *`ulama'*, was an advocate of certain techniques of *istikhara*. In his *Kashkul-i Kalimi* Shah Kalimallah recommended *zikr* at Sufi saints' graves as a means for disciples to communicate with the souls of saints.[26] Similarly, Imdadullah offers concise prescriptions for effecting a vision (*kashf*) through meditative practices and sleeping near the tombs of Sufi saints. Oral recitation of prescribed formulas is an essential ingredient in effecting the desired vision. One formula proposes:

> The devotee should emphatically recite via a thousand rhythmic beats (*zarb*): "Praise be to God" to his right, "O Holy God" to his left, "Lord of the Angels" towards the sky, and "O Soul" towards his heart, and then facing the intended direction, he will meet the intended soul or spirit. This meeting will take place by means of a thousand recitations, whether awake or while dreaming.[27]

Another formula recommends explains how to acquire knowledge about or from a deceased Sufi master:

> First, say "O Lord" for twenty-one rhythmic beats, and then recite "O Spirit" towards the sky, "O Spirit" over the tomb and "O Spirit of the Spirit" on the

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[25] T. Fahd, "*Istikhara*," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 259-60.

[26] Nile Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, 3 (2003): 287-313, at 307.

[27] Hajji Imdadullah, *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya*, 44.

heart. God willing, in dreaming or in wakefulness, you will gain knowledge of the state of the deceased. There is an additional way. First, after sitting near the tomb, recite the Fatiha over the deceased and then say "Bring a vision, O Light" towards the sky, and say "Bring a vision, O Light" towards the heart, and over the tomb, and then face in the direction of the heart.[28]

Elsewhere Hajji Imdadullah prescribes "A Method for Discovering a Spiritual Link with a Living or Dead Saint" (*ahl-i Allah*):

This method is as follows: If he is alive, then sit together with him, and if he is dead, sit together with his tomb. Then empty yourself of all spiritual bonds and then pray in the palace of the Knower of the Unknown, saying "O Omniscient One! O Knowing One! O Manifest One! Make me knowledgeable and tell me of his inner states." And facing in the direction of his spirit, after a moment, your own spirit will be given over to his.[29]

Comparing Imdadullah's work to the teachings of a later Deobandi scholar, Hakim Muhammad Akhtar, underscores how differently later Deobandis approached the issue of graves, particularly those of deceased Sufi masters. For Hakim Akhtar, after a Sufi master's death, one must find a living one. "After the demise one's *shaykh*, one could meditate by his grave one hundred thousand times and [even then] reform (*islah*) will not be forthcoming," he writes. "He is unable to remove himself from the well of the lower self's desires. It is necessary to have a living *shaykh* in order to attain freedom from the lower self and achieve its reformation."[30]

Later Deobandis reject the sort of meditative practice at Sufi tombs that Imdadullah advocates. While Imdadullah's work is a precursor for later Deobandis' emphasis on Sufism as principally a matter of personal self-perfection and morality, what we do *not* find in Imdadullah's work is an explicit need to defend Sufism from external attacks, to justify Sufism in terms of the Qur'an or *sunna*. This does not suggest that he does not believe that Sufism *is* integral to Islamic piety; rather, this is so obvious that it is not something that must be stated outright. With Gangohi, this is no longer the case.

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[28] *Ibid*., 45.

[29] *Ibid.,* 55.

[30] Muhammad Hakim Akhtar, *Manazil-i Suluk*, Karachi: Kutub Khana-yi Mazhari, 1992, 42.

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi: Sufism is/as the Law

Even in his earliest writings, Gangohi had already assimilated Sufism to ethics. As with

Zafar Ahmad Uthmani much later, Gangohi asserted that Sufism could be reduced to ethical

demeanor (*adab*). One of Gangohi's early works states:

> The Sufi's knowledge is that of the inner and outer aspects of the religion and of
> the power of divine certainty (*yaqin*). This is highest form of knowledge. The
> Sufi's reality is in the rectification of ethics and in remaining perpetually turned
> towards God. The realities of Sufism are to be adorned with God's ethical
> characteristics, the eradication of one's will, and absorption in seeking the
> satisfaction of God. The Sufi's ethics are identical to those of the Prophet
> Muhammad … *The entirety of Sufism is in fact adab*.[31]

Unlike Imdadullah, Gangohi seems to initiate an apologetic strain in Deobandi works,

equating Sufism and *shari`a* in response to Salafi and Wahhabi critics who were beginning to

reject Sufism wholesale. Gangohi subscribed to the notion that knowledge of Sufism was

completely synonymous with knowledge of proper, 'orthodox' belief and practice. Knowledge of

the Sufi path (*tariqa*) and knowledge of normative Islamic practice (*shari`a*) are, for Gangohi, the

very same thing; the former is simply an internalization of the latter: "Both [*tariqa* and *shari`a*]

are one. Outwardly, it is a matter of performing the *shari`a*. When the rules of the *shari`a* enter

the heart, naturally they will remain. This is *tariqa*. Both are derived from the rules of the Qur'an

and *hadith*."[32]

One of the longest *fatwas* in his collection, "On the difference between Sufism and

shari`a," demonstrates this point well. Here, the one requesting the *fatwa* repeatedly inquires why

Sufis and *`ulama'* have come to represent dueling, competing cultures of Muslim piety. It begins

with the following question:

> Are *shari`a*, which some call 'knowledge of the book' (*ilm-i safina*), and Sufism,
> which some call 'knowledge of the heart' (*ilm-i sina*), one and the same thing, or
> two different things? If they are one, then why not say that 'purification'
> (*tazkiya*) comes only through external knowledge (*ilm-i zahiri*) and, why not
> stipulate that every *`alim* is a Sufi and every Sufi an *`alim*? As for one who is a

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[31] Quoted in Muhammad Zakariyya, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, 292-293. (emphasis added)

[32] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 214-217.

mujtahid of external knowledge [i.e. *fiqh*] why can't he engage in *ijtihad* within Sufism?

The author wants to know, if indeed Sufism and *shari`a* are the same, why are there divisions of religious labor, so to speak, in the first place, divisions that distinguish between Sufis and *`ulama'*? Even more provocatively, he asks, why not apply the language of ranks in Islamic law (e.g. *mujtahid*) to Sufism, and vice versa, so that a Sufi like Mu`in al-Din Chishti is a '*mujtahid*' of Sufism? His question for Gangohi continues:

> In fact, some *`ulama'* completely deny the existence of Sufism … Within Sufism, there exist thousands of *`ulama'* and great scholars who have a lineage within Sufism, yet among the throngs of *`ulama'* there is no knowledge of this, and that includes Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Muhaddith, who were great scholars in their *hadith* criticism. But there was no Sufi order that we can trace back to them.

Gangohi's lengthy response reasserts his basic argument that Sufism is *shari`a* internalized; what this means on a practical level is a complete unification of right knowledge and ethical action:

> Knowledge of *shari`a* and knowledge of Sufism are the very same thing, and *shari`a* and Sufism are also the same … To perform a duty or necessary deed against the will of the lower self (*nafs*) is called an action in line with *shari`a*. When sincerity (*ikhlas*) and love for the reality of God completely encompass the depths of the heart, that is called Sufism. So long as knowledge and practice are in conflict with one another, *shari`a* will dominate. And when the conflict dissipates, that is Sufism … Likewise, the master jurists were involved in Sufism. But they did not involve themselves in the investigation of this field of knowledge. The external form of the *shari`a* was an obligation, so they understood its explanation to be more important. Yet they were complete experts of Sufism, because Sufism is substantiated by and derived from the *hadith*, and most masters within Sufism were *`ulama'*, but were not busy with investigating *shari`a*. It was sufficient that they be part of a group of *`ulama'* who wrote about the internal explanations of *shari`a*. Some Sufis possessed enough knowledge about *fiqh* but were also specialists and scholars of the subtleties of Sufism, and thus they did not involve themselves in both fields of knowledge. Similarly, some of the *`ulama'* were major scholars of both fields of knowledge.[33]

In his response, Gangohi does not assimilate *shari`a* to Sufism; he assimilates Sufism to *shari`a*. In positing a higher synthesis between the two, he implicitly privileges the normative moral order of *shari`a*, regarding Sufism as an intensification and interiorization of its ethos. True Sufism, for Gangohi is so intertwined with proper ethical conduct that the very possibility of attaining a

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[33] *Ibid.*

mystical state (*hal*) "depends entirely on the piety and morals of the individual in question."[34]

Ashraf `Ali Thanawi: Sufism, the Qur'an and the Hadith

By the time Ashraf `Ali Thanawi began his literary career in earnest, Muslim modernists, on the one hand, and Salafis and Wahhabis on the other, had leveled vicious accusations against Sufis and Sufism. No longer was there a need merely to advise and caution Muslim publics over the nuances of Sufi practice, though that need certainly remained; now, Thanawi and other Deobandis found themselves having to defend 'Sufism' as a whole, navigating a narrow path between their own ongoing critique of Sufism from within and their defense of Sufism as integral to the Islamic experience from without.

Thanawi, therefore, understood that he had to demonstrate that Sufism is rooted firmly in the Qur'an and *sunna* if he hoped to counter Sufism's most hostile critics; Salafis and Wahhabis vociferously denied that Sufism was anything but an accretion that had no basis in the scriptural sources of Islam. One way of defending Sufism was to show meticulously how the Qur'an and *hadith* are wellsprings of Sufi ethics; the corollary to this approach was to show how other cultural accretions associated with 'Sufism' were in fact antithetical to it. The first is what I am calling, throughout this dissertation, Deoband's 'constructive' project: fashioning and advancing a Sufi ethics derived from the Qur'an and *sunna*. The second is what I am calling the 'critical' project: purging and purifying Sufism from the inside out while policing its boundaries.

The aim of Thanawi's *Shari`a and the Sufi Path* (*Shari`at o Tariqat*) is to demonstrate that Sufism is firmly grounded in Islam's scriptural sources. Thanawi begins by defining both *shari`a* and *tariqa* at length before proceeding to discussion of Sufi initiation (*bai`at*), relations between a Sufi master and disciple, and spiritual exercises for Sufis. But the bulk of the treatise comprises elaborations on Sufi ethical traits, followed by a list of technical terms (*istilahat*)

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[34] *Ibid.*, 227.

pertaining to Sufism.[35]

He begins by asserting like Gangohi that Sufism is no more and no less than the

internalization of the Shari`a:

> *Shari`a* is the name for the collection of rules from which all inward and outward
> actions derive. In the terminology of the ancients the word '*fiqh*' had a meaning
> synonymous with *shari`a*. … Then in the terminology of the present, the part of
> Shari`a connected to outward actions became '*fiqh*' and the part connected to
> inward actions became 'Sufism', and the paths for these inward actions is called
> '*tariqat*'.[36]

To disabuse the reader of the notion that this is simply self-evident, Thanawi notes with a good

deal of irony that 'wayward Sufis' and 'superficial' `ulama' (*khushk `ulama'*) actually both

uphold the same erroneous notion: that Sufism is not to be found in the Qur'an and *sunna*:

> The roots of Sufism exist in the Qur'an and the *hadith* but people seem to
> understand Sufism as something absent from the Qur'an and *hadith*. Of course
> this is erroneous. Wayward Sufis and superficial `ulama' alike believe that
> Qur'an and *hadith* are free of Sufism. But both these views are in error. The
> superficial `ulama' say that Sufism is nothing but this is delusional. The wayward
> Sufis say that the Qur'an and *hadith* contain only external rules, that Sufism is
> knowledge of the internal, and believe - God forbid! - Qur'an and *hadith* are not
> necessary. In short, both groups believe that the Qur'an and *hadith* are devoid of
> Sufism … But that which is not in the Qur'an and *hadith* is not Sufism.[37]

It is one thing to say that Sufism is 'based on' the Qur'an and Hadith, but Thanawi is making a

stronger claim; if it does not exist in the Qur'an and Hadith it *cannot* be related to Sufism.

A paramount concern for Thanawi, in this and other works, is the popularization of Sufi

ethics; in his view, "every believer" (*har mu'min*) should adopt the teachings of Sufism into their

lives, and all even have the opportunity of becoming 'saints' (*awliya'*). Thanawi even provides

the felicitous phrase, 'mass sainthood' (*wilayat-i 'amma*), to describe this idea. Only two aspects

of Sufi ethics are necessary to enter this level of 'sainthood': faith (*iman*) and consciousness of

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[35] It is worth noting that Thanawi's list of Sufi technical terms (*istilahat*) in this treatise includes none of
the disputed devotional practices to which Imdadullah gave so much attention.

[36] Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Shari`at o Tariqat*, 34-35. Cf. Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Malfuzat-i Hakimulummat*, Vol.
6, Multan: Idara-yi Ta'lifat-i Ashrafiyya, 2003, 247-248.

[37] *Ibid*.

God (*taqwa*). At the "lowest" level of attaining these two traits, one has reached 'general

sainthood', unattainable without "interior reform" (*islah-i batin*); at the "highest" level, when

one's faith and consciousness of God has been "perfected," then one has attained 'sainthood of

the elect' (*wilayat-i khaas*) and can properly be called a 'saint' (*wali*).[38]

The bulk of the text is concerned with outlining the 'stages' (*maqamat*) of ethical self-

improvement, which entails both the acquisition of positive traits and the removal of negative

ones. Internal ethical reform (*islah*) is the goal of pursuing these stages.[39] In a comprehensive

chart displaying the interconnections of stages on the Sufi path, Thanawi proposes a fundamental

division between the 'volitional' (*maqsud*) and the 'non-volitional' (*ghair maqsud*) aspects of the

Sufi journey. The 'volitional' aspects comprise those actions over which the Sufi has some

control, whereas the 'non-volitional' are due entirely to the beneficence of God; they happen *to*

the traveler along the Sufi path. The 'non-volitional' dimensions consist largely of 'states'

(*ahwal*) and 'stations' (*maqamat*).

First, the 'volitional' dimension is divided into (1) 'actions' (`*amal*) comprising the

acquisition of noble virtues (*akhlaq-i hamida*) and the divestment of evil virtues (*akhlaq-i razila*),

as well as (2) 'benefits of association' with other Sufis. The 'unintentional' dimension is divided

into three parts: (a) the 'means' by which one can facilitate these involuntary states, including

classic Sufi ascetic techniques such as sleeping, speaking, eating and associating with others as

little as possible, as well as (b) meditative techniques, which Thanawi further divides into those

which are potentially hazardous (*tasawwur-i shaykh*, *ishq-i majazi*, and *sama`*) and those which

are not (*zikr*, *shugl*, *muraqaba*).

The states are divided into those that are harmless (*firasat-i sadiqa*, *wahdat al-wujud*,

fana' o baqa', *ilham*, *ijabat-i du'a*, *ru'ya-i saliha*, *wajd*) and those that can be harmful

(*mushahida*, *karamat*, *qabz o bast*, *tasarruf*, *istigharaq*, *kashf-i koi*, *kashf-i ilahi*, and *wahdat al-*

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[38] *Ibid.*, 36.

[39] *Ibid.*, 49-51.

wujud ma`a sukr). Finally, he lists the five 'obstacles' to the Sufi's progress: worship of beauty, haste in the Sufi path, hypocrisy, opposition to the Sunna, and opposition to one's *shaykh*.[40]

What should we make of this systemization of Sufi experience? Several points are worth observing here. First, even though the involuntary states depend solely on the grace of God, the Sufi will only receive these graces after disciplining the mind (through meditations) and disciplining the body (through physical deprivations). Second, and more germane to the argument I am making here, the entire edifice of Sufi experience depends on the initial feat of purging the self of negative qualities and adorning the self with the noble virtues.

Thanawi's *Issues in Sufism in Light of the Hadith* (*Masa'il-i tasawwuf Ahadis ki Roshni Men*) demonstrates how the *hadith* can cast light on issues that Sufis face in their day to day lives, a kind of 'self-help' reference manual for Sufis.[41] Crucially, by the time Thanawi formulated this collection of issues, those that Imdadullah treated in *Decision on Seven Controversies* have all but disappeared. Here Thanawi's treatise, written for fellow Sufis, mentions nothing of issues such as *mawlud* and `*urs*, and very little having to do with pilgrimage to Sufi saints' tombs. These are simply not addressed, the implication being that Sufism as such has nothing to do with the controversies treated by Imdadullah.

The central idea here is that Sufism is not only grounded in, but can literally be derived entirely from, the Qur'an and *hadith*. For Thanawi, all the most prized ethical traits of the perfect Sufi are contained in the Qur'an and the *hadith*:

> After correcting beliefs and reforming actions, it is an obligation of all Muslims
> to reform (*islah*) one's internal states. Innumerable verses in the Holy Qur'an and
> endless narrations in the *hadith* clearly attest to this essential precept. Yet most
> superficial people are forgetful of this, bound by sensory desires. Who does not
> know that the Qur'an and *hadith* stress acquiring virtues such as asceticism
> (*zuhd*), contentment (*qana'at*), humility (*tavazo'*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude
> (*shukr*), love of God, acceptance of fate, trust (*tawakkul*), surrender to God
> (*taslim*), and expressly forbids qualities such as love of the world, greed (*hirs*),

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[40] *Ibid*., 55.

[41] The full title is *Realities of the Sufi Path from the Elegance of the Sunna: Issues within Sufism in Light of the Hadith* (*Haqiqat al-Tariqat min al-Sunnat al-Aniqa, ma`na Masa'il-i Tasawwuf Ahadis ki Roshni Men*).

pride (*takabbur*), hypocrisy (*riya*), lust (*shahvat*), anger, envy (*hasad*), and contempt? … This is the meaning reforming one's internal actions and the fundamental purpose of the Sufi path (*tariqa*), and it is proven without the slightest doubt that this is a required duty [of all Muslims]. Alongside this, experience attests to the fact that this reform revolves around being in the presence of Sufi masters - who have already experienced reform - and by serving and obeying them, and when this presence is not easily attained, then studying their lives, tales and teachings will be, to a certain extent, a sufficient substitute.[42]

As Thanawi further explains, not only is the 'presence' of a Sufi master - or failing that, his teachings[43] - essential to becoming a morally complete human being, the presence of the morally corrupt precludes this possibility.[44]

Here Thanawi derives core Sufi ethics from an analysis of three hundred and thirty individual *hadith* narrations. Each is labeled with several categories depending on the particular "moral" (*fa'ida*) that the narration offers.[45] The gamut of issues Thanawi treats here ranges wildly, from how to shake hands when undergoing Sufi initiation, to whether some Sufis go too far in eating too little. To provide a sense of how the text works, the following is a sample passage, in which Thanawi derives a ruling against prostration towards tombs from a *hadith*. He provides, first, the Arabic *hadith*, then an Urdu translation, and then the moral of the *hadith* for issues in Sufism:

> Hadith # 114
> Abu Hurayra said that the Messenger of God said: God cursed the Jews and the Christians for taking their prophets' tombs as places of prostration.

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[42] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Masa'il-i Tasawwuf,* 51.

[43] In fact, elsewhere Thanawi taught that mere study (*mutali`*) of Sufism was not sufficient to reform one's character, and stated that many benefits of the Sufi path would be difficult to attain without the presence of an expert (*mahir ki sohbat*) in Sufism. See Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Malfuzat-i Hakimulummat*, Vol. 2, 285.

[44] Hence the need to create and maintain an ethically 'sanitized' space, which will become crucial when we discuss how *madrasas* seek to maintain an ethical 'sensorium' in later chapters.

[45] These categories are common words in the Sufi lexicon, but Thanawi clarifies the meaning of each for the purposes of his treatise, giving some of the categories nuances they would not otherwise have. Sometimes a single *hadith* applies to multiple categories. They are: ethics (*akhlaq*), non-volitional states (*ahwal*), practices (*ashghal*), instruction (*ta`limat*), virtues (*faza'il*), widely accepted beliefs and habits (*'adat o adab*), cultural practices that may be acceptable but not necessary (*rusum*), issues or problems that require clarification (*masa'il*), other special explanations (*tawjihat*), and matters that require reform (*islah*), and miscellaneous matters (*mutafarriqat*). *Ibid.*, 53-54.

The moral of this *hadith*:
Reform - forbidding prostration at tombs. The reforming lesson of this *hadith* is that this action of prostrating towards the tombs of Sufi saints, which today is propagated by ignorant Sufis, is *kufr* and *shirk* if the intention is worship, and exceedingly close to *kufr* if the intention is salutations [towards the dead].[46]

In short, here Thanawi mobilizes individual *hadith* narrations to execute both the 'critical' and 'constructive' projects of Deoband. While Deobandi scholars embarked on these dual and intersecting projects through their texts, they also reflected on how to extend these projects into the public realm, the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Sufi Devotions, Sufi Ethics and Public Morality

One of the great twentieth century Deobandi scholars, Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, tells a story about Shah Muhammad Ishaq of Delhi, grandson of Shah `Abd al-'Aziz, who is revered among Deobandis as an immediate predecessor to their movement. One of his students had been living in Ajmer, site of the largest `urs celebration in the world, that of Khwaja Mu`in al-Din Chishti. He learned of Muhammad Ishaq's impending plans to undertake a long journey and wrote to his teacher asking him not to come to Ajmer, because he had been teaching the locals in Ajmer not to make pilgrimages to saints' shrines based on a certain *hadith* that a special journey should not be undertaken anywhere except for a journey to one of three places: Mecca, Medina, or Jerusalem. The student worried that if his master came to Ajmer, even for reasons having nothing to do with the shrine of Mu`in al-Din, the locals would assume he had made a special pilgrimage there, and this would nullify the lessons he had preached. Muhammad Ishaq responded: "I will not make Ajmer my intended destination. But as Ajmer is on the way, and as Khwaja Sahib [Mu`in al-Din] is one of our great masters, I will not be able to pass through and not visit him. When I come to Ajmer, give a sermon in which you explain that I am in error in coming to Ajmer and that there is no need for this sort of action. Say this in front of me and don't think I won't be able to endure it. I will admit my error and you will avoid doing the harm that

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[46] *Ibid*., 170-171.

worries you so." Muhammad Ishaq's response is striking in suggesting that his personal veneration of Mu`in al-Din should override the fact that it would still appear to the locals that he made a special pilgrimage to the shrine. As a compromise, he offered himself as an example by which to teach the locals what *not* to do.[47]

What is odd, though, is that the next story in Mahmud Hasan's anthology seems to contradict the ethos of this one. If the tale of Shah Muhammad Ishaq suggests that occasionally one can be exempt from certain normative restrictions, especially when borne out of genuine love for a fellow Sufi, Mahmud Hasan's commentary on the next tale states that adherence to the law must trump love and reverence for one's Sufi master. He tells of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi visiting Hajji Imdadullah in Mecca. The latter invites Gangohi to attend a *mawlud*, and Gangohi replies, "No, Master, I cannot go. In India I prevent people from going to this. If I participate, the people back home will say that I gladly went to a *mawlud* here." Mahmud Hasan offers his own interpretation at the end of the story: "Now, look! Who could be more beloved and honored than one's Sufi pir? Yet among the followers of the religion (*din*), its preservation is more essential [than love or honor]. When there is a contradiction between the two, preference was given to the religion."[48]

Juxtaposing these stories reveals how the Deobandis negotiated occasional contradictions between their adherence to the *shari`a* and their love of their own Sufi masters, as in the story of Gangohi and Imdadullah, and contradictions between their love of Sufi saints and their need to educate Muslim publics on these delicate matters, as in the story of Muhammad Ishaq and his student.

The early scholars of Deoband became increasingly invested in the task of educating Indian Muslims on a mass scale in what they believed were the basics of orthodox belief and practice. As I argue elsewhere, in the twentieth century, scholars of Deoband would extend this

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[47] Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, *Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*, 119.

[48] *Ibid*., 120.

effort even further than their predecessors, publishing enormously popular, pamphlet-sized summaries of Islamic belief and practice. To some degree, the Tablighi Jama`at was borne of this very mission to extend Deobandi teachings to Muslim publics. We can discern the origins of this engagement with Muslim publics in the works of the earliest Deobandis.

Naturally, Hajji Imdadullah influenced the debate within Deobandi circles over the nature of this engagement even as his successors disagreed somewhat with his conclusions. Imdadullah provides an impassioned call for keeping divisive issues beyond the purview of the Muslim masses. There is compelling evidence to support both sides of specific issues - like the possibility of God lying and of creating other prophets on the scale of Muhammad. Thus with so much conflicting information, debate (*qil o qal*) and argument (*guftugu*) are pointless, and in fact can be positively dangerous when the untutored, untrained masses engage in it. Imdadullah even suggests that dreams are really one of the best ways to gain insight into issues that so transcend the bounds of intellection. On the other hand, if one insists on discussing the possibility that God could lie or create other prophets, as we saw in the work of Muhammad Isma`il, he or she should do it in private conversation (*zaban-i khalwat*) and never before a public audience. But if someone is absolutely determined to write about these issues, Imdadullah admonishes them to do so in Arabic, lest the masses read it and feel the need to debate these issues amongst themselves.[49]

Imdadullah believed he could assuage fissures in the Indian Muslim community by urging non-specialists to avoid debating the issues publicly, and by asserting that, for the most part, the controversies were merely semantic ones:

> These days, different opinions have arisen on issues (*masa'il*) within the branches of Islamic law. Turmoil has arisen over minutia, and among both the specialists and the masses, religion is being destroyed, even though most of the matters concern mere semantic distinctions (*naza' lafzi*). Because seeing the state of things is such a shock to Muslims generally, and especially to those linked to me, a desire to publish something that would temper this quibbling and fighting entered the heart of this humble author.[50]

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[49] Hajji Imdadullah, *Kulliyat-i Imdadiyya*, 85.

[50] *Ibid.*, 77.

He adds that his "intention is not to engage in a disputation (*munazara*)," the traditionally agonistic and confrontational form of intellectual exchange typical of interreligious debate in colonial India.[51]

Avoiding strife is paramount in Imdadullah's hermeneutic. The factions opposed to one another on the question of the *mawlud*, for instance, should still meet one another, exchange letters, greet one another and continue to respect one another, but especially avoid criticizing and debating each other in the presence of the common folk as it is contrary to the vocation of `ulama':

> Scholars should refrain from issuing *fatwas* on these controversies or signing off on documents pertaining to them. They should show favor to one another; for example, if a supporter of standing in respect of the Prophet is in a gathering of those who oppose it, it is better for him not to stand so as not to cause any discord (*fitna*). If an opponent of standing is at an event where standing is taking place, it is better for him to participate. If the general public engages in any excessive or extreme practices, the `ulama' should gently forbid these acts …
> The public should not read books or study treatises about such subjects, as this is the work of `ulama' and doing so breeds suspicion towards the `ulama' and doubts about these controversies.[52]

He closes by noting his conclusions are valid for other controversies as well: the `ulama' must avoid controversies when possible but above all foster mutual respect when controversies are unavoidable, and attempt to keep such controversies out of public view. Imdadullah shows a keen sensibility for preventing divisive issues from poisoning the Muslim public; later Deobandis, Gangohi included, preferred a different tack: they endeavored to arm the Muslim masses with the 'correct' stance on controversial issues such as *mawlud*, the basis of what I will later call Deoband's 'critical project'. If Imdadullah was hesitant to involve a nascent mass-Muslim public, later Deobandis conjure these very same publics by virtue of calling them towards their normative ideals.

Imdadullah emerges here as a kind of steward of public order, protecting the Muslim

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[51] *Ibid.*, 77.

[52] *Ibid.*, 80-81.

masses from issues they are not equipped to understand. His approach may indeed strike us as patronizing and even infantilizing, but it is essential to understand the worldview that compelled him to take this approach, one that emerges out of a classic intellectual division of labor in Islamic history, in which the `ulama' claimed an intellectual monopoly on certain domains of scholarship that demanded years of difficult study. Alternatively, it may seem equally patronizing, in Gangohi's case, to declaim the 'truth' to the masses but be unwilling for individual Muslims to discover the same truth on their own terms. In either case, the moral state of the Indian Muslim public is of paramount concern.

Fatwas fill the Void: Law and Muslim Publics in the Nineteenth Century

As a *mufti*, Gangohi was trained to issue *fatwas* to individual Muslims who solicited them, and seemed to have viewed his *fatwas* as a means of educating Muslims about correct belief and practice. The changing shape of how *fatwas* were issued during the nineteenth century sheds light on the early Deobandis' engagement with Muslim publics. This engagement was a direct reaction to British attempts to recast Islamic law as they deemed it appropriate. A quick overview will allow us to situate Deobandis' work in this shifting historical context.

The British sought to recast the institution of Islamic law in India in the image of British common law, relying principally on 'canonical' texts. In 1772 the Regulating Act of the British East India Company determined that in "civil" matters of law, the judicial system would adhere to the "law of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans."[53] However, because the Company regarded the traditionally fluid and context-specific nature of the judgments of Muslim legal scholars to be fickle and unreliable, they followed the advice of William Jones (d. 1794) in seeking to create a "complete Digest of Hindu and Mohammedan laws" that would render the "Pandits and Maulavis" superfluous.[54] For their purposes, the *Hedaya* of Marghinani, a text on Hanafi law,

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[53] Quoted in Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law,* London: Oxford University Press, 1955, 37.

formed almost the sole foundation of what the British called 'Anglo-Muhammadan law'. In

Charles Hamilton's introduction to his 1791 translation of the *Hedaya*, Hamilton posited, at once,

the immutability of Islamic law's textual sources and the fickle caprice of the Muslim jurists who

interpret it:

> [I]t is impossible, in the infinite variety of human affairs, that the text of the
> KORAN, or the traditionary precepts of the Prophet, would extend to every
> particular case, or strictly suit all possible emergencies. Hence the necessity of
> *Mooftees*, whose particular office it is to compound the law and apply it to cases.
> The *uncertainty* of this science, in its judicial operation, is unhappily proverbial
> in all countries. In some, which enjoy the advantage of an established legislature,
> competent at all times to alter or amend, to make or revoke laws, as the change of
> manners may require, or incidental occurrences render necessary, this uncertainty
> arises pretty much from the unavoidable mutability in the principles of decision.
> Of the *Mussulman* code, on the contrary, the principles are fixed; and being
> intimately and inseparably blended with the religion of the people, must remain
> so, as long as they shall endure.[55]

As Scott Kugle has aptly stated, "British scrutiny of Islamic law consisted of a two-fold dynamic:

first, the British assumed that law exists in a formal code which they could administer, and

second, if such a code did not exist, they assumed the right to alter legal practices in order to form

one."[56]

The practice of issuing *fatwas* on a mass scale developed in British India to fill the gap

that the British colonial system had created in the administration of Muslim personal law.[57] By

first decade of twentieth century, virtually every Muslim political organization had a *dar al-ifta'*.

The *Dar al-'Ifta* at Deoband claimed to have issued over 100,000 fatwas.[58] By Gangohi's era, the

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[54] Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and David S. Powers, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, 197.

[55] *Hedaya, a Commentary on the Mussulman Laws*, trans. Charles Hamilton, London: T. Bensley, 1791, xxxi. For such a historically consequential text, the *Hidaya* of Burhan ad-din Abu'l Hasan Marghinani (d. 1197) has received minimal scholarly treatment. For one account, see Y. Meron, "Marghinani, His Method and His Legacy," *Islamic Law and Society* 9, 3 (2002): 410-416.

[56] Scott Alan Kugle," Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, 2 (2001): 257-313, at 270.

[57] Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India," 195.

mid- and late-nineteenth century, *muftis* began to issue legal opinions on the authority of a particular *madrasa*, and issued *fatwas* in substantially larger numbers than previously through widespread use of the incipient technology of printing in India.[59] The *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya* is one such compilation, and it is in this shifting legal environment in which we must locate Gangohi's text.[60] By and large his *fatwas* were solicited by individual Muslims, responding to their questions about proper belief and practice. As Metcalf writes, "*Fatawa* in a Muslim state were traditionally given by a court official, the *mufti*, for the guidance of the *qazi* or judge. Now in India they were given directly to believers, who welcomed them as a form of guidance in the changed circumstances of the day."[61] And unlike *muftis* of the past, Gangohi and his generation of *muftis* rarely cited works of *fiqh*, and often gave their *fatwas* without any explanation of their legal reasoning at all, typically providing nothing more than a relevant quotation from the Qur'an or *hadith*. One could argue that the very lack of juristic reasoning in these *fatwas* points to its broad audience, who would, presumably, have little use for it. The use of the *fatwa* as a tool of mass moral reform is also salient here, becoming "a form of the care of the self," with its success in linking "selves to the broader practices, virtues, and aims" of Islamic tradition.[62]

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[58] Asaf A. A. Fyzee, "Muhammadan Law in India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, 4 (1963): 401-415, at 405.

[59] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam*, 25.

[60] It is worth contrasting this collection to one of the most important pre-colonial works of Islamic law in the subcontinent, the *Fatawa-yi Alamgiri*, to understand how Gangohi's collection stands out as a uniquely colonial-era work. Completed during reign of Aurangzeb from 1667 to 1675, the *Fatawa-yi Alamgiri* is not a collection of *fatwas*, unlike the *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, but a legal treatise on Hanafi *fiqh*. Its selection and arrangement of subjects are modeled after Marghinani's *Hidaya*, with chapters on judicial proceedings and decrees, legal forms, legal devices, rules of inheritance, economic transactions, treatment of slaves, land, etc. In short, the emphasis on aspects of piety, belief, worship, and prayer found in Gangohi's *fatwas* is far removed from the more worldly, practical matters addressed in the *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*. The shift from concern over the pragmatic exigencies of Mughal rule to the late- and post-Mughal concern over matters of private faith and piety is symptomatic of Indian Muslims' public sense of moral crisis. See Alan M. Guenther, "Hanafi *Fiqh* in Mughal India: The *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 214-215.

[61] Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India,* 50.

[62] Hussein Ali Agrama, "Ethics, Tradition, Authority: Toward an Anthropology of the Fatwa," *American Ethnologist* 37, 1 (2010): 2-18, at 4.

Gangohi believed that the popularization of Sufi devotional practices distracts the masses

from the *shari`a*, even as he fully acknowledges the efficacy of certain practices, including those

that take place in the vicinity of tombs. This is a position that he shared with Imdadullah;

however, whereas Imdadullah simply wants to caution non-specialists from discussing these

contentious issues at all, Gangohi wants to draw boundaries and dictate rules that would keep the

masses from even attempting these practices. This is partly due to the state of widespread

corruption and moral decline that Gangohi diagnosed in the Indian body politic; many Sufi

practices may have been permissible at one point, but the political and social context of British

rule and perceived decline of Muslim vitality dictate that contemporary Muslims shun such

practices.

For instance, Gangohi affirmed the existence of saintly miracles (*kharq-i 'adat*, *karamat*)

but the masses, for Gangohi, have an innate tendency to misinterpret these events, assigning the

agency to the saint rather than to God.[63] Likewise, Gangohi denounced the gullibility of the

masses in believing just about any miracle tale of the great Sufi saints: "Ignorant people often

misunderstand the tales of the great ones, and even if some of them are true, they do not

understand those and might be made to say ecstatic utterances (*shathiyat*) the meaning of which

they do not know."[64]

While many Sufi ritual actions were proscribed, Gangohi did not deny their efficacy. In

fact, he believed they must be regulated all the more diligently precisely *because* of their efficacy.

Gangohi believed strongly in the mysterious powers of 'effulgence' (*faiz*) that emanate from the

tombs of saints, but objected that the masses do not have the insight to understand the nature of

these powers and tend to mistake the spiritual rewards of pilgrimage as something that comes

from the saint himself rather than from God alone, a form of *shirk*. Thus one inquirer wishes to

know whether 'effulgence' "can be acquired at the shrines of the saints, and if so, in what form?"

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[63] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 105.

[64] *Ibid.*, 107.

Gangohi replies that these powers "can be experienced at the shrines of saints, but it is never permissible to sanction this for the masses." One can learn about these mysterious powers according to one's spiritual capabilities and intellect, but "for the masses, to explain these matters is only to open up the door to idolatry and polytheism."[65]

Hardening Religious Boundaries: Gangohi on 'Resembling' Religious Others

Another means of safeguarding public piety for Gangohi entails educating Muslims to be aware of a perceived influence of 'Hindu' or 'Christian' elements in their devotional practices. Here he extends the reasoning found in Muhammad Isma`il's work that articulates perceived cultural distinctions along 'religious' lines, so that the act of a Muslim wearing 'Hindu' clothing becomes anathema. Gangohi often reasons that such acts are shameful because of their 'resemblance' (*mushabbah*) to Christians' and Hindus' practices. Explaining his position on 'resembling' Christians and Hindus in a *fatwa* on the circumambulation of tombs, relying yet again on the logic that formerly permissible practices are now too risky to be acceptable because of their 'resemblance' to non-Muslim practices, he writes:

> Circumambulation of the tombs of pious ancestors or the saints is *bid`a* without the slightest doubt because its occurrence is not found in the past. But these days, the contestation concerns whether this *bid`a* is of the permissible or the forbidden variety … In some works of *fiqh*, it is considered permissible, but the correct juridical ruling is that it is not, since it necessitates resemblance with the idol-worshipers, who engage in the same activity around their idols. Furthermore, according to the legal norm (*shari'*), circumambulation has been specified for the Ka`ba and to suggest a resemblance between the grave of a saint and the Ka`ba is reprehensible.[66]

Gangohi uniformly equates lighting candles at shrines with polytheism and Hindu idolatry,[67] and regards leaving food at tombs in most cases and setting up lights at tombs as *haram*.[68] Gangohi

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[65] *Ibid*., 104.

[66] *Ibid*., 82. See a similar judgment on 69, where he also prohibits kissing tombs.

[67] *Ibid*., 142-143.

specifically forbids leaving food at tombs on an appointed day or a specific occasion, a line of

reasoning similar to Muhammad Isma`il's belief that anything done with a prescribed time

encroaches upon the *sunna*: "Distributing food on an appointed day is without the slightest doubt

an innovation, even though one may still incur divine favors, and a fixed `urs is against the *sunna*,

and therefore an innovation. Distributing food only at an unappointed time is permissible."[69]

Gangohi lived through a period of increasing 'objectification' of Indian religiosity that

created rigid, ossified boundaries between religious communities.[70] His disdain for popular

interpretations of Sufi practices arises in part through their alleged adulteration by Hindu and

Christian influences. One can argue that the Deobandis internalized the modern reifications of

'Hindu' and 'Muslim' along sectarian lines.[71] Indeed, Gangohi wrote and taught in an agonistic

sectarian milieu, one typified by the many heated public debates between Deobandis and

Christian missionaries, Hindu nationalists and various sectarian leaders that hardened religious

boundaries.[72] A famous debate (*munazara*) in 1876-77 between Gangohi's colleague Muhammad

Qasim Nanautawi and representatives of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement, reveals

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[68] *Ibid.*.

[69] *Ibid.*, 166.

[70] The literature on this process is vast, and Western discourses on Indian religions both reflected and reinforced the process. See for instance Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion: postcolonial theory, India and the 'mystic East'*, London: Routledge, 1999, especially his fourth and fifth chapters. Harjot Oberoi examines the formation of Sikh identities in this period and summarizes this process in a broad sense: "Religion, as a systematized sociological unit claiming unbridled loyalty from its adherents and opposing an amorphous religious imagination, is a relatively recent development in the history of the Indian peoples. Once such a tidy cultural construct surfaced, probably sometime in the nineteenth century, it rapidly evolved, gained wide support, and became reified in history. Out of this reification it easily turned into something separate, distinct and concrete: what we now recognize as Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism." See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 17. Of course Islam had a certain reflexive identity long before this period, but locating Gangohi's and other Deobandis' work against the backdrop of this proliferation of *isms* is important.

[71] See the introduction to David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence, eds. *Beyond Turk and Hindu: rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.

[72] As previously mentioned, Avril A. Powell's *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, London: Curzon, 1993, examines the role of the *munazara* in the formation of sectarian religious identities in the nascent Indian public sphere prior to the explosion of print-based interreligious polemics.

the extent to which these identities had become objectified.[73]

Gangohi discouraged Muslims even from doing business with Hindus, urged Muslims not to attend Arya Samaj lectures and rallies, and criticized Muslims who retained trappings of 'Hindu' culture and lifestyles, whether in dress, hair styles or even in the use of brass instead of copper for containers.[74] He was by no means the first to proclaim such stark warnings about Muslims interacting with non-Muslims; one story tells of Sayyid Ahmad reprehending Muhammad Isma`il for attending a Hindu fair (*mela*).[75] But in Gangohi, these warnings become charged with a sense of urgency that Indian Muslim scholars had to make a concerted effort to purify Islamic practice on a mass, public scale.

This aversion to all things Hindu included Christians and Jews as well. One of Gangohi's *fatwas* rejects the practice of kissing tombs, ostensibly not because kissing tombs is forbidden from an Islamic legal standpoint, but because "Kissing tombs is the practice of the Jews and Christians, and is thus *haram*."[76] One *fatwa* not only prohibited Muslim parents from sending students to English schools where they may sing patriotic British songs or Christian hymns, but declared that singing such songs and hymns is an act of *kufr*.[77] A similar *fatwa* banned the wearing of 'Hindu' and English clothing.[78]

A final, and immensely important, point about Gangohi's relation to Muslim publics must be mentioned. Imdadullah wrote mostly for an elite audience of fellow Sufis such as the circle of those he had personally initiated. In contrast, as we have seen, Gangohi's *fatwas* reached a wide readership concerned with issues relevant to the belief and practice of the Muslim public, for

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[73] See Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, *Mubahisah-yi Shahjahanpur*, Karachi: Dar al-Sha`at, 1977.

[74] Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 153.

[75] Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, *Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*, 118.

[76] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 69.

[77] *Ibid.*, 54-55.

[78] *Ibid.*, 70.

whom he regarded idolatry and unbelief as perennial temptations. In other words, if Imdadullah's

literary persona is an intimately private one, Gangohi's is eminently public. This contrast is

brought into clear relief by comparing his *fatwas* to Gangohi's treatise *Imdad al-Suluk*. Written in

Persian for a comparatively small group of fellow Sufis, long after Persian had ceased to be the

lingua franca of educated Muslims, this treatise contains almost no discussion of the tomb-based

practices that occupy such a prominent place in the *fatwas*, nor any formulas of the kind we see in

The Brilliance of Hearts. Rather, *Imdad al-Suluk* explains stages in the Sufi path, enumerates

conventional *zikr* techniques, and offers advice on the *pir-murid* relationship and characteristics

of the ideal *shaykh*. Quoting widely from early Sufi masters Abu-l Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) and

Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896), he predictably identifies *shari`a* as the first stage (*maqam*) in the Sufi

path, and the goal of the Sufi path as the complete "reformation of the heart" (*qalb ki islah*)

through a regimen of disciplinary techniques.[79] These conditions of the Sufi journey include

being in a state of ritual purity, refraining from food beyond what is necessary to live, refraining

from excessive talk, seclusion (*khalwat*), mastery of *zikr*, and commitment to a Sufi master.[80]

What is remarkably absent from this treatise, compared to the *fatwas*, is any lengthy treatment of

legal matters pertaining to, or dangers inherent in, popular shrine-based Sufism. The only hint at

such issues here is advice to shun "ignorant Sufis" who purport to know more than they really do

and repeated warnings that Satan is always waiting to dupe and deceive those on the Sufi path.[81]

But the very absence of discussion of popular Sufi practices signals Gangohi's notion of what

Sufism is: a striving to purify the self in the journey towards God (*sair ila Llah*).[82] Composed in

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[79] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, 99. It makes sense that Gangohi would take Junayd as his principle source of inspiration in this treatise. Among early Sufis, Junayd emphasized purification of the self and sobriety (*sahw*) as fundamental traits of the Sufi path, and believed in a 'spiritual elect' whom God had endowed with special capacities for affirming *tawhid* through *fana*. See Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 15-18.

[80] Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Imdad al-Suluk*, 78-140.

[81] *Ibid*., 57-58.

[82] *Ibid*., 155-156.

Persian and translated into Urdu only at a much later date, *Imdad al-Suluk* was, by default, written for a far smaller audience of like-minded Sufis who, unlike the masses, had the knowledge to proceed cautiously and prudently along the Sufi path.

To say that Deobandis conveyed one message to the masses and another to the 'elite' is not to accuse them of hypocrisy; rather, they knew that they had to convey a simpler and stricter message publicly, without disclosing the complex reasoning behind the decisions, whereas the 'elite' Sufis among them in theory already knew the rules, as it were. In subsequent chapters, in fact, we see how this dual approach to audiences reverberates in South African Deobandi writings, where the most contentious aspects of the Deobandi critique of Sufism become the movement's public face. Virtually all of the most vocally critical Deobandi literature in South Africa stems from one of two (closely linked) publishing sources: the Majlisul Ulama of Port Elizabeth and the Young Men's Muslim Association in greater Johannesburg. Crucially, the bulk of their publications are anti-'grave worshipping' screeds aimed for a mass readership, and for this reason *The Majlis* journal and its primary author, Ahmed Sadiq Desai, are widely derided among the Cape's Muslims. In other words, Deobandis' critical project is an eminently, and perhaps inherently, public one. Conversely, South African Deobandis' work on Sufi ethics, perhaps like Gangohi before them, tends to have a narrower audience in mind. The Deobandi constructive project would seem to have a more circumscribed readership (or listenership, for that matter, given new ways that Deobandi scholars have used new forms of media to project their message, as we will see).

Ashraf `Ali Thanawi: Muslim Publics and Mass Sufism

Thanawi also believed that he had a role in shaping Muslim publics in the South Asia of his day, that mass education in the 'essentials' of Muslim faith and practice was not only a right but a duty for all Muslims, regardless of their level of education or literacy. To this end, Thanawi

sought to abbreviate the traditional *madrasa* curriculum to make it more accessible to a mass-

Muslim audience:

> If one has a desire (*shawq*) for Arabic but has little time, one can read only the necessary books. After a curriculum has been abbreviated according to this necessity, what once entailed ten years will only take two and a half. Don't be alarmed at this novelty and don't say earlier `ulama' were wasting their time since what now takes two and a half years used to take ten. For my intention is not that *the very same* instruction that was ten years now will be two and a half, but we can conclude that a man, after such instruction, will become firm in his religion (*din*) and can become a scholar (*maulvi*) of moderate skill. Of course his knowledge will not be vast, but if he so desires, he will have the ability to expand it.[83]

To confront a rapidly advancing Western modernity, traditional Islamic learning had become a

"binding duty" (*fard `ayn*) upon all Muslims individually.

In *Heavenly Ornaments* (*Bihishti Zewar*), Thanawi links the moral health of the

individual with the moral health of the Muslim body politic in explicit terms. One of the most

widely printed books in South Asia, *Heavenly Ornaments* is a primer for women to learn basics

of the faith as well as traditional *adab*, etiquette and comportment. This treatise neatly combines

Thanawi's critical and constructive projects, while packaging both in the language of a lay

audience. Here Thanawi brought his critique of 'culture' to the widest possible audience available

at the time. One can see the logic by which he links individual and polity in the following:

> Thanks to divinely granted insight, experience, logic, and learning, I realized that the cause of this ruination is nothing other than women's ignorance of the religious sciences. This lack corrupts their beliefs, their deeds, their dealings with other people, their character, and the whole manner of their social life … Beyond that, their words, their thoughts, and their style of behavior take root in the hearts of the children whom they nurture in their very laps. So the children's religion is ruined, and their daily life grows vapid and tasteless. The reason is that faulty belief leads to faulty character, faulty character to faulty action, and faulty action to faulty dealings that are the root of the disquietude of society.[84]

At the same time that he critiques participation in the *mawlud* and tomb-based devotions, he also

advocates widespread initiation into Sufism and adoption of Sufi ethics in everyday life. In a

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[83] Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Tuhfat al-`ulama'*, Multan: Idara-yi Ta'lifat-i Ashrafiyya, 1995, I: 553. I thank Muhammad Qasim Zaman for sharing photocopies of this anthology of Thanawi's writings with me.

[84] Ashfaf `Ali Thanawi, *Perfecting Women*, 48.

section on "the relation of master and disciple," he lists the ethical traits which all Sufis must seek to attain - *tauba*, *khauf*, *sabr*, *bharosa*, *mahabbat*, *raza*, *sidq*, *muraqaba*, and so on - and, crucially, asserts that this is "the way in which every disciple - *indeed, every Muslim* - should live."[85]

Thus, in the Deobandis' critique of Sufism, there was a clear disparity between a somewhat flexible, conciliatory stance on controversial Sufi devotions when writing amongst themselves, and a far stricter stance on the same devotions when writing for a popular audience. The Deobandis envisioned their roles as guardians of public morality and as beacons in the quest to educate the Indian Muslim masses on the rudiments of the faith. There is, in short, a kind of 'elitist' tolerance of participating in these devotions when the participant is educated in the nuances of Muslim belief and fully circumspect about the inherent dangers in certain practices.

Gangohi, Thanawi and other scholars of the Deobandi tradition positioned Sufism at the nexus of legal and ethical discourses, and it is this Sufism that they project in their public writings. At the same time, we must exercise diligence to avoid projecting our own notions of what these categories - 'law', 'ethics' and 'mysticism' - mean onto Deobandis' own works. This chapter has shown how these categories are so mutually imbricated within Deobandi discourses as to be indistinguishable. Sherali Tareen has insightfully expressed the need to avoid ascribing "contemporary categories such as 'law' and 'mysticism' onto historical subjects who did not live out their lives under the confines of such neat binaries."[86]

Finally, as their critique relegates Sufi devotions to the impure domain of 'culture' it leaves behind what Deobandis viewed as the kernel or essence of Sufism: ethical self-fashioning. The Deobandi self is an ethical work in progress, consummating in complete self-mastery, perfection of character and the adoption of virtuous character traits (*akhlaq-i hamida*) - God-

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[85] *Ibid.*, 169. (emphasis added)

[86] Sherali Tareen, "Normativity, Heresy and the Politics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam," *The Muslim World* 99, 3 (2009): 521-552, at 547.

consciousness (*taqwa*), gratitude (*shukr*), patience (*sabr*), love (*muhabbat*), asceticism (*zuhd*), fear of God (*khushu'*) and others, as enumerated in Thanawi's *Shari`at o Tariqat* - that Sufis have expounded for centuries. This, for the Deobandis, is the ultimate aim of Sufism; accordingly, this view explicitly shuns those worldly devotions, which, alongside the pursuit of *akhlaq*, equally laid claim to being an essential part of Sufism for centuries before they became major points of contention. By consigning public devotions to the domain of 'culture', the Deobandis produced an interior, private Sufi discourse. Yet it is a private discourse that became eminently public in Deobandis' teachings, writings and public sermons.

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CHAPTER THREE

How a Tradition Travels: Deobandi Scholars, Texts, and Institutions in South Africa

That Islam is a global religion is obvious; what is less obvious is precisely *how*. This chapter inquires into Deoband as one particular manifestation of Islam's global reach, attending to its arrival in South Africa and to how scholars from the subcontinent and their students established Deoband as a presence - ideologically and institutionally - in South Africa. It attends closely to ways that South Africa became, more than any other region outside of the Indian subcontinent, essential to the Deobandi experience 'abroad'. The dual projects of Deoband - reforming Sufi devotions and reforming the self - take root in South Africa textually through Deobandis' writings and institutionally through the development of the Tablighi Jama`at and the founding of *madrasas*.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Islam in South Africa in order to set a scene for the gradual emergence of Deoband, beginning with Deobandi `ulama' councils in the 1920's, the beginnings of the Tablighi Jama`at in 1960, and culminating with the first Deobandi *madrasa* in 1973. It then sets forth how two Deobandis - Masihullah Khan and Mahmud Hasan Gangohi - were the teachers and Sufi masters to generations of South African Deobandi scholars and were instrumental in establishing a Deobandi presence in South Africa. Through their repeated visits to South Africa and their Sufi initiations of scores of South Africans, many of whom went on to establish or teach in Deobandi *madrasas* there, Masihullah Khan and Mahmud Hasan Gangohi

are responsible for forming the closest links between Deoband in the Indian subcontinent and southern Africa. Mahmud Hasan is particularly instrumental in forming and maintaining a South African Tablighi presence, while Masihullah Khan took with him, above all else, Thanawi's Sufi ethics and reformist project. It was also through these two that Deobandi scholars of South Africa understood themselves as continuing a Sufi chain that reaches back to Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, and beyond. By detailing these links, the chapter advances one of this dissertation's central arguments: that the global Deobandi 'network' is configured primarily through Sufi initiations between master and disciple. These scholars and their students advanced Deoband's Sufi ethics through their writings, to which I attend in detail, and through their advancement of *tabligh*.

And as I will further explain, the Tablighi Jama`at forged an ideological presence in South Africa with the first Tablighi gatherings taking place in 1960, long before the first Deobandi *madrasas* were established in the 1970's. I will discuss how individual graduates of the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband intersected with the founding of the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa on multiple levels, as well as discern how in this period, public debates about the Deobandi critique of Sufism had not yet emerged, and would in fact not emerge until the 1970's, which saw a fateful combination of four factors: the institutionalization of Deoband in the form of *madrasas*, the increasing influence of the Tablighi Jama`at, the rise of Barelwi organizations and *madrasas*, and perhaps most crucially, a restive Muslim public that interrogated 'Deoband' itself for its allegedly retrogressive politics and arcane theological cavils.

The chapter ends with an overview of the major Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa to illustrate different dimensions of the institutionalization of Deoband. Almost all of these *madrasas'* founders were students of either Masihullah Khan or Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. As I will show, these *madrasas* illustrate key features of the local Deobandi network, ranging from the intersections of *madrasas* and *tabligh* to the role of the internet for extending Deobandis' mission to educate Muslims into new spheres.

Islam(s) in South Africa and the Arrival of Deobandi Scholars

The three-and-a-half century old story of Islam in South Africa has been told and retold by a growing number of scholars, so I will offer only the barest overview here and concentrate on the features of this history that are most relevant to the formation of South African Deoband.[1] Previous studies have established two trends in early Islamic history in South Africa that are particularly relevant to my discussion here. First, Sufism was an ever-present feature of Cape Islam from the beginning, and several early leaders of the Muslim community were also prominent Sufi shaykhs whose tombs (*kramats*) are still visited on pilgrimage by Muslims today. Second, though slaves of Indian origin were among the many Muslims who arrived in the Cape as prisoners, Indians did not begin to migrate to South Africa *en masse* until the mid-nineteenth century, when they brought to its shores Sufi traditions different from the older ones anchored in the Cape.

In 1652 the Dutch colonial administrator Jan van Riebeeck established Cape Town as a waystation for Dutch ships traveling between the Netherlands and Dutch trading posts in the East Indies. Situated along a natural harbor at the tip of southern Africa, Cape Town was settled immediately by Dutch farmers and merchants who relied on slave labor. From the outset, the Dutch imported slaves from other parts of its empire to work in the Cape, many of whom were Muslim.[2] They came from all parts of the empire, but at least 36 percent of the slaves arriving in the Cape between 1652 came from India, until 1808 when the British formally abolished the slave

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[1] Early landmark studies of Islam in South Africa included, for example, Achmat Davids, *The Mosques of the Bo-Kaap: A Social History of Islam at the Cape*, Cape Town: South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980 and Suleman Dangor's *A Critical Biography of Shaykh Yusuf*, Durban: Centre for Research in Islamic Studies, 1983. Also see Ebrahim Moosa, "Islam in South Africa," in Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy, eds. *Living Faiths in South Africa*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995; Abdulkader Tayob, "Race, Ideology and Islam in Contemporary South Africa," in R. Michael Feener, ed. *Islam in World Cultures*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004; Robert C. Shell, "Islam in Southern Africa," in Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, eds. *The History of Islam in Africa*, Athens, Georgia: Ohio University Press, 2000.

[2] See Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: forced migration in the Dutch East India Company*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, especially 127-178.

trade in its colonies.[3] The Dutch had no tolerance whatsoever for practicing Islam openly in its

colonies; a decade earlier, in 1642, the Governor General in Batavia, Anthony van Diemen, had

issued the Statuten van India rendering the public practice of Islam a capital offense.[4]

The Dutch imported Muslim slave-soldiers, known as Mardyckers, from the Molucca

islands beginning in 1658, to protect the colony from the indigenous Khoi-San, but the arrival of

Shaykh Yusuf aboard the Dutch ship De Voetboeg in 1694 marks the emergence of the first

major figure in Cape Muslim history, though even in the era of Shaykh Yusuf there was no

substantial Muslim community in the Cape. Exiled by the Dutch for fomenting unrest and

fighting against the Dutch in Indonesia, Shaykh Yusuf was forcibly settled at Zandvliet outside of

Cape Town where he wrote treatises on Sufism in Malay, Bughanese and Arabic.[5]

It was another political prisoner, Imam Abdullah ibn Kadi - popularly known as Tuan

Guru - who worked to institutionalize Islam in the Cape. Imprisoned until 1793 on Robben

Island, the island off the coast of Cape Town where the apartheid regime would later send its

most prominent political prisoners, Tuan Guru established the first *madrasa* in Cape Town the

year of his release. Tuan Guru also wrote a treatise on Ash`ari theology and wrote a copy of the

Qur'an by hand while imprisoned, which he later used to teach students at the *madrasa* on Dorp

Street. After the British took over control of the colony and liberalized some restrictions on

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[3] Yusuf Da Costa and Achmat Davids, *Pages from Cape Muslim History*, Cape Town: Naqshbandi-Muhammadi South Africa, 2005, 2. However, slaves could be retained, bought and sold within the colony until 1834.

[4] Ebrahim Moosa, "Islam in South Africa," 130. The statute stated: "No one shall trouble the Amboinese about their religion or annoy them; so long as they do not practise in public or venture to propagate it amongst Christians and heathens. Offenders to be punished with death, but should there be amongst them those who had been drawn to God to become Christians, they were not to be prevented from joining Christian churches." See Achmat Davids, *The Mosques of the Bo-Kaap*, 35-36.

[5] Suleman Dangor, *Critical Biography of Shaykh Yusuf* and Yusuf Da Costa and Achmat Davids, *Pages from Cape Muslim History*, 19-23. Some of these treatises are housed at Leiden University and the former Royal Batavian Society library. Shaykh Yusuf's gravesite at Faure, near Cape Town, is the most important grave on the Cape *karamat* circuit, built in its present form by a Cape Muslim philanthropist, Hajji Suleiman Shah Mohammed, in 1927. See Achmat Davids, *The Mosques of the Bo-Kaap*, 144.

Muslims, a free black slave established the first mosque in South Africa in 1795, known as Auwal

Masjid, still in use today. Tuan Guru served as the first imam.[6]

In 1795 the British took Cape Town as part of a larger campaign to secure global trade

routes during their war with Revolutionary France. The Dutch reclaimed Cape Town in 1803 and

granted religious freedoms to Cape Muslims the following year when the *Statuten van Indien* was

overturned. The British once again seized the Cape in 1806 and ceased the import of slaves in the

following year, effectively ending the import of Muslim slaves.[7] With their new freedom to

practice Islam openly (albeit with some restrictions), one of the first acts of the Muslim

community was to build a cemetery, the Tana Baru in the present-day Bo Kaap neighborhood,

along with a number of small *madrasas*.[8]

The period from 1770 to 1840 saw a sharp growth in the Muslim population of the Cape,

and by 1840, Muslims were one-third of the Cape population of roughly 20,000.[9] There is

inconclusive but suggestive evidence that the Sufi rites practiced at this time offered a sense of

communitas for freed slaves, who were generally barred from Christian congregations, thereby

swelling the ranks of the Cape's Muslims.[10] The Afrikaans language was also forged within the

Muslim community during this period, as they transitioned from speaking Malay to speaking the

Dutch of their overlords; some of the first extant written forms of Afrikaans are in Arabic script,

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[6] Robert Shell, "*Madrasahs* and Moravians: Muslim Educational Institutions in the Cape Colony, 1792-1910," *New Contree* 51 (2006): 101-113, and Yusuf da Costa and Achmat Davids, *Pages from Cape Muslim History*, 48-49.

[7] Martin Legassick and Robert Ross, "From Slave Economy to Settler Capitalism: The Cape Colony and its Extensions, 1800-1854," in Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard K. Mbenga and Robert Ross, eds. *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, Vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 262.

[8] Achmat Davids, *The History of the Tana Baru*, Cape Town: Committee for the Preservation of the Tana Baru, 1985.

[9] Ebrahim Mahida, *History of Muslims in South Africa, A Chronology*, Durban: Arabic Study Circle, 1993, 18.

[10] John Edwin Mason, "'A Faith for Ourselves': Slavery, Sufism, and Conversion to Islam at the Cape," *South African Historical Journal* 46 (2002): 3-24. See also R. C. Shell, "Rites and Rebellion: Islamic Conversion at the Cape, 1808 to 1915," *Studies in the History of Cape Town* 5 (1984): 1-46.

known as Arabic-Afrikaans.[11] At this point there was still nothing resembling a unified body to represent Cape Muslims, even as powerful *imams* emerged to lead individual mosques.[12]

The Cape Muslims - or Cape 'Malays' as some would later call them[13] - developed along a trajectory that would eventually intersect in numerous ways with another trajectory, that of the Muslim Indians who began to arrive on the shores of Natal, then a British colony on the East coast. In the nineteenth century, the British sent millions of Indians to work in far-flung parts of its empire, which became the engine of the modern South Asian diaspora. Indians first arrived in Natal as indentured servants in 1860, and the first 'passenger' Indians began to arrive shortly thereafter, so called because they paid for their own passage to Africa as opposed to indentured Indians whose passage was paid by their employers in exchange for a fixed (and often brutal) labor contract. Beginning in the 1880's, both indentured and passenger Indians began to fan out across southern Africa, entering the Boer-controlled Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek (later the Transvaal) and the British-controlled Cape. Between 1860 and 1911, when importation of Indian labor ceased, over 150,000 Indians entered southern Africa.[14]

Significantly, among those on the first ship to arrive was the Sufi Hazrat Badshah Peer, whose biography is shrouded in myth but who is nevertheless regarded as the founding saint of Indian Sufi traditions in South Africa. Another Sufi, Hazrat Shah Goolam Muhammad, known as

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[11] Achmat Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815 to 1915: a socio-linguistic study*, M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1991.

[12] Shamil Jeppie, "Leadership and Loyalties: The Imams of Nineteenth Century Colonial Cape Town, South Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, 2 (1996): 139-162; Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999, 24-39.

[13] This remains a contested term. See Shamil Jeppie, "Reclassifications: Coloured, Malay, Muslim," in Zimitri Erasmus, ed. *Coloured by history, shaped by place: new perspectives on Coloured identities in Cape Town*, Colorado Springs: International Academic Publishers, 2001 as well as his *I.D. du Plessis and the 're-invention' of the 'Malay', c. 1935-1952*, Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, 1988.

[14] Surendra Bhana and Joy B. Brain, *Setting down Roots: Indian migrants in South Africa, 1860-1911*, Johannesburg: Witswaterstrand University Press, 1990, 11-15.

Soofie Saheb, is credited with establishing Badshah Peer's legend.[15] Habib Ali Shah of

Hyderabad sent the young Soofie Saheb, his initiate in the Chishti Sufi order, to Durban to

propagate Islam in Africa. Upon arrival in 1895, according to narrations of Soofie Saheb's

students, he intuitively knew that a great 'holy man' had recently died and sought out his grave.

After finding the site along the banks of the Umgeni river in Durban, he established a shrine,

mosque, and Sufi retreat (*khanqah*) that remains today.[16]

  Of the passenger Indians, almost 80 percent were Muslim.[17] Many hailed from Gujarat

and were roughly divided into two 'ethnic' groups, Memons from Kathiawar and Bohras from

Surat. Accordingly, wealthy Gujarati Muslims founded mosques along largely ethnic lines in the

1880's. In 1881 a Memon merchant financed Durban's Grey Street Masjid, still today the largest

mosque in the Southern hemisphere. Surti traders financed the West Street Masjid in 1885.[18] The

trustees that managed the mosques were also defined in terms of ethnicity; Memons exclusively

oversaw the Grey Street Masjid until 1905, after which the board comprised five Memons, two

Surtis, one Kokan and one "colonial born," the latter referring to a descendant of indentured

servants. These mosque committees wielded enormous influence in establishing new mosques

and defining their ideological slant. In the Transvaal they were typically elected, and in Natal

often appointed for life, allowing the patronage of wealthy Muslims to shape religious

infrastructure.[19]

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[15] Goolam H. Vahed, "A Sufi Saint's Day in South Africa: The Legend of Badsha Peer," *South African Historical Journal* 49 (2003): 96-122, at 98-99.

[16] *Ibid.*, 100-101. See also Nile Green, "Islam for the Indentured Servant: A Muslim Missionary in Colonial South Africa," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, 3 (2008): 529-553.

[17] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1995, 55.

[18] Goolam Vahed, "Mosques, Mawlanas and Muharram: Indian Islam in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 31, 3 (2002): 305-335, at 314.

[19] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 58.

These 'ethnic' divisions also constituted divisions over normative Islamic piety. The
Memons were more inclined towards popular Sufi devotions, tracing their origins to a descendant
of `Abd al-Qadir Jilani and maintaining close links to the annual `urs of Mu`in al-din Chishti at
Ajmer, India.[20] They began observing `urs and *mawlud* almost immediately upon arrival; in
March 1877, they petitioned the government for exemption during the "period of the Moulood
Sharif" from the evening curfew that applied to all Indians.[21] The Surtis, on the other hand, were
"giving up their former spiritual guides and transferring their reverence to the new preachers who
have become the leaders in religious matters," preachers described as "Wahhabi," in the words of
a contemporary observer.[22] These divisions, while far from seamless, presaged the ethnic
contours of Deobandi/Barelwi polemics in later decades, and more specifically, the efforts of
'Deobandi' and 'Barelwi' mosque committees to exclude the other from prayers at their
respective mosques, a topic to which I return in the fifth chapter.

Indian Muslims spread into the interior, especially after the discovery of gold in the hills
of the Witwaterstrand in 1886, prompting a massive influx of labor into what would become
Johannesburg. Indians in Natal and the Transvaal (roughly corresponding to the current province
of Gauteng) faced severe restrictions on their religious practice. The Boer-governed Orange Free
State, centered at Bloemfontein, completely prohibited any Indians from living in its borders,
while the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek, centered at Pretoria, forbade non-whites from owning land
except in rare circumstances.[23] Mohandas Gandhi established the Natal Indian Congress in 1894
to petition the government on behalf of Indians, and later developed his philosophy of *satyagraha*
at Phoenix, near Durban, in 1906, in an attempt to redress some of these wrongs through civil

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[20] Goolam Vahed, "Mosques, Mawlanas and Muharram," 316.

[21] *Ibid.*, 317.

[22] Quoted in *ibid.*, 317.

[23] Abdulkader Tayob, "Race, Ideology and Islam in Contemporary South Africa," 258-259.

disobedience.[24] The 'Indian Question' became even more vexing after the 1910 formation of the Union of South Africa, based on a political compromise between Boers and the British. Almost immediately the leadership imposed a detailed racial hierarchy upon all aspects of economy, society and political life in South Africa. Most whites favored repatriation for so-called 'Asiatics'; D. F. Malan's Asiatic Bill of 1925 declared Indian properties and businesses 'unsanitary' and advocated Indians' return to India.[25]

Despite these restrictions, Indian Muslims continued to seek ways to build new mosques. Some migrated to Cape Town, where they enjoyed relatively more freedom; the first Quawatul Islam Mosque was the first Indian mosque in Cape Town, built in 1892.[26] A second wave of Indians to came to the Cape directly from Bombay, mostly Kokani speakers who tended to share the Shafi`i legal school with the majority of the Cape's Muslims. Even after Indian immigration in Natal and Transvaal ceased in 1911, the Cape continued to allow Indians to immigrate.[27] It is during the interwar period, and especially in the 1920's, when we first began to discern the beginnings of a Deobandi presence in South Africa.

Early Deobandi History in South Africa: Jamiatul `Ulama' Transvaal, Waterval Islamic Institute, and the Advent of South African *Tabligh*

Deoband has been a global phenomenon nearly since its inception. Whether through high profile figures such as Hajji Imdadullah teaching scores of Deobandis in the Hijaz or through graduates of Deobandi *madrasas* fanning out over the British empire, Deobandis moved, like

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[24] For a recent study, see Surendra Bhana and Goolam H. Vahed, *The Making of a Political Reformer: Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2005.

[25] Rehana Ebr-Vally, *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa*, Colorado Springs: International Academic Publishers, 2001, 83.

[26] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 57. Tayob does not indicate whether this mosque was Surti or Memon in its makeup, or neither or a combination thereof. I have been unable to find this information elsewhere.

[27] *Ibid.*, 57-58.

millions of other Indians, through the global networks established by the British empire. India

became a "nodal point from which peoples, ideas, goods, and institutions - everything that

enables an empire to exist - radiated outward."[28] While there were centuries-old networks that

linked coastal cities that surrounded the Indian Ocean, creating what some have called an Indian

Ocean sphere, the advent of the steamship and the regularization of British shipping lines in the

mid-nineteenth century facilitated new movement of vast numbers of people between India and

Africa.[29]

The first institution founded by a Deobandi in South Africa was the Jamiatul Ulama

Transvaal. In 1922 a group of `ulama' formed the Jamiatul to provide Islamic guidance on

religious and Islamic legal matters to local Muslims in the Transvaal. In its creation, Tayob posits

an effort by Transvaal `ulama' to assert their authority against increasingly powerful mosque

committees.[30] However, in its first incarnation the committee was ineffectual for the most part.

Some years later in 1935, a young graduate of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, Mufti Ebrahim Sanjalvi (d.

1983) revived it. Sanjalvi arrived in Durban from Bombay in 1932 and migrated to Johannesburg

in 1934. Sanjalvi announced in the Gujarati-language *Indian Views* that his organization would

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[28] Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 1. Metcalf has argued persuasively that diaspora enabled by the British empire also laid the foundation for Indians to 'objectify' their own identity and forged a 'national' consciousness that they did not necessarily have on the subcontinent, and one may posit that dealing with the 'Indian Problem' in South Africa and elsewhere may have fostered a sense of 'Indian' solidarity, as in Gandhi's efforts to act on behalf of Indian interests broadly as a young barrister. However, the replication and persistence of religious and regional differences in the Indian diaspora cannot be denied.

[29] For some general perspectives on Muslims in modern Indian Ocean history, see Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, "Cosmopolitanism Contested: Anthropology and History in the Western Indian Ocean," in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, eds. *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008; Bettina Dennerlein and Dietrich Reetz, "Continuity and Disparity: South-South Linkages in the Muslim World," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, 1 (2007): 3-6; and John O. Voll, "Islam as a Special World System," *Journal of World History* 5 (1994): 213-226. On Indian Ocean exchanges between India and Africa more generally, see John C. Hawley, "Introduction: Unrecorded Lives," in John C. Hawley, ed. *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

[30] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 65.

field questions from Muslims on matters of Islamic belief, ritual and law. In 1935 he also began teaching Arabic and, the following year, appointed a Persian instructor.[31]

The Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal was primarily an advisory body of *`ulama'* who worked to standardize local *madrasa* curricula and provide consultations on issues such as *zakat*, prayer, fasting, and so on. It did not engage in Deobandi polemics nor identify self-consciously as a 'Deobandi' organization. It identified its mission as to "promote, develop and maintain religious, cultural, educational, social, economic, charitable services, and general upliftment of people at large" as well as to "establish, protect and maintain *madaris, masajid, Jama`at khanas, awqaf* and other Islamic institutions of the Muslim community" and "render Islamic guidance and services in prison, hospitals and other institutions."[32]

The Jamiatul Ulama was closely linked to the Waterval Islamic Institute at Mia's Farm outside of Johannesburg; the latter was founded in 1940 by Maulana Muhammad bin Musa bin Isma`il Mia. To this day, it has served as a major source of English translations of Deobandi texts, especially the Tablighi literatures of Muhammad Zakariyya,[33] and has also facilitated the construction of mosques and *madrasas* for younger students in the former-Transvaal region (now roughly corresponding to the province of Gauteng).[34] The Jamiatul Ulama eventually integrated

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[31] Charl Le Roux, "Die Hanafitiese Ulama: Hulle Rol in Suid-Afrikaans Konteks," M.A. thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1978, 61-62.

[32] Ebrahim Mahomed Mahida, *History of Muslims in South Africa*, 57.

[33] Especially Zakariyya's work anthologized in the enormously influential *Faza'il-i A'mal*, considered the central tome for the Tablighi Jama`at. Also occasionally called the *Tablighi Nisab*, this collection features Muhammad Zakariyya's reflections on pious and edifying tales from the Companions of the Prophet as well as 'virtues' (*faza'il*) of the Qur'an, prayer, *zikr*, *tabligh*, and fasting during Ramadan. The collection also features Ihtishamul Hasan Khandlawi's essay "Muslim Degeneration and its Only Remedy" and 'Ashiq Ilahi's "Six Fundamentals." Waterval Islamic Institute's version is now in its seventh printing, testifying to its popularity in South Africa: *Faza'il-e-A'maal*, Johannesburg: Waterval Islamic Institute, 2000.

[34] These *madrasas* are not Dar al-`Ulums, meaning they were not equipped to train students to become *`ulama'*. Until 1973, with the opening of Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle, South Africans had to go abroad to become *`ulama'*. Charl Le Roux's 1978 study of South African *`ulama'* lists sixty-three of these smaller *madrasas* that affiliated with the Jamiatul Ulama in the Transvaal region. See Charl Le Roux, "Die Hanafitiese Ulama: Hulle Rol in Suid-Afrikaans Konteks," M.A. thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1978, Appendix 2.

the 'Tablighi Nisab' (the Tablighi Curriculum) into its basic curriculum for these local

madrasas.[35]

Maulana Muhammad Mia's father, Musa ibn Isma`il, migrated from Simlak, Gujarat to

South Africa for business, and sent Maulana Muhammad Mia to Dar al-`Ulum Deoband for

study. At Deoband, Muhammad Mia studied with Anwar Shah Kashmiri, leaving the Waterval

Islamic Institute in the care of Maulana Muhammad Ibrahim Sahib and his brother, Maulana

Mufti Ahmad Mia.[36] He would later convince Anwar Shah Kashmiri to relocate to Jamia'

Islamiyya at his ancestral home of Dabhel. Maulana Ibrahim Sahib departed for Deoband some

years later in 1960, taking Sufi initiation with Muhammad Zakariyya, and subsequently his

brother Maulana Ahmad Mia also left for Deoband in 1965, studying with Mahmud Hasan

Gangohi and becoming a *khalifa* of Muhammad Zakariyya.[37]

Even though the founders and *`ulama'* associated with the Waterval Islamic Institute

studied at Deoband, it is difficult to say exactly to what extent this was a 'Deobandi' institution. It

was, for one, not a Dar al-`Ulum, meaning they were not preparing students to become *`ulama'*;

they taught, for example, the *Mishkat* collection of *hadith* but did not teach the six canonical

collections, mastery of which is the culmination of a Deobandi education. In another sense, the

public seems not to have associated the institute directly with Deoband. A May 1963 obituary of

Maulana Muhammad Mia, Waterval's founder, does not mention his time at Deoband at all.[38]

The Mia family maintained close links to the man who would eventually establish the

first Dar al-`Ulum in South Africa, Qasim Sema. Moulana Qasim Sema was born in South Africa

in 1920. Maulana Muhammad Mia of the Waterval Islamic Institute encouraged him at a young

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[35] A facsimile of a handwritten Urdu letter from the Jamiatul Ulama, dated 20 January 1976, discusses the introduction of the Tablighi Nisab into its affiliated *madrasas*. See Charl Le Roux, "Die Hanafitiese Ulama: Hulle Rol in Suid-Afrikaans Konteks," Appendix 3.

[36] Muhammad Faruq, *Afriqah aur Khidmat-i Faqihulummat*, 258.

[37] *Ibid.*, 258-259.

[38] "Death of Prominent Moulana," *Muslim News*, 3 May 1963.

age to pursue advanced Islamic studies in India. He arrived in Dabhel to study at Jami`a

Islamiyya[39] with Yusuf Binnori. Moulana Mia secured Qasim Sema employment at Majlis Ilmi at

Simlak, near Dabhel, which Moulana Mia founded.[40] Interestingly, after one trip to Deoband,

Sema traveled to the Nizamuddin district of Delhi, the historic center (*markaz*) of the Tablighi

Jama`at, so that he could seek a Sufi initiation with Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of the Tabligh

Jama`at. However, Ilyas refused, saying that he preferred for `*ulama'* to spend seven *chillas*

(forty days) doing *tabligh* because, as he put it, Sufi initiation was concerned only with oneself,

while inviting others to Islam helped the Islamic community as a whole.[41] This, in a few words,

encapsulates the *tablighi* approach to Sufism.

Sema finally returned to South Africa in 1944, where he became a founding member in

1955 of the Jamiatul Ulama Natal, designed to provide for Muslims in Durban services similar to

those of the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal.[42] More importantly, he also became a tireless advocate for

the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa, and especially noteworthy for wanting to extend *da`wah* to

the black African populations of southern Africa, significant insofar as proselytizing to non-

Muslims generally falls out of the ambit of what the Tablighi Jama`at does. He produced a Zulu

translation of the Qur'an, and his biographers emphasize how Sema was accosted and intimidated

by apartheid police for his work in the townships. He emphasized the need to practice *da`wah*

among the black population in his address at a Tablighi gathering in 1960, possibly the first in

Southern Africa. In fact, the precise dates for the origins of the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa

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[39] Jami`a Islamiyya Dabhel is a Deobandi *madrasa* in Simlak, in the district of Surat, where Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Yusuf Binnori, Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, and other prominent Deobandis have taught.

[40] Moulana I. E. Akoo, *Biography of the Founder of Darul Uloom Newcastle: Moulana Cassim Mohamed Sema Saheb*, Newcastle, South Africa: Darul Uloom Newcastle, 2007, 24.

[41] *Ibid.*, 32.

[42] The Jamiatul Ulama Natal is now known as the Jamiatul Ulama Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN). See www.jamiat.org.za. For information on the founding of the Jamiat, and Sema's role in it, see: http://www.jamiat.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=272&Itemid=81 (last accessed 17 March 2011).

are difficult to discern. Moosa locates the first *ijtima`* in Ladysmith in 1961.[43] Cilliers, one of the first to investigate the early history of the movement in South Africa, placed the first nationwide *ijtima`* in 1966.[44] Among those credited with bringing the Tablighi Jama`at to South Africa was the Gujarati businessman Goolam Mohammed 'Bhai' Padia, who attended the lectures of Muhammad Shafi`, Deoband's grand *mufti* at the time, when Muhammad Shafi` lectured in South Africa in 1966.[45]

Sema arranged an *ijtima`*, called the First All African Tablighi Ijtima`, on 30 October 1960 at Wasbank in Natal. In his address, Sema commented on "The Importance of Missionary Work in Islam," stating rather provocatively that "propagating Islam is also equally obligatory … as Namaaz, Rozah and Haj," basing his claim, as many Tablighis have, on the Qur'anic injunction in 3:109 that Muslims must "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (*al-amr bi-l ma`ruf wa nahy al-munkar*).[46] A second "All African Muslim Ijtima" would later be held on 28 October 1962, also at Wasbank. We know that future Tablighi assemblies grew substantially in size; Lenasia became on the largest sites for these events, with an estimated 15,000 men in attendance at one *ijtima`* in 1981.[47]

From the outset there was a close link between the founder of the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa - Hajji Bhai Padia - and the founder of the first Deobandi Dar al-`Ulum - Qasim Sema. In December 1960, Bhai Padia invited Sema to Durban where the two instigated the

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[43] Ebrahim Moosa, "Worlds 'Apart': The Tablighi Jama`at under Apartheid: 1963-1993," in Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama`at as a Transnational Movement for Faith Renewal*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 209.

[44] Jacobus L. Cilliers, 'Die Tabligh-Beweging en sy invloed in Suid-Afrika," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 4 (1984): 55-77, at 69.

[45] Maulana Muhammad Rafi' Usmani, the son of Muhammad Shafi`i, discussed his father's impact on Bhai Padia during a lecture at Darul Ulum Azaadville, near Johannesburg, in August of 2005. See Maulana Muhammad Rafi' Usmani, *The Responsibilities of the 'Ulama*, Karachi: Dar al-Isha'at, 2007, 5-6.

[46] Moulana I. E. Akoo, *Biography of the Founder of Darul Uloom Newcastle*, 120.

[47] *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 April 1981. The paper reported a common criticism of the Tablighi gatherings: that they are a waste of money.

formation of the first *jama`at* in South Africa, with Goolam' Bhai' Padia, Hajji Yusuf Patel

(father of Yunus Patel), Moulana Suleiman Koloa of Stanger and others as charter members.[48]

Sema approached Hajji Suleiman Seedat, custodian of the Soofie Saheb mosque in Ladysmith,

for permission to have the first *ijtima`* at that site. Soofie Saheb had arranged the construction of

this mosque, Ladysmith's first, before he settled in Durban.[49] It is an incredible historical irony

that the Tablighi Ijtima` at Ladysmith in 1961 took place at the renovated Soofie Saheb Masjid.

In future decades, as we will see, relations between the Barelwi-inclined Soofie family of Durban

and the Tablighis would not remain as cordial.

The Tablighi Jama`at made inroads into the Cape as well in the early 1960's. In 1963,

Qutbuddin Kagee, one of Cape Town's great *`ulama'* of the late twentieth century, returned to

Cape Town after studying at Nadwa in Lucknow and praised the Tablighi Jama`at. "I must

particularly mention the Tablighi Jammat," he proclaimed, "with whom I traveled through

Northern India visiting villages, and the work they are doing spreading Islam and its teachings

amongst the people … I was very much moved by their devotion to revive the Sunnat of the

Prophet."[50] Curiously, though, Maulana Kagee was most involved throughout his career as an

imam at the Habibia Soofie Masjid in the Athlone district of Cape Town, a mosque that is among

the most supportive of Barelwi Sufi devotionalism than any in the Cape.[51] It is also unclear

whether Maulana Kagee continued his work with the Tablighi Jama`at in the Cape.

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[48] Moulana I. E. Akoo, *Biography of the Founder of Darul Uloom Newcastle*, 42.

[49] Nile Green, "Islam for the Indentured Indian: a Muslim missionary in colonial South Africa," *Bulletin of SOAS*, 71, 3 (2008): 529-553, at 542.

[50] Youthful Moulana Returns from India After Long Absence," *Muslim News*, 6 September 1963, 1.

[51] The mosque was founded by Hazrat Soofie Saheb on a visit to Cape Town in 1905 and has been affiliated to varying degrees with the Soofie family throughout its history. Soofie Saheb assigned his brother-in-law, Maulana Abdul Lafief Qazi (d. 1916), to oversee the *khanqah* complex at the mosque. Upon Maulana Qazi's death, he was buried near the mosque and his tomb is a site of annual *`urs* festivities. See *Habibia Soofie Masjid Centenary Magazine: A Spiritual Legacy of a Hundred Years*, Cape Town: Habibia Soofie Masjid, 2005, 32. The fact that the tomb stands directly in front of the prayer hall in the direction of the *qibla*, so that during *salat* the congregants are prostrating, by extension, towards the tomb, has been a point of contention.

However, in 1966 Goolam 'Bhai' Padia and a certain Pakistani, Mufti Zayn al-`Abidin, initiated a Cape Town Tablighi *Jama`at*, and two years later in 1968, an *ijtima`* was held at the Muir Street Mosque, which remains today the center of Cape *tabligh*. Abu Bakr Najjar was first Cape `alim to openly welcome the Tablighi Jama`at to Cape Town, and there is ample evidence that by the late-1960's the Tablighi Jama`at was firmly established in the Cape.[52] One report describes their work in the black townships,[53] while another gives a list of dates and times when *Jama`ats* visiting from Durban would be visiting the Cape's mosques.[54] By the end of the decade, a public discussion had formed around whether the Tablighi Jama`at's methods were appropriate for the task of proselytizing in a country where Muslims comprised such a tiny minority.[55] The fact that one of these letters complains that their methods turn away non-Muslims suggests, at least, that they were in fact proselytizing among non-Muslims, not a traditional method of the movement.

It is important to note here that the rise of Tablighi activity in South Africa is part of a larger global expansion of the movement during the mid-century. It is in the 1950's and 1960's when the Tablighi Jama`at became a truly global movement, and it is not a coincidence that the first consciousness of 'Deoband' in South Africa dates to this same period - even though individual graduates of Deobandi *madrasas* had been in South Africa for at least several decades. Muhammad Yusuf, son of the movement's founder Muhammad Ilyas, became the second leader of the Tablighi Jama`at upon his father's death. He soon determined that the movement should

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[52] Qasimul Uloom, "Tabligh Work in the Cape," *1st Annual Bukhari Khatam Jalsa*, 7 December 2003, 28-31.

[53] "Tablighi Jamaat invades slums," *Muslim News,* 16 June 1967, 9. The article does not indicate whether these efforts targeted Muslims, the typical *modus operandi* of Tablighis, or non-Muslims.

[54] "Programme of Natal Tabligh Jamaats," *Muslim News*, 25 August 1967.

[55] In one letter to the *Muslim News*, a certain M. Dawood in Johannesburg complained that their methods made non-Muslims believe Islam was a "difficult, demanding" religion. "Tablighi Jamaat Discouraging?" *Muslim News*, 25 April 1969, 12. Additional letters suggest a wide debate over the Tablighi Jama`at in Johanessburg as well as the Cape, especially the point-counterpoint opinions of Ahmed Carrim's "Tabligh Methods too Rigid " and Fatima Ahmed's "Tabligh Defended," in *Muslim News*, 4 July 1969.

spread beyond South Asia, a decision that Gaborieau traces to an *ijtima`* held in 1945, with the

first preaching parties traveling to Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq. In the mid-

1950's Tablighi preaching parties began to make inroads into southern Africa.[56]

Up to this point in South African Islamic history, even though there were individual

graduates of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and affiliated *madrasas* in India and a fledgling Tablighi

movement, there was little consciousness of a 'Deobandi' identity. The polemics that would

divide South Africa's Muslims in the 1970's and 1980's had not yet emerged. For instance, an

organization known as the Universal Truth Movement, supported largely by Deobandi *`ulama'*,

collaborated with Barelwi scholars and even endorsed local *mawlud* celebrations. Founded in

1958 by Ismail Abdur Razzack and Qasim Sema,[57] the UTM had the primary purpose of

translating the Qur'an into African languages and printing pamphlets introducing Islam to a wide,

mostly non-Muslim audience. The founders of the Universal Truth Movement recognized the

power of printing local pamphlets and booklets in the service of spreading their message:

> Though the voice of preachers may reach the ears of many millions, thoughts
> emanating from the pens of authors travel farther to reach the eyes of many more.
> On looking closely at the immense power wielded by the ordinary daily
> newspapers, one finds that newspapers flash their messages across many oceans
> and deserts, countries and continents in a relatively short time, for the benefit of
> readers scattered on the surface of the globe. A similar effect is obtained when
> booklets, pamphlets and handbills containing religious material are published and
> distributed widely amongst the people. Islam, being the Universal Truth, must be
> propagated by every Muslim for any non-Muslim to read, understand and ponder
> about.[58]

They also raised funds for sending South African students to Deobandi Dar al-`Ulums in India

and Pakistan; during Qari Muhammad Tayyib's visit to South Africa in 1963, the UTM

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[56] Marc Gaborieau, "The Transformation of the Tablighi Jama`at into a Transnational Movement," in
Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama`at as a Transnational
Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 126 and 129.

[57] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 101.

[58] Universal Truth Movement, *Universal Truth Movement General Report*, 1964.

beseeched him to set up special language training in Urdu and Persian for African students at Deoband.

But significantly, the UTM translated and published a major Barelwi scholar's introduction to Islam: Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui's *Elementary Teachings of Islam*. Moreover, they even hosted an annual *mawlud* program that they viewed as an opportunity for interreligious discussion and reflection: "Everywhere in the country Muslims hold the Mouloodun Nabi. The significance of the Prophet Day Celebrations held by the U.T.M. lies in the fact that prominent speakers from all races and religious denominations are given an opportunity of expressing their view on the Holy Prophet's life. The value of this interchange cannot be over-emphasized for it brings in its wake true harmony and tolerance amongst different people."[59] What are we to make of this, an ostensibly 'Deobandi' organization - co-directed by the man who is widely regarded as the forefather of Deoband in South Africa, Qasim Sema, and which hosted Deobandi scholars and raised money for Deobandi students - that sponsored an annual *mawlud*?

There is other suggestive evidence that 'Deoband' had not yet become the contentious 'brand' that it would later become, at least in South Africa. Coverage of Deobandi rector Qari Muhammad Tayyib's monumental visit to South Africa in 1963, just over a month after Maulana Muhammad Mia died, mentioned little about his connection with Deoband and nothing about the controversies that would accrue around the Deobandi 'brand' years later. Qari Muhammad Tayyib made his first trip to South Africa with great fanfare. He visited Johannesburg first, receiving an official reception from the city's mayor, J. F. Oberholzer. Coverage identified him as "Chancellor of the Deoband Madressa" and "one of the most learned and powerful Alims today in the Indo-Pak sub-continent."[60] He then visited Cape Town on 4 August 1963 with his son Maulana al-Haq Muhammad Salim. He was welcomed by hundreds of Muslims at a ceremony that featured speeches by the mayor of Cape Town and Sheikh A. Najaar of the Muslim Judicial

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[59] *Ibid*.

[60] "Mayor Welcomes Moulana," *Muslim News*, 28 June 1963, 4.

Council, who delivered a lengthy panegyric upon Tayyib's arrival. Tayyib gave his first lecture at the Habibia Mosque in Athlone, which was then, and remains now, a 'Barelwi' mosque.[61] The article does not mention Tayyib in relation to any 'Deobandi' identity or ideology, even though this is the very man who was at that time most responsible for articulating that same ideology.[62]

Muslim News reprinted a letter from Tayyib, in which he praised Cape Muslims for their "steadfastness" in Islam and observed that a "deep resentment and dislike could be seen among the staunch Muslims towards the Quadiani [*sic*] menace," referencing Deobandi antagonism towards the Ahmadiyya movement. Tayyib notes that Yusuf Karaan, then of the Muslim Judicial Council, was a graduate from Deoband. Yet astonishingly, on the very same page is coverage of a *mawlud* on August 11, where Yusuf Karaan was billed as the main speaker (though interestingly it does not say that Tayyib attended).[63]

In seeking out a key moment when widespread public awareness of 'Deoband' as an institution emerged among South Africa's Muslims, one could point to 1966, when the Dar al-Ifta' at Deoband issued a *fatwa* declaring South Africa an 'Abode of War' (*Dar al-Harb*) so that the normal rules governing the taking of interest would no longer apply. The Deoband *fatwa* was, by all measures, a scandal for many South African Muslims, with Muslim newspapers in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban registering the negative sentiment. "Alas, with a reckless disregard for the preservation of pure, unadulterated Islam, the Muftees of Doeband [*sic*] have issued a Fatwa decreeing that South Africa is Darul-Harb," complained one letter in the *Muslim News*. "How has the amorphous entity called public opinion reacted to this Fatwa?" asked another. "Alhamdulillah! The Muslims have treated it with scorn … Doeband must take note that

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[61] "Tumultuous Welcome for Moulana by Cape Muslims," *Muslim News*, 9 August 1963, 1. His talk was a somewhat generic lecture, according to the reports, on the subject of Muslims' forgetting the reason they were created (one of the central ethical teachings of the Qur'an), and preached that contemporary Muslims have indulged in too many vices.

[62] I explore Tayyib's role in articulating 'Deobandi' identity in the next chapter.

[63] "Moulana's Farewell Message: Praise for Cape Muslims," *Muslim News*, 23 August 1963, 1.

any assault by them to thwart the holy spirit that rages within the Muslims here in South Africa will discredit them forever."[64]

Fatima Meer, at the time a prominent sociologist and scholar of Islam in South Africa, regarded the fatwa as a "dangerous pronouncement, capable of producing serious and damaging moral, material and political consequences for South African Muslims and to the cause of Islam."[65] Meer challenged Tayyib's use of the concept of *dar al-harb*, arguing that the concept has "not the least authority either in the Quran or in the Hadith."[66] As far as Meer is concerned, Tayyib defined *dar al-harb* as such solely because Muslims are not the "ruling majority" in South Africa, and not "on the grounds of its governmental policies of inequality and racial discrimination which conflicts with the fundamental Islamic concept of universal brotherhood."[67]

Meer's analysis, it seems, accords with the high-modernist approach to the Qur'an and *sunna* that was popular among mid-century South African Muslim intellectuals, for example those involved in the Arabic Study Circle. Features of this approach included criticism of the authority of `ulama', and the promotion of movements to read and understand the Qur'an directly as a source of authority. She is not critical of Deobandis specifically, but of `ulama' in general. Ultimately she states, "Muslims believe that the best is in the Quran and the Quran makes riba unlawful (haram)."[68] For Meer, "by adopting the fictitious division of the world into dar-ul-Islam and dar-ul-harb the Fatwa presents a false image of Islam and it thereby offers a challenge to the basic Islamic message of peace for humanity."[69]

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[64] "The Irony of the Doeband [*sic*] Fatwa," *Muslim News*, 8 April 1966, 26. The issue contained a large collection of furious letters grouped under the banner of 'THE DOEBAND [*sic*] BLUNDER'. The issue even published one reader's satirical poem about the Deoband *fatwa*, "with apologies to Keats."

[65] Fatima Meer, "Interest and Dar-ul-Harb in Islam: A Preliminary Analysis of the Fatwa on Riba of the Muftees of Dar-ul-Uloom, Deoband," supplement to *Views and News*, 10 February 1966, 2.

[66] *Ibid*., 10.

[67] *Ibid*., 2.

[68] *Ibid*.,, 12.

Thus, in multiple respects, we must note that there was little self-conscious awareness of a 'Deobandi' presence in South Africa at least until the visit of Qari Muhammad Tayyib, appropriate given Tayyib's own work in 'marketing' Deoband, and more specifically, with the subsequent fiasco surrounding the Deobandi *fatwa* on interest, which was widely rebuked. Ultimately 'Deobandi' identity is a two-way street: on the one hand, it was imported self-consciously by graduates of these *madrasas* in South Africa, but also *ascribed* to individuals and institutions as well, as in the largely positive reaction to Qari Muhammad Tayyib's high-profile visit and the negative reaction to the Deoband *fatwa* on South Africa as an 'abode of war'.

Mahmud Hasan Gangohi and the South African Tablighi Jama`at

I will now turn to the roles of two pioneering Deobandi scholars, Mahmud Hasan Gangohi and Masihullah Khan, in forging a Deobandi presence in southern Africa. First, Mahmud Hasan Gangohi's imprint on South African Deoband is measured largely through his role as a stalwart of the Tablighi Jama`at, and in fact his work is largely responsible for helping to justify *tabligh* among prominent Deobandi `ulama', such as Qari Muhammad Tayyib, who were at first skeptical of its conformity with the *shari`a*. His Sufi initiates have included major South African Deobandi scholars, such as Ebrahim Saliji of Madrasa Ta`lim al-Din in Isipingo Park, near Durban; Ebrahim Desai of Madrasa In'aamiyya in Camperdown; Fazlur Rahman Azmi of Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville; and Yunus Patel of Madrasa Sawlehaat in Durban. One of the smaller Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa, Jami`a Mahmudiyya in Springs, is named in his honor.[70]

Mahmud Hasan's legacy in the Tablighi Jama`at centers, in part, on his efforts to convince other Deobandi scholars that an organized *tabligh* effort was both worthwhile and permissible in Islamic legal terms. Initially, several high-profile Deobandi scholars regarded organized *tabligh* is an 'innovation' (*bid`a*) and especially asked whether, even if one rejects the

[69] *Ibid*.

[70] http://www.mahmoodiyah.org.za/ (last accessed on 10 February 2011).

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notion that it is *bid`a*, does it not merely repeat the religious work that is already carried out in the *madrasas* and Sufi lodges (*khanqahs*)? I will show here how Mahmud Hasan's defense of *tabligh* is a direct extension of Deobandis' reconceptualization of the public role of the *`ulama'*. It was no longer adequate merely to train students at *madrasas* or reform their character in Sufi lodges; instead, he sought to bring the religious education of the one and moral reform of the other directly to the Muslim public. I will also show how his fervor for *tabligh* energized the South African Tablighi Jama`at and, by extension, laid the groundwork for the subsequent institutionalization of Deobandi thought in the form of *madrasas*.

Mahmud Hasan Gangohi was born in July 1907 in Gangoh.[71] His biographers note that he was born on the very day in 1907 - 8 Jumada al-Thani - on which Rashid Ahmad Gangohi died two years earlier.[72] His father, Maulana Hamid Hasan, studied at Deoband with 'Shaykh al-Hind' Mahmud Hasan, Deoband's first student, and became a Sufi disciple of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi.[73] Mahmud Hasan Gangohi entered Mazahir al-Ulum in Saharanpur in 1923 and later entered Deoband in 1930.[74] There he studied *hadith* under Husain Ahmad Madani.[75] By 1955 he was the senior lecturer in *hadith* at Jami` al-Ulum in Kanpur.[76] Finally, in 1964 he was appointed Chief Mufti at Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, where his collected *fatwas* were published under the name *Fatawa-yi Mahmudiyya*,[77] and in 1966 he became rector of Mazahir al-`Ulum.[78] Mahmud Hasan Gangohi became a senior *khalifa* of Muhammad Zakariyya, with whom he took initiation while at

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[71] Muhammad Faruq, *Hayat-i Mahmud, savanih Faqih al-ummat Mufti Mahmud Hasan Gangohi*, Mairath: Maktaba-yi Mahmudiyya, 1998, 150.

[72] Muhammad Faruq, *Afriqah aur Khidmat-i Faqihulummat*, 228.

[73] *Ibid*., 229.

[74] Muhammad Faruq, *Hayat-i Mahmud*, 156 and 159.

[75] *Ibid*., 159-160.

[76] *Ibid*., 287.

[77] *Ibid*., 414-445.

[78] Muhammad Faruq, *Afriqah aur Khidmat-i Faqihulummat*, 234-235.

Deoband.[79] He made numerous visits to South Africa for the purpose of lecturing and accepting

Sufi initiations, making an extended stay from 1984 to 1986.[80] Mahmud Hasan engaged in public

debates with Barelwi scholars in South Africa, most notably Muhammad Shafee Okarvi.[81] He

died on 2 September 1992 while in South Africa, where he came frequently to advise his many

followers and give public lectures.[82] He is buried in Johannesburg's Elsberg Cemetery.

Mahmud Hasan was involved with the Tablighi Jama`at from its inception,

accompanying Muhammad Ilyas on some of his initial preaching expeditions in Mewat.[83]

Mahmud Hasan also took credit for ingratiating Qari Muhammad Tayyib to the Tablighi Jama`at,

the latter being skeptical of the group at first.[84] Other prominent Deobandis did not warm up to

the Tablighi Jama`at as easily as Tayyib. There was a dispute between Mahmud Hasan and

Maulana Abdul Bari Nadwi while Mahmud Hasan was in Lucknow for an *ijtima`*. The contention

concerned Thanawi's view of the Tablighis, which came to head in an argument. A friend of

Mahmud Hasan's believed, in Thanawi's view, that there must be an order in which reformation

takes place: first oneself, then one's household, then one's village, and only then should one go to

reform others outside one's village. Mahmud Hasan replied, "This view is incorrect. Hazrat

Thanawi wrote *Islah al-Rusum*, *Bihishti Zewar*, and traveled to various locales to preach. Did he

first reform his own neighborhood (*mahalla*) and town (*qasba*)? Did he only take to reforming his

own home? Is there a custom that was not also widespread in Thana Bhavan? Hazrat Thanawi's

wife was the aunt of my close relative; I know all about their home." His friend replied, "I was

not aware the Tablighi Jama`at could influence the Grand Mufti of Deoband to such an extent."

[79] *Ibid.*, 235.

[80] *Ibid.*, 252.

[81] *Ibid.*, 250-251. I discuss Okarvi and his work in the fifth chapter.

[82] Muhammad Faruq, *Hayat-i Mahmud*, 546.

[83] Fazlur Rahman Azmi, *Hazrat Mufti Mahmud Hasan Sahib Gangohi aur Jama`at-i Tabligh*, Karachi: Zamzam Publishers, 2003,16.

[84] *Ibid.*

Mahmud Hasan replied, "On the contrary, the Tablighi Jama`at gave the Dar al-`Ulum [Deoband]

a *mufti*. The Dar al-`Ulum required a *mufti*, so they asked the Tablighi Jama`at to give them one. I

am a Tablighi first and foremost, and a *mufti* second."[85]

Mahmud Hasan aligns the mission of the Tablighi Jama`at in the same tradition of public

engagement that Rashid Ahmad Gangohi advocated for the *`ulama'*. Mahmud Hasan identifies

the *tablighi* gathering as a third site, after the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*, for disseminating

religious knowledge and fashioning moral selves, a view that had a deep impact on South African

Deobandis' public writing and preaching and their advocacy of *tabligh*. Not everyone has the

time or intellectual capacity to study books or sit with a Sufi master, taught Mahmud Hasan, but

through the Tablighi Jama`at, Deobandi *`ulama'* sought to bring those insights, in a simplified

form, to the masses:

> The fundamental point is that learning the *din* is required of everyone. To this
> end, books are written and published, *madrasas* are established, a syllabus is
> formulated for them and its system of study is arranged, *khanqahs* are
> established, preachers are provided to lecture at gatherings, and libraries are
> founded. Various methods are chosen to make it easy to acquire the *din*, on the
> condition that none of them violates the *shari`a*. One of these is the Tabligh
> Jama`at. Not every person is able to acquire the *din* from a *madrasa*, nor does
> every person have time to read through an entire syllabus, nor does every person
> even have the intellectual capacity to do so. The same situation applies to the
> *khanqah*. Not every person is able to acquire the *din* through books … Among
> the countless (*karor*) Muslims, how many are able to benefit from the *madrasas*
> and the *khanqahs*? And those who benefit from gatherings and sermons are even
> less in number. Religiousness (*be dini*) is so prevalent (*`amm*) that it was
> necessary to find a method of promoting *din* that could also be both prevalent and
> simple.[86]

At the same time that the Tablighi Jama`at complements the work of the *madrasa* and *khanqah*, it

also important to note that it does not replace it: "Those involved in the Tabligh parties have a

responsibility to grant the utmost respect to the *madrasas* and *khanqahs* and to consult with them

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[85] *Ibid*., 17-18.

[86] *Ibid*., 31. Compare a similar statement: "The work of the *madrasas* and *khanqahs* is very important and it is misguided to say that they are useless. Yet it is true that one enters a *madrasa* or a *khanqah* after the desire enters the heart, and until that desire comes, one will not enter, and most people are without that desire. The Tablighi Jama`at goes out to these people without that desire, just as the Messenger used to do." *Ibid*., 115.

in their own reform (*islah*)."[87]

Mahmud Hasan saw this educational mission as *the* central strategy in combating the proliferation of illicit innovations (*bid`a*). And in fact, his biographer identifies South Africa as the site where the advocates of *bid`a* have been most successful and, thus, where the Tablighi Jama`at is most needed:

> When the *sunna* is alive, surely *bid`a* will be finished. So many proponents of *bid`a* have repented of their innovations and have been overcome by a passion for following the *sunna*. So many of those who commit *bid`a* in the name of the Sufi saints at their tombs and their nonsense have been stopped. *In India, after the era of bid`a was ended, the proponents of bid`a established their center in South Africa … where they attempt to make bid`a commonplace*. But the great scholars (*akabir*) of Deoband, and particularly Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, are bringing an end to their influence by means of their travels abroad.[88]

Mahmud Hasan helped define the Tablighis' ethos of political disengagement and detachment from conflict. His student Fazlur Rahman Azmi, the senior instructor in *hadith* at South Africa's Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville, compiled a collection of his master's statements pertaining to *tabligh*. Azmi narrates that several of Mahmud Hasan Gangohi's followers came to him during one of this South African tours with complaints about the vociferous criticisms of the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa. They singled out a particular `*alim*, unnamed in Azmi's text. Mahmud Hasan's advice to his students was simple: stay away from conflict with him and do not engage the `*alim*'s critics publicly: "My opinion is that you should need not say anything to him. You will continue with your work and he will continue with his, believing it to be a duty. The more you try to prevent him, the more he'll persist. Continue with your work and let him continue with his."[89]

Mahmud Hasan's book *The Limits of Difference* (*Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*) exemplifies this Tablighi ethos of avoiding conflict whenever possible (even though, as we will see in later

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[87] *Ibid.*, 48.

[88] Muhammad Faruq, *Afriqah aur Khidmat-i Faqihulummat*, 249. (emphasis added)

[89] Fazlur Rahman Azmi, *Hazrat Mufti Mahmud Hasan Sahib Gangohi aur Jama`at-i Tabligh*, 15.

chapters, Tablighis in South Africa did not always live up to their lofty ideals). The title is meant to connote how Deobandi scholars differed amongst themselves, but that they knew the appropriate 'limits' in asserting these differences; in other words, at least in its own idealized self-narrative, there is healthy room for disagreement and debate within the Deoband movement.

Drawn from Mahmud Hasan's own sayings and excerpts from other Deobandis' works, this text consists almost entirely of exemplary tales of the *adab* of Deobandi `*ulama*', revolving around their irenic, patient means of quelling disputes or dealing with criticism, and the many disagreements that formed among themselves. Several, for example, narrate how Deobandi scholars maintained mutual respect and courtesy amidst major differences over how, if at all, the `*ulama*' should be involved in politics.[90] It may also serve implicitly as a foil to the vitriol of Deobandis' most vocal critics, such as Ahmed Reza Khan. In some ways it complements Tayyib's *Maslak-i `ulama'-yi Deoband*, with its notion that Deobandis adhere to a 'middle' path, avoiding extremes in belief or in practice.

One of the most crucial chapters in *The Limits of Difference* asks, "What should the masses do when the `*ulama*' differ?" drawing on the statements of Mufti Muhammad Shafi'i and Muhammad Zakariyya.[91] Muhammad Shafi`i notes the tendency for people to take disagreement among the `*ulama*' as license for listening to none of them. But he asks, if someone consults two or more doctors for a treatment but is not satisfied with any of them, does he then simply ignore the illness? Likewise, Muhammad Zakariyya reiterates, in blunter terms, the importance of consulting the `*ulama*' for the public, and of the `*ulama*' guiding the public in religious matters:

> The masses have made it their business to form opinions of their own on
> religious controversies (*masa'il*). Why do they find it necessary to arbitrate over

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[90] The most well known dispute transpired between Husain Ahmad Madani, who became intimately involved in anti-British independence politics and opposed the Pakistan movement, and Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, who opposed `*ulama*' involvement in the movement for independence. In one letter, Madani wrote that Thanawi's view was in error, but that he completely rejected any "rudeness" (*gustakhi*) towards him and insisted that his own students cease from criticizing Thanawi. Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, *Hudud-i Ikhtilaf*, 133.

[91] *Ibid*., 208-212.

differences among the men of knowledge (*ahl-i `ilm*), over intellectual issues and reasoning, when they lack the capacities to do so? In such arbitrations and decisions, they ought to follow the true *`ulama'* whose sound beliefs and piety are borne of experience and whose credentials as men of God are established. But this is not their intention. Their intention is to engage in disputes. In such assemblies, in such public discourses, the masses find no gratification unless others are reviled, unless others are criticized, unless others are publically disgraced. The masses find assemblies in which religious topics are explained in a straightforward manner to be dull (*phika*) and insipid (*be maza*).[92]

We can discern Mahmud Hasan's impact on South African Deoband, to sum up, in at least three forms: in advocating *tabligh* as a means of bringing both rudiments of *madrasa* education and reformed Sufi ethics to the masses, in strategizing about how Deobandi scholars should engage with reforming Muslim publics, and in shaping the apolitical ethos of Deobandi *`ulama'* that many South African Muslims maligned in the 1980's, as I explain in the fifth chapter.

Masihullah Khan: Imprinting Thanawi on South African Deoband

Muhammad Masihullah Khan Sherwani is arguably the single Deobandi scholar who has had the most direct and sustained influence on South African Deobandi thought and writing. Thanawi personally selected him as among his most esteemed and spiritually talented Sufi pupils, and throughout Masihullah's writings the imprint of Thanawi is abundantly evident. Some of his more prominent South African Sufi pupils include Ebrahim Saliji of Madrasa Ta`lim al-Din in Isipingo Beach; Ahmed Sadiq Desai of *The Majlis* in Port Elizabeth; Siraj Desai of Dar al-`Ulum Abu Bakr in Port Elizabeth; Ismail Mangera of Johannesburg, author of numerous collections and commentaries on Masihullah's teachings; Mufti Hashim Boda of Ashraf al-`Ulum in De Deur; as well as Qasim Sema, the aforementioned founder of Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle who played an enormous role in implementing the Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa.

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[92] *Ibid.*, 211.

Muhammad Masihullah Khan was born in 1910 at Bariah, near Aligarh.[93] He hailed from the Sherwani clan of Pathans, some of whom participated in Sayyid Ahmad's *jihad* in Kashmir.[94] Thanawi considered him one of his highest ranked *khalifas*. He became a Sufi initiate of Thanawi while studying at Deoband. At Deoband he also studied under Husain Ahmad Madani. Thanawi introduced Masihullah Khan to Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jama`at, instigating Masihullah's involvement in the Tablighi Jama`at. In 1937, Thanawi directed Masihullah to go to Jalalabad and establish a *madrasa* there, called Miftah al-`Ulum. Thanawi in fact laid the foundation stone for the *madrasa*, acting as its spiritual patron.[95] Masihullah also established a *khanqah* near the *madrasa* for advising his many disciples. While he concentrated his energies on his many students and on those who came to his *khanqah* seeking spiritual advice, he also found time to write. He is the author of *Faizul Bari*,[96] a popular commentary on Bukhari; *Risala-yi Taqlid wa Ijtihad*,[97] a defense of traditional *taqlid* against Salafi critics; *Risala-yi Ihtimam-i mashvarah*,[98] a treatment of the basis of 'consultation' (*shura*) in Islam and its application to contemporary *madrasas*, and *Shari`at o Tasawwuf*,[99] which will be the focus here, as well as

[93] Rashid Ahmad Mevati Miftahi, *Hayat-i Masihulummat*, Faridabad: Idara-yi Ta'lifat-i Masihulummat, 1995, 56.

[94] *Ibid.*, 62-63.

[95] Muhammad Faruq, *Zikr-i Masihulummat*, Brixton: Maktaba Noor, 1998, 8.

[96] Muhammad Masihullah Khan, *Faiz al-Bari fi dars al-Bukhari*, Muzaffarnagar: Maktabah-yi Faiz-i Ashraf, 1972.

[97] The Majlisul Ulama of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, translated this treatise, among others, for local readerships: Masihullah Khan, *Taqlid and Ijtihad*, Port Elizabeth: Majlisul Ulama of South Africa, 1980.

[98] Muhammad Masihullah Khan, *Risalah-yi Ihtimam-i mashvarah*, Karachi: Zam Zam Publishers, 1999. This treatise is translated into English by the Majlisul Ulama of Port Elizabeth as *Shura: Islamic Consultation*, Lenasia: N & M Publishers, n.d. Masihullah tells of a clash within Dar al-`Ulum Deoband when a certain wealthy noble in the town applied to become a member of the *madrasa*'s *shura* council, but Rashid Ahmad Gangohi did not believe the man had the credentials to serve on the council. He refused the application, and an outcry ensured; Masihullah approvingly says that Gangohi stood his ground and insisted that the *shura* council was a sacred institution that could not be compromised by the influence of wealth or prestige. See *Shura: Islamic Consultation*, 42-45.

[99] Muhammad Masihullah Khan, *Shari'at o Tasawwuf: fan-i tasawwuf ki mukammal o mudalil-i kitab*, Multan: Idara-yi Ta'lifat-i Ashrafiyya, 1996.

other texts. He saw his work as merely an elaboration upon his master's, Ashraf `Ali Thanawi; Masihullah prescribed a reading list for his *khulafa'*, consisting of Thanawi's *Bayan al-Qur'an*, *Imdad al-Fatawa*, *Bihishti Zewar*, *Tarbiyat al-Salik*, *Islahi Nisab*, *Ashraf al-Sawanih*, as well as his own *Shari`at o Tasawwuf* and *Majalis Masih al-Ummat*.[100]

Masihullah's connections with South Africa were deep; South African students at the *madrasa* Miftah al-`Ulum, of whom there were many, were sizeable enough to have their own separate dormitory and even collected funds to expand the sitting area where Masihullah would deliver his popular *majalis*.[101] Masihullah Khan traveled to South Africa five times over the span of thirteen years, making his first trip in 1970 and his final trip in 1983.[102] His followers have driven Deobandi Sufism's global reach, establishing themselves in South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and elsewhere. His *khulafa'* in South Africa numbered at least ten out of approximately sixty *khulafa'* in total.[103]

Many of his students now direct and teach *madrasas* in South Africa. Like Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, Masihullah Khan sees the relationship between the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* as synergistic and mutually supportive. The role of the *khanqah* is to translate theoretical knowledge gained in the *madrasa* into ethical practice: the *madrasa* educates through instruction (*ta`lim*), while the *khanqah* educates through moral training (*tarbiya*) in ethics (*akhlaq*).[104] Elsewhere, he

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[100] Muhammad Faruq, *Zikr-i Masihulummat*, 67.

[101] *Ibid.*, 54-55.

[102] *Ibid.*, 17.

[103] *Ibid.*, 47-48. They include Maulana Munshi Moosa Yaqub of Verulam, Maulana Ismail Kathrada of Natal, Maulana Ahmad Sadiq (A.S.) Desai of Majlisul Ulama in Port Elizabeth, Dr. Abdul Qadir Hansa of Ladysmith, Maulana Abdul Haq Omarjee of Durban, Dr. Ismail Mangera of Johannesburg, Haji Yusuf Kathrada of Verulam, Mufti Rashid Mia of Waterval, Maulana Muhammad Hashim Boda of Lenasia, Maulana Qasim Dawood of Parlock, and Yusuf Navlakhi in Lenasia.

[104] Ismail Mangera, *For Friends*, *Selected Discourses of Maseehul Ummat Hadhrat Maulana Muhammed Maseehullah Khan Saheb*, Volume 2, Brixton, Johannesburg: Young Men's Muslim Association, 1990, 21.

explains, "Academic knowledge will be acquired in the *madrasa*, but the practical application of that knowledge will take place in the *khanqah*."[105]

Shari`a and Sufism (*Shari`at and Tasawwuf*) is essentially Masihullah's own anthology of Thanawi's most essential teachings on Sufism, drawing from Thanawi's *Bavadir al-Navadir, Shari`at o Tariqat* and other works.[106] Part commentary, part oral discourses (*malfuzat*), the text is a sort of extended homage to his master. Like many Sufi works, it is discursive, moving deftly from topic to topic with little sense of overarching organization. Roughly the first half covers the nature of Sufi initiation, the need for a *shaykh* and how to identify a qualified one, the 'rights' (*huquq*) of the *shaykh* and the *murid*, the four forms of 'striving' on the Sufi path (*mujahidah*): reducing one's speech, one's food, one's sleep, and one's association with other people. The second half is devoted entirely to Sufi ethics. As with Thanawi, ethical self-perfection is a dual process of divesting oneself of specific negative attributes (*akhlaq-i razila*) and cultivating noble ethical virtues (*akhlaq-i hamida*). Collectively, this process is known as 'self purification' (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).

Masihullah begins *Shari`a and Sufism* succinctly affirming three major facets of Deobandi Sufism: its basis in ethics of the self, the apologetic tone that seeks to defend Sufism as aligned with the *shari`a*, and the notion that *all* Muslims should avail themselves of Sufi ethics. For Masihullah, Sufism not only revolves around "adorning" the self with ethical virtues, but is in fact the very "purpose of life:"

> Sufism is the soul of the religion (*din ki ruh*) and its perfection. Its goal is to purify the interior self (*batin*) of the negative attributes such as lust, calamities of the tongue, anger, envy, jealousy, love of the world, love of fame, stinginess, greed, pretence, show, vanity, and pride, and to adorn the interior self with the noble ethical virtues such as repentance, patience, gratitude, fear of God, hope, asceticism, the unity of God (*tawhid*), trust, love, desire for God (*shauq*), sincerity, honesty, meditation (*muraqaba*), taking account of oneself (*muhasiba*),

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[105] *Ibid.*, 24.

[106] An abridged version of this text is published in English as Shaykh Masihullah Khan Sherwani, *The Path to Perfection: An Anthology of the Spiritual Teachings of Hakim al-Umma Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi*, Santa Barbara: White Thread Press, 2005.

and contemplation. Thus a regard (*tavajjoh*) for God is cultivated, which is the very purpose of life. Sufism and the Sufi path is therefore not at all contrary to the religion and the *shari`a*. *In fact, it is incumbent for every Muslim to become a Sufi. Without Sufism, in reality, one cannot truly be called a complete Muslim.*[107]

In one of his *majalis*, Masihullah Khan reiterates the Deobandi notion that Sufism is necessary for the ethical rectification of the entire Muslim public and that anyone can become a 'saint' (*wali*). Speaking to a public *majlis*, Masihullah announced:

> You are all saints. Yes! You are all saints … A person is inclined to persons with temperaments similar to his …Where does a buffalo stay? Amongst buffalos! Where does a goat stay? Among goats! Where does a camel stay? Amongst camels! Whose company does a thief keep? Thieves! In what circle does royalty move? In royal circles! This coming of yours clearly points to you being of the Ahlullah.[108]

Thus Masihullah fully appropriates both Thanawi's 'democratization' of Sufism as well as the apologetical approach to Sufism typical of Deobandi critiques. The legitimacy of Sufism is clearly a 'controversy' in need of address. In fact, Masihullah spills a substantial amount of ink dismissing the exaggerated claims that some make for Sufism and which have tarnished its image; it does not sanction amulets or talismans for achieving worldly success, he says, nor does it portend the future or promise that Sufis will experience ecstasy, dreams and visions.[109]

Masihullah's *Shari`a and Sufism* illustrates the intertextual and interwoven discourses of Deobandi Sufism. Borrowing liberally from Thanawi's *Shari`a and the Sufi Path* and other works, Masihullah lifts entire passages from his teacher and predecessor, integrating Thanawi's work seamlessly into his own formulation of the Sufi path. And just as Masihullah Khan used Thanawi's writings on Sufi ethics as a basis for his work, one of Masihullah Khan's most prominent *khalifas* in South Africa, Ismail Mangera, uses Masihullah's work as the basis for his *Good Character*. Here, Mangera translates the serial list of good and bad ethical qualities into contemporary parlance, imbuing it with a sort of 'self help' approach readily accessible to South

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[107] Masihullah Khan, *Shari`at o Tasawwuf*, 17-18. (emphasis added)

[108] Masihullah Khan, *Islah-i Nafs*, Witbank, South Africa: Madrasa Arabia Miftahul Ulum, n.d., 24.

[109] Masihullah Khan, *Shari`at o Tasawwuf,* 24.

African Sufis today.

An example will illustrate the relation between Thanawi's and Masihullah Khan's work, and in turn, between Masihullah Khan's and Ismail Mangera's work. To see how this discourse develops from Thanawi to Masihullah to Mangera, it will be helpful to trace how each wrote of a single ethical characteristic. Here I will choose *hirs*, 'greed'. What becomes evident is that Masihullah Khan offers a nearly literal translation of Thanawi's entry on *hirs*, while Mangera extrapolates from Masihullah to tease out the moral implications of his reasoning. I begin with Thanawi's explanation of greed, then continue to Masihullah Khan's. I have highlighted in bold font the phrases where their texts differ:

An explanation of greed (*hirs*):

Allah Ta'ala says: *Do not raise your eyes towards the glitter of the worldly life, which We have granted to various groups among them.*

The Messenger says: *The son of Adam ages while two things of his grow younger: greed for wealth and greed for a longer life.*

The realities of greed: Greed is defined as attention (*tavajjoh*) and inclination towards the world, in other words when the heart is consumed with money and the like. If one turns his attention in another direction it will [still] be towards the world, and naturally, the more one regards that thing, the more one will be compelled to do so and the more this attention towards the world will be strengthened. So keep your attention turned towards God; the more one turns towards God, the less one will turn towards the world.

Greed is the root of all maladies. It is such a malady that one could call it the mother of all maladies because all strife and conflict arises from it. If one does not have greed for money, he will respect the rights of others. The basis of evil deeds is taking pleasure in greed. The basis of all evil attributes (*akhlaq-i razila*) is pride and pride is a desire for status. Thus the origin of pride, too, is greed. It is human nature that if a man owned two forests where gold and silver were as abundant as water, he would want a third. The more a desire is satiated, the stronger it becomes. The more you scratch a rash, the worse it gets. God proclaimed: 'Does humankind not have everything he desires?' The virtuous man will be able to fulfill all his desires, but the greedy man knows no solace and nothing can quench the desire in his belly.

> *Desire for the things of this world /*
> *Are quenched only by the dust of the grave.*

A single desire has no end; it leads to another, and another. One is then not content with fate (*taqdir*) but is overwhelmed with desires too difficult to fulfill,

leading to worry upon worry. Whether its more money or more children, it will always cause worry in the heart of the greedy man.

The remedy for greed: Decrease what you spend. Do not worry about your income nor worry about the future. Reflect on the baseness of greed and desire. **Continue pondering this explanation of the love of the world. God willing, it will be of benefit to you**.[110]

Masihullah's version reads as follows:

An explanation of greed (*hirs*):

Allah Ta'ala says: *Do not raise your eyes towards the glitter of the worldly life, which We have granted to various groups among them.*

The Messenger says: *The son of Adam ages while two things of his grow younger: greed for wealth and greed for a longer life*.

The realities of greed: Greed exists when the heart is consumed with money, etc. Greed is the root of all maladies. It is such a malady that one could call it the mother of all maladies because all strife and conflict arises from it. If one does not have greed for money, he will respect the rights of others. The basis of all evil attributes (*akhlaq-i razila*) is greed. **The mystics (`arifin) have said that the root of all evil attributes is pride and pride is a desire for status.** Thus the origin of pride, too, is greed. It is human nature that if a man owned two forests where gold and silver were as abundant as water, he would want a third. The more a desire is satiated, the stronger it becomes. The more you scratch a rash, the worse it gets. God proclaimed: 'Does humankind not have everything he desires?' ' The virtuous man will be able to fulfill all his desires, but the greedy man knows no solace and nothing can quench the desire in his belly. A single desire has no end; it leads to another, and another. One is then not content with fate (*taqdir*) but is overwhelmed with desires too difficult to fulfill, leading to worry upon worry. Whether its more money or more children, it will always cause worry in the heart of the greedy man.

The remedy for greed: Decrease what you spend. Do not worry about your income nor worry about the future. Reflect on the baseness of greed and desire.[111]

The only differences are two: Masihullah omits a Persian couplet in Thanawi's version along with

a few other words, and adds that these teachings about greed are derived from Sufi 'mystics'

('*arifin*).

Finally, note how Ismail Mangera's abbreviated version in English attempts to distill the

essential ideas in Thanawi and Masihullah, drawing on contemporary terminology:

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[110] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Shari`at o Tariqat*, 205-206.

[111] Masihullah Khan, *Shari`at o Tasawwuf*, 71-73.

Hirs - Greed

Definition: The total attachment to, and engrossment in, materialism.

Dangers and Consequences: Greed has no end point. Like a fire raging more and more as additional fuel is fed into it, a person with greed desires more and more irrespective of how much he has already attained. Greed in various guises is the root of all ills. Immorality is nothing but lust for pleasure; arrogance is greed for fame. The effects of *Hirs* can be seen in features like dishonesty, strife, needless lawsuits, mental anguish, spiritual stunting and a host of other debasing features seen in society.

Prevention:
   (i)   Recognize and admit that *Hirs* is despicable - a greedy person is contemptible. Make a resolution not to be controlled by greed.
   (ii)   Assess one's priorities and necessities in life - strive to fulfill these but curb the desire for anything in excess.
   (iii)   Be contented with what *Allah Ta'ala*, the Best Provider, has granted, i.e. count one's blessings.
   (iv)   Avoid obsession with events in the unseen future.

Treatment:
   (i)   Cut down on expenses - check extravagances and avoid luxuries.
   (ii)   Act against one's *nafs*, contrary to one's desires - abstain not only from everything *haraam*, but also from certain items which may be *halaal* but non-essential. This is termed *Mujaahidah*.[112]

This sort of translation of Deobandi Sufi rhetoric into pragmatic language is typical of many of the local Deobandi texts in South Africa, as we will also see in the oral discourses of Yunus Patel. More importantly, this juxtaposition of three passages on the same issue of Sufi ethics illustrates the direct continuities in Deobandi Sufi discourse from Thanawi, through his pupil Masihullah Khan, and to Masihullah Khan's pupil Ismail Mangera. This is merely one way that Deoband in India and South Africa is linked not just institutionally but textually as well.

Just as these texts reduce Sufism to its ethical dimensions, Masihullah Khan's living pupils continue these teachings in their daily lectures. To take one example, Hashim Mohamed Boda, or 'Mufti Boda' as he is known locally, studied at Miftah al-`Ulum in the late 1970's and then stayed at Masihullah Khan's *khanqah* in Jalalabad. He is now the director of Ashraf al-

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[112] Ismail Mangera, *Good Character: Compiled from the Teachings of Maseehul Ummat Hadhrat Maulana Muhamed Maseehullah Khan Saheb*, Benoni: Young Men's Muslim Association, 1992, 5-6.

`Ulum, a small *madrasa* south of Johannesburg where he gives weekly Thursday evening lectures on topics related to Sufism.

For Mufti Boda, the import of Masihullah's teachings is that even the ritual components of Deobandi Sufism, especially *zikr*, become expendable. In his view, Masihullah's teachings on Sufism were "99% *majalis* for the *akhlaq* and 1% for *zikr*,"[113] and the objective of Sufism is "embedding *tawhid* in the heart" and "bringing one's daily *'amal* into total conformity with the Shari`a." The Sufi orders, on the other hand, have strayed from this simple objective and have become a kind of "cult." The only essential aim of Sufism is to advance personal ethical traits, and "if someone does not make a single *zikr*, but achieves these traits otherwise, he has achieved the purpose of *tasawwuf*." The early generations of Muslims did not need *zikr*, according to Mufti Boda: "The *sahaba* did not need *zikr*, but today we need it because of *ghaflat* [heedlessness]." The implication of his attitude towards *zikr* is that if one can attain absolute moral perfection, then *zikr* becomes unnecessary; it is a means, not an end.

For him, out of all the negative ethical attributes that must be expelled, anger is among the most crucial. To illustrate the Sufi approach to tempering one's anger, he recounted a story from the life of `Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's fourth caliph. When `Ali was on the battlefield, just as he lifted his sword to kill an enemy, the enemy spit in his face. `Ali put down his sword and refused to kill him, explaining that he had previously been acting solely for God, but the anger generated from being spat upon would have meant he acted through his anger, which he refused to do. Mufti Boda's message was clear: anger is perhaps inevitable, but acting on it is not. "Your eyes will always stray," he explained, "but *tasawwuf* is about teaching the heart never to stray." He then speculated on the *'ikhlas'* of contemporary *jihadis* who act, in his view, largely out of anger. "The harm done to the Afghans by themselves [because of their anger] is worse than the harm done by the Soviets," he reflected. Mufti Boda sees Sufism as the cure for political Islam; "patience, sincerity, etc are traits that *jihadis* don't

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[113] Interview with Hashim Mohamed Boda, De Deur, 7 December 2009.

have."[114] In short, Mufti Boda is one living example of how Deoband's Sufi ethics, as articulated by Thanawi and transmitted through Masihullah Khan, becomes embodied in the everyday teachings of a single South African Deobandi scholar.

Understanding Deobandi *Madrasas* in South Africa

This chapter concludes with brief notes on Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa, using each one to illustrate a key point about contemporary Deobandi identity. On the whole, Deobandi *madrasas* have acclimated to the South African context in novel ways that may be unknown elsewhere among Deobandis 'abroad', particularly in teaching the Shafi`i legal tradition in order to accommodate the proclivities of local 'Malay' Muslim populations, in teaching languages other than Arabic and Urdu, and in extending *da`wah* to African populations.

There are at least nine Deobandi Dar al-`Ulums in South Africa: Dar al-`Ulum Zakariyya in Lenasia, outside of Johannesburg; Madrasa In`aamiyya in Camperdown, between Durban and Pietermaritzburg; Madrasa Arabia Islamia in Azaadville, outside of Johannesburg; Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle at Newcastle, between Durban and Johannesburg in the Natal Midlands; Dar al-`Ulum Abu Bakr in Port Elizabeth; Dar al-`Ulum al-Arabiyya al-Islamiyya in Strand, Qasim al-`Ulum in Mitchell's Plain, Madrasa Ta`lim al-Din in Isipingo Beach, Jami`a Mahmudiyya in Springs, and Ashraf al-`Ulum in De Deur. I will briefly examine three of these: Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle, Qasim al-`Ulum in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, and Madrasa In'aamiyya, in Camperdown.

Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle

The first Deobandi *madrasa* in South Africa was Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle, founded in 1973 by Moulana Qasim Sema (d. 2007). As previously mentioned, Qasim Sema has become a legendary figure within the South African Deobandi community for his work in building *madrasas*, training `*ulama'* and advancing Islamic charitable organizations. Dar al-`Ulum

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[114] Interview with Hashim Mohamed Boda, De Deur, 7 December 2009.

Newcastle illustrates several crucial points about Deobandi *madrasa* in South Africa. First, from the outset, Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle was closely aligned with the Tablighi Jama`at, as discussed previously. Second, soon after being established, the administration of Newcastle found it necessary to accommodate the Shafi'i *madhhab* in its teachings, since a large number of non-Hanafi, non-Indian students began to enroll from the Cape. Whether or not other Deobandi *madrasas* outside of South Asia have had to make these accommodations is, to my knowledge, unstudied. Historically, all Deobandi *madrasas* have taught only Hanafi *fiqh* texts in their curricula, but whether or not Deobandi *madrasas* outside of the Indian subcontinent should teach the legal *madhhab* of the local majority Muslim population is an issue they must address. Newcastle, as the oldest Deobandi *madrasa* in South Africa, was also the first to grapple with teaching Shafi`i *fiqh*. Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle is located in the Natal highlands, southeast of Johannesburg, in a region where most of the Muslims were, and remain, of Indian origin. The Hanafi *madhhab* has always been the dominant legal school in this region. However, the prestige of being the first Dar al-`Ulum in South Africa drew students from the Cape region, where the Shafi`i *madhhab* has historically dominated, deriving largely from the centuries-old links with Southeast Asia.[115]

Qasim al-`Ulum: In the Orbit of Newcastle

Just as Newcastle was established in the orbit of the original Deoband *madrasa* so Qasim al-`Ulum was established within the orbit of Newcastle, and its founders conceived it as essentially an extension of the latter. Qasim al-`Ulum is to Newcastle, in a sense, as Newcastle is to Deoband. Two features of Qasim al-`Ulum illustrate the expansion of the Deobandi network in novel ways. First, the students are almost exclusively Coloured Muslim ('Malay') students from the Cape, rather than of South Asian origin; second, the *madrasa* teaches Shafi`i law in addition to Hanafi law in order to accommodate the legal preferences of local Muslims. This is in spite of

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[115] Interview, Ismail Akoo, Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle, 23 March 2010.

the fact that Deobandi scholars define Hanafi law as an essential part of the Deobandi *maslak*. As a former student and current instructor explains, "We broke from the Indian tradition … The Muslims of Cape Town are a bit of a different breed. We changed that system to fit local needs. Our graduates are meant to serve the local community."[116]

The latter feature particularly signifies the adaptability of the Deobandi model outside of a South Asian context where the Hanafi legal school predominates. Much of the *madrasa*'s literature revolves around defending adherence to one legal school at the same time that it promotes the equality of all four.[117] The current director of the *madrasa* credits Qasim Sema with introducing instruction in more than one legal school to South Africa.[118] In terms of curriculum, the *madrasa* teaches Shafi`i commentaries on each of the six canonical *hadith* collections.

The name Qasim al-`Ulum was carefully chosen; it is meant to honor 'three Qasims': the Prophet Muhammad, whose name was Abul Qasim; the founder of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, Qasim Nanautawi; and Qasim Sema.[119] Situated outside of the Cape Town city center in the mostly Coloured township of Mitchells Plain, Qasim al-`Ulum was founded by a group of Deobandi scholars, mostly graduates of Newcastle, who registered the property under the Majlis ud Da`wah wal Islah on 8 January 1997.[120] The Majlis ud Da`wah wal Islah was a body of `ulama' that offered legal and marriage counseling for local Muslims, and published small educational tracts in Afrikaans and Arabic.[121] Four of its members founded the *madrasa* and worked as instructors. The founders of the mosque display a handwritten letter from Qasim Sema

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[116] Interview, Munier Adams, Qasim al-`Ulum, 22 September 2009.

[117] Qasimul Uloom, "Friendship and Tolerance," *3ʳᵈ Annual Graduation of Ulama Jalsah*, 11 December 2005, 9-15.

[118] Interview, Ismail Alie, 22 September 2009.

[119] *Ibid*.

[120] "Report on the Progress of the Building of the Qaasim ul Uloom Madrasah-Cape Town." Unpublished document, Qasimul Uloom.

[121] Qasimul Uloom, *1ˢᵗ Annual Bukhari Khatam Jalsa*, 7 December 2003, 11. Some of the tracts include, for instance, a primer on Islamic beliefs, *Islah al-Maqasid*, and a short primer on Shafi`i law, *Fayd al-Qasim*.

after his visit to the construction site in 1998, where the *madrasa* was in the process of being built. Sema concludes the letter with an injunction that is a sort of *de facto* mission statement of the *madrasa*: to remember the public role of the *madrasa*, one that extends into the administrators' strong advocacy for local *tabligh*. Sema writes:

> In conclusion my sincere advise to you is: Hold fast to this Hadith. The Messenger of Allah said: Learn the knowledge of Deen and teach it to the people. Learn the Laws of inheritance and teach them to the people. Learn the Quran and teach it to the people, because I am a person who will be taken away. And knowledge will diminish and fitnas (discord and dissension) will appear everywhere to such an extent that two persons will disagree on an obligatory command and no person will be found to give a conclusive judgment.[122]

With this emphasis on *da`wah*, Qasim al-`Ulum continues the tradition of Qasim Sema in preaching directly to the black populations of southern Africa, through direct *da`wah* and through various charity programs. The *madrasa* makes the link with Qasim Sema palpable through reprinting hand-written letters from Sema in its annual reviews and including short biographies of Sema in its newsletters.[123] Sema was consulted on every aspect of the *madrasa*'s establishment, construction, and curriculum.

Despite the indebtedness to Qasim Sema and Newcastle, the administrators express little in the way of 'Deobandi' allegiance. The rector, Ismail Alie, stated his view as such: "I am not a 'Deobandi'. I have not seen Deoband with my own eyes. I am a student of the *din*," and goes on to elaborate that Deoband is the most "comprehensive" of the approaches to Islam, and the one with the least accretions, and that the Barelwis are part of a "school" whereas Deoband is not.

The administrators may not identify directly as 'Deobandi' but they do advance Deoband's project of Sufi critique, if on a very modest and highly localized scale. In terms of local Sufi practices, the *madrasa* has spoken out against the widespread practice among Cape

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[122] Unpublished document, Qasimul Uloom.

[123] For example, one pamphlet printed a letter on the subject of 'sincerity' (*ikhlas*) in one's educational pursuits. Qasimul Uloom, *1ˢᵗ Annual Bukhari Khatam Jalsa*, 7 December 2003.

Muslims of visiting the *kramats* before embarking on *hajj*.[124] Purification of the *nafs* is not 'taught' in the *madrasa* per se, but is taught through "*sohba*," being in the presence of one's *shaykh* and observing his character, his *adab*, his moral demeanor. This *sohba* results in the "indirect, subtle transformation of the morals," according to Maulana Adams. Purification of the self is inseparable from the knowledge that one acquires in the *madrasa*: "It's a package deal."

Madrasa In`aamiyya: Deobandi Sufism on the Web

Madrasa In`aamiyya was founded in 1994 in Camperdown, a small town between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Its notoriety comes from the presence of Mufti Ebrahim Desai. Ebrahim Desai (b. 1963) is one of the most well known Deobandis in South Africa because of his popular website www.askimam.com. He first studied at the Deobandi *madrasa* Jami`a Islamiyya Ta`lim al-Din in Dabhel, a coastal town in the Indian state of Gujarat. In Dabhel he studied with *ifta'* and other subjects with Mufti Ahmad Khanpuri, one of the senior Sufi pupils of Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. Mufti Desai spent eight years at Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, from 1980 to 1988. During his third year at Deoband, he took initiation with Mahmud Hasan Gangohi and began to spend all of his time away from studies in the presence of Gangohi in his *khanqah* at the Chatta Masjid in Deoband.[125]

For Mufti Desai, "Muhammad had three missions. The first was to educate the people in the *shari`a*. The second was to convey *tawhid* and the third was *tazkiya*, purification of the soul." He explained that the three missions were, in his view, complementary and comprehensive of the ethical injunctions of Islam. The first points to the public nature of Muhammad's, and by extension, Desai's own teachings, while the latter suggests the application of these teachings to

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[124] Qasimul Uloom, "Gadj and the Greeting of the Kramats," *5th Annual Ulama Graduation and Bukhari Jalsa*, 9 December 2007, 29-30.

[125] Interview, Ebrahim Desai, Madrasa In`aamiyya, 13 May 2010.

one's own interiority. "*Shari`a* is inclusive of *tasawwuf*," he clarified. "But every act of *tasawwuf* must be in conformity to the *shari`a*. The *shari`a* is the measuring stick."[126]

Mufti Desai encourages but does not require his students to undergo initiation with a Sufi *shaykh*. While the *madrasa* does not incorporate Sufi texts directly into the curriculum, he encourages students to read authors such as Ghazali outside of normal curricular work. He endeavors to bring Sufism into all his public lectures, particularly what he views as Sufism's ethical core: humility before God. "When a person loves position, he cannot reach the heights of Sufism," he explains. "When we look at the political situation around the world, people are looking for position … [Sufism] is about deflating yourself, recognizing your weaknesses … The more you regard yourself to be insignificant, the more you recognize the being that is powerful."[127]

Desai maintains a website that is singularly devoted to advancing Sufism, www.darulmahmood.com, named after Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. The website is geared towards those who have little to no knowledge about Sufism and is part of Mufti Desai's extensive public outreach, the other being his website www.askimam.com. His views reiterate his teacher Mahmud Hasan Gangohi's view that Sufism and *tabligh* are mutually constitutive and essential facets of a complete ethical life; on his website, he asks the rhetorical question, "If someone is involved in Tasawwuf, is it ok if he does not do the effort of Dawah & Tabligh?" He answers:

> All these efforts are needed and have to be done simultaneously in order to create a better individual and a more religious society. One who is concentrating on Tasawwuf should not neglect the effort of Da`wah and Tabligh but should try and create a balance in his life. For example, weekly, if a person attends the halaqah [circle] of a certain Buzurg [Sufi elder] on a Thursday, then he should participate in the Ghusht and Jawla[128] programmes on Monday and Wednesday. In other words, we need to make some type of adjustments to our daily lives and

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[126] *Ibid*.

[127] *Ibid*.

[128] Literally denoting in Urdu the act of taking a walk or making rounds, the 'ghusht', more commonly spelled *gasht*, is the name for the local rounds that Tablighis make in a certain neighborhood to call people for *salat*, among other things. *Jawla*, likewise, denotes 'wandering' for the purpose of *tabligh*.

routines in order to facilitate all these efforts of Deen …We should refrain from becoming totally one sided, biased and neglecting some of these efforts and doing only some.[129]

Desai's web presence evinces the dual roles that Deobandi scholars have played in the South African Muslim community; on the one hand, his website, www.askimam.com is almost exclusively oriented around educating Muslims in basic matters of belief (`aqida) and on issues such as marriage, divorce, *zakat*, *salat*, ritual purity (*taharah*), fasting, inheritance, and so on; on the other, his www.darulmahmood.com website is concerned exclusively with Sufism. This division of labor is telling; for decades, beginning with the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal, Deobandi scholars have been, first and foremost, `ulama', and fulfill the roles that `ulama' fill, offering religious advice to individual Muslims. Broadly speaking, the subjects here are similar to those that Gangohi's own *fatwas* addressed, but there is a notable absence of questions and answers on contentious matters (*masa'il*); www.askimam.com does not address issues such as *mawlud* or `*urs*, or other matters that previous Deobandi scholar invested so much energy in critiquing. When I asked Desai about this absence, he replied triumphantly that "Muslims today have little need to inquire into these controversies," even though, as the final chapter will show, these controversies are still widely discussed within the Muslim community, particularly in the Cape.

To sum up, this chapter has traced the emergence of a Deobandi institutional presence in South Africa, in the form of `ulama' councils, the Tablighi Jama`at, and Dar al-`Ulums. Muhammad Masihullah Khan and Mahmud Hasan Gangohi established the most direct and palpable connections between South Africa and Deobandis in the Indian subcontinent, particularly connections to Thanawi and the advancement of *tabligh*. While Deobandi institutions were founded by graduates of the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and other Deobandi *madrasas*, there was little sense of these institutions self-identifying as 'Deobandi'. And during most of this history, Deobandi scholars were not actively involved in executing their critique of Sufi devotions. As I show in the fifth chapter, the first notable public clashes over these practices

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[129] http://www.daralmahmood.org/tasawwuf.html (last accessed 16 August 2010).

emerged only in 1970, beginning with the lecture tour of a popular Barelwi scholar in Cape Town, but Deoband's 'critical project' in South Africa would only reach its zenith in the 1980's, when it fatefully clashed with a mass mobilization of Muslims against apartheid. Before proceeding to that history, the next chapter will delve more fully into the problem of how Deobandi discourses on Sufism relate to the *madrasa* as an institution and its curriculum, and show how students locate themselves within these discourses.

CHAPTER FOUR

The *Madrasa* and the *Majlis*: Locating Deobandi Sufism

This chapter addresses a problem in understanding the Deobandi approach to Sufism: Sufism has pervaded the Deobandi movement from its origins, but particularly as a textual tradition, Sufism is completely absent from the curriculum of Deobandi *madrasas*. If Sufism is essential to Deobandi ideology, and *madrasas* are the institutional basis of the global Deobandi movement, where then is Deobandi Sufism 'located'? How is the Deobandi understanding of Sufism, in both the critical and constructive projects I outlined in the previous chapters, reproduced beyond the circulation of texts? The present chapter locates the circulation of Deobandi Sufism outside of texts, namely in the daily life of Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa and in the oral discourses of the Deobandi *majlis* (pl. *majalis*), a gathering that combines informal sermons and Sufi meditations (*zikr*). In these public gatherings Deobandi scholars bring Sufi teachings to a mass audience.

Despite the centrality of Sufi discourses throughout Deoband, Sufism is not integrated into the curriculum of Deobandi *madrasas*, either through the teaching of Sufi texts, the history of Sufism, or the formal incorporation of Sufi ritual practices, such as communal *zikr*. This chapter explores the reasons for this absence, and attempts to pinpoint where, then, Sufism is located within the Deoband ideology (*maslak*). Among other things, this chapter argues, based on fieldwork at a Deoband *madrasa* in South Africa and interviews with students and faculty, that

Deobandi Sufism is instantiated in coterminous, overlapping relationships between teachers and students and Sufi masters and disciples; that these relationships are built on and perpetuate the Deobandi understanding of Sufism as ethical self-formation; and that Deobandi scholars advance their interpretation of Sufism through the *majlis*, an extension of Deoband's mission to bring its Sufi ethics to a mass Muslim public. This chapter will pose, but can by no means fully answer, larger questions pertaining to the relationship, past and present, between Sufism and the *madrasa* as an institution. To what extent do the epistemologies and pedagogies of the two overlap or remain distinct? Does the mere act of posing these distinctions rely on old dichotomies between the legalist and the mystic, or between the epistemological dichotomies of Sufi revelatory insight (*kashf*) and discursive 'book' knowledge (*'ilm*)?

The chapter begins with a discussion of how the scholars of Deoband conceived Sufism to be essential to their tradition yet did not integrate Sufism formally into the Deobandi curriculum. I illustrate this by comparing the curricula of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and Johannesburg's Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville to foreground both the absence of any formal 'instruction' in Sufism in the *madrasa* itself and Azaadville's efforts to cultivate a sense of Deobandi identity and locate itself in the broader continuity of Deobandi history. Next, the chapter examines the *madrasa* at Azaadville in depth, using extensive fieldwork to discern how Sufism and ethics are mutually imbricated in the daily lives of the students and how they seek to cultivate and maintain a pure 'sensorium' - a space where oral Sufi teachings, bodily comportment, and the self-transforming power of Sufi *zikr* coincide.

The chapter continues with discussions of my fieldwork at multiple Deobandi *majalis*. Through the *majlis*, Deobandi scholars have made their Sufism 'public', in a form where Sufi ethics exists in its plainest, most distilled form. Many participants in the *majalis* are not Sufis at all, nor do they need to be to learn from the ethical ruminations of the South African Deobandi scholars who preside over them. I use the discussion of the *majlis* as a point of departure for theorizing how Deobandi scholars engage with Muslim publics in South Africa.

Qari Muhammad Tayyib on Sufism and the Deobandi Movement

Qari Muhammad Tayyib's *The Ideology of the Deoband School* (*Maslak-i `ulama'-yi Deoband*) is perhaps the seminal theoretical statement of what constitutes 'Deobandi' tradition and what comprises its central tenets.[1] For Tayyib, Deoband is not a "sect" (*firqa*) but is the very essence of Sunni Islam, the "Ahl-i Sunnat wa Jama`at." The two main arguments in Tayyib's treatise are that the Deoband ideology is comprehensive, unifying all aspects of traditional Islamic law, theology and Sufism, and that it avoids any 'extremes', tracing a middle path between, for example, those who indulgence in the excesses of Sufi piety and those who reject Sufism indiscriminately and as a whole. On "comprehensiveness" (*jami'yyat*), Tayyib writes that Deoband's ideology derives itself seamlessly from the fundamental teachings of the *sunna* and the moral rectitude of the Companions, teachings that are channeled through the Sufi chains of initiation that originate with the Prophet: "The Ahle Sunnat Wal Jammat adopted the very same path of comprehensiveness [as the Companions] … This comprehensiveness was transmitted, link by link, until … it passed on to the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, which in turn transmitted it Deobandi *`ulama'*. This [comprehensiveness] became their distinctive trait."[2] It also strives to avoid any form of "excess" (*tafrit*) or "extremism" (*ghuluw*) and is consistently "balanced" (*mu`tadil*) in all respects. Tayyib's use of these words does not, of course, connote the way in which these rhetorically loaded phrases - such as 'moderate Muslim' or 'extremist' - are used today. Rather, for Tayyib, Deoband situated itself between, for example, the anti-Sufi stance of the Salafis and Wahhabis, and the 'excessiveness' (*tafrit*) of certain antinomian, heretical strains in Sufism.

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[1] Qari Muhammad Tayyib was rector of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband for over half a century, from 1929 to 1982, and grandson of Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, founder of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband. He received initiation into Sufism (*bai'at*) from Husain Ahmad Madani and then subsequently from Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, who designated him as a *khalifa*. He is, perhaps more than any other twentieth century Deobandi scholar, responsible for articulating a coherent Deobandi 'identity' in his works. He wrote the most direct statement of what defines 'Deobandi', *Maslak-i `ulama'-yi Deoband*, Lahore: Tayyib Publishers, n.d. Both texts are available in multiple printings.

[2] Qari Muhammad Tayyib, *Maslak-i `Ulama'-yi Deoband*, 15-16.

In his treatise, Tayyib begins his discussion of the centrality of Sufism to the Deoband school with the standard conceit that we have seen on many occasions elsewhere: Sufism is, in its very essence, a matter of personal character and inner purification, and cannot be separated theoretically or practically from the *shari`a*:

> The Deobandis believe that perfecting one's ethics (*takmil-i akhlaq*) and purifying one's self via taking initiation and being in the presence of Sufi *shaykhs* are beneficial and necessary forms of spiritual guidance. However, the Sufi path (*tariqa*) is not a path different from *shari`a*, which is transmitted from one heart to the next. The Sufi path is simply the internal and ethical dimension of the *shari`a*, the path of reforming the heart (*islah-i qalb*), principles of which are firmly established by the Qur'an and *sunna*.[3]

Sufis go astray, Tayyib submits, when they forget the stipulations of the *shari`a* and become mired in 'excessive' practices.

> In the view of the Deobandi *maslak*, the holy saints among the esteemed Sufis are like the spirit (*ruh*) coursing through the *ummat* from which it derives its inner life (*batini hayat*), which is the very root of life. Thus the Deobandi *maslak* understands that love and respect for the saints is vital to preserving faith (*iman*), but extremism (*ghuluw*) in love for them or in certain beliefs must not result in their deification. It understands that honoring the saints is a legal (*shari'*) duty but this does not mean worshipping them, prostrating towards or circumambulating their graves, taking oaths on them or making sacrifices for them.[4]

For Tayyib, 'Deobandi' identity was above all a certain 'disposition' (*mizaj*) - a word that could also be rendered as' taste' or even as 'humour', in the medieval sense of the word - a 'disposition' that the most pious Deobandis would naturally internalize in the process of self-purification. It is a 'disposition' that one embodied through learning at the feet of one's Sufi master and emulating the pious precedents of one's elders and, above all, of the Prophet's *sunna*. It is a disposition that one acquires not only through reading texts (though texts certainly contain a wealth of knowledge that can guide one towards perfected piety) but also through person-to-person relationships, the relationships that, this chapter will show, are key to how Deoband coheres as a global movement and institution: "The Deobandi *maslak* is steadfast to its principles.

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[3] *Ibid.*, 30.

[4] *Ibid.*, 28.

It neither idolizes people, nor regards mere religious education as sufficient in and of itself; neither people, nor books, nor pure intellection is sufficient on its own, nor reliance solely on the words and deeds of persons."[5]

This 'disposition', according to Tayyib, permeates every aspect of life; for students in a *madrasa*, exemplary ethical models are everpresent, but not in the form of texts. Sufism, it may be said, is in the *madrasa* but is not *of* it. It is not a formal part of the *madrasa* curriculum, but it pervades *madrasa* studies on an informal level. I will discuss this 'pervasiveness' of Sufism in the lives of *madrasa* students below; first, however, it will be important to outline exactly how and why Sufism is not a formal part of the Dar al-`Ulum curriculum.

Sufism and the Dars-i Nizami

The Dars-i Nizami, upon which contemporary Deobandi *madrasas* have based their curriculum in a truncated, modified form, did not incorporate any Sufi texts when it was first devised, nor does it today.[6] Here I suggest at least two reasons for this. The first has to do with the traditional mode of transmitting Sufi knowledge orally between teachers and disciples, and not via texts.[7] The second reason has to do with the historical particularities of the Nizami curriculum at its origins. The Dars-i Nizamiyya was created in the early eighteenth century by Mulla Nizam al-Din, descendant of a learned family of Lucknow to whom the Mughal emperor

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[5] *Ibid.*, 16.

[6] Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 46-52.

[7] Many scholars have made note of Sufism's 'orality' and have linked this phenomenon to the broader dynamics of transmitting knowledge in Islam; just as Sufi knowledge is traditionally transmitted orally and Sufis' pious dispositions are adopted through observing the exemplary conduct of one's masters, knowledge within the *madrasa* itself is transmitted in a similar fashion. Thus the modes by which knowledge is transmitted and ethical dispositions are learned follow similar patterns in traditional Sufism and traditional Islamic education. See, for example, Carl W. Ernst, "The Textual Formation of Oral Teachings in Early Chishti Sufism," in Jeffrey Richard Timm, ed. *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. More general treatments include, among many others, Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, and Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: the Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Aurangzeb had given a palace called Farangi Mahall, so-called because it had been previously occupied by a wealthy French (*farang*) merchant.[8] Mulla Nizam al-Din gave far more emphasis to the 'rational' sciences (*ma`qulat*) such as rhetoric, logic and philosophy, and far less to the 'transmitted' sciences (*manqulat*) such as *hadith* and Qur'an commentary. By stressing the rational sciences, argues Francis Robinson, Mulla Nizam al-Din sought to prepare young *`ulama'* for work as scribes in the late-Mughal administration. Like the 'transmitted' sciences, Sufism was extraneous to the exigencies of training courtly scribes. As Robinson notes, "the emphasis of the Dars on training capable administrators for Muslim states rather than specialists in 'religion' *per se* may explain the dropping of mysticism from the course." He goes on to clarify that "the lack of books on Sufism certainly did not mean any opposition on the part of Mulla Nizam al-Din and his family to the spiritual dimensions of Islam … [T]hey were, almost without exception, devout Sufis and no student could have sat at their feet without being aware of this."[9]

Mulla Nizam al-Din had, in fact, innovated an earlier curriculum that Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi developed as a teacher in Delhi's Madrasa Rahimiyya. This curriculum *did* include the formal study of Sufi texts. J. M. Baljon goes so far as to state that "without doubt the chief attention in [Madrasa Rahimiyya] was given to mystic literature."[10] Yet in the post-Mughal era, Deoband had largely retreated from the task of creating literate and loyal government functionaries. If Robinson is correct in believing that Sufism was no longer germane to this administrative task, would not Sufism reappear in Deoband's curriculum, as it apparently did at Farangi Mahall in the late nineteenth century?[11] If we may speculate why it did not, it seems that

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[8] Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 44-46.

[9] *Ibid.*, 53-54.

[10] J. M. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah, 1703-1762*, Leiden: Brill, 1986, 4-5. See also Ghulam Sufi, *Al-Minhaj: Being the Evolution of Curriculum in the Muslim Educational Institutions of India*, Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Dihli, 1977, 69-70. The Madrasa Rahimiyya assigned students to read Suhrawardi's (d. 1234) *Awarif al-Ma`arif* and multiple works by Jami (d. 1492) including his *Sharh al-Ruba'iyyat*, his *Naqd al-Nusus* (a commentary on the *Nusus* of Qunawi, one of Ibn 'Arabi's students), and his commentary on the *Lama`at* of Iraqi (d. 1289).

textual and mystical pedagogies overlapped in earlier *madrasa* traditions, like Madrasa Rahimiyya and Farangi Mahall, precisely because they were based on familial ties. By way of contrast, Deoband was, in the words of Muhammad Qasim Zaman, borrowing from Anthony Giddens, "disembedded" from the patronage networks of Muslim emperors and local princes, the familial networks of a dynasty like that of Farangi Mahall or the Wali Allah line, and networks of Sufi *pirs* and their shrines.[12] Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi explicitly sought to establish the Deobandi *madrasa* through patronage and support from individual Muslims, seeing government patronage as compromising intellectual and political independence, and seeing familial patronage, like that which governed Farangi Mahall, as antiquated and limiting.

Ironically, one of the foremost living Deobandi scholars, Mufti Taqi Usmani, has called for a return to Sufism in the *madrasa* curriculum as part of a larger project of reform. In *Our Educational System* (*Hamara Ta`limi Nizam*), Taqi Usmani submits that Sufism was not part of the Deobandi syllabus because of a simple reason: the moral nurturing that comes from the presence of a Sufi master was once easy to obtain, but the moral decadence of the present day has thoroughly compromised the ability to gain this nurturing through sitting in the 'presence' (*sohbat*) of a Sufi alone. Hence he calls for re-introducing Sufi texts to *madrasa* syllabi:

> Sufism and ethics (*akhlaq*) were not included in *madrasa* coursework because
> the very environment of the *madrasa* trained one in ethics and the Sufi path, and
> for anything else attachment to a Sufi master would be sufficient. Nowadays it
> seems necessary that books on Sufism and ethics should be included into the
> foundations of *madrasa* coursework. To this end, select parts from Ghazali's
> *Hidaya al-Hidaya*, *Arba'in*, and *Ihya al-`Ulum*, Suhrawardi's *Awarif al-Ma'arif*,
> Thanawi's *Al-Takashshuf*, and so on can be incorporated at different levels of
> coursework.[13]

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[11] Robinson cites Altaf al-Rahman Qidwa'i, *Qiyam-i Nizam-i Ta`lim*, Lucknow, 1924 in making this observation of a return of Sufi texts in the Dars-i Nizamiyya at the Farangi Mahall, but qualifies the claim, noting "current Farangi Mahall tradition suggests, however, that the teaching of *tasawwuf* in the *Dars* was reserved for members of the family." Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 54, n. 13.

[12] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf Ali Thanawi*, 9.

[13] Mufti Taqi Usmani, *Hamara Ta`limi Nizam*, Deoband: Maktaba-yi Dar al-`Ulum, 1998, 99.

Among the most necessary reforms, Usmani submits that "every *madrasa* [should] make Sufism

and moral excellence (*ihsan*) part of the curriculum … The teachers and administration of every

madrasa should establish a spiritual link with a Sufi *shaykh* for the purpose of reform and

training."[14] He further recommends reading groups to study the lives of Deoband's great Sufi

scholars:

> Teachers and students should be required to meet together even once a week to
> study the sayings and lives of the great elders of the *din*, especially the great
> *`ulama'* of Deoband. In this way, Hazrat Thanawi's *Arwah al-Salasa*, the
> *Tazkirat al-Rashid*, *Hayat-i Qasimi*, *Tazkirat al-Khalil*, *Hayat Shaykh al-Hind*,
> *Ashraf al-Savanih*, *Aap Biti*, should be studied collectively to yield their
> benefits.[15]

Taqi Usmani's call to reincorporate classic Sufi texts and biographies of Deoband's founding

figures into *madrasa* curricula reveals an anxiety about whether Deoband's traditional approach

to teaching Sufism - by 'example' rather than by text - is effective. As we will see below, this

anxiety arises partly through the fact that, without texts to anchor Sufi teachings, and without the

ritual components of Sufism that the Deobandis have foresworn, Sufism amounts largely to a

composite of abstruse and rarefied ethical teachings.

Comparing Curricula: Deoband and Azaadville

We can best illustrate the absence of Sufi texts from the Deobandi curriculum, and

appreciate the continuity of the Dars-i Nizami across time and space, by comparing the syllabi of

Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and Madrasa Arabia Islamia at Azaadville.[16] Besides the absence of Sufi

texts, we will also see how Azaadville supplements the standard Deobandi curriculum with texts

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[14] *Ibid*., 94-95.

[15] *Ibid*., 95. These are the biographies of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, Khalil
Ahmad Saharanpuri, Mahmud al-Hasan, Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, and Muhammad Zakariyya, respectively.
The latter is, to be precise, an autobiography.

[16] The source for all the details of Azaadville's syllabus is Madrasah Arabia Islamia, *Prospectus of
Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, Azaadville, South Africa: Madrasa Arabia Islamia, 2000.

on Deobandi history in order to instill a sense of continuity with earlier tradition among its students.

Compared to the original Dars-i Nizami curriculum, the Deobandi curriculum incorporated far more works in *hadith* and law and far fewer in logic and philosophy. Azaadville shares this Deobandi emphasis on the 'transmitted' sciences (*manqulat*). At both Deoband and Azaadville, students study the biography (*sira*) of Muhammad, the Qur'an, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Arabic grammar (*sarf*) and syntax (*nahw*), logic (*mantiq*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its foundations (*usul al-fiqh*), Islamic beliefs (*aqa'id*), rules of inheritance, and some philosophy (*falsafa*).[17] Both syllabi culminate with an extensive mastery of several collections of *hadith*, discussed below. But at Deoband, as well as at Azaadville and Zakariyya, no component of the syllabus deals directly with Sufism, whether defined in terms of personal character or devotional practices.[18]

A battery of core texts in Deoband's classic adaptation of the Dars-i Nizami, emphasizing the *manqulat* over the *ma`qulat*,[19] remains in place at Azaadville. This adaptation privileges the Qur'an and the Prophetic biography, and makes *hadith* the core and culmination of a Deobandi education. Azaadville differs somewhat in assigning simple introductory texts to transition

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[17] A concise syllabus of Dar ul-Ulum Deoband is available on the school's website in both English and Urdu. Unfortunately, it does not provide unique URLs for each page on the website. On the Urdu page, http://darululoom-deoband.com/urdu/index.htm click on "*nizam-i ta`lim*" and on the English page, http://darululoom-deoband.com/english/index.htm, click on "System of Education" (last accessed 17 August 2010).

[18] Though this section is primarily concerned with comparing Deoband's and Azaadville's current curricula, it may be useful to note the continuity of certain texts from the *original* Dars-i Nizami syllabus of Mulla Nizam al-Din and Azaadville. In fact, there are only six: Tabrizi's *Mishkat al-Masabih*. Suyuti's *Tafsir Jalalayn,* Baydawi's *Anwar al-Tanzil*, Ubayd Allah bin Ma'sud's *Sharh al-Wiqaya*, Allamah Mulla Jiwan's *Nur al-Anwar*, and Marghinani's *Al-Hidaya*. Manazir Ahsan Gilani (d. 1956), a graduate of Deoband who taught at Osmania University in Hyderabad and became an early advocate for *madrasa* reform, noted that continuity through the Dars-i Nizami was based on such a small number of texts that, he argued, the *madrasa* curriculum should, in fact, be extremely flexible, able to accommodate new intellectual and social needs. See Sayyid Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Pak o Hind men Musalmanon ka nizam-i ta`lim o tarbiyat*, Lahore: Maktaba-yi Rahmaniyya, 1983. Muhammad Qasim Zaman discusses this point in "Bridging Traditions: Madrasas and their Internal Critics," in Andrew Shyrock, ed. *Islamophobia/ Islamophilia: beyond the politics of enemy and friend*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, 123-125.

[19] See Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 101.

students into tackling the classic treatises. For example, in the study of the Qur'an, students at both institutions use Suyuti's *Tafsir Jalalayn*[20] and Baydawi's *Anwar al-Tanzil*[21] to cap the study of the Qur'an. But Azaadville also teaches an introductory text on the Qur'an in the first year, Maulana Mahfouz al-Rahman Nami's *Miftah al-Qur'an*. In the principles of *tafsir*, both institutions use Shah Wali Allah's *Al-Fawz al-Kabir*.[22]

In the realm of *hadith* the two institutions display the most continuity, as mastery of *hadith* remains the linchpin of a Deobandi education. The two schools share a total of nine *hadith* texts. Students and Azaadville and Deoband both extensively learn the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Jami` al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, *Sunan al-Nisa'i*, *Sunan ibn Majah* - known as the 'six canonical collections' (*sahih sitta*)[23] - as well as Imam Malik's *Muwatta*, Tabrizi's *Mishkat al-Masabih*, and *Sharh Ma'ni al-Athar*. Again, however, Azaadville adds introductory materials to transition into higher *hadith* studies, including a student of Muhammad Zakariyya, Maulana 'Ashiq Ilahi's (d. 2002) *Zad al-Talibayn* and Nawawi's (d. 1278) *Riyad al-Salihin*.[24]

Likewise in Islamic jurisprudence, students at Deoband and Azaadville read almost identical texts: Shirinbali's *Nur al-Idah*, Quduri's *Mukhtasar al-Quduri*, Abdallah bin Mas`ud's

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[20] Muhammad Jalal ad-din Suyuti (d. 1505) was an Egyptian polymath, prolific in nearly every field of traditional Islamic sciences. The *Tafsir Jalalayn* was begun by his teacher, Jalal ad-din Mahalli (d. 1459), and perfected by Suyuti. Jalal ad-din Mahalli, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Mukhtar, 2004 is a recent edition, and a recent English translation is available as well: *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, trans. Feras Hamza, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008.

[21] Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Baydawi was a late thirteenth-century Shafi`i commentator on the Qur'an. His *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* is a work of *tafsir* that is largely derived from Zamakhshari's *Al-Kashshaf*. Baydawi attempted to purge his predecessor's work of Mu'tazilite leanings. His success in this regard became a point of debate for later critics. See J. Robson, "Al-Baydawi," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition.

[22] Shah Wali Allah, *Al-Fawz al-Kabir fi Usul al-Tafsir* is a widely read and reprinted Qur'an commentary. See *Al-Fawz al-Kabir*, Deoband: Al-Maktaba al-Wahidiyya, 1974. It is also translated into English as *The Principles of Qur'an Commentary*, Islamabad: National Hijra Council, 1985.

[23] Though his focus is the *sahihayn*, the two authoritative collections of Bukhari and Muslim, Jonathan Brown's *The Canonization of Bukhari and Muslim* also discusses the formation of a larger Sunni canon through the '*sahih* movement'. See *The Canonization of Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, especially 54-59.

[24] Nawawi is considered an authoritative source on Shafi`i *fiqh* and author of this simple primer on *hadith*.

Sharh al-Wiqaya, 'Allamah Mulla Jiwan's *Nur al-Anwar*, and Marghinani's *al-Hidaya*. The latter is a compendium of Hanafi *fiqh* that had the single most widespread influence of any such texts in the Indian subcontinent.[25]

Yet beyond Qur'an, *tafsir*, *hadith* and *fiqh*, the curricula of Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and Madrasa Arabia Islamia at Azaadville share only a few texts in common: Tahawi's *Al-'Aqida al-Tahawiyya*, Taftazani's *Sharh al-`Aqa'id*, Sajavandi's *Sirajiyya* for the study of Islamic inheritance, and two texts on logic: Janjuhi's *Taysir al-Mantiq* and Khairabadi's *Mirqat*.

What, then, are the primary differences between the two? First, the curriculum at Azaadville is abbreviated to six years rather than eight. Second, it incorporates more 'modern' material than the Deoband syllabus, with a curricular sub-focus on Islamic history and geography, the ability to learn languages such as Zulu for doing *tabligh* among local populations, and a module on 'social issues'.[26]

In all other divisions of Azaadville's curriculum - contemporary jurisprudence, Arabic grammar and morphology, literature, rhetoric and eloquence, writing and composition, 'general knowledge', history and geography, calligraphy, 'defense of Islam', 'biographies of great Muslims', 'exposition of the greatness of Allah in the study of nature', and 'social welfare' - the Azaadville *madrasa* shares no texts with the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, perhaps partly due to the fact that Dar al-`Ulum does not have some of the more contemporary divisions in its curriculum. And it is, by and large, in these supplementary fields of learning where the *madrasa* incorporates some key texts that work to solidify its participation in a 'Deobandi' tradition. For example, in the

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[25] Y. Meron, "Marghinani, His Method and His Legacy," *Islamic Law and Society* 9, 3 (2002): 410-416.

[26] This example, among others, belies the common suggestion that *madrasa* education is thoroughly 'medieval' in nature and makes no concessions whatsoever to addressing contemporary social needs. While I was unable to procure details on the 'social issues' component of the Azaadville curriculum, the prospectus states that "The Alim often has to fulfill the role of a social and welfare worker in his community due to the position of respect and leadership that he occupies. Basic training in the more common skills and demands of this role like counseling for marital problems, AIDS, drugs, arbitration, financial aid and assistance to the indigent and other social-welfare related issues are briefly covered in the fourth year. One period a week is devoted to this." Madrasah Arabia Islamia, *Prospectus of Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, Azaadville, South Africa: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2000, 83.

field of `aqa'id, they read one of the core ideological treatises expounding 'Deobandi' thought

and Deobandi-Barelwi differences, Yusuf Ludhianwi's *Ikhtilaf-i Ummat aur Sirat-i Mustaqim*.[27]

In its division on the 'defense of Islam' (*al-dafa` 'an al-Islam*), students read one of Ashraf `Ali

Thanawi's texts, *Ashraf al-Jawab*, which arms students with readily accessible answers to

common polemical questions put towards Islam and Muslims.[28] Students also read essays by the

second *amir* of the Tablighi movement, Ihtisham al-Hasan, such as "Muslim Degeneration and its

Only Remedy," that is part of the Tablighi *vade mecum,* Muhammad Zakariyya's *Faza'il-i

A`mal*.[29] The *madrasa* also compiled and published a series of texts for students, such as *Akabir-i

Hind wa Idarat-i Islamiyya*, described as "a life sketch of Shah Wali Allah and his spiritual

progeny, the elders of Deoband."[30] It is only in Azaadville's division of study on 'biographies of

great Muslims' where we can find a text that has anything to do directly with Sufism: a

publication by the *madrasa* itself, *A'imma-i Tasawwuf*, which, in its own words, "contains a brief

life-sketch of the founders of the *Salasil-e Arba'ah* (four spiritual orders) and other great saints of

Islamic History."[31]

In short, Azaadville maintains the traditional Dars-i Nizami emphasis on *hadith* and *fiqh*,

and to a somewhat lesser extent, conscientiously fosters a sense of students participating and

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[27] I have already mentioned the importance of this work as a polemical statement of 'Deobandi' identity. Students also read an English-language polemical work by a Maryam Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahle Kitab*, first published in 1968, that explores, in the words of Azaadville's *Prospectus*, "the imminent dangers of Christian missionary strategies and Zionist malevolent designs on Muslims and the Muslim world." *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab*, Lahore: Mohammed Yusuf Khan, 1968.

[28] Thanawi's apologetical treatise responds to common accusations against Muslims, offering in some sense a snapshot of Western biases against Muslims from his day, some of which are no longer as relevant today, others that are still common stereotypes. He trains his readers to field questions pertaining to issues such as whether Islam was 'spread by the sword', European opinions of Islamic law and *jihad*, whether Muslims 'worship' the *ka`ba*, fate and predestination (*qadr o qimat*) in Islam, and so on. See Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Ashraf al-Jawab*, Saharanpur: Maktaba-yi Thanawi o Deoband, 1990.

[29] Although this essay is included in the *Faza'il-i 'A'mal*, it is a translation of an Urdu essay, *Musalmanon ki Maujuda pasti ka wahid `Ilaj*. The students at Azaadville actually read the text in English as part of their training in English, one of the required languages of study.

[30] Madrasah Arabia Islamia, *Prospectus of Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 80-81. I was unable to locate a copy of this text.

[31]*Ibid*., 80.

continuing a specifically 'Deobandi' identity. But there are no texts in the Deobandi syllabus *or* the Azaadville syllabus that engage explicitly with Sufism, whether the great corpus of 'classic' works of Sufism or works composed in modern South Asia.

Sufi Ethics 'in' and 'of' the *madrasa*: Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville

Where, then, 'is' Sufism in a Deobandi *madrasa*, if not in its texts? At Madrasa Arabia Islamia, informally known as Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville, Sufism, especially in its ethical configurations, 'colors' the act of learning itself. Learning is a pious act intricately and intimately bound up with embodiment of Sufi ethics in daily life and the pedagogies of the *madrasa*. Yet this Sufism, arguably like Deobandi Sufism as a whole, is so diffuse and dispersed that it is difficult to 'locate' it in any precise sense. To the extent that Deobandi Sufism is in a sense at once 'everywhere' and 'nowhere', one may speculate whether there is an acute lack of ritual or devotional elements to ground Deobandi Sufism in a tangible form. The 'everywhereness' of Deobandi Sufism should not come as a surprise; Deobandis assimilate Sufism to ethics and ethics to Sufism, because ethics are indistinguishable from the carefully crafted piety that Deobandis find in the Prophetic *sunna*. This is the sort of Sufism that Mohammed Akram Nadwi ascribed to a fellow student at Nadwa: "He is a very practical person. Although he may not be conversant with the philosophy of Sufism, he is no less than a Sufi in practice. He is characterized by piety, virtue, honesty, truth, purity and discipline."[32]

This section of the chapter looks first at some limitations to the fieldwork I conducted at Azaadville; it then proceeds to consider how students' understanding of their place in a 'Deobandi' tradition is inseparable from the Sufi initiations they have taken with their teachers, especially the principal Abdul Hamid Ishaq and the Shaykh al-Hadith Fazlur Rahman Azmi; next

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[32] Mohammed Akram Nadwi, *Madrasah Life: A Student's Day at Nadwat al-Ulama*, London: Turath Publishing, 2007, 9.

I explore some debates that I had with the students that illuminate their engagements with Sufi ethics.

Limitations on fieldwork in madrasas

My fieldwork at Azaadville relied both on active conversation with students and teachers and passive observance of daily life in and around the *madrasa*. On some occasions the conversations were directed; for formal interviews, I asked a series of questions (see Appendix A) but very quickly realized that these serial lists of questions, which I had conceived even before arriving in the field, would be of limited value. I also encountered resistance to recording interviews; from the outset, interviewees were discomfited by the presence of a recorder, such that I eventually stopped attempting to record interviews. I opted for recording copious interview notes by hand, along with quotes. As I discuss below, students and faculty both seemed to find the interview process somewhat stilted; the natural give-and-take of informal conversations with students was far more illuminating.

There is very little work that can be justifiably called 'ethnography' in a *madrasa*.[33] On the one hand, scholars have commented on difficulties of conducting fieldwork in *madrasas* as an 'outsider'.[34] On the other, one can find useful depictions of *madrasa* life by *madrasa* students that

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[33] A few noteworthy anthropological studies of *madrasas* have emerged in recent years. See for example, Arshad Alam, "The Enemy Within: Madrasa and Muslim Identity in North India," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008): 605-627; Masooda Bano, "Beyond Politics: The Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, 1 (2007): 43-68; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Closed Doors: (Not) Accessing Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* in Britain," *Fieldwork in Religion* 1, 1 (2005): 7-33; Humayun Kabir, "Replicating the Deobandi model of Islamic schooling: the case of a *Quomi madrasa* in a district town of Bangladesh," *Contemporary South Asia* 17, 4 (2009): 415-428; and Marieke Winkelmann, *From Behind the Curtain: A Study of a Girls' Madrasa in India*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005. Farish Noor's *The Qur'an and Cricket: Travels through the madrasahs of Asia and other stories*, Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish Books, 2009 is a somewhat less conventional approach to the subject, based on the author's first-hand experiences at Deoband and elsewhere.

[34] See for example, Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Closed Worlds: (Not) Accessing Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* in Britain," *Fieldwork in Religion* 1,1 (2005): 7-33. Gilliat-Ray attempted, unsuccessfully, to gain entrance to several British Deobandi *madrasas* for an extended study of the students and their motivations for taking up religious study. Here she reflects on taking rejection from a field site as a legitimate form of data in and

are immensely insightful, but such works do not typically engage with the concepts and problematics of contemporary work in the social sciences or religious studies.[35] When I first conceived this project, I had hoped to spend a significant amount of time observing a single *madrasa*. I quickly realized this would not be a viable option, short of literally becoming a *madrasa* student.

On the occasion that I spoke with students informally about their experiences as students and as Sufis, initially they typically referred me to speak with their teachers, who often acted as their Sufi master as well. There was an implicit presumption that students' own experiences in the *madrasa* - intellectual, pedagogical, ethical - were of little consequence to me and that, rather, I was there to gain some 'knowledge' about Islam, Sufism or the Deobandi tradition, so why should the students attempt to answer my queries if their teachers could do so far better than they? It was difficult at first to disabuse students of this approach to my presence.

Another difficulty is that *madrasas* remain highly suspicious, for obvious reasons, of outsiders purporting to 'study' them, having been subject to intense and often unwarranted scrutiny for the last decade. As I have noted in the introduction to this dissertation, critics of *madrasas*, ranging from journalists and foreign policy analysts to bloggers, have vilified them for all sorts of reasons. My interlocutors were all too aware of this coverage. The Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville even published a short pamphlet, *Propaganda Against Religious Institutes*, which states in no uncertain terms how numerous forces had aligned, in the author's view, to regard *madrasas* as supremely suspect. The text notes the strength of the Deobandi network of *madrasas*, surmising that students of "the Deobandi school of thought number in excess of nine hundred thousand," and states, referring primarily to Deobandi institutions in Pakistan:

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of itself. Luckily, I did gain access, but my access was not without certain anxieties on the part of my interviewees.

[35] For example, see Mohammad Akram Nadwi's *Madrasah Life: A Student's Day at Nadwat al-Ulama*, London: Turath Publishing, 2007. The original Urdu account was published as *Nadwe ka ek din*, Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyyat-i Islam, 2006.

> The English media … have once again started their full onslaught against the Dini Madaris [religious schools] … Everyone knows that the Taliban were graduates of Dini Madaris. If the enemies of Islam think that they can convince the present military government of targeting the religious institutes, they are dearly mistaken because our army protects the beliefs and ideologies of the country just as it safeguards the borders.[36]

My interlocutors were, therefore, nonplussed at best as to why a white, non-Muslim American wished to do 'fieldwork' inside their institutions, and my attempts to disabuse them of their suspicions usually began by explaining the very notion of 'fieldwork'. What do I want to learn from them, and why can't I find this knowledge in books about Islam? Who would be reading my dissertation? Why am I interested in *madrasas* and in Deoband particularly? I framed my interest in Deoband, accurately and sincerely, in terms of *resisting* and *interrogating* the dominant conversation about Deoband within journalistic circles, an approach that I believe helped them to see my approach as sympathetic and nuanced.

There are many aspects of quotidian *madrasa* life that I do not cover here, in an attempt to stay as focused as possible on the way the Deobandi appropriation and critique of Sufism informs the personal and intellectual lives of the students. This is not to say the quotidian lives of students are not interesting or significant. One of the more endearing portraits to emerge from Muhammad Akram Nadwi's recollections of *madrasa* life in Lucknow account is that students in the *madrasa* are still *students*, after all, and act accordingly. Nadwi shows young men doing what young men do: waking up late, dozing off in class, expressing boredom with certain subjects (especially grammar), or indulging in friendly rivalries with other students.[37] But I did not witness this side of the *madrasa*. I have no doubt that it exists, at Azaadville, at Newcastle and elsewhere, just as it does at Deoband itself; in my own experience at Deoband some students were quite 'playful' in their approach to a truly novel stranger, sometimes gathering in small groups to

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[36] Muhammad Mazhar Saheb, *Propaganda against Religious Institutes*, Azaadville: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2000, 30 and 4-5. The author is a Pakistani Deobandi scholar of the Ashraful Madaris *madrasa* in Karachi. What is especially striking is the date; this pamphlet was written a year *before* 2001 and the barrage of anti-*madrasa* journalism that came in its wake.

[37] See especially James Piscatori's introduction to Mohammed Akram Nadvi, *Madrasah Life*, xiii-xiv.

whisper in each other's ears and nod subtly in my direction. And then again, there were those

students at Deoband who could not have possibly seemed less concerned about my presence. In

contrast, students I encountered in South Africa, and at Azaadville in particular, seemed careful

and deliberate in representing only their most dignified selves to an outsider. This was a sort of

adab - granted, not the stylized respect and deference (*ikram*) that one shows another Muslim; for

instance, one of Azaadville's students refused to shake my hand in the Western fashion,

preferring the two-handed *sunna* handshake (*musahafah*), but since I am not a Muslim he would

not extend this form of greeting to me. I learned this, rather awkwardly, by extending my hand in

the 'Western' fashion, only to have it rebuffed, and then on a second occasion, thinking I had

simply erred in not shaking with both hands, attempted that and had that gesture rebuffed too.

Azaadville's Madrasa Arabia Islamia (*Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville*)

Azaadville is a small Indian neighborhood, about nine square kilometers, created under

the Group Areas Act about 30 kilometers west of central Johannesburg. The name 'Azaadville' is

somewhat cynical insofar as *azaad* is an Urdu word meaning 'freedom'; the city was created

under conditions that were anything but free. Situated next to the black township of Kagiso, and

between the larger Johannesburg suburb enclaves of Krugersdorp and Randfontein, Azaadville is

populated by a mix of primarily Muslim and Hindu middle-class Indian families, much like the

substantially larger and better known Indian township of Lenasia to the south. Both Lenasia and

Azaadville formed in the wake of forced expulsion of Indians from central Johannesburg after the

Group Areas Act of 1950.[38] One of the most striking aspects of Azaadville's landscape is that,

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[38] For the effect on this act on the development of Indian townships in Durban, see Brij Maharaj, "Apartheid, Urban Segregation, and the Local State: Durban and the Group Areas Act in South Africa," *Urban Geography* 18, 2 (2010): 135-154. A. J. Christopher's *The Atlas of Apartheid*, London, New York: Routledge, 1994 remains a landmark study of apartheid urban geography. Surprisingly, to my knowledge, there is no published work on the expulsion of Indians from central Johannesburg into townships such as Lenasia. One of the few works to address the effect of apartheid social planning on Indians is M. W. Swanson, "The Asiatic Menace: Creating Segregation in Durban, 1870-1900," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16, 3 (1983): 401-421.

upon approaching it after driving through the cluttered and crowded township of Kagiso, one notices how it is surrounded by an undeveloped green belt at least one kilometer long on each side. Whether or not this is a deliberately planned racial 'buffer' or an accident of urban development is unclear, but the brutal logic of apartheid-era urban planning seems evident even here, on Johannesburg's easternmost edge; Azaadville is the outcome of apartheid government efforts to separate the South Africa's Indians along generic racial lines, ignoring ethnic, linguistic and religious differences among them.

I conducted fieldwork at Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville *madrasa* between October 2009 and January 2010. On the first occasion, I visited the bookstore and spoke informally with *madrasa* administration; during the next series of visits, I visited classes and interviewed students, both formally and informally. On the final visits I attended Tuesday-evening *majalis* for students and the public with Abdul Hamid Ishaq, the principal. It was clear from the beginning that students perceived me with a mixture of curiosity, courtesy, suspicion and opportunity - in the latter case, as a potential convert to Islam, which I address below in light of the students' understanding of Sufism. I had numerous conversations over the course of my fieldwork - at times vexing but always illuminating - on subjects ranging from the contemporary state of Sufi piety, Islam and the media, whether there is a Deobandi 'movement', what it means to be doing 'Islamic studies' in the secular academy, and on the very purpose of a religious knowledge. As I discuss below, these issues illuminate how Azaadville students conceive of themselves as ethical Muslims and as Sufis. In all of these conversations, students drew widely from the moral and intellectual resources of their *madrasa* educations and Sufi initiations, seeing both as mutually complementary dispositions.

Madrasa Arabia Islamia was conceived in 1981 by several *`ulama'* staying in the Sufi *khanqah* of Muhammad Zakariyya in Saharanpur, India. By 1982, the *madrasa* had been

established at Azaadville with eight students in the `alim course.[39] Today the *madrasa* houses

some seven hundred to eight hundred students, boasting a distinctly international mix; one student

surmised that slightly less than half of the students were from outside of South Africa. I met, for

example, black students from other parts of southern Africa, white European students, and

American students of Indian descent. A few students with whom I spoke had initially hoped to go

to Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, but were unable to procure student visas; since 2001, India has become

stricter in issuing visas for *madrasa* study to non-Indians. All with whom I spoke knew about the

reputation for learning and piety that Azaadville represented in the global Deobandi community.

The medium of Madrasa Arabia Islamia at Azaadville is a mixture of Arabic, English and

Urdu,[40] and teaches mainly Hanafi *fiqh* but attempts to offer an overview of Shafi`i *fiqh* for its

non-Indian students.[41] The *madrasa* itself is a large, three-story brown brick facility that

surrounds a spacious green courtyard. Palm trees and flowers grow copiously along the edges,

where a covered arcade leads to dorms and classrooms. To the right of the entrance is the

bookstore and mosque, topped with a large green dome and open to local Muslims for prayer and

on Friday's for *jum`a* prayers. A mosque with an imposing green dome overlooks the courtyard.

In the middle of the courtyard stands a large green water tower. The *madrasa* includes an

attached mosque, a section for teaching Qur'an memorization, for teaching *hadith* and for

teaching the issuing of *fatwas* (*ifta'*), twenty classrooms, a library, kitchen, laundry, dining hall,

and printing press. The latter produces numerous publications by the *madrasa*'s faculty as well as

a periodic newsletter, *An-Nasihah*, for the general Muslim public that is distributed in the

madrasa's mosque and other nearby Muslim centers. On certain occasions, especially during

Ramadan, the *masjid* is used as an informal *'khanqah'* where local Muslims can stay for long

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[39] Ebrahim Muhammad, *A Guide to Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 6-7.

[40] In terms of language abilities, the two criteria for entry into the *madrasa* are proficiency in English and a basic ability to read and recite the Qur'an. Most entry-level courses are conducted in English, with instruction rapidly switching to Urdu. Arabic is the medium for some upper-level courses.

[41] *Ibid.*, 5.

periods to pray and meditate.

Who is a 'Deobandi' anyway?

As I discuss in the introduction, because there is no official certification for *madrasas* that are part of the Deobandi network, defining precisely what or who is 'Deobandi' becomes problematic. One interviewee, in a separate context, flatly asserted that there is "no Deobandi movement."[42] This sort of assertion emerges, I would suggest, out of the belief that Deoband represents, as we have seen with Qari Muhammad Tayyib, a comprehensive version of Sunni Islam, the very 'essence' of Sunni piety as it were.

Here I will show how the notion of 'Deoband' at Azaadville is configured partly through supplementary readings about Deobandi scholars of the subcontinent and their achievements, and partly through the Sufi chains of initiation (*silsila*) between teachers and their pupils that stretch back to the subcontinent; often in fact, for the students at Azaadville, one's instructor in *hadith* is likely also to be one's Sufi master. Teacher-student relationships such as this one are equally as constitutive of the global Deoband network than any abstract allegiance to 'Deoband' as a place, movement, or institution. And precisely *because* these relationships are most often between Sufi masters and their disciples, the centrality of Sufism within Deoband becomes part of how students form a sense of identity.

One paradox that emerges in attempting to identify a *madrasa* such as Azaadville's as 'Deobandi' is that even though its principal and senior scholars may be graduates of the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband and closely linked *madrasas* of the subcontinent, it is ultimately an institution that is open to all; there is no ideological test for becoming a student at the *madrasa* at Azaadville. Ideally, they serve any student who wishes to study there, provided he is a Muslim, has a strong command of English (the *lingua franca* for the first couple of years, until one masters Urdu and eventually Arabic), and is willing to abide by the strict codes of conduct (being asleep

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[42] Interview with Muhammad Alie Moosagie, Cape Town, 24 June 2009.

by a certain hour, prompt attendance at communal prayers, shunning television even if visiting one's parents, and so on).

The students at Azaadville are well aware that the principal, Abdul Hamid Ishaq, is a *khalifa* of Hakim Muhammad Akhtar, who in turn studied closely with Ashraf `Ali Thanawi. Students spoke proudly of being a mere two 'links' in the chain from Thanawi, the greatest Deobandi scholar of the twentieth century. In this way, students at the *madrasa* do have a distinct comprehension of themselves as continuing a certain 'Deobandi' tradition. All with whom I spoke knew of the contributions of Deoband's founders, such as Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, and were conversant with ideas and contributions of Thanawi. Thus students do have a strong sense of the prestige of their institution and its place in Deobandi history. Yet this too generates a certain tension; students expressed pride in continuing a Deobandi tradition, at the same time that their engagement with Sufism trains them to diminish their pride (*kibr*) altogether.[43]

Sufi moral discipline informs pedagogies outside the classroom. Students will typically go to their teachers for moral advice and training regardless of whether they have a formal initiation with them. One of the students who studies *hadith* with Abdul Hamid Ishaq explains that not all the students who go to him are initiated Sufis. This student frequently consults Abdul Hamid Ishaq for advice on self-reformation but is not technically speaking his initiate.[44] This sort of relationship hints at the informality of Sufi pedagogy, even among students in the *madrasa*; more broadly, as we will see below, it characterizes the way the general public who attend Abdul Hamid Ishaq's *majalis* relate to him. Just as Fazlur Rahman Azmi, Azaadville's Shaykh al-Hadith, kept a 'reformative relationship' (*islahi ta`alluq*) with Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, students

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[43] Hakim Muhammad Akhtar's work is particularly concerned with eliminating pride as among the most essential tasks of the Sufi path. Pride (*kibr*) is opposed to gratitude (*shukr*) towards God, the most cherished of traits. See Hakim Muhammad Akhtar, *Ilaj-i Kibr*, Karachi: Kutub Khana-yi Mazhari, 47.

[44] Confidential interview, 'Qasim', 2 December 2009.

maintain similar relationships with their teachers, even if they are not technically their initiates.[45]

The 'reformative relationship', which resonates with the Deobandi emphasis on 'reform' (*islah*)

in all aspects of personal and social life, is crucial in understanding how teachers guide the moral

development of their students, even those who are not their Sufi pupils.

One student, whom I will call ' Qasim', described the Sufi relationship that he keeps with

Abdul Hamid Ishaq and the place of Sufism in the *madrasa*. He stated, "Here we study *fiqh* and

hadith. We do not 'study' Sufism. But, we try to make Sufism part of what we study. Sufism is

really about cleansing yourself inside, cleansing your heart." He continued, "Sufism is *taqwa*

[repentance]. There is no difference [between the two]." He described his own experience with

Abdul Hamid Ishaq, a *khalifa* of Hakim Muhammad Akhtar as well as an initiate of Muhammad

Zakariyya. While he and other Sufi initiates are free to consult Maulana Abdul Hamid between

'*asr salat* and *maghrib salat* on most days of the week, Qasim prefers to write letters to his

master "even if he is next door." This method is "considered more respectful and it is easier to

formulate your thoughts." Qasim explains that communications between Sufi master and disciple

transpired via hand-written letters for hundreds of years. He does not criticize the digitalization of

Sufi correspondence, but he does not have an email address of his own. The personal nature of

hand-written correspondence continues a tradition that actively maintains the proximity and

spiritual intimacy between master and disciple.[46]

Another way that the *madrasa* cultivates conscientiousness of a larger Deobandi tradition

is through publishing short biographical pamphlets on major Deobandis - including Hajji

Imdadullah, Gangohi, Nanautawi, Husain Ahmad Madani, Thanawi, Muhammad Zakariyya, and

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[45] Fazlur Rahman Azmi took initiation with Muhammad Zakariyya and maintained a 'reformative relationship' (*islahi ta'alluq*) with Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. Mufti Atiqur Rahman Azmi, *A Brief Biography of Shaykh al-Hadith Fazlur Rahman Azmi*, Azaadville: Madrasah Da'watul Haq, 2008, 77-79.

[46] One could compare how Masihullah Khan maintained a detailed correspondence with his disciples and insisted on the virtues of hand-written letters in fostering *islah*. He believed, for example, that when his disciples wrote him seeking *islah*-related advice, they must leave a large margin on both sides of the page so that he could write individualized commentary in the letter. Because of the volume of letters he received, he eventually limited his disciples to two letters per month, which had to be a maximum length of two pages each. Muhammad Faruq, *Zikr-i Masihulummat*, 68.

others - that `ulama' at Azaadville compose in English for students and for local Muslims who

visit the bookstore. These biographies praise the achievements of early Deobandi scholars and

foster a sense of pride and place for Azaadville's students.[47] Written in simple English for young

readers, they advance a few key narratives about Deoband and Azaadville's place within a

Deobandi network: first, that Deoband was an utterly unique development in Indian Islamic

history; second, that the Deobandis' struggle against the British was a noble act, an exemplary

model for contemporary struggles; and third, that its origins were humble and that its founders

were motivated solely by God's worship. This latter sentiment is echoed in the prospectus, which

states that the Deobandi `ulama' pursue religious knowledge for its own sake, not as an accessory

to modern 'career' advancement: "There were many Ulama of Deoband who did not even take a

certificate after qualifying as this was not their aim. Religious institutes are built upon the pillars

of sincerity, piety and the enthusiasm to serve mankind."[48]

The introduction to an Azaadville-published biography of Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi

highlights the Deobandi network as it is configured through students and teachers:

> In India there is a Madrasah where every year people from far off places come
> and study the knowledge of *din* as well as other aspects of religion … The
> students of this madrasah are the students of Allah and the Rasuls (messengers).
> You may ask how? The Ambiya, *alaihimus salam*, taught their close associates
> and in turn they taught others. One scholar produced other scholars. In this way
> knowledge spread far and wide and it reached us. Whenever students of this
> madrasah convey Rasulullah's advices and teachings, they mention their
> teachers' names who taught them. This link (chain) is from the time of
> Rasulullah. Are they not then the students of Rasulullah?[49]

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[47] The five biographies are all written by Maulana Maqbul Ahmad Sewharwi (b. 1883), a scholar who
wrote short primers for girls' education in India (see Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery, Craig Jeffrey,
"Islamization, Gentrification and Domestication: 'A Girls' Islamic Course' and Rural Muslims in Western
Uttar Pradesh," *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (1) 2004: 1-53, at 4), and also composed a biography of Sayyid
Ahmad, *Imam-i Tabligh Hazrat Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*, Delhi: Al-Jami'yat Book Depot, 1971. The five
short biographies published by Azaadville are: *Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi*, Azaadville: Madrasa
Baqiyatus Salihat, 2004; Maulana *Husain Ahmad Madani*, Azaadville: Madrasa Baqiyatus Salihat, 2004;
Muhaddith Gangohi, Azaadville: Madrasa Baqiyatus Salihat, 2004; *Hadrat Haji Imdadullah Sahib*,
Azaadville: Madrasa Baqiyatus Salihat, 2005; *Shaikhul Hind Hadrat Maulana Mahmud Hasan Deobandi*,
Azaadville: Madrasa Baqiyatus Salihat, 2007.

[48] Ebrahim Muhammad, *A Guide to Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 6.

The *madrasa* also supplements the Dars-i Nizami curriculum with supplementary readings on Deobandi history. While Azaadville does not make sectarian distinctions between Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-i Hadith and others a regular part of the curriculum, it does incorporate a handful of texts that impart a certain degree of knowledge about where Deoband fits into the wider Sunni world. They read, for example, Muhammad Yusuf Ludhianvi's *Ikhtilaf-i Ummat aur Sirat-i Mustaqim*, a popular polemical treatise outlining the major differences between Deobandis and Barelwis.[50]

On 'studying' Islam

Students at Azaadville often used the language of Sufism to describe not just relationships with their teachers but the very purpose of studying in a *madrasa*. This orientation to their studies first became obvious in a number of conversations about the nature of Islamic education and, indeed, the goals of knowledge itself.

When I first met 'Qasim', we were exiting Mufti Azmi's *ifta'* course on a cool afternoon in November. Most of the students seemed diffident about my presence; 'Qasim', on the other hand, accosted me directly to inquire about what I was doing, who invited me to come, what I hoped to get out of my visit, and so on. In giving an account of myself, naturally I first produced my business card. I had given little thought to the phrases that I used to describe myself on my card - 'College of Arts and Sciences', 'Ph.D. candidate', and most problematic for my purposes here, 'Islamic studies'. I could not have expected that this simple interaction would lead to a series of conversations in the coming weeks in which we worked together to parse, in the most precise terms possible, what exactly I claimed to be *doing* in doing 'Islamic studies'. Nor could I

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[49] Maulana Maqbul Ahmad Sewharwi, *Maulana Qasim Nanotwi*, Azaadville: Madrasa Baqiatus Saalihaat, 2004, 3-4.

[50] Madrasah Arabia Islamia, *Prospectus of Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 45. See Muhammad Yusuf Ludhianvi, *Ikhtilaf-i Ummat aur Sirat-i Mustaqim*, Lahore: Maktabah-yi Madania, 1992.

have predicted that this conversation would prompt us to call into question certain presumptions about the very purpose of knowledge. "What is all this knowledge you have? I mean what is it *for*?" asked another student, whom I will call 'Dawud'; with his emphasis on the *for*, he intentionally seemed to draw into relief the false 'utility' of my 'knowledge' of Islam, in contrast to the sincerity of motivations that they claimed for their knowledge. In these conversations, he actively invoked the Sufi vocabulary of 'sincerity' of purpose, *ikhlas*.[51]

Qasim, Dawud and others were puzzled by the notion of an *academic* approach to Islam. As I was asked many times, how I could be exposed to the message of Islam on a daily basis and not submit to it? What good is religious knowledge, after all, if it is not applied to oneself? I could have predicted least of all that my interlocutors at Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville would accuse my knowledge of being "dead," "mere words on paper," unless I allowed them to act to "penetrate my heart" as their learning had penetrated them. "What's the point of all this learning if not to bring you nearer to God?" asked a student I will call 'Rashid'. When Rashid spoke of bringing oneself "nearer to God," he did not explicitly reference 'nearness' in the classic Sufi usage of the term (cf. *qurbat*, 'nearness' or 'proximity' to God, for example) but one student did draw a direct homology between the purity of one's motivations in gaining religious knowledge in the *madrasa* and the sincerity one must find even to *begin* the Sufi path.[52] At a later point, I discovered in Abdul Hamid Ishaq's own work that "Zikrullah softens the heart."[53] During a long conversation with Rashid after one of Abdul Hamid Ishaq's *majalis*, he referenced the *ikhlas* that one must bring to one's studies, among the very first 'stations' (*maqamat*) in the Sufi path.[54] Just

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[51] Confidential interview, 'Dawud', 22 November 2009.

[52] There are numerous discussions of the centrality of this concept in Sufism. For one, see William Chittick's *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts*, Albany: State University of New York, 1992, especially 6-12.

[53] Abdul Hamid Ishaq, *The Reality of Tasawwuf and Ihsan*, 10-11. Qari Muhammad Tayyib also used the language of 'softness' to describe the effect of *zikr* on the heart. Qari Muhammad Tayyib, *Importance of Zikrullah*, 2-3.

[54] Confidential interview, 'Rashid', 8 December 2009.

as one cannot embark on the Sufi path without *ikhlas*, he explained, so one cannot embark on a course of religious learning without the same disposition, and for the same reason. If fame, wealth, praise or any motive other than worship of God is present in the hearts of a student, then his task is compromised from the very beginning.[55]

But how do students manage the very *real* needs of providing for one's family, paying one's bills, and so on? Some students seemed outright discomfited by my questions about what they wanted to 'do' with their learning after they had graduated from the *madrasa*. The vocational prospects of a *madrasa* degree are tenuous yet, frankly, unimportant for the students with whom I spoke. This is not to say that they did not have practical plans; Qasim and Dawud wanted to work as *imams* in their local communities. Another student I will call 'Muhammad' wanted to teach *hadith* in a *madrasa*, perhaps even founding his own *madrasa*. Rashid, on the other hand, wanted to spend the rest of his life studying. The prospectus for the Azaadville *madrasa* exemplifies students' approach to studying in a *madrasa*, opening with a quote from Muhammad Yusuf Binnori's *Dalil-i Jami`at al-`Ulum al-Islamiyya*:

> The aim of these institutes is not to attain a degree and thereafter to be employed in some government department, educational faculty or to become an orator or an author. The primary aim of these institutes is to attain proficiency in the Islamic sciences in order to serve Din and to give one's life for the service of Islam. The student should be courageous to proclaim the truth by attaining his true inheritance from the Ambiya [Prophets] without seeking secular wealth, position, the love of fame or the praise of the people.[56]

The *madrasa*'s self-published *Guide to Madrasa Arabia Islamia* describes "self reformation" as a "department" of the *madrasa*.[57] Likewise, a short treatise of Masihullah Khan,

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[55] One could cite Qushayri, for example, among others. See *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism: Al-risala Al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, trans. Alexander D. Knysh. Reading: Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2007, 220-222. Qushayri defined 'sincerity' here as "seeking closeness to God - praise be to Him - to the exclusion of everything else, such as making a show [of one's piety] for other people, seeking their praise and taking delight in it."

[56] Madrasah Arabia Islamia, *Prospectus of Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 5-6.

[57] Ebrahim Muhammad, *A Guide to Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 9. It points out, specifically, the *majalis* that are regularly held by Maulana Fazlur Rahman Azmi, Muhammad Saeed Motara, and Maulana Abdul Hamid Ishaq. "People from far and wide come to spend the entire month of Ramadan or shorter or longer

published in South Africa by the Deobandi Majlisul Ulama of Port Elizabeth, articulates a direct

correlation between the Sufi emphasis on self-purification and the *raison d'être* of religious

education, which must be pursued solely for the 'pleasure of God':

> The pursuit of Deeni knowledge for the obtainal [*sic*] of a degree, certificate,
> livelihood, for the acquisition of wealth, rank, post, fame, honour, etc. will be the
> consequence of corrupt motives. Any of these purposes will indicate that the
> intention underlying the pursuit of *Ilm* [knowledge] is corrupt and unwholesome
> … Thus the purpose of acquiring Deeni knowledge is nothing but the cultivation
> of *Ridhaa-e-Haqq* or the Pleasure of Allah. The way in which this purpose is to
> be attained is *tazkiya-e-nafs* [purification of the lower self] … The student
> should, prior to embarking on his academic career, engage in *tazkiyah-e-nafs*.
> Only then should he enter Path in quest of knowledge "[58]

The language of Sufi ethics is marshaled here in a striking way; purifying the inner self is not a

result of religious learning but its *prerequisite*. And the purified self will have no ulterior motives

in pursuing religious knowledge. Or as Qasim put it, invoking the principle of 'trust' (*tawakkul*)

in God, "We are sustained by Allah. If you put your absolute trust in him, you have nothing to

worry about. Nothing at all."[59]

Some students spoke of translating 'knowledge' into 'practice' as the most essential

purpose of Sufi training. This sort of language resonates with Thanawi's concept of Sufism as

embodied ethics, or ethical knowledge that unites both the 'external' (*zahir*) and the 'internal'

(*batin*) demeanor, as we saw in the second chapter, and is especially salient in the *madrasa*'s

emphasis on *tabligh*. One of the noteworthy features of Dar al-`Ulum Azaadville is the emphasis

on *tabligh* as an integral part of a student's overall education.[60] Nearly every Sunday, the

madrasa arranges student and teacher groups for *gasht*, making rounds in the province of

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periods in the Khanqah and they perform *i'tikaf* [staying in a mosque during Ramadan] in the Dar al-`Ulum
Masjid for this purpose."

[58] Masihullah Khan, Majlisul Ulama, trans. *Ilm Madaris and Strikes*, Port Elizabeth: Majlisul Ulama of
South Africa, 1982, 14.

[59] Confidential interview, 'Qasim', 2 December 2009.

[60] Ebrahim Muhammad, *A Guide to Madrasah Arabia Islamia*, 8.

Gauteng and, occasionally, further afield. Students are also expected to do a '*chilla*',[61] a forty-day preaching tour, during holiday periods.[62] Students often employed the same language for describing the purpose of *tabligh* as they did the purpose for having a Sufi *shaykh*. As a student attending a *majlis* in Durban explained when I asked about the links between Sufism and *tabligh*:

> The purpose of going out for *tabligh* is to help others correct themselves. You can't help others correct their morals until you correct your own. This is why *tasawwuf* is important. You see how these connect? *Tasawwuf* helps you perfect yourself, and *tabligh* lets you take this out to the people. Not everyone has the time to sit with a Sufi.[63]

Sufi meditations to 'open the heart': Lessons in self-fashioning

It is now, of course, commonplace for scholars who conduct fieldwork to highlight ways in which their interlocutors approached their presence in the field, and how this mutual dynamic affects the production of knowledge. The field is never a space of passive or neutral 'observation'; it is a truism to state that one conducting fieldwork is simultaneously and necessarily both observer and observed.[64] Here I will concentrate on how a series of talks with students at Azaadville brought the affective power of Sufi language into full relief. As I discuss below, over the course of several conversations, some students sought to open me to the possibility of becoming a Muslim through performing specific ritual actions alongside them and, more importantly, through giving me Sufi meditations (*zikrs*) to recite on my own.

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[61] Tablighis' use of the Sufi term '*chilla*' is illustrative of their adaptation of Sufi concepts for their own purposes. Denoting a forty-day spiritual retreat for Sufis, the *chilla* became a forty-day preaching excursion among the Tablighis.

[62] Confidential interview, 'Qasim', 2 December 2009.

[63] *Majlis* at Masjid un-Noor, Asherville, Durban, 12 November 2009.

[64] For a couple of examples, see Thomas A. Tweed, "On Moving Across: Translocative Religion and the Interpreter's Position," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, 2 (2002): 253-277, and Anthony P. Cohen, "Self-Conscious Anthropology," in Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds. *Anthropology and Autobiography*, London: Routledge, 1992. For a somewhat dated but still classic examination of ethnographic self-knowledge, see Dorinne K. Kondo's "Dissolution and Reconstitution of Self: Implications for Anthropological Epistemology," *Cultural Anthropology* 1, 1 (1986): 74-88.

In the course of my fieldwork, including the time I spent in India and South Africa, students politely asked that I conform my own actions to the *sunna* while in their presence. In the course of meals at Deoband, to take one example, I was asked to recite "bismillah" before eating and even to lick my plate clean in accord with the Prophetic *sunna*, as, I was told, it is *sunna* not to waste even a morsel of food. Before entering the mosque at Azaadville, I was asked, to take another example, to perform *wudu'*, even though those actions are typically not required of non-Muslims entering a mosque. Initially I believed that conforming *my* actions to the *sunna* was merely a matter of maintaining some sort of 'respect' for my hosts. But this is not how the students and teachers with whom I sat, ate and talked seemed to understand my actions; rather, conforming to the *sunna* in one's actions is, above all, a praxis-centered collection of physical dispositions, a sort of training not just for the body, one which they had embodied fully but which would benefit me as well, a non-Muslim. Students invited me to perform *salah* for similar reasons, an activity that, my interlocutors insisted, would condition my body for the "*haqq*" (truth) of Islam to penetrate my heart.

How I became a sort of 'project' for my interlocutors was most palpable during interviews. Often they seemed vexed by the formality of the interview process. Typically we would share a meal or tea and talk informally about a myriad of subjects; some of my deepest insights into the lives of Deobandi scholars and students - their experiences as Sufis, their politics, how they see themselves as part of a larger 'Deobandi' totality - came out of these conversations. Often, upon formally beginning the 'interview', when I began to ask the list of generic questions that I had prepared even before reaching the field, the mood and dynamic shifted subtly, if not overtly, so that a casual give-and-take between two interlocutors became a one-way flow of 'information' from interviewee to interviewer. Some commented on the overweening formality of the interviews, and a few even used them to turn the flow of information in the other direction. A particular encounter will illustrate this well. In Johannesburg I interviewed a major disciple of Masihullah Khan at his home. Upon reading the part of the

assent form that states the interview will neither harm nor benefit him, he immediately asked me, with a wry smile, "It may be of no benefit to me, but how is it going to benefit *you*? And I am not speaking about your paper." It was clear that he was speaking of my own 'spiritual condition'.[65]

I am all too conscious of certain invidious tropes about Muslims and the conversion of non-Muslims. As I took my fieldnotes, I grappled with the difficulties of how to discuss this essential aspect of my field experience without reiterating the trope of the zealous Muslim who sees every non-Muslim as a potential convert. I hope that I have succeeded in discussing this experience without doing so. Nevertheless, I found myself occupying a liminal space, representationally and ethically: while I was firm in asserting that I had no intention of becoming a Muslim, I realized the productivity of these conversations and wanted them to continue, and understood that rejecting these offers *too* explicitly might cause my interlocutors to close themselves off from me prematurely. In other words, continuing my fieldwork depended partly on continuing to serve as a 'project' for them as much as they were part of my own project. It is precisely in this liminal space where ethnography transpires, as in Susan Harding's view: "The irony is that this space between belief and disbelief, or rather the paradoxical space of worship, is also the space of ethnography. We must enter it to do our work."[66]

Of all the students I met at Azaadville, 'Rashid' was particularly eager to speak with me about my own faith position. He gave me a copy of a book by a well-known South African Muslim evangelist, Ahmed Deedat's *The Choice: Islam and Christianity*, which had compelled him to accept Islam.[67] On a subsequent visit to the *madrasa* after we had talked about the

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[65] Confidential interview, 'Ibrahim,' 3 December 2009.

[66] Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist language and politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 58.

[67] Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005), founder of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban, was a controversial South African Muslim preacher whose high-profile debates with the likes of Jimmy Swaggart earned him a wide international following among Muslims, though many traditional *`ulama'* criticized his tactics. He professed to train Muslims in resisting the work of Christian missionaries. For scholarly assessments of Deedat, see David Westerlund's "Ahmed Deedat's Theology of Religion: Apologetics through Polemics,"

difference between merely 'knowing the truth' and internalizing it, between passive cognizance and active embodiment, we struck up this conversation once again. This time, among the students with whom I was speaking, sitting on the lawn of the *madrasa* courtyard, Rashid spoke up and said: "Tonight, before you go to sleep, I just want you to close your eyes and sit quietly, and try saying *Allahu akbar* thirty three times, *Al-Hamdu Lillah* thirty three times, and *La ilaha ila Llah* thirty three times. " I replied, "But how can I use these *zikrs* if I am not a Muslim?" "You don't have to be Muslim to benefit from *zikr*," he replied. "And anyway, if you say these *zikrs* every night, in the correct way, they will open your heart to the truth."[68] Another student nearby cited verses from the Qur'an condemning hypocrisy (*nifaq*), pointing out in particular that among the worst of the hypocrites are those for whom there is a disconnect between belief and practice, between mere passive cognizance of the 'truth' and assenting to the truth actively and fully.[69]

In the end, I did not use the *zikr* chants that the students at Azaadville suggested to me. But merely entertaining the idea in our conversations was crucial to allowing the students to explain the affective force of this language. It is not 'ordinary' speech; these are speech acts, to be sure, but not in the classic sense of 'performative' speech as John Austin defined it long ago.[70] They are more accurately defined as *transformative* speech acts. I sought to be open to the transformative power of this language in a way perhaps analogous to what Harding called 'narrative belief': "standing in the gap between conscious belief and willful unbelief … opens up born-again language and makes available its complexity, its variety and creativity, and its agile

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force."[71] Harding speaks of 'catching' the language of her interlocutors, those who 'witnessed' to her about the power of the Gospel; to do so is not to 'convert', but it does entail participating willingly in a speech community. "The membrane between disbelief and belief is much thinner than we think," writes Harding. "All I had to do was to listen to my witness and to struggle to understand him. Just doing so did not make me a fundamental Baptist born-again believer, but it drew me across that membrane in tiny ways so that I began to acquire the knowledge and vision and sensibilities, to share the experience, of a believer."[72] Another point of comparison here is the space of belief between "either" and "or" that Eve Sedgwick finds in her studies of Buddhism, a space where one may be "liberated by both possibility and impossibility, and especially by the relative untetheredness to self."[73] One need not rule out the affect of Sufi language nor embrace it uncategorically to comprehend how it works. I believe that this openness to the affective force of language is characteristic to the attitudes these students maintained towards the language of Sufi *zikrs*.

When I speak here of 'self-fashioning', what do I mean by *self*? I do not suggest that there is a singular, unchanging entity in need of fashioning; as Debbora Battaglia submits, "there is no selfhood apart from the collaborative practice of its figuration. *The 'self' is a representational economy*: a reification continually defeated by mutual entanglements with other subjects' histories, experiences, self-representations; with their texts, conduct, gestures, objectifications."[74] The self that the students of Azaadville seek to discipline through the regimes of *tazkiya al-nafs* is entangled not only with the broader discourses of Sufi ethics but, more

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[71] Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, xii.

[72] *Ibid.*, 58.

[73] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 179.

[74] Debbora Battaglia, "Problematizing the Self," in Debbora Battaglia, ed. *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 2.

narrowly, with the specific Deobandi textual and interpersonal configurations of how a self *ought* to be disciplined.

Recent scholars, among them Saba Mahmood, Charles Hirschkind and Hussein Ali Agrama, have commented on Western imaginaries of the liberal, and *liberated*, self in relation to perhaps well-meaning but misguided projects of recreating Muslim societies; for Agrama, this presumption is based on a series of ideals, namely "the familiar ideal that the true self is the free self; an understanding of freedom as the pursuit and realization of one's interests and pleasures; and the belief that a free self is one that follows its own will only, and that wants to follow only its own will."[75] But the 'self' cultivated in the *madrasa* is not an emancipatory one. It is not, then, a classically 'liberal' self, and in this regard it is worth drawing a contrast here between the subjectivity of the *madrasa* and the liberal subject bound up in the phrase 'liberal arts', with which Western pedagogy defines a certain expectation about the emancipatory ends towards which higher education is a means.

Cultivating a pure sensorium: TV, radio and bodily demeanor

If Sufi ethics inform how students at Madrasa Arabia Islamia conceive of the ultimate purpose of their studies, and the language of Sufism in the form of *zikrs* works to shape their internal dispositions, the students also strive for a space that I will call a 'pure' ethical sensorium, one carefully and deliberately purified of 'offensive' visual and auditory stimuli. The result is an 'inhabited ethics', an ethics in which one can dwell.

A couple of incidents brought this into stark relief. During one visit to Azaadville, when I was meeting with three students who were on their own for lunch since classes were not in session, I suggested that I could drive all of us into the town market to eat at a local restaurant. The students obliged my request and we all climbed into my car. As soon as the car started, the

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[75] Hussein Ali Agrama, "Ethics, Tradition, Authority: Toward an Anthropology of the Fatwa," *American Ethnologist* 37, 1 (2010): 2-18, at 6.

radio came on. I had been listening to one of Johannesburg's classical radio stations. Almost instantaneously, as a kind of reflex, one of the students reached for the radio and turned it off. The reaction was startling; there was no debate on whether or not to keep the radio on, no polite request to turn it off. I certainly did not mind, but sensing that I may perceive his action as odd or startling at best, the student explained that music of any kind is a threat to morality, a temptation that ensnares the heart and distracts one from the sole 'recollection' (*zikr*) of God in daily life.

Among these students, Qasim particularly saw no utility in radio whatsoever, even of Islamic radio stations that broadcast only sermons or Qur'anic recitations. This seems, as far as I can tell, a minority opinion, given that Johannesburg boasts a radio station in Lenasia, Radio Islam, supported by the Deobandi-affiliated Jamiatul Ulama Gauteng. We had a similar conversation on another occasion when we ventured into the local market. I voiced a desire to eat at a nearby café that I had visited alone during a previous trip to Azaadville. The fact that the café had a television in the corner, incessantly blaring cricket and soccer games, had not occurred to me as problematic. Qasim, however, knew the place and politely explained that he could not eat there because of the television. I asked Qasim and Dawud whether there are *any* circumstances in which television could be a social good, referencing the concept of *maslaha*, the notion that Imdadullah and others have cited to argue, for example, that the social good of *mawlud* (introducing people to the morally edifying tales from the life of the Prophet Muhammad) outweighs its potential harmful effects. The other way of reframing this question, I explained, in referencing Thanawi, is to ask if *mawlud* is permissible so long as certain conditions are met (e.g., there is no intermixing of men and women, the organizer is not doing it for personal gain, and so on). Can TV also, I asked, have certain merits if there are conditions on its content? Qasim said he was aware of the argument for *maslaha* that some Deobandis had used to defend *mawlud*. In this case, however, he argued that it is not possible to separate the medium and the message. "Nothing good can come out of television. It doesn't matter if it's an *imam* giving a *bayan* or

what. It's just not necessary." Ultimately he seemed to regard the medium, or even the very object, the *actual television*, as toxic in and of itself.[76]

The Prophetic *sunna* conditions every aspect of Azaadville's students' lives. But they also sought to make me open to its conditioning affect. This is similar to what Annemarie Schimmel called the "*imitatio Muhammadi*."[77] Cornell, building on Schimmel's examples, noted the centrality in Sufism of imitating the Prophet's "beautiful example" (*uswa hasana*) in all respects. In early Sufi texts like Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma`* the *imitatio Muhammadi* entailed adhering to the "Prophet's etiquette, his moral and spiritual states, and, whenever possible, his inner realities."[78] Oftentimes this affect is intrinsically physical. During one evening, after a *majlis* with Abdul Hamid Ishaq, I stayed to observe and speak with students who were studying in rows that wrapped around the central *masjid* in a semi-circle. As they read, students sit on the floor, with their feet under them, reading aloud from texts that are positioned on small stands, while rocking back and forth. I asked a student whom I had come to know, Mahmoud, whether or not they "learned" to read this way. He said it was not really a "conscious thing." He added, "I don't know where it comes from. But I know it helps us remember what we recite."[79] The careful postures were also evident while sitting in on classes, including Fazlur Rahman Azmi's *ifta'* course, where students sat in a similar semi-circle.

Scholars have addressed ways that such physical states are 'contagious'. Teresa Brennan,

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[76] Brian Larkin has discussed the banning of cinema in the northern Nigerian state of Kano and argued that cinema wielded a certain "aura" above and beyond its form and content: "It is this excess, the immaterial experience of cinema emerging from the assemblage of built space, film, and social practice, that became the target of regulation." See Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 1-2. I would argue that radio and television for these students bore a similar 'aura' that had less to do with the *content* on the television or radio (hence these students' rejection even of 'Islamic' television), and more to do with its metonymic associations with illicit sexuality, violence, and the like.

[77] Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: a Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 90.

[78] Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998, 199.

[79] Confidential interview, 'Mahmoud', 12 December 2009.

for instance, analyses how physical affect often precedes thought.[80] Ebrahim Moosa similarly

identifies several sensory modalities that are part of the goal of what he calls "optimizing the

sensorium" in the *madrasa*.[81] Students are trained in subtle embodied sensibilities (how to eat,

how to pray, how to wash) and in auditory practices (reciting the Qur'an, *zikrs*, studying aloud),

as well as in "regimes of the visual" including ways to understand visions and interpret dreams.

As I have noted above, 'optimizing the sensorium' depends equally on purging it of dangerous,

subversive or threatening forms of media and sensory stimuli.

Pedagogy and Persuasion: Sufi ethics and the *majlis*

One of Azaadville's weekly gatherings is a *majlis* led by Abdul Hamid Ishaq, who speaks

to students and the general public every Tuesday after *isha* prayers, as well as on the first Sunday

of every Islamic month. Fazlur Rahman Azmi also leads a *majlis* every Sunday in the mornings,

though his are attended mostly by students. The word *majlis* (pl. *majalis*) literally means 'a place

of sitting' and has been used throughout Islamic history, usually to denote a religious and/or

political assembly.[82] Deobandis have adapted the notion of the *majlis* as a medium for

disseminating spiritual instruction and moral advice, both to initiated Sufis and to the general

Muslim public. A Deobandi *majlis* can have myriad forms. It can be a *majlis-i zikr*, a gathering

for the purpose of reciting pious litanies in 'remembrance' of God; many are of this type, such as

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[80] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

[81] Ebrahim Moosa, "Melancholic Traditions in Islam: Mullahs, Madrasahs and Militants in South Asia," lecture at STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies), Stellenbosch, South Africa, 25 March 2010.

[82] The word appears most often in the sense of an administrative, parliamentary or advisory body; in various incarnations, different majority Muslim countries have had institutions such as a *majlis al-shura*, a *majlis al-mashwara*, or a *majlis al-ummah*. W. Madelung, *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 2nd edition, "*Madjlis*." The word has also appeared in an Indian Shi`i context to describe assemblies that form during Muharram to mourn the events of Karbala. Munibur Rahman, *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 2nd edition, "*Madjlis*." For uses of the term in South Asian contexts, see also Meer Hassan Ali, *Observations on the Mussulmauns of India*, London: Parbury Allen, 1832. Oxford University Press republished this important document in 1974.

those at Lenasia's Khanqah Masjid Shaykh Zakariyya[83] under the direction of Maulana Ebrahim

Mia.[84]

However, the kind on which I will focus is the *majlis-i bayan*, a gathering for the purpose

of lecturing on some topic, in most cases topics within the purview of Sufi ethics or in some cases

- specifically in the *majalis* of Yunus Patel - matters related to improving Muslims' lives and

society (e.g. raising a family in a properly 'Islamic' manner, dealing with crime, keeping children

away from drugs and alcohol, gambling, adultery, and so on). Furthermore, the *majlis* can take

place in a variety of settings, from a *madrasa*, a mosque, a *khanqah*, or even a community lecture

hall.

The *majlis* combines elements of the traditional recorded 'sayings' (*malfuzat*) of Sufi

masters, a genre especially associated with the Chishti Sufis of South Asia, and practical advice

on relating Sufi wisdom to quotidian problems and concerns. As a pupil of Masihullah Khan

describes the *majlis*:

> A *majlis* does not follow the pattern of a lecture. A lecture on a subject will have
> a systematic explanation of aspects of that subject. A *majlis*, on the other hand, is
> an informal talk. There may or may not be a theme around which the talk
> unfolds, but the topics discussed may change from minute to minute. The object
> of the talk is to provide answers to the problems faced by those attending the talk
> … Those attending have come in search of answers leading to their self-
> rectification (*islah*). As the answers may appear at any moment, and may appear

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[83] *Majlis*, Khanqah Masjid Shaykh Zakariyya, 24 November 2009. Maulana Mia's *majalis* are held
Tuesdays and Thursdays about 45 minutes before *isha* prayers in the evening.

[84] Maulana Mia studied at Dar al-`Ulum Deoband alongside Yunus Patel in the early 1970's. He was born
in 1947 in Mpumalanga but refers to Dahbel in Gujarat, a geographic focal point for many South African
Deobandis, as his ancestral homeland. He became a *khalifa* of Muhammad Zakariyya in 1972 while
studying at Deoband, and spent years in the presence of his *shaykh* at Deoband, Saharanpur and in Mecca.
Perhaps of all those I interviewed, Maulana Mia was the most fervently explicit about his affiliation to and
allegiance towards Deoband. "All of my teachings are in accord with the Deoband school of thought" was
one of the first things he said to me when I explained my project. Our conversation quickly diverted from
his work as a Sufi *shaykh* and a disciple of Muhammad Zakariyya to Deobandi/Barelwi polemics.
"Deobandis do not regard Barelwis as Muslims," according to Maulana Mia, a statement that many,
perhaps most, other Deobandis would contest. The main points of difference between Deobandis and
Barelwis are, in his opinion, *salaami* and *hazir-o-nazir*, but I asked him about *mawlud*. Would *mawlud* be
acceptable if all of the stipulations that Thanawi made in his analysis-namely, being devoid of *qiyam*, not
entailing waste, not convened by someone seeking fame or praise, and so on? "No, there is no basis for
celebrating *mawlud* at all," he replied. Interview, Maulana Ebrahim Mia, Khanqah Masjid Shaykh
Zakariyya, 22 November 2009.

in an expected way, each and every sentence uttered by the sheikh has to be listened to with the greatest concentration.[85]

The *majlis* has been a staple of Deoband's public face for generations. It is difficult to pinpoint when the earliest *majalis* took place, but we know at the very least that Thanawi held frequent *majalis* at his *khanqah* in Thana Bhavan. Many of these *majalis* were 'recorded' by students (meaning, in the absence of actual recording devices, they were most likely turned into prose from student notes). Deobandi publishers in South Africa have published transcribed *majalis* of prominent Deobandi scholars of the subcontinent, including those of Thanawi, Masihullah Khan, and Shah Abrar al-Haq, a *khalifa* of Thanawi and whose most prominent disciple is Hakim Muhammad Akhtar.[86]

Majalis have a standard format. They typically begin with recitations from the Qur'an or a series of Urdu *na`ts*. Patrick Eisenlohr has argued that the *na`t*, as a genre of South Asian devotional performance, is 'claimed' in a sense by Barelwis,[87] yet each 'Deobandi' *majlis* that I attended featured Urdu *na`ts*. Following these recitations, a Sufi *shaykh* gives a talk, usually about an hour long, on a variety of topics. The gatherings typically conclude with members of the audience queuing to formally greet the *shaykh* and sometimes to ask him for specific moral advice.

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[85] Ismail Mangera, *For Friends: Selected Discourses of Maseehul Ummat Hadhrat Maulana Muhammad Masihullah Khan Sahib*, Brixton, South Africa, 1992, i-ii.

[86] For a few examples of Thanawi's *majalis* that have been translated and published: Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Love of the World*, translated by Yusuf Gundiwala, Azaadville, South Africa: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2006; Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Union with Allah and Separation from non-Allah*, translated by Yusuf Gundiwala, Azaadville, South Africa: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2002, based on a *majlis* on 8 January 1925 and recorded by Zafar Ahmad Uthmani; and Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Chattels of the World*, translated by Yusuf Gundiwala, Azaadville, South Africa: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2001, based on a *majlis* on 1 August 1912. Hakim Muhammad Akhtar recorded and collected his master Shah Abrar al-Haq's *majalis*, which a publishing house near Azaadville has translated and published as *Majalis-e-Abraar: Advice of Moulana Shah Abraarul Haq Saheb*, Krugersdorp, South Africa: Akhtari Publications, n.d.

[87] Patrick Eisenlohr, "*Na't*: Media Contexts and Transnational Dimensions of a Devotional Practice," in Barbara D. Metcalf, ed. *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, Princeton and Chicago: Princeton University Press, 2009. Most often *na`ts* are poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, though may also be sung in praise of the great Sufi masters such as 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166) or Mu`in al-Din Chishti (d. 1235).

One of the *majalis* that I witnessed took place at Azaadville in December of 2009.[88] In attendance were students and members of the Azaadville community, about fifty in all, both men and children. Most were Muslims of South Asian descent, though a few black African Muslims listened as well. The lesson began, as usual, with Urdu *na`ts* sung by students. In this case, both were *na`ts* of Mahmud Hasan Gangohi, to whom Abdul Hamid affectionately referred to as "Our Hazrat."

The message centered on the twin ideals of having gratitude (*shukr*) towards God for the bounties (*rizq*) that God provides, and tempering the lower self (*nafs*). The Muslims today, Abdul Hamid explained, are far too consumed with fighting perceived 'enemies', whether ideological or physical ones. Such actions naturally breed pride, the antithesis of gratitude and humility; rather, the greatest of all fights is the one against the *nafs*, "because all spiritual victories begin with mastering the *nafs*." He concluded the lecture with a lengthy meditation on the reality of death and the futility of accumulating wealth in this life, underscoring the merit of giving one's wealth for the sake of God through the traditional forms of Muslim charity (*zakah* and *sadaqah*). One is not merely spending that money but "transferring it from the account of *dunya* [this world] to the account of the *akhira* [the next world] … No one can rob the bank of the *akhirah*, it will never fold or go bankrupt."

Among the most popular Deobandi *majalis* in South Africa are Yunus Patel's. When I met Yunus Patel at his office at Madressa Sawlehaat, an all-girls *madrasa* in the Asherville district of Durban, I waited for Maulana Patel behind a steady stream of followers who had come to him for both worldly and spiritual advice. He met Qari Muhammad Tayyib during his visit to South Africa in 1963 and decided later to attend Dar al-`Ulum Deoband, citing Tayyib as direct inspiration for his decision.[89] Patel is one of the most spiritually connected Sufis in South Africa, having undergone Sufi initiation with Muhammad Zakariyya, Hakim Muhammad Akhtar, and

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[88] *Majlis* of Abdul Hamid Ishaq, Darul Uloom Azaadville, 8 December 2009.

[89] Interview, Yunus Patel, 12 November 2009.

Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. He is a *khalifa* of the latter two. He is quick to point out that his initiations link him to Hajji Imdadullah through his two most influential disciples: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Ashraf `Ali Thanawi; the *silsila* through Mahmud Hasan Gangohi extends to Muhammad Zakariyya (d. 1982), then to Maulana Rashid Ahmad Saharanpuri (d. 1927) and finally to Gangohi, while the *silsila* through Hakim Muhammad Akhtar extends to Shah Abrar al-Haq (d. 2005), then to Thanawi.[90] Patel was briefly involved with the Tablighi Jama`at in the 1970's but "did not go into it exclusively," as he put it, implying that some Deobandi scholars do. One scholar who knows Maulana Patel suggested to me that he has been "sidelined" by the major Deobandi *jama`ats* partly because of his lack of interest in *tabligh* and relatively accommodating views on some contentious Sufi issues.[91]

Yunus Patel gives a *majlis-i bayan* on Thursday nights and a *majlis-i zikr* on Monday nights after *isha* prayers. An interesting feature of Maulana Patel's *majalis* - and for the most part, Deobandi *majalis* in general - is that one need not be an initiated Sufi to participate or derive knowledge and spiritual benefits from attending. He lectures widely around South Africa and the world, but most of his lectures are held at Masjid un-Noor, which is nearby the girls' *madrasa* in Durban, Madrasah Sawlehaat, where he serves as rector.

I sat in on two of Maulana Patel's *majalis* during November and December 2009, both *majalis-i zikr*, and supplemented my attendance in person with listening to recorded *majalis* available on Maulana Patel's website. After a series of Urdu *na`ts*, Maulana Patel delivers his talk in English, with an occasional quotation in Urdu from the *malfuzat* of Mahmud Hasan Gangohi. Those in attendance are not passive recipients of Maulana Patel's knowledge; members of the audience may echo the refrains of specific Urdu *na`ts* that they know by heart. Towards the end of the *majlis*, many of the participants chanted "Allah… Allah… Allah" and on both occasions

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[90] His *silsila* can be found at http://yunuspatel.co.za/myp-spiritualtree.php (last accessed 20 September 2010).

[91] Interview, Ahmad Mukaddam, International Peace College of South Africa (IPSA), 21 May 2009.

that I attended in person, Maulana Patel ended his lecture with a tearful conclusion. It was difficult to discern - and perhaps irrelevant - whether or not his crying was 'sincere', but the scene invoked the well-known *hadith* from Ibn Majah: "Recite the Qur'an and cry. If you cannot cry, then make yourself cry." The performative aspects of crying while reciting the Qur'an have been widely discussed;[92] the affective and evocative power of Maulana Patel's crying reverberated through his audience as they echoed his refrains in an increasingly plaintive mode. Afterwards a semicircle of attendants gathered in a queue for *musafaha* - a *sunna* style of greeting by shaking with both hands - with Maulana Patel. While his *majlis-i zikr* involves participants in a more direct way, in which they recite a litany of *zikrs* in unison, his *majlis-i bayan* also encourages active audience response and hardly conforms to what the word 'lecture' connotes.

Maulana Patel's *majalis* are known throughout, and beyond, South Africa for his socially and politically oriented messages on dishonesty, drinking, adultery, crime, and so on. He attracts a broad cross-section of Durban's Muslim middle class. I spoke with an attorney who said, "I come to his talks to uplift my morals. I do not have time to go out on Tabligh, though *insha'llah* some day I can do that. We must work to uplift the entire *ummah* but it begins with each one of us."[93] Maulana Patel is not alone in advocating this Sufism for South Africa's middle classes. Azaadville's Abdul Hamid Ishaq advocates Sufi *zikr* as "the key to all of success,"[94] while Muhammad Hakim Akhtar sees as the first sign that inner peace (*sakina*) has been attained that God's light (*nur*) remains firmly entrenched in the heart whether one be in the mosque or "in the markets or in the factories or in London or Germany or Japan. God's light must remain firmly

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[92] For discussion of emotion in relation to poetic practice in Arabic contexts, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Interestingly, Abu-Lughod notes that few men engage in the stylized 'crying' common in Bedouin mourning rituals except in the context of men singing poems at the tombs of Sufi saints, which they sing "in a quavering voice as they move from tent to tent." See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 198-199. The 'quavering voice' accurately describes the tone of participants in Patel's *majalis*.

[93] Unidentified man at *majlis*, Asherville, Durban. 12 November 2009.

[94] Maulana Ridwaan Kagee, *Virtues of the Zikr of Almighty Allah*, Azaadville: Madrasah Arabia Islamia, 2005, 15.

embedded in the heart."[95]

Maulana Patel's lectures incorporate what we may, perhaps somewhat awkwardly, call 'Sufism beyond Sufi orders', but which is an essential aspect of Deobandi Sufism; according to Patel, many of those who come to hear him are not initiated Sufis, but all are, in a sense, his students. Likewise, he uses the narratives and symbolic resources of Sufism to illustrate his messages. His lecture of 12 November 2009 used metaphors from contemporary technology to describe the invisible interconnections between Sufi saints: "We have no trouble believing in the invisible connections between computers, radios, etc. that transfer information, but we are skeptical of the transfer of love through the heart-to-heart technology of the *awliya'* [Sufi saints]."[96] He expanded this theme in his *majlis* at the same location on 7 December:

> Where is the connection? We don't see the connection with our eyes but there is a connection. Our cell phones, the message that is coming, there is a connection with the one who is sending the message. And that person's cell phone has got a connection with wherever they are transmitting from, wherever the signals are coming from ... In everything there is a connection. This fan is working, the air conditioner is working, the lights are working. There is a connection. If there's no connection with the powerhouse you won't get anything here. But you don't see anything. We don't see it. So we believe in all this kind of technology but we can't believe that Allah Ta'ala says certain actions have certain reactions. We say where is the connection? Where is the connection that when someone commits adultery, his *barakat* [blessings] and his *rizq* [sustenance] will go away?[97]

Maulana Patel described the Sufi saints repeatedly as "reservoirs of *taqwa*, reservoirs of *ishan*, reservoirs of *sukr*." But the crux of his talk came through linking the saints' moral lessons and those listening to his speech that evening. He continued, explaining to the crowd present that "Moral qualities are not the exclusive property of the *awliya'*." In fact, for him, striving for such saintly morality is the duty of every pious Muslim.

The 'reality of Shaitaan [Satan]' is a major theme in his discourses. Satan most crucially lacks, according to Patel, the element that makes one a *kamil* (perfect) Sufi: love for God. In fact,

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[95] Hakim Muhammad Akhtar, *Nuzul-i Sakina*, Karachi: Kutub Khana-yi Mazhari, n.d. 21.

[96] Yunus Patel, *majlis* at Masjid un-Noor, Asherville, Durban, 12 November 2009.

[97] *Ibid.*, 7 December 2009.

as he explains it, Satan was once a perfect Muslim in nearly every respect; he had a flawless

knowledge of the "*madhhab* and the *din* of all the *anbiya* [prophets]." He was, in a sense, a "very

great *`alim*" knowing completely "the *masa'il* of the Shari`a." He was also a perfect "*`abid*"

(servant). There was one thing Shaitaan was not: "he was not an *`ashiq*," a lover. He did not

possess the rapturous love (*`ishq*) that true Sufis possess. For Maulana Patel, love is "*farz*,"

obligatory - as necessary as every other quotidian Islamic injunction.[98]

One of Maulana Patel's *majalis* was a lengthy commentary on the verse beloved by Sufis

on the primordial covenant (Qur'an 7:172), in which God commands the progeny of Adam to

bear witness to his lordship.[99] He used a fairly routine discussion of the *zahir*/*batin*, or

outer/inner, distinction as a point of entry to reiterate the Deobandi notion that Sufi 'sainthood' is

open to each and all, so long as one purifies his or her inner self:

> Look at *akhlaq-i hamida* and *akhlaq-i razila* - good characteristics and bad ones.
> The person has to remove from his heart the *akhlaq-i razila*. All those traits, all
> those characteristics that are in the heart, of *nifaq*, that is hypocrisy, pride,
> arrogance, envy, greed, malice, jealousy - ah, what we have in our hearts! But we
> consider ourselves to be Muslims supreme. So to clear the heart of all that debris,
> all that muck, all that dirt and of all that filth that has embedded itself in our
> hearts. Now if we want *walayat* [closeness, 'sainthood'] of Allah Tabarraka wa
> Ta'ala we're talking about *nisbat* [connection] of Allah Tabarraka wa Ta'ala. So
> how will that *nisbat* come if that heart is already polluted with so much of filth?
> … There has to be in his life some time that has to be devoted and spent in X-
> raying his heart, of checking his heart, of all that is in there that falls under the
> category of *akhlaq-i razila*. Without that there is no question of *nisbat* to Allah
> Ta'ala, no question of *walayat*. So to remove those evil traits and characteristics,
> and to build up in the heart *taqwa, tawakkul, yaqin*, trust and faith in Allah
> Ta'ala, *sabr, shukr,* zuhd, *qana'at,* contentment - all these type of traits to build
> up and develop. This type of person does both things, *then* he gets *wilayat*.[100]

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[98] *Ibid.*, 10 October 2008. Accessed online at http://yunuspatel.co.za/audio-majlis.php.

[99] For a brief study of different interpretations of the verse, see Wadad Kadi, "Primordial Covenant and
Human History in the Qur'an," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147, 4 (2003): 332-338.
The verse reads: "And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam…all their descendants,
and made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? (*alastu bi-rabbikum*) They said:
Yes! We bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: Surely we had no knowledge of
this."

[100] Yunus Patel, *majlis*, 10 October 2008. Accessed online at http://yunuspatel.co.za/audio-majlis.php

Here Maulana Patel extends a trope typical of Deobandi scholars' 'public' Sufism - namely the notion of a 'sainthood of the masses', which Thanawi termed *waliyat-i 'amma*.[101] Patel speaks loosely and matter-of-factly about the accessibility of 'sainthood' for his audience in Durban, connecting Deobandi discourse on purifying the *akhlaq* that emerges from the works of Gangohi, Thanawi, Masihullah Khan and others, with contemporary and quotidian metaphors (e.g. in this case, that of 'X-raying' the heart, or comparing the causality of moral interiority and external actions to the 'connections' between mobile phones and computers).

His discussion continues by invoking Qushayri and ends by tying up several themes in a commentary on the very purpose of the *majlis* as an institution for perfecting ethical lives:

> [Qushayri] said the *wali* [saint] is that person who fulfills on the one hand the rights of Allah Tabarraka wa Ta'ala, and on the other hand fulfills the rights of the creation of Allah Ta'ala. Both things he does. *Huquq al-Lah* and *huquq al-`ibad*. Not just reading some *wazifa* [litany]. Not attendance of just some *majlis*. Not just sitting in a *khanqah* for a few days and thinking he became *kamil* [perfected]. Not just doing some work of *da`wat* and *tabligh* and thinking we are perfect. Not just sitting in some *madrasa* and thinking we have already attained the highest stages. These things *everybody* will have to develop, whether he is going to the *khanqah*, to the *jama`at*, to the *madrasa*, whether he is going for *hajj*, for *umrah*. Everybody will have to develop this because it's easy sometimes to go for *hajj* upon *hajj*, *umrah* upon *umrah* … So now these are the things we have to check, and as I have repeatedly mentioned, this *majlis* is not for the increase of knowledge. It is to increase that *kaifiyyat*. To increase our spiritual progress. To purify our hearts and our souls from all these evil traits and characteristics. That is the purpose.[102]

For Maulana Patel, the *majlis*, as a religious institution, is especially equipped for the task of 'performing' *islah* on individual Muslims, or more precisely, equipping them to perform *islah* upon themselves. Deobandi ethics are concerned, foremost and fundamentally, with self-purification and self-perfection. It is a highly individualistic ethos, taking reformation of the individual Muslim as an ethical end; the means to this end include, but are not limited to, Sufism. In the quotation above, Patel neatly enumerates the sites and institutional locations where this

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[101] Ashraf `Ali Thanawi, *Shari'at o Tariqat*, 36.

[102] Yunus Patel, *majlis*, 12 February 2007. Accessed online at http://yunuspatel.co.za/audio-majlis.php.

ethical deliberation transpires: the *masjid*, the *madrasa*, the *khanqah*, and the *majlis*. There are multiple avenues towards the same goal; how one arrives is immaterial.

To conclude, the scholars of Deoband have often seen the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* as mutually complementary sites for moral reform, and because the *madrasa* does not incorporate Sufism formally into its curriculum, the Deobandi tradition must necessarily articulate its reformed Sufi ethics outside of it. This is where Deobandi Sufism is 'located': as we saw with Mufti Taqi Uthmani, the very atmosphere of the *madrasa* is, at least ideally, infused with Sufi moral persuasion, and individual relationships between Sufi master and student disciples offer both Sufi training and a sense of spatial and temporal continuity with an imagined Deobandi tradition. Deobandis' Sufi ethics, like their Sufism as a whole, is not always inculcated in the formal relations of teacher/student and master/disciple, of course, even in the confines of the *madrasa*. But outside of the *madrasa*, in the space of the *majlis*, Deobandi scholars bring their reformist Sufi ethics to a larger audience. The content of these public oral discourses concerns almost exclusively what Deobandi scholars view as the essence of Sufism: its ethical core. Deobandis' critical project rarely, if ever, forms a part of the *majlis*. In a sense, Deobandi scholars address one sort of public in their oral discourses, and a very different sort of public in their critical polemics; if the public of the *majlis* is far more circumscribed, confined to the immediate space of the mosque where these talks take place, the public of Deobandis' polemics is broader and, as we will see, less receptive to the Deobandi critical project. The final two chapters examine the public reception of the Deobandi critique in South Africa, and show how a wide swath of South African Muslims rejected the Deobandi critique.

CHAPTER FIVE

Deoband in Public: Polemics and Apartheid Politics

        This chapter examines polemics and counterpolemics over Sufi devotional practices in

South Africa and discerns how apartheid-era political engagements informed these polemics.

While many of these exchanges transpired largely in the domain of texts, this chapter asserts that

we must move beyond the domain of texts to reconstruct the public reception of these ideas. To

this end, in addition to textual polemics, this chapter analyzes public confrontations over Sufi

devotions in South Africa, focusing on a number of key events: the clash in 1970 between the

Tablighi Jama`at and the Barelwi Sufi scholar Maulana Khushtar during his speaking tour of

Cape Town, fallout over the 1985 public lecture of the Deobandi scholar Ebrahim Adam on the

"Barelwi Menace," and Tablighis' attack on a *mawlud* assembly at Azaadville in 1987.[1] I use

these key moments to illustrate the development of public debate over Sufi devotionalism and

Deobandi identity. Perhaps minor events in the *longue durée* of South African history, these

events reveal subtle dynamics of the public debate over Sufism and Deobandis roles' in them.

These confrontations are perhaps akin what Georg Simmel once called 'snapshots'

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[1] For a brief overview of these events and others, see Jacobus A. Naude, "A Historical Survey of
Opposition to Sufism in South Africa," in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds. *Islamic Mysticism
Contested*, Leiden: Brill, 1999. I am indebted to Naude's overview for introducing me to this history early
in my research project. I have returned to the original sources that he used, among others, and have
endeavored to place these events in a broader context of Deobandi history, a context largely missing from
his overview.

(*Momentbilder*), events that act as windows onto a larger social totality.[2] My focus on these events is not to suggest that debates over Sufi practices ceased in the intervals between them; on the contrary, Deobandis and Barelwis continued their critiques and counter-critiques through a barrage of pamphlets and newsletters.

In several of the clashes considered below, parties to the conflict used threats of violence or actual violence. Parties to a debate often described the other using dubious appellations that served to end debates rather than resolve them, or merely to antagonize opponents. Thus Deobandis often describe Barelwis as *qabr parasti*, 'grave worshippers', while Barelwis often described Deobandis as 'Wahhabis'.[3] Both of these appellations are deeply problematic to anyone who has studied the history of both movements; no Barelwi 'worships' graves, and Deoband's links to the Arabian Wahhabi movement are tenuous at best. No side could claim 'victory' in the ongoing Deobandi-Sufi disputes. But what the records bear out is that the parties to the debate, the two opposing 'sides', became increasingly reified, each side representing the other as a caricature.

Polemics over Sufism were instrumental in fashioning South African Muslim publics. As a "space of discourse" constituted through the reflexive circulation of media, 'publics' include not only the debate's participants but the onlookers as well, literally and figuratively.[4] To the extent that we cannot fully understand the Deobandi critique of Sufism without understanding its public reception, in the South African case, the tenor of public debate over Sufism is inseparable from

[2] See David Frisby's discussion of *Momentbilder* within Simmel's theory of modernity. *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, 6.

[3] The use of 'Wahhabi' as a rhetorical attack has a long historical precedent and is alive and well in contemporary discourses, in South Africa and elsewhere. Marcia Hermansen has analyzed its use in nineteenth century India, in contexts that I explored in the first chapter. See Martha Hermansen, "Fakirs, Wahhabis and Others: Reciprocal Classifications and the Transformation of Intellectual Categories," in Jamal Malik, ed. *Perspectives in Mutual Encounters in South Asian History 1760-1860*, Leiden: Brill, 2000. For comparison, Alexander Knysh analyses the rhetoric of 'Wahhabism' in contemporary Central Asia, particularly in Russian language sources. See his "A Clear and Present Danger: 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil," *Die Welt des Islams* 44, 1 (2004): 3-26.

[4] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 67 and 90-91.

Muslim politics in the late- and post-apartheid eras. With the acceleration of anti-apartheid activism among Muslims in the 1980's, public debates over Sufism increase both in frequency and in intensity.[5] At least three salient trends animate the background of these debates. First, many came to see the Deobandi/Barelwi disputes as not only quibbles in which a majority of Muslims had no stake, but as a veritable distraction from, or even a hindrance to, the anti-apartheid struggle; second, apposite to this, many South African Muslims came to view the `ulama' in general, and Deobandi `ulama' particularly, as politically reactionary and retrogressive; and third, there was a growing politicization of Sufism within anti-apartheid politics, in which the *mawlud* festival particularly became an occasion to extol the revolutionary force of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, even as Deobandis defended their detachment from politics in the language of Sufism.

Deobandi and Barelwi Polemics: Textual Exchanges

This section presents an overview of Deobandi-Barelwi polemics and counterpolemics in South Africa largely over *mawlud, `urs*, and the nature of 'Deobandi' identity, especially with regard to the pejorative appellation of 'Wahhabism'. Here I will only present the gist of these exchanges with reference to a few key sources, since there are scores of these pamphlets. In the larger context of this chapter, I posit here that the 'public' clashes over Deoband's Sufi critique that we will explore subsequently were more consequential than the circulation of polemical texts in changing the tone of local opinion towards this 'Indian' theological debate.

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[5] For general sources on Muslim anti-apartheid activism, see S. Sikard, "Muslims and apartheid: the theory and practice of Muslim resistance to apartheid," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 10, 1 (1989): 199-222; Farid Esack, "Three Islamic Strands in the South African Struggle for Justice," *Third World Quarterly* 10, 2 (1988): 473-498; Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective on Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1997; and Shamil Jeppie, "Amandla and Allahu Akbar: Muslims and Resistance in South Africa, c. 1970-1987," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 4, 1 (1991): 3-19.

Deobandi scholars engaged in a series of polemics with South African Barelwi scholars mostly during the 1980's. We can make some broad observations about these texts and the exchanges that transpired between their authors. First, they are largely disengaged from local politics or history; these texts typically rehash the contours of subcontinental Deobandi-Barelwi polemics. This disengagement is one of the reasons why many South African Muslims maligned Deobandis and Barelwis alike for carrying out these polemical battles during the height of Muslim anti-apartheid activism in the late 1970's and 1980's, as the chapter subsequently explains. Second, these polemical exchanges often condense the argumentation we saw in the work of early Deobandi scholars, though the nuance is typically lost; in translation especially, the rhetoric becomes a caricature of its forms in the Urdu literature. Third, both Deobandis and Barelwis adopt the rhetorical strategy of claiming to represent 'Sunni' Islam *tout court*. Both project themselves as the normative Muslim public from which the other is a deviation, attempting to be seen "not so much as *in* the public but rather *as* the public."[6]

Fourth - and very important for understanding the public reaction to these polemics - Deobandis' critical texts have reached audiences much wider than what I've called their 'constructive' texts, the latter dealing largely with Sufi ethics and directed towards an audience of fellow Deobandis; to take just one example, most Muslims in Cape Town are well aware of the invectives of *The Majlis*, but Ismail Mangera's writings on Sufi 'character' or Abdul Hamid Ishaq's sermons on the Sufi's 'sincerity' (*ikhlas*) and other topics will typically be far less known. I submit that this is due to the nature of the polemics in question; Deoband's critical project is one that is, perhaps inherently, directed outward, with the aim of reforming the customs and practices of local Muslims. We saw this divide as far back as Gangohi, in which he used his *fatwas* to reform Sufi practices for a wide audience while writing erudite treatises in Persian for a small audience of elite Sufis. Further, Deobandi scholars tend to 'specialize' in either critical or constructive texts. Durban's Yunus Patel writes and speaks publically about Sufi ethics almost

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[6] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction," 12.

exclusively, whereas Port Elizabeth's A. S. Desai writes almost exclusively about contentious matters such as 'grave worship' as well as other issues beyond the scope of this dissertation, carrying out protracted polemics against Muslim Personal Law and *halal*-certification boards.

Barelwi rhetoric in these polemics tends to have several overarching features of its own. First, they often cite Deobandi scholars to advance their arguments, aiming to show how that these contentious matters, especially *mawlud* and devotional practices at saints' graves, are far more complex than Deobandi rhetoric has made them out to be. If even certain *Deobandi* scholars have tacitly accepted *mawlud* with certain reservations, as this line of thinking goes, then surely the matter is far from settled. Whereas Barelwi authors cite Deobandis in support of their positions, the obverse is never the case; to my knowledge, no Deobandi author has cited Ahmed Reza Khan in support of his positions. Second, Barelwis link Deoband with the movement of Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab, sometimes through careful rhetorical analysis and historical research, though as often, merely as a means of disparaging their opponents with a widely reviled label. Third, Barelwi polemics tend to be more 'baroque' in their language and argumentation than Deobandi polemics; it is not uncommon for their texts to put forth, as in one example, seventy two theses refuting Deobandi claims or defending their own practices.[7]

Locating Polemics: The Majlisul Ulama and Barelwi Institutions

Most of these polemical exchanges are produced by a fairly small number of publishing sources. The most important source of Deobandi textual polemics against Sufi devotional practices in South Africa is undoubtedly *The Majlis*. As a periodical, *The Majlis* is bitterly maligned by a large segment of Cape Town's Muslims.[8] It does, however, claim a large

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[7] See the lengthy defense of *mawlud* in *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982, 2-63, further discussed below.

[8] During the duration of my stay in Cape Town, A. S. Desai and *The Majlis* newspaper were consistent objects of derision on radio stations such as Voice of the Cape, especially when he issued a blistering statement against SANHA, a widely respected *halal*-certification board. Several interviewees who are

readership in South Africa and overseas. In Cape Town, where most Muslims are far less

sympathetic to this degree of conservatism, if at all, many regard *The Majlis*' focus on the length

of beards and trousers and its strong opposition to television and even radio as quaint at best, and

dangerously reactionary at worst. On Muslim radio stations and on local chat forums, dismissing

The Majlis as a 'tabloid' is common.

  The Majlis is published by the Majlisul Ulama of South Africa, a body founded in 1970

in Port Elizabeth. Its original members consisted of Ismail Moosagie, who acted as president,

Muhammad Hanif Ismail Moosagie, and Ahmed Sadiq Desai, who became the public face and

principal writer of the group's literature. All three studied at Miftah al-`Ulum in Jalalabad, India,

with Masihullah Khan.[9] A. S. Desai, a *khalifa* of Masihullah Khan, has published *The Majlis*

regularly since 1976 and is also the principal translator behind the Majlisul Ulama of South

Africa, and has published scores of original pamphlets and tracts alongside translations of

Deobandi scholars' writings through his link with the Young Men's Muslim Association, now in

Benoni, near Johannesburg. *The Majlis* prints excerpts in translation from numerous Deobandi

scholars, especially Muhammad Zakariyya, Masihullah Khan, Manzur Numani, Mufti Taqi

Uthmani, and most of all, Ashraf `Ali Thanawi. The topics overwhelmingly tend towards

discussions of *hadith*, the proper form of *salat*, 'proper' Muslim attire, the inadmissibility of

Muslims associating with '*kufaar*', opposition to television and media generally, opposition to

schools for women, opposition to Shi`as, Salafis and Ahmadis, strict objection to Muslims voting

or involvement in democratic politics, and - most salient here - strong criticisms of "qabr parasti,"

i.e. 'grave worship' and *mawlud*.

  In line with the division of Sufism I have discussed in previous chapters, *The Majlis* also

exclusively privileges the ethics of Sufism over its devotional aspects. Following Masihullah

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sympathetic to the ultra-conservative Islam that A. S. Desai is advancing also privately conceded that the author's polemical tone probably does more harm than good for the interests of South Africa's Muslims. The notion that he is all too ready to "pick a fight," as one put it, is common.

[9] "Port Elizabeth gets second Ulema body," *Muslim News*, 27 February 1970.

Khan, it asserts the purpose of Sufism is to "eliminate the bestial qualities in man and to supplant them with the high and virtuous qualities of angels." *The Majlis* extends Thanawi's and Masihullah Khan's vision of Sufism as an obligatory feature of Islamic piety; it claims itself a proponent of "Tasawwuf, i.e. Qur'aanic Tasawwuf - *the Tasawwuf which is Fardh* [obligatory] *upon every Muslim.*"[10]

The *Majlis*, like many Deobandi organizations, has positioned itself in the space between defending 'traditional' Sufism against its Salafi and Wahhabi critics and critiquing the alleged 'Sufism' of 'grave worshipping' Barelwis, who are concerned only with fleecing the gullible masses:

> Tasawwuf is a misunderstood concept. Its true meaning and significance in the daily life of a Muslim are lost. Commercial 'Sufis' (men of guile who exhibit themselves as saints) are trading Tasawwuf as some mysterious cult of 'Mysticism' apart from the Shariat and Sunnat of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). They have reduced Tasawwuf to potions, talismans, incantations, empty rituals, and they have cloaked it with beliefs and theories of kufr and shirk. They have interwoven Tasawwuf with bid'ah and practices of corruption … Muslims who treasure their Imaan and Islaam have to be aware of such robbers of the Deen who are easily recognized by the high fees which they levy for spiritual initiation (ba'yt) into their 'mystical' paths, for their annual renewal fees, for their tabarruk charges and for their many other fees.[11]

As with nearly all the polemics considered here, the veracity of these claims is irrelevant (and indeed, Barelwis challenged their veracity); the accusations arise not out of observing actual Sufis, but instead they are recycled from a litany of standard Deobandi tropes.

The Majlis' invectives did not take place in a vacuum of course. The institutionalization of Barelwi thought (in the form of *madrasas* and *`ulama'* bodies) and a series of foreign Barelwi lecturers energized Barelwi production of these textual polemics, largely in response to the Majlisul Ulama's screeds. These Barelwi organizations include the Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, formed in 1978; Cape Town's Ghousia Manzil *khanqah*, founded in 1980 to continue the

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[10] "What is Tasawwuf?" *The Majlis*, Vol. 4, Issue 12, 7. (emphasis added)

[11] *Ibid*.

teachings of the Barelwi Qadiri Sufi, Hazrat Sayyid Zainul Abidien.[12] Foreign Barelwi dignitaries

typically founded South African Barelwi organizations, or they were founded in their honor. The

Dar al-`Ulum Aleemia Razvia, for instance, was named in honor of both Ahmad Reza Khan and

Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, a *khalifa* of Ahmad Reza Khan, who visited South Africa in 1952.

Opening in January 1983 at Chatsworth, near Durban, Dar al-`Ulum Aleemia Razvia hosted the

prominent Barelwi scholar and son of Abdul Aleem, Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani Siddiqui,

who led a *mawlud* there on the occasion of its first graduation.[13] Maulana Noorani had lectured

throughout the country earlier, in 1981. The Ahl-i Sunnat wal Jammat in 1984, while in Pretoria,

the Barelwi *madrasa* Dar al-`Ulum Pretoria was formed in 1990.[14] The Sunni Ulama Council was

founded in September 1993 to coordinate Barelwi activities in the country.[15]

But the most significant source of polemics has probably been the Imam Ahmed Raza

Academy. Its textual output suggests how these organizations impact the debate with Deobandis

locally. The Academy formed in Durban in July of 1986.[16] It publishes large numbers of

pamphlets and books to bolster the presence of Barelwi argument in this crowded rhetorical field.

Some incorporate standard Barelwi theological positions, such as the omnipresence of the

Prophet Muhammad and his being "present and seeing everything,"[17] or pamphlets outlining the

performance of conveying merit (*isal-i sawab*) upon `Abd al-Qadir Jilani, known as *giyarwi*

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[12] *Muslim News*, 21 March 1980.

[13] *Muslim Views*, 28 January 1983, 9. Ahmad Noorani Siddiqui said at the commencement, "We are the followers of Hazrat Badshah Peer and Hazrat Soofie Saheb, and this Darul Uloom has been built to safeguard their moral preachings."

[14] Interview, Mufti Akbar Hazarvi, Darul Uloom Pretoria, 1 December 2009.

[15] *Muslim Digest*, October/November 1993.

[16] Interview, Yunus Karim at Imam Ahmed Reza Academy, 9 November 2009. See also Mahida, *A History of Muslims in South Africa*, 132.

[17] See Muhammad Yunus Abdul Karrim Qadri, *The Excellence in Reciting the Darood Shareef upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad*, Durban: Imam Ahmed Raza Academy, n.d., especially 87-91.

sharif.[18] One pamphlet published *fatwas* requested by South Africans from a Barelwi scholar, Muhammad Akhtar Reza Khan Azhari (d. 1942), the great-grandson of Ahmad Reza Khan, which forbids praying behind Deobandi *imams*.[19] Large lists of the Prophet's miracles are also standard in these works. It is also common for these South African translations of Barelwi texts to place the Deobandi-Barelwi dispute in a local context.[20] They also print works by Ahmed Reza Khan himself.[21]

With respect to direct polemical encounters with Deobandis, perhaps the most significant Barelwi scholars were Muhammad Shafee Okarvi (d. 1984) and especially his son, Allamah Kawkab Noorani Okarvi. Muhammad Shafee first came to South Africa in 1976 and again from 1979 to 1980, and Maulana Allamah Kawkab Noorani Okarvi came to South Africa six times between 1987 and 1991, establishing branches of the Maulana Okarvi Academy. In December of 1988, Maulana Kawkab went to the Waterval Islamic Institute to challenge its *"Deobandi-Wahaabi-Tableeghi"* `ulama'* to a public debate, even printing the invitation in a local newspaper. The invitation was not requited.[22] Okarvi's *Deoband to Bareilly* is an exhaustive rebuttal of Deobandi accusations, and though it was first published in South Africa, the text addresses almost nothing of local debates, typical of many polemics on both sides of the traditional Deobandi-

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[18] Imam Ahmed Raza Academy, *Qaseedah Ghousia and Khatme Qaadiriya Kabeer*, Durban: Imam Ahmed Raza Academy, n.d.

[19] Shaykh Allama Mufti Mohammad Akhtar Reza Khan Azhari, *Azharul Fatawa*, Bareilly: Idara Sunni Dunya, n.d. This text is distributed in South Africa by Habibi Darul Ifta.

[20] Such as the preface to the South African translation of Imam Ahmad Reza Khan's *Tamheed-e-Imaan*, Durban: Khanqah Qadria Razvia of Durban, 1987. In the preface by Mohammed Bana of Durban, Bana's primary grievance with the Deobandis revolves around three alleged Deobandi claims about the Prophet Muhammad's knowledge and God's sovereignty: that Satan has more knowledge than the Prophet, that "the knowledge of the Holy Prophet of Islam is equivalent … to the knowledge of madmen, children or any four-legged animal (which includes pigs as well)," and that God is capable of lying.

[21] For instance, Imam Ahmed Reza Khan, *The Validity of Saying 'Ya Rasoolallah'*, trans. Durwesh Abu Muhammad Abdul Hadi al-Qadiri, Durban: Imam Ahmed Raza Academy, n.d.

[22] *Muslim Digest*, December 1988/January 1989, 4.

Barelwi divide.[23]

The contours of Deobandi/Barewli polemic in South Africa

The Majlis is the most vocal interlocutor in Deobandi polemics. Like their predecessors

Gangohi and Thanawi, *The Majlis* balances advancing Deoband's 'constructive' and 'critical'

projects. In its apprehension of Sufi ethics, *The Majlis* has stated, in terms that echo Thanawi's

apologetical defense of Sufism:

> Many people have misunderstood the meaning of Tasawwuf. Tasawwuf is not
> some mysterious cult apart from the Shariah. Tasawwuf is an integral part of
> Islam. Any conception of Tasawwuf which conflicts with the Shariah is a satanic
> delusion. Tasawwuf is that part of the Shariah which discusses moral purification
> and spiritual elevation in terms of the Qur'aan and Sunnah… Tasawwuf is not a
> theoretical branch of study. It is a practical endeavor to purify the nafs from the
> evil qualities and adorn it with the noble attributes."[24]

But *The Majlis* is overwhelmingly focused on Deoband's critical project. "In South

Africa," *The Majlis* announces, "the Qabar Pujaaris are making frantic efforts to introduce and

perpetuate their acts of grave-worship."[25] *The Majlis* lists the "worst aspects of this shirk" as

prostration towards graves, circumambulation of graves, spreading cloths on graves, and the

notion that God shares his power with the saints.[26] It implores South Africa's Muslims to be "on

their guard against these semi-Shiah worshippers of graves:"

> Their religion of rituals consists of only the clamour of 'Hubbe Rasool' [love of
> the Messenger], the slogan of Takbeer, rituals of grave-worship, merry-making
> festivals, singing, dancing, qawwali headed by dagga-smoking qawwals

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[23] See Kaukab Noorani Okarvi, *Deoband to Bareilly: The Truth*, Lahore: Zia ul-Quraan Publications, 1996, as well as the same author's *White and Black: Deobandi-ism caught up in its own web*, Durban: Maulana Okarvi Academy, 1991 and *Truth wins: the full account of a historic challenge to establish truth as the truth and falsehood as the falsehood*, Durban: Maulana Okarvi Academy, 1991.

[24] *The Majlis*, Vol. 11, Issue 6.

[25] *Puja* is of course a Hindu term, describing a wide variety of practices based on ritual reverence for Hindu deities. *The Majlis* is well aware that describing the devotional reverence of deceased Sufi saints as the '*puja*' of tombs is particularly offensive.

[26] "Qabar Pujari Shirk," *The Majlis*, Vol. 6, Issue 8, 6.

(singers), feasting and skinning ignorant people of their money in the names of the dead Auliya.[27]

The Majlis has taken particular aim at the Imam Ahmed Raza Academy, with whom it has debated the permissibility of even building tombs at all, much less visiting them.[28] But in fact, most Deobandi-Barelwi polemics and counterpolemics in South African do not address `urs at all; in fact, they most often consist of Deobandi accusations of 'grave worship' (*qabr parasti*) and Barelwi responses to these claims. In some sense, one senses a shift in rhetoric from the nuance in debates about `urs to rather wooden and simplistic discussions of 'grave worship'. Most of these polemics were published in the 1980's, at the height of Deobandi/Barelwi conflict.[29]

Beyond Deobandi-Barelwi polemics, the Majlisul Ulama has initiated intra-Deobandi contentions over visiting the dead in its *Ziyarat of the Quboor*. Its main grievance is lifting one's hands during collective *du`a*, which emulates the "practice of the Ahl-e-Barailli." There is a certain novel logic at work here: the Ahl-e-Bid`a perform a certain practice, in this case raising the hands during *du`a* at the gravesite, that is merely permissible but neither recommended or mandatory, but *by virtue of their performance of that practice* it becomes anathema.[30]

The essence of *The Majlis'* criticism of these practices is that they have no basis in the *sunna*:

> We see the Sahaabah rigidly clinging to the minutest details of Rasulullah's Sunnah - even to such detailed acts which are not imposed on the Ummah by the Shariah. On the contrary we find the loud-mouthed grave-worshippers shunning almost every Sunnat act of Rasulullah. We find clean-shaven fussaaq - dagga smoking qawwals - singing the praises of Rasulullah with the accompaniment of haraam musical instruments. Are these fujjaar superior in love for Rasulullah

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[27] "The Curse of Grave Worship," *The Majlis*, Vol. 7, Issue 9, n.d., 1.

[28] "The Graveworshippers and their Mausoleum," *The Majlis*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, 7-8.

[29] However, some of these pamphlets are far more recent. Among the most caustic attacks against Deobandis are two texts published in recent years (the exact date is uncertain) by a Barelwi publisher called Sunni World, *The Original Beliefs of the Wahabi/Deobandi/Tablighi Sect*, Durban: Sunni World, n.d. and *An Attack on Our Sunni Beliefs by the Wahabi/Deobandi/Tablighi Sect and Our Reply*, Durban: Sunni World, n.d. These books are veritable encyclopedias of the Deobandi/Barelwi conflict.

[30] Young Men's Muslim Association, *Ziyaarat of the Quboor: Visiting the Graves and the Shariah*, Benoni, South Africa: Young Men's Muslim Association, n.d.

than the noble Sahaabah who offered their blessed bodies as shields to protect the mubaraak body of Nabi-e-Kareem from the spears and arrows of the kuffaar?[31]

As with debates over 'grave worship', polemics and counter-polemics over *mawlud* transpired mostly between the Majlisul Ulama and various Barelwi scholars. These polemics are abundant.[32] Here I will look at a few briefly. First, in 1981 the Durban-based *Muslim Digest* published a full issue devoted to Deobandi-Barelwi polemics. The issue juxtaposes a lengthy *fatwa* in support of *mawlud*, *qiyam*, and other contentious issues in roughly the first half of the issue with mocking reports of the internal discord that Deoband experienced during the early 1980's, even suggesting that the Deoband administration was basically passing out *alim* certificates to unqualified students after only a few years of study.

In November of 1981, a prominent businessman in Pretoria submitted, in Urdu, a series of questions to Mufti Alli Aswari, asking about the permissibility of *mawlud* and specifically of *qiyam*, whether it is possible to prepare food for *mawlud* and distribute it among Muslims, and other issues. This *fatwa* extends the Barelwi strategy of arguing against Deobandis by citing them;[33] one 'proof' narrates how Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi accepted "the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) as 'haazir' and 'naazir' in front of him, calls for help thus: 'Help me Oh kindness of Ahmad, for besides thee / There is no helper for Qasim, the helpless!"[34] At the same

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[31] Young Men's Muslim Association, *Moulood and the Shariah*, Benoni, South Africa: Young Men's Muslim Association, n.d. 32.

[32] Barelwi pamphlets in support of *mawlud* include, for instance, Mufti Akbar Hazarvi's *Meelaad-un-Nabie Celebration in the light of Shariah*, Laudium, South Africa: Soutul Islam Publications, 1999, published by and read at Darul Uloom Pretoria. Deobandi polemics include, for example, Majlisul Ulama's, *What is Meelaad?* Young Men's Muslim Association, 1988. There is little reference in these texts to the arguments about *mawlud* that took place among Imdadullah, Gangohi and Thanawi. More recently, other exchanges have included the Imam Ahmed Raza Academy's response to Muhammad Taqi Uthmani's (b. 1943) fatwa against *mawlud* (Uthmani's *fatwa* is reprinted at http://www.albalagh.net/general/rabi-ul-awwal.shtml (last accessed on 10 December 2010). The Academy's response is titled *Mawlid: Celebration of the Birth of the Prophet*. See Sheikh G. F. Haddad, *Mawlid: Celebration of the Birth of the Prophet*, Durban: Imam Ahmad Raza Academy, 2002.

[33] Moulana Muhammad Ali Aswari, "Fatawa Aswari, in Justification of: Meelad-un-Nabi, Meelad Feast, Qiyaam, Salaami, Dua after Taraweeh, Tarqiyah," *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982, 6-7.

time that they *cite* Deobandi scholars for their apparent support of certain beliefs, they criticize them vociferously for others; Gangohi is notably singled out here, with reference to Gangohi's notion that God is capable of telling a lie.[35]

In terms of local debate over *mawlud*, two exchanges will illustrate how these texts engage one another. After reiterating the older Deobandi claims that *mawlud* is an invention of the middle period, as well as asserting their standard position on *bid`a* - "to regard a mustahab or a permissible act as compulsory" - the Majlisul Ulama's *Meelaad Celebrations* then submits several factors which "make the customary moulood celebrations unislamic:" that supporters of *mawlud* regard it as "compulsory" and even more important than *salat*, engage in *qiyam*, organize *qawwali* performances, recite verses that "transgress the limits of legitimate praise, thus assigning a position of divinity to our Nabi," allow the presence of immoral people, permit singing at these functions by young boys and girls, allow intermingling of the sexes, ignore *salat*, waste resources, imitate the nonbelievers (*tashabbuh bil kuffar*), ostracize those who do not participate, and regard the distribution of sweets as essential, and the belief that the Prophet presents himself.[36]

In a response to the Majlis' *Meelaad Celebrations*, Abdun Nabi Hamidi, a prominent Barelwi scholar of the Imam Ahmed Raza Masjid in Lenasia, took the Majlisul Ulama to task with *Yes, Meelaad Celebration is Commendable.* Hamidi provided a point-by-point refutation of

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[34]*Ibid.*, 59. Gangohi wrote that "the Holy Prophet is 'haazir' and 'naazir' and standing with respect, hands clasped (as was his habit), and seeking assistance and help from the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), calls in the present: 'Oh Muhammad Mustafa, I have need of thee / Help me! For Allah's sake, Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa!" 57.

[35] "Fatwa by Majlisush Shura al Islami: Is it Possible for Allah to Speak a Lie?" *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982, 69. It offers a rejoinder to the Deobandi vision of divine sovereignty outlined in the first chapter: "Therefore, should it be possible for Allah to tell lies, then the following should be taken into consideration: (a) He curses Himself. This then brings His character into degradation. (b) We know Him to be All-Wise. Then surely if it is possible for Allah to tell lies, then He is contradicting himself in many verses of the Holy Qur'an. It will then lead us to believe that our Holy Qur'an could possibly be made up of lies, which, as we know, can never ever be accepted. So much so that one who believes this to be even remotely possible, will fall out of the fold of Islam. Allah is all-Powerful. From this we learn that Allah's power has no limit, but this does not mean that Allah's power is used to make the impossible possible. Allah's power is therefore not used unwisely."

[36] Majlisul Ulama of South Africa, *Meelaad Celebrations*, Benoni, South Africa: Young Men's Muslim Association, 1985, 9-16.

The Majlis' pamphlet in order to prove that *mawlud* is *mustahabb*, 'commendable'. First, he says no Muslim actually believes the *mawlud* to be compulsory. *Qiyam*, he says, and as I noted in the first chapter, was in fact practiced by Hajji Imdadullah, and no one has ever claimed it to be obligatory. And of the "hundreds" of *mawluds* Hamidi has attended in South Africa, he has never observed *salat* being neglected; even if one misses *salat*, it does not follow that one should condemn the entire institution of *mawlud*: "If a person traveling by car from Johannesburg to Cape Town misses a few of his Salaah or misses the Jamaat, will one pass a Fatwa that travelling in a car from Johannesburg to Cape Town is Haraam?"[37]

It is the same with *qawwali*; Hamidi has never observed *qawwali* in South African *mawluds*, and even if this were the case, it is not a reason to ban the entire celebration. He rejects the notion that any verses of praise in the *mawlud* assign divinity to Muhammad. You cannot ban *mawlud* because of the presence of one sinner (*fasiq*), any more than you can ban Tablighi *ijtima`s* for that reason, nor can you ban *mawlud* because of the presence of 'mature' (*baligha*) youth any more than you can ban Dar al-`Ulums for that reason. If there is intermingling of sexes, he says, one must teach the participants the proper behavior, rather than banning *mawlud* outright. As for accusations of 'waste' (*israf*), if feeding the poor at a *mawlud* is a waste, then surely the money spent on Tablighis' *ijtima`* tents and organizing those large events is even more so.[38]

Other polemical exchanges took place over claiming the mantle of 'Sunni' Islam. The Young Men's Muslim Association's *Who are the People of Sunnah?* is a prime example, arguing not only that Deobandis represent Sunni Islam but that Barelwis ('qabar pujaaris') are the greatest deviants:[39]

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[37] Abdun Nabi Hamidi, *Yes, Meelaad Celebration is Commendable*, Azaadville: Sunni Ulema Council, n.d. 1-9. Hamidi has also responded to Deobandis' critiques of loud *zikr*. See his *Permissibility of Loud Zikr in the Masjid and Elsewhere*, Johannesburg: Sarwari Qaaderi Publications, 2000. This is specifically a reply to Mufti A. H. Elias' tract, *Impermissibility of Loud Zikr in the Masjid*.

[38] Abdun Nabi Hamidi, *Yes, Meelaad Celebration is Commendable*, 12-13.

[39] Young Men's Muslim Association, *Who are the People of the Sunnah?* Benoni: Young Men's Muslim Association, 1987, 2.

The sect of the Qabar Pujaaris have made the Ulama of Deoband and the Tablighi Jamaat their prime targets of attack and vituperation for the single reason that the Ulama of Deoband resolutely declare the falsehood of qabar puja and bid'ah. The Deobandi *ulama* teach you how to perform Salaat; they do not teach you to make sajdah and ruku' to the graves. They teach you how to conduct your daily life in conformity with the detailed Sunnah practices of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam).[40]

The notion that Deobandis represent the essence of Sunni Islam, which as we saw, Qari Muhammad Tayyib lays out in exquisite detail, amounts here to rejecting the very idea of Deoband as a 'movement':

The grave-worshippers seek to convey the impression that the Ulama of Deoband are a new group or a sect which has arisen recently, *hence they refer to the Ulama of the Sunnah as the 'Deobandi Movement'. Deoband is merely the name of a town in India where the famous Darul Uloom is located*. If the Deobandi Ulama's beliefs and teachings are unacceptable to the grave-worshippers then in actual fact their dislike is for the beliefs and teachings propagated by the Sahaabah since the beliefs and teachings are in fact the Shariah of Islam which was handed to the Ummah by the Sahaabah of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam).[41]

A Barelwi response, from the Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, *Confusion or Conclusion: Answer to 'Who are the People of the Sunnah?'* attempts to subvert accusations of *bid`a* by turning it back upon Deobandi authors. If *mawlud* is an innovation, then surely Tablighi gatherings must be as well. Besides, it submits, Deobandi scholars such as Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri have given their qualified approval of *mawlud*.[42] The text also reminds us that Hajji Imdadullah testified to participating in *mawluds* often, as I note in the first chapter.[43] After reporting that Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi himself is said to have visited the Sufi shrine of Shaykh `Ali Sabir - originator of the Sabiri Chishti lineage - at Kalyar Sharif, the author asks, "One wonders how this practice

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[40] *Ibid.,* 3.

[41] *Ibid.,* 4. (emphasis added)

[42] Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, *Confusion or Conclusion: Answer to 'Who are the People of the Sunnah?'* Durban: Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, n.d. 2-3. It submits that, in *Al-Muhannad*, Saharanpuri claimed "God forbid, neither we nor any Muslim will ever condemn the commemoration of the birth of Rasulullah Sallallahu Alahihi wa Sallaam including the dust of his shoes, the urine of his donkey, as vile, as Bidate Sayyiah (evil bidat) or Haraam," and even points out that Thanawi is a signatory to Saharanpuri's *Al-Muhannad*.

[43] *Ibid.,* 3.

of the pagans - Qabar Puja - grave worship was embraced by the very founder of Darul Uloom Deoband."[44]

Some polemics against Deoband were not theological at all; the *Muslim Digest* went beyond criticizing Deobandi ideas to criticizing the entire institution in their coverage of internal discord that plagued the Dar al-`Ulum Deoband in the early 1980's.[45] An article in the same issue claimed an (unnamed) South African student at Deoband returned from the madrasa after the 1981 conflict to describe an institution ravaged by chaos, where faculty were awarding `alim degrees to students after only two or three years of study, and even that Qari Muhammad Tayyib was a multi-millionaire who zipped around India in a private helicopter.[46] Tayyib's rival, Maulana Asad Madani, came to South Africa in September 1981, a mere month before the conflict at Deoband ensured, in order to raise money. Some South African supporters of the *madrasa* were incensed that Madani did not publicize the looming conflict at the time, but instead appears to have used the funds to undergird his own side, reaping nearly a million rupees from his South African trip.[47]

Nor did all of the anti-Deobandi sentiment arise out of Sufi circles. The journal *Al-Balaagh*, first published in Johannesburg and later Lenasia, is a case in point. Citing the

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[44] The pamphlet translates a passage from *Savanih Qasimi*, "It has come to me from my elders that when he [Nanautawi] used to visit Kalyar Sharif, he used to remove his shoes at Rorki, a few kilometers away from Kalyar. Entering the Mazaar at night and closing the door behind him he used to spend the entire night in seclusion." Pg. 15.

[45] "Why Did Deoband Dar-ul-Uloom Close Down Recently?" *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982**,** 72. The report alleges that rioting started on 31 October 1981, when the son of Qari Muhammad Tayyib, Moulvi Saalim, fired on students. Tayyib blamed Vice-rector Muhammad Uthman, and others for the riot, culminating with his decision to close the *madrasa* on 1 November 1981.

[46] Returning Deoband Student Speaks Out-Molvie Certificates Issued after 2 to 3 Years' Study," *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982, 73.

[47] "Deoband's supporters in South Africa having second thoughts," *Muslim Digest*, January/February 1982**,** 74-75. "The financial supporters of Deoband Darul Uloom in South Africa," it continues, "are now having second thoughts and are all the more convinced that the call for the democratic running of the Darul Uloom by those who are demanding it is an absolute necessity for the institution to have its credibility restored in the eyes of the Muslims of the world." "Deoband's supporters in South Africa having second thoughts," *Muslim Digest*, date or issue, 75.

modernist icons Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Abduh in nearly every issue, its articles

assault both the Jamiatul Ulama Natal, the Majlisul Ulama of Port Elizabeth, as well as the

Tablighi Jama`at. Its politics are anti-apartheid and pro-Iran, with the tagline "dedicated to

expounding Islam in its PRISTINE PURITY." *Al-Balaagh* is an, admittedly somewhat rare,

example of a highly pro-*mawlud* view coinciding with a virulently anti-Sufi one. On the one

hand, it celebrates *mawlud* as:

> perfectly in order - never mind what the Tableeghis and their Deobandi gurus say
> to the contrary! The entire Muslim world celebrates the GREATEST day in the
> history of mankind - the day that the RAHMATUL LIL 'AALAMEEN was born!
> And according to the Hadith that "<u>My Ummah will never be united in error,</u>" it is
> obvious that all the Muslims inhabiting the globe (comprising the Ummah)
> <u>CANNOT</u> be wrong in celebrating Maulood. The Deobandis and Tableeghis are
> a <u>negligible</u> MINORITY whose objections are un-Islamic, captious, crass,
> fragile, feckless and of NO importance![48]

On the other hand, it is also firmly against what it calls 'peeri-mureedi', the *pir-murid*

relationship at the core of Sufi initiations: "This 'Peeri-Mureedi' business is a CULT, cultivated

by those Muslims who want EASY Islam. There are two kinds of Islam: The Islam of ACTION,

and the other is the easy Islam of sitting on the musallahs, moving Tasbeeh (rosary beads),

intoning wazeefahs and expecting Allah to reward us with many mansions in Jannat … We of

AL-BALAAGH are the TRUE believers in the Awliya-Allah, because the Awliya we believe in

NEVER claim to perform miracles and do things CONTRARY to Allah's Fixed Physical

Laws."[49] This is a classic Iqbalian critique of Sufism: Sufis represent *inaction* as opposed to the

Islam of *action*; claiming 'true' Sufism for itself and separating the luminaries of Sufism from the

ignorant masses.

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[48] *Al-Balaagh,* Vol. 12, Issue 4, November/December 1987, 6. One article, "Maulana Thanwi, the Moon
and the Mullahs," criticizes Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal for relying on Thanawi's work for determining
sighting of the moon in South Africa. *Al-Balaagh*, Volume 19/No. 2, May/June 1994.

[49] *Al-Balaagh*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, Feb/March 1988, 6.

Public Confrontation: Deobandis, Barelwis, and Apartheid Politics

Most of these textual polemics and counterpolemics had a very small audience. Their

principal readers were already invested in the debates themselves. When these polemics erupted

into more public venues (e.g. lecture halls, radio, television) they often entailed not just rhetorical

confrontation but physical ones as well, and their coverage in local media entailed the

involvement of a larger audience.[50] The events below brought Deobandi-Barelwi polemics under

critical scrutiny. Opposition to Deobandi critiques became one of two general types: the standard

opposition of Barelwi scholars and their sympathizers, on the one hand, and those who opposed

the very nature of the debates, those who were not at all invested in Deobandi-Barelwi polemics

and who found them to be damaging to South African Muslim society, on the other hand. In these

confrontations, moreover, Deoband became inextricably bound up with public perceptions of the

Tablighi Jama`at. As Moosa has noted concerning this relationship, "The mileage that the school

of Deoband has gained out of its links with the Tablighi Jama`at in the South African context, in

terms of its own spread and authority, is unmistakable. The fortunes of the Deoband School in

this region will to a large extent follow that of the Tablighi Jama`at."[51]

Maulana Khushtar and the Tablighi Jama`at

The first of these public events took place early in the history of Deobandi-Barelwi

polemics. In 1970, a Barelwi organization, the Sunni Razvi Society, sent its founder and patron,

Maulana Ibrahim Khushtar of Mauritius, to visit Cape Town and give a series of public lectures at

town halls and mosques. As the third chapter explained, the period of the late-1960's and early-

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[50] I realize this is an inversion of the standard approach to the relation between print and its audiences, which posits print has having a much larger audience but one comprised of individual 'private' readers. It is also worth noting that, by calling the events discussed below 'public', I do not intend to suggest that textual polemics are somehow inherently 'private'.

[51] Ebrahim Moosa, "Worlds 'Apart': The Tablighi Jama`at under Apartheid: 1963-1993," 220.

1970's coincides with the rise of the Tablighi Jama`at as a precursor to the establishment of Deobandi *madrasas* in South Africa.

Emotions were especially raw as Maulana Khushtar's visit came on the heels of that of Mohammed Palan Haqqani, a mysterious traveling lecturer who preached against *bid`a* in a tour of Southern Africa, leaving bitter controversies in his wake. The Arabic Study Circle of Durban hosted him there. Details of his lectures are scant, but in its wake, the Arabic Study Circle convened a meeting of community leaders at West Street Mosque in June 1970 to counter Palan Haqqani's views on *bid`a*.[52]

Maulana Khushtar (d. 2002) was a renowned Indian Barelwi scholar originally from West Bengal. His initiation in the Qadiri Sufi *silsila* extended back to `Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166) through Imam Ahmed Reza Khan Barelwi (d. 1921), founder of the Barelwi movement and arch-nemesis of the Deobandi *`ulama'*.[53] After graduating from the chief Barelwi *madrasa* of India, Miftah al-`Ulum, Khushtar migrated to Mauritius and established the Sunni Razvi Society in 1965.[54]

From 29 June to 5 July 1970, Maulana Khushtar gave four lectures in Cape Town. This clash did not end in violence, as future clashes would, but did end with the threat of violence.[55] His first, at the Wynberg Town Hall, did not provoke any response from the Cape Town Tablighi Jama`at. But his second lecture took place the following Thursday at what was then the center of Cape Tablighi activity, the Khanamia Mosque on Muir Street. As if provoking the Tablighis directly, Khushtar lectured mostly in Urdu about the intercession (*wasila*) of the saints and

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[52] *Views and News,* June 1970. Also see Goolam Vahed "Contesting 'Orthodoxy': The Tablighi-Sunni Conflict among South African Muslims in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23, 2 (2003): 313-334, at 318-319, as well as Shamil Jeppie, *Language, Identity, Modernity: The Arabic Study Circle of Durban*, Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2007, 71.
[53] On Ahmad Reza Khan, see the work of Usha Sanyal, most recently *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi: In the Path of the Prophet*, Makers of the Muslim World. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.

[54] See http://www.sunnirazvi.org/society/index.htm (last accessed on 23 June 2009).

[55] "Cape Town Tablighi Jamaa Declares Itself Wahabi," *Muslim News*, 17 July 1970, 1.

standing in honor of the Prophet when his name is invoked (*salami*).[56] After Khushtar had already

left, Shaykh Abu Bakr Najjar, spokesperson for the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), criticized the

speaker in front of what remained of the audience. At the end of following lecture at the

Chiappini Street Mosque, delivered on the same theme, the chairman of the MJC, Shaykh Omar

Gabier, began an impromptu counter-lecture criticizing Khushtar's main points. The president of

the MJC, Shaykh A. Behardien, then took the microphone from Gabier and announced that

everything Khushtar had said was not only true, it was the core belief of the "Ahl-e Sunnah wal-

Jama'a" and anyone who disagreed with part of the "Wahhabi sect."[57] During the final lecture, at

the Woodstock Town Hall, members of the Tablighi Jama`at stormed the stage. Later a group of

the Tablighis came to the home of the man who was hosting Khushtar in Cape Town; during a

scuffle a member of the Tablighi party brandished a knife, although no one was hurt.

In the coming weeks, most comments on this event concerned how to mend incipient

fault lines within the Cape Muslim community, not to mention fault lines within the MJC itself.

The Muslim Judicial Council had been founded in 1945 as a body of `ulama' with the tasks of

issuing *fatwas* to the Cape Muslim community, giving advice in Islamic legal matters, issuing

halal certifications to food outlets, and the like - one without any particular ideological

orientation be it 'Deobandi' or 'Barelwi'.[58] Yet some were concerned of an apparent 'Wahhabi'

or 'Tablighi' infiltration of the MJC. This conflation of 'Wahhabi', 'Tablighi' and 'Deobandi'

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[56] Interview with Ahmed Mukaddam at International Peace University of South Africa (IPSA), 21 May 2009.

[57] *Muslim News*, 17 July 1970, 12. The phrase 'Ahl-e Sunnah wal-Jama'a' literally means 'The People of the Sunnah and the Community [of Muslims]'. Barelwis often describe themselves as 'Ahl-e Sunnah wal-Jama'a' or simply as "Sunnis" to suggest that their believes are Sunni Islam in its essence, no more and no less. Of course this claim fiercely contested by Deobandis. Both, however, often cast their own historically and contextually specific approaches to Islam as 'Islam' *per se*. Similarly, 'Wahhabis' almost universally reject that appellation in preference for *muwahhidun*, the 'monotheists'.

[58] Gerrie Lubbe, "The Muslim Judicial Council: Custodian or Catalyst?" *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 14 (1994): 34-62.

would, in subsequent decades, become a major trope of anti-Deobandi polemics. Regardless, the resistance to the Tablighi Jama`at in the Cape was substantial.[59]

In response to the events in Cape Town, the Sunni Razvi Society issued a pamphlet, "The Meaning of Bidat," on 31 July 1970, in which they directly challenged the Deobandi rhetorical monopoly over defining the concept of *bid`a*. "The senseless conflict presently being witness in the Muslim community," the pamphlet begins, "is the result of the misuse and incorrect interpretation of the word 'Bidat'."[60] A simple premise animates the argument of the pamphlet: clearly it is impractical to condemn anything and everything that did not exist in the era of the Prophet and the Companions. Cars are 'innovations', as are *madrasas*, to take just two examples; neither existed in the early eras of Islam, so on what grounds should they exist now? "The Deobandi movement condemn [*sic*] Salam, Meelad, Urs, Fateha and label all these good deeds as Bidate Sayyia because it did not take place as it does today or in the present form during the time of the Prophet (SAW), the Sahabas, Tabaeen and Tabbae Tabaeens [the Righteous Companions, the Followers, or the Followers of the Followers]," it argues. It adds that if the Deobandi interpretation of *bid`a* is upheld, "then almost all aspects of Islam and daily life automatically become Bidat, because nothing is still done in the original manner."[61]

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[59] Cilliers suggests that the strength of the mosque networks in the Cape inhibited the spread of the Tablighi Jama`at there, and that the movement had mass appeal to 'Indians' far more than to 'Coloureds'. See Jacobus L. Cilliers, 'Die Tabligh-Beweging en sy invloed in Suid-Afrika," 71-72.

[60] "The Meaning of Bidat," Durban: Sunni Razvi Society, 1970, 1.

[61] *Ibid*. In some ways, the Sunni Razvi Society's intervention oversimplified Deobandi argumentation surrounding *bid`a*. As we saw in the first chapter, Deobandis submitted that *mawlud* and `urs, when performed with a frequency, intensity or intentionality reserved for commandments of the religion, are reprehensible precisely because they blur this boundary. The pamphlet submits a bifurcation of *bid`a* that is a common trope in texts that aim to counter Deobandi argumentation, one between 'good' innovations (*bid`a hasana*) and 'bad' innovations (*bid`a sayyia*), the former subdivided into *bid`a wajib*, 'necessary' innovations, *bid`a mustahab*, 'beneficial' innovations, and *bid`a jaiz*, 'permissible' innovations. The first, it says, includes things essential to the religion that did not exist in the time of the Prophet, such as inserting diacritical marks in the Qur'an. In the second category, significantly, the authors include *mawlud* and `urs. The third category includes things acceptable but not performed with the intention of gaining religious merit, i.e. going on *hajj* by automobile. *Bid`a sayyia* is subdivided into *bid`a makruh*, 'reprehensible' innovations such as excessive adorning of mosques, and *bid`a haram*, 'forbidden' innovations, such as introducing a new method of doing *salat*.

Within a matter of weeks, the Khushtar controversy of 1970 largely subsided. Other clashes came in its wake at the end of the decade, but none that entailed a similarly public dispute over the nature of *bid`a*.[62] The relative brevity of the Khushtar controversy stems from at least two factors. First, anti-apartheid activism, galvanized by events still half a decade away, had not yet altered the tone of the debate; at the center of the dispute was *bid`a*, but the political role of the *`ulama'* or of the Sufis in abetting or resisting apartheid was not yet part of the public discourse. Second, the institutional presence of Deobandis and Barelwis was relatively minor. As we have seen in the third chapter, the first Deobandi *madrasa*, Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle, was established only in 1973.[63] During the 1970's the Deobandi reformist programme was carried out largely through the work of the Tablighi Jama`at. Many of the most prominent Barelwi organizations - such as the Ghousia Manzil in Cape Town,[64] the Ahl-e Sunnat wal-Jama`at of Cape Town,[65] and the Imam Ahmed Raza Academy of Durban - were established long after this event, in 1980, 1984 and 1986 respectively. Significantly, reactions to the Tablighi criticisms of Maulana Khushtar lacked the overtly political tone that these clashes would take in the 1980's, when anti-apartheid activism escalated to a feverish pitch; it remained, rather, a dispute over doctrine and the role of the MJC.

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[62] On 27 April 1979, Imam Nazir Ahmed of Mooi River in Natal gave a *khutbah* in the mosque siding with the Tablighi view that one should not read *salaami* (devotional praises of the Prophet Muhammad) inside the mosque. He was accosted by a group of angry congregants and then beaten. *Cape Herald*, 28 April 1979, 4. Another confrontation took place at the Grey Street Mosque in Durban on 22 September 1981. Three Muslim men were charged with assaulting seven others in a Tablighi-Barelwi dispute, but unfortunately the news article does not report which side committed the assault. *Natal Witness*, 23 September 1981.

[63] "Republic's First Darul Uloom," *Muslim News*, 4 May 1973, 1.

[64] *Muslim News*, 21 March 1980, 2. The Ghousia Manzil was established as a spiritual retreat (*khanqah*) for Qadiri Sufis, the *silsila* that Hazrat Sayed Zainul Abedien established in Cape Town during his visit in 1961. Many, if not most, Barelwi-oriented Sufis in South Africa are Qadiris, though many Chishtis and Naqshbandis are strong ideological allies. Speaking on behalf of the *khanqah* during its opening, Shaikh M. S. Dien vaunted the implicit political power of Sufism: "People in South Africa have the wrong idea of Tasawwuf and its power in propagation. Not only does the khanqah serve as a retreat but it is a centre where social and political activity is generated."

[65] *Muslim News*, 25 January 1985. Barelwi Sufi leaders in the community met at Ghousia Manzil *khanqah* in November 1984 to establish the Ahl-e Sunnat wal-Jammat, with Maulana Ahmed Mukkadam in charge.

Soon after Khushtar's visit, another acclaimed Sufi scholar, Fazlur Rahman Ansari (d. 1974) of Pakistan, gave a series of lectures in 1970 to rapturous praise, visiting a second time in 1972.[66] Writing and lecturing internationally and conversant in both Islamic theology and Western philosophy, Ansari's work was typical of mid-twentieth century Islamic modernism;[67] he theorized Islam as a comprehensive system, saw the Qur'an as a "comprehensive moral code," and believed that Islam and science are complementary.[68] In many ways, Ansari's effect on Cape Muslims was far more profound and enduring than Khushtar's; his lectures in Cape Town have been redacted into a popular volume[69], recordings of which were played on Radio 786, one of the two major Muslim radio stations in Cape Town, throughout the late 1990's.[70] The *Muslim News* criticized the Muslim Judicial Council's tepid reception of such a renowned scholar.[71] While Ansari's visit to Cape Town did not provoke any reaction from the Tablighi Jama`at, it did elicit a heated response from Tablighis based in Johannesburg.[72]

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[66] "Dr. Ansari Accorded a Tumultuous Welcome at D. F. Malan Airport," *Muslim News* 25 September 1970, 1. See also "Muslim Assembly Confers Life Patronage on Dr. Ansari," *Muslim News* 9 October 1970, 1.

[67] He may be usefully compared to Muhammad Iqbal, to take just one example, though his legacy is in no sense as far reaching or influential as Iqbal's.

[68] See his *Quranic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society*, Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1973 (reprinted in 1977, 1989 and 2008).

[69] Fazl al-Rahman al-Ansari, *Islam to the Modern Mind: Lectures in South Africa, 1970 and 1972*, Cape Town: Hidden Treasure Press, 1999.

[70] Muhammed Haron, "*Da`wah* Movements and Sufi *Tariqahs*: Competing for Spiritual Spaces in Contemporary South(ern) Africa," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25, 2 (2005): 261-285, at 275.

[71] "The Cape's Shame," *Muslim News*, 21 April 1972.

[72] *Muslim News* 19 May 1972, 8. An angry letter to the editor of *Muslim News* from A. S. K. Joommal, editor of the Johannesburg-based Muslim newsletter *Al-Balaagh*, noted that the Tablighis in Natal had actively campaigned against Ansari's lecture there: "just before the arrival of Dr. Ansari at As-Salaam in Easter, the following announcement was made in some mosques at the behest of a number of Moulvis: 'Muslims are urged to assemble at Pietermaritzburg for the Tableegh Jamaat Ijtima. Here there will be talk of Allah and Rasool. And what will be the talk there? (meaning As-Salaam) - only of FOOTBALL and CRICKET!' When Dr. Ansari was scheduled to speak in Lenasia, the faithful myrmidons of the Moulvis rubbed out the announcement of his lecture from the masjid blackboard FOUR times, until the mutawallees had to use forceful language to stop them from doing so."

Anti-Apartheid Activism and Anti-`Ulama' Sentiment

By the middle of the 1970's, the *`ulama'* came under increased scrutiny for their failure to speak out against a spate of detentions and arrests by the apartheid regime, the most noteworthy of which, for Muslims, was the arrest and murder of Imam Abdullah Haron in 1969.[73] Criticism of the *`ulama'* was coupled by a steady radicalization of South African Muslim politics; during the late 1970's and early 1980's, the major Muslim newspapers printed countless articles on the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, and covered the fate of Muslims in Lebanon, Palestine, Kashmir and elsewhere. Against this backdrop, the disputes among Deobandis, Tablighis and Barelwis appeared to many South African Muslims as increasingly parochial.

This section explores the contours of anti-Deoband and anti-`ulama' sentiment especially as it manifests in the textual record of Muslim newspapers in South Africa. While these are by no means the only source for reconstructing these debates, they are overwhelmingly the most prominent ones. It is crucial to note here that these sources – especially *Muslim Views*, *Muslim News*, *Muslim Digest*, *Al-Qalam* – were 'biased' in the sense that each had specific editorial aims, and all were embedded ideologically and institutionally in the Muslim anti-apartheid movement to varying degrees. They are, in other words, both the source for reconstructing these debates and partisans in the debates themselves. Thus they do not offer any sort of transparent 'window' into South African Muslim publics, nor do I represent them as such. Despite their own editorial slants, ultimately they are the principal venues for public debate among South Africa's Muslims and writing the history that follows here would be impossible without them.

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[73] See Ursula Günther's "The Memory of Imam Haron in Consolidating Muslim Resistance in the Apartheid Struggle," in Gordon Mitchell and Eve Mullen, eds. *Religion and the Political Imagination in a Changing South Africa*, New York; Munich: Waxmann, 2002. Haron's death is still commemorated annually and his legacy as a pioneer of the anti-apartheid struggle is a potent symbol for South African Muslims, especially in the Cape. I attended a Sufi *dhikr* at Imam Haron's grave in the Mowbray neighborhood of Cape Town on 27 September 2009, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of his death. The event attracted about three hundred mourners who recited verses of the Qur'an near the grave. Achmad Cassiem, leader of the Islamist organization Qibla, eulogized Haron's principled commitment to social justice.

This period of anti-`ulama'` and anti-Deoband sentiment coincides with the emergence among South African Muslims of what George Marcus called an 'activist imaginary',[74] which I will define for my purposes here as a strong, affective and politically charged ethical bond with an imagined, transnational *ummah*, the global community of Muslims. Recent scholars have explored the potential of ethical imaginaries in motivating individuals or groups to act on behalf of 'others', however disparate or geographically far-flung.[75] In South Africa, the 1980's witnessed an efflorescence not only of anti-apartheid activism but Islamic charitable and humanitarian organizations that acted independently of the main `ulama'` bodies, namely Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal, Jamiatul Ulama Natal and the Muslim Judicial Council. South African Muslim non-governmental organizations such as the Islamic Dawah Movement, Islamic Medical Association, and the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF) grew in part out of the Muslim Youth Movement's activities; likewise, charities such as the Tuan Yusuf Foundation and the Mustadafin Foundation, both founded by Muslim women and which deliver emergency food assistance, emerged completely separate from the `ulama'` councils.[76]

For the anti-apartheid activists of this era, there was simultaneously an identification with the suffering of Muslims globally and a local call for solidarity with fellow victims of apartheid across religious divides. As one scholar puts it, "the trans-national and universal community of Muslims had, among Cape Muslims, with good reason increasingly become defined as *a religious*

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[74] Marcus was concerned with mapping out the role of media technologies in the emancipatory politics of subaltern groups. My concern is different but I find the phrase useful. See his introduction to George Marcus, ed. *Connections: Engagements with Media*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 4-6.

[75] Examining the early twentieth century, for instance, Leela Gandhi discusses 'affective communities' among Europeans critical of imperialism, those who actively aligned themselves in solidarity with the colonized. See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, Durban and London: Duke University Press, 2006. More provocatively, Faisal Devji posits structural similarities between the ethical imaginaries that motivate both terrorism and humanitarianism; both phenomena are organized around mobile and decentered networks of agents acting upon a "vicarious identification with the suffering of others." See Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics*, London: Hurst and Company, 2008, 22-23.

[76] Samadia Sadouni, "New Religious Actors in South Africa: The Example of Islamic Humanitarianism," in Benjamin F. Soares and Rene Otayke, eds. *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 103-113.

community of transnational suffering with which one is obliged to identify."[77] Deobandis and

Tablighis were criticized for lacking this identification with the global *ummah* as well as

eschewing both inter-religious and *intra*-religious solidarity among Muslims. Throughout the

1980's anti-apartheid activists increasingly dismissed Tablighi and Barelwi quarrels as 'Indian'

debates irrelevant to South Africa at best, and at worst branded Tablighis as reactionary

collaborationists with the apartheid regime. During this period, Muslims increasingly criticized

the `*ulama'* as a whole for their reticence on the detention of anti-apartheid activists; in this way,

popular opinion of the Deobandi `*ulama'* became bound up with criticism towards the `*ulama'*

generally, particularly as the most conspicuous `*ulama'* bodies at that time - the Jamiatul Ulama

Transvaal, the Jamiatul Ulama Natal - were controlled by graduates of Deobandi *madrasas*.[78]

   Muslim News, the most widely read and prominent Muslim newspaper in the Cape and

possibly South Africa as a whole, first began to speak out in editorials against the `*ulama'* for

silence on the issue of detentions in 1974.[79] "Our ulema and representative Muslim bodies have

remained strangely quiet about the detention of almost 40 young people by the authorities," read

one editorial. Another proclaimed, "Of these detainees, some are students, Christian church

bodies, and others concerned with the civil liberties have raised their voices in protest urging the

authorities to bring those detained to court to face whatever charges laid against them."[80] A

certain Farid Ahmed asked, "Why this tight-lipped silence by the Ulema and Muslims bodies in

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[77] Sindre Bangstad, *Global Flows, Local Appropriations: Facets of Secularization and Re-Islamization among Contemporary Cape Muslims*, ISIM Dissertations, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007, 55. (emphasis added)

[78] See chapter 3, as well as the discussion in Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 66-67.

[79] *Muslim News* became increasingly politicized from the mid-1970's onward. As with other Muslim papers, it straddled the line between general reporting and political advocacy. For an assessment of its impact on Muslim affairs in South Africa, see Muhammed Haron, "*Muslim News* (1973-1986): Its Contribution towards an Alternative Press at the Cape," *The Muslim World*, 85, 3/4 (1995), 317-332. Haron shows how *Muslim News'* editorial coverage was almost precisely balanced between international and local stories related to Islam and Muslims in the 1960's, but gradually the scale tipped in the direction of local stories during the height of anti-apartheid activism, such that in the 1980's nearly 80% of all editorial coverage concerned local issues. See pg 322.

[80] "Do We Not Protest?" *Muslim News*, 20 December 1974, 2.

South Africa over the spate of arrests and bannings of people who dared to speak the truth? The truth our Ulema are too scared to utter."[81] In 1975 the newspaper issued an impassioned call for South African `ulama' to become more politically active.[82]

But the Soweto massacre of 16 June 1976 was the single event that most quickly mobilized South African Muslims *en masse* against the apartheid regime during the 1970's.[83] As thousands of black school children marched through the Soweto township near Johannesburg to protest the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools, clashes between students and police escalated and the ensuing violence left hundreds dead, mostly children. Muslims applauded a statement from the Muslim Judicial Council in Cape Town condemning the massacre,[84] but `ulama' bodies in Natal and the Transvaal remained silent. Abdullah Osman of the Muslim Youth Movement issued a statement on the occasion of a *mawlud* in the aftermath of Soweto, a plea for Muslims to abandon what he considered to be an obsessive focus on the external trappings of Muslim identity and focus on the political core of the faith:

> The Muslims today unfortunately lack the true Islamic dynamism and spirit due to their lack of Islamic knowledge. We are too busy wrapped up in rituals and customs … If an outside observer had to analyze us he would be convinced that our Islam revolves around the keeping of beards, wearing of khurtas and the eating of dates … *Let us push aside ritualistic Islam out of our lives and light the world too long in darkness with Muhammad's (S.A.W.) true character and personality contained in the Holy Qur'an.*[85]

The editors of *Muslim News* declared: "The Ulama of the Cape and the various Muslim organizations who issued the statement on behalf of the Muslims on the current situation in the

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[81] Farid Ahmed, "An Open Letter to the Ulema and Muslim Bodies of South Africa," *Muslim News* 31 January 1975, 8.

[82] "Our Ulema and Injustice," *Muslim News* 14 March 1975, 2.

[83] The literature on the Soweto uprising in substantial, but an academic perspective that places this watershed event in the broader history of anti-apartheid activism is Anthony W. Marx's *Lessons of Struggle: South African internal opposition, 1960-1990*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

[84] See Gerrie Lubbe, "The Soweto Fatwa: A Muslim response to a watershed event in South Africa," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 17, 2 (1997): 335-343.

[85] *Muslim News* 18 March 1977, 6. (emphasis added).

country need to be complimented for the uncompromising stand they have adopted … At the same time it is sad that the Ulama and Muslim organizations in Transvaal and Natal have remained mute on this most basic issue of justice and freedom for all South Africans."[86] After Soweto, the allegedly apolitical stance of the `ulama' in general and Deobandis in particular began to seem increasingly accommodationist. Statements condemning the violence, and the lack of `ulama' response, came from several bodies, including Majlis Ashura Al-Islami, Institute of Islamic Shariah Studies and the Muslim Assembly, regarding the massacre during the Soweto uprising.[87]

Muslim News became particularly avid in its condemnations of the apartheid state, becoming banned on multiple occasions.[88] It issued rousing calls-to-arms in the late 1970's and early 1980's, such as its "Message to the Oppressors and their Supporters" of September 1979, its "Islam's Freedom Charter" of August 1980, and its "Revolutionary manifesto of the oppressed people" in August of 1983.[89] In July 1982, the Muslim News expressed its vision of transnational solidarity with political movements elsewhere in the Muslim world, in activist language that South African Deobandis found abhorrent:

> We in South Africa must look at ourselves in the context of the brave
> Mujahideen of Afghanistan who are toiling under the yoke of Soviet
> Afghanistan. We in South Africa must look at ourselves in the context of our
> suffering under this ungodly regime. The people of Lebanon and Afghanistan are
> suffering yet they are actively striving and sacrificing in the face of the assault on
> their human dignity. Muslims in South Africa suffer the indignity of being
> reduced to non-people yet we do not fight back. The moment the oppressed
> people resolve to destroy the system of oppression and actively engage the

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[86] "Cape Ulama's Stand," Muslim News, 24 September 1976, 3.

[87] "Soweto: South Africa's Tragedy," Muslim News, 25 June 1976, 1-2.

[88] See Muhammed Haron, "The Muslim News (1973-1986): Its Contribution towards the Establishment of an Alternative Press at the Cape," The Muslim World 85, 3-4 (1995): 317-332. Haron sees the politicization of Muslim News beginning with the editorial appointment of Abdul Qayyum and Abdul Quddus Sayyid in 1973, but then especially after the Soweto massacre of 1976. Haron does not provide much information about the editors themselves.

[89] See "Message to the Oppressors and their Supporters," Muslim News, 21 September 1979 and "Islam's Freedom Charter," Muslim News, 8 August 1980. For "Revolutionary manifesto of the oppressed people," see Muslim News, 12 August 1983, 8-9.

oppressors then they no longer suffer because they have now resolved to sacrifice. In any struggle, sacrifice is a necessity. Sacrifice towards achieving martyrdom is a fundamental principle of Islam."[90]

Several other factors coalesced in the late 1970's and early 1980's to steer the course of debates on the role of Deobandis and Sufis in a changing South African political climate. First, during this period Deobandi anti-Shi`a sentiment, long a staple of the Deobandi movement, led to Tablighi criticisms of the revolution in Iran; however, the allure of the Iranian revolution was substantial for many South African Muslims, who saw it as definitive proof that Muslims could be politically mobilized around an Islamic ideology to overthrow a repressive regime. Johannesburg-area Tablighis criticized Iran from the pulpit of area mosques and urged South African Muslim students not to support the revolution. The Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal even ordered South Africa's Muslims not to travel to Iran after the revolution. Ten South Africans - among them one of Cape Town's foremost anti-apartheid activists, Hassan Solomon - openly defied the Jamiat and flew to Iran to be a part of a 'World Ulema Unity Week'. A spokesman for Qibla praised the Iranians and the decision of the South African `ulama' delegation to Iran.[91] Meanwhile, student groups at the University of the Witwaterstrand in Johannesburg accused the Tablighis of accosting students for supporting Iran but failing to speak out against a litany of wrongs, including the Group Areas Acts, Zionism in Israel, and Saudi ideological control over Mecca and Medina.[92] A group called the Black Students Society slammed the Deobandi Jamiatul Ulama and called their Tablighi supporters "sterile puppets:" The "Jamiatul Ulama did not have the guts to hit out at oppression, racism, Zionism and imperialism the way the Shi`a leaders in Iran are doing."[93]

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[90] "Where do we stand?" *Muslim News*, 16 July 1982, 40.

[91] "Muslims defy ban," *Cape Herald*, 8 January 1983.

[92] "Islamic Iran: Local Ulema sow dissension," *Muslim News*, 3 September 1982, 1 and 4.

[93] *Ibid*.

Second, Tablighis' deliberate policy of skirting 'politics', narrowly conceived here as citizens in their relations to states - the very policy that has allowed Tablighis to avoid conflict with local authorities and the repression that Islamist parties have faced from suspicious governments - lost them some support in South Africa, particularly in the Cape.[94] As Moosa has stated, "Given their focus on eschatological matters and concern for personal salvation, the social and political ethos of Islam is not just neglected but ignored. In the South African context, except for the self-confessed right-wing religious groups, virtually all significant religious denominations and movements except for the Tablighi Jama`at demonstrated their abhorrence for the political system of apartheid."[95] Their ostensibly 'apolitical' stance began to appear outmoded to South African Muslims who called for a more direct confrontation with the ruling government. Cape Town's *Observer* sent a letter to the *Muslim News*, professing "For the last twenty years we witnessed the Tabligh Jamaa establishing themselves in the country with an innumerable amount of their Maulanas from India telling Muslims what is Islam and what is not Islam."[96] Meanwhile, the mosques became increasingly polarized between whether the *imam* leading communal prayers was a Tablighi or a Barelwi, with the one often refusing to pray behind the other.[97] Even in later years, the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal still gave preferential licensing to mosques that allow Tablighis.[98]

But even if Tablighis in South Africa skirted political activism wholesale, their deliberate

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[94] Moosa corroborates this point in his general examination of Tablighis in South Africa. See Ebrahim Moosa, "World's 'Apart': Tablighi Jama`at in South Africa under Apartheid, 1963-1993," 211-212.

[95] *Ibid.*, 218.

[96] *Muslim News*, 20 May 1983, 13.

[97] Vahed has deftly summarized these disputes, which reached their climax in Durban in the early 1980's. One of them emerged from a row over the celebration of an `urs near the mosque in Verulam. In his assessment, Barelwis used their numerical majority to oust Tablighi congregations from their mosques, and the latter used their greater financial resources to establish mosques in nearby neighborhoods. The Muslim Judicial Council and the Muslim Youth Movement both criticized these moves as a waste of resources. See Goolam Vahed, "Contesting 'Orthodoxy': The Tablighi-Sunni Conflict among South African Muslims in the 1970s and 1980s," 327-329.

[98] *Al-Qalam*, September 1994, 12.

engagements with doctrinal controversies challenge assumptions in much of the academic literature on the Tablighi Jama`at.[99] However, the South African case offers an important counterexample, one in which Tablighis avoided 'politics' but never shied away from addressing contentious religious matters in public contexts.[100] If we conceive 'politics' more broadly in terms of power, authority and subjecthood, the Tablighi Jama`at is eminently political.

The Tablighi Jama`at is the engine of Deoband's expansion, given the inherent mobility of *jama`ats* that allows them to move almost effortlessly across national borders. This spatial mobility works in tandem with what Metcalf calls its "typological" view of history, a "history without the nation-state and with no concern for worldly progress" and a vision of "nonlinear time created by patterns of moral significance." In this apprehension of space and time, "All such moments are the same in essence, and contingencies of time and place are irrelevant."[101] As I argue here, their disengagements from 'nation-state' politics were indeed problematic in South Africa. I would suggest here that we not take Tablighis' own idealized self-narratives of spatial mobility and moral history so seriously that we overlook how their project is *received* locally. Metcalf seems to do so when she claims that, in Tablighis' mobility, what is at stake is "not *space*, the new place where they have chosen to live, but *time*, in which the past and future

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[99] Barbara Metcalf offers a generalization about Tablighis' cautious avoidance of conflict and controversy that may be true in most cases: "Always closely tied to men with traditional learning and the holiness of Sufis, Tablighis nonetheless took its impetus from a desire to move the dissemination of Islamic teachings away from the *madrasa*, the heart of Deobandi activity, to inviting 'lay' Muslims, high and low ranking, learned and illiterate, to share the obligation of enjoining others to faithful practice. It also differed from the original movement because it eschewed debate with other Muslims over jurisprudential niceties and resultant details of practice." Barbara Metcalf, "'Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs," Leiden: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) Papers, 2002, 8.

[100] Yoginder Sikand, among others, has proposed an important corrective to the oft-repeated assumption that Tablighis shun politics, pointing out that the movement's aloofness from politics in post-independence India allowed them to work in an environment hostile to Muslims and especially Muslim politics. During the Emergency of 1975-1977, for instance, when the Indian government banned many religious organizations, the Tablighi Jama`at was spared. See Yoginder Sikand, "The Tablighi Jama`at and Politics: A Critical Reappraisal," *The Muslim World* 96, 1 (2006): 175-195.

[101] Barbara Metcalf, "New Medinas: The Tablighi Jama`at in America and Europe," in Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed. *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 119.

converge in the present … Far from being on the periphery, *they can make any place a center*."[102]

While perhaps they *can* make any place a center, the vociferous opposition to the Tablighi

Jama`at in South Africa during apartheid suggests, at the very least, that, like Deoband as a

whole, local contestations of the Tablighis' project cannot be overlooked in place of the

Tablighis' own idealized self-narratives. Farish Noor makes this point elegantly in arguing the

Tablighi Jama`at is high on "bonding capital" but low on "bridging capital." [103] In other words,

the Tablighi Jama`at is arguably adept at bonding its members together, but is less adept in its

ability to adapt to local contexts.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum from the Tablighis were Qibla, founded in

June of 1981, and Call of Islam, founded in June of 1984. Aligning itself with the Pan-Africanist

Congress (PAC), Qibla's ultimate aim was an Islamic revolution in South Africa, far-fetched in a

country with comparatively few Muslims.[104] But their means towards this end - organizing local

Muslim communities to share food and education, and seeing social, legal, political and economic

justice exemplified in the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*[105] - electrified Muslims in the Cape, at least

at first. "Islam is not only a message, but also a method" was one among several Qibla rallying

cries.[106] The arrest of Qibla's leader, Achmat Cassiem, and his imprisonment on Robben Island

burnished Qibla's anti-apartheid credentials.[107] *Muslim News* likewise issued a manifesto on the

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[102] *Ibid.*, 123. The emphasis is mine.

[103] Farish A. Noor, "Pathans to the East! The Tablighi Jama`at Movement in Northern Malaysia and Southern Thailand," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, 1 (2007): 7-25, at 24.

[104] See Qibla, *One Solution, Islamic Revolution*, Athlone, Cape Town: n.d. and Qibla, *Eid Message: The intellectual roots of the oppressed and Islam's triumph over apartheid*, Athlone, Cape Town, 1992. Qibla also printed its first public statement in *Muslim News* on 19 June 1981.

[105] Qibla, *Dimensions of the Kalimah*, Claremont, Cape Town: n.d.

[106] *Muslim News*, 24 July 1981, 4.

[107] Named after the direction towards which Muslims pray while facing Mecca, Qibla still exists today but is widely criticized for its alleged links to PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs), the notorious, predominantly Muslim vigilante group formed to confront drug dealers in the Cape Flats. Qibla is also

occasion of Ramadan 1981 envisioning the physical and moral discipline of the fast as the

ultimate preparation for total personal, social and political revolution: "Islam has as its main

objective the liberation of man and ending the domination of man by man."[108]

However, many Muslims were repelled by the Islamist approach of Qibla, and the Call of

Islam soon eclipsed Qibla in terms of community support. Aligned with the United Democratic

Front (UDF), which had been formed in 1983 as a non-racial umbrella organization for groups

opposed to the proposed tricameral parliament.[109] The United Democratic Front (UDF) initiated a

major boycott of white owned businesses and products in 1985.[110] A popular flyer showed Dr.

Allen Boesak and Hassan Solomon arm-in-arm as police officers whisked them away to detention

for the crime of speaking at the funeral of a young man who died at the hands of security forces in

the black township of Gugulethu, near Cape Town.[111] Hassan Solomon decried *`ulama'* who

became mired in "mere rituals or deadening formalism" and thereby failed to materialize the

"revolutionary thrust of Islam." The *`ulama'* of South Africa have "shown that they are incapable

of leading the Ummah in the struggle." When Solomon praised a protest where "true Muslims

and Christians and activists joined hands and stood shoulder to shoulder," he was implicitly

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linked to the Islamic Unity Convention (IUC), which carries on many of the social upliftment and education programs that originally characterized Qibla but largely without the overt Islamist politics. I attended an all-female *mawlud* hosted by the IUC Women's Forum on 26 April 2009 in Saldahna Bay, north of Cape Town. The organizers told me that the *mawlud* was specifically aimed towards poorer, lower-class Muslim women. The standard *mawlud* liturgy was interspersed with speeches about the need for women's empowerment, better literacy and education on health matters that affect women. The IUC runs Radio 786, one of the two main Muslim radio stations in Cape Town (the other being the MJC-affiliated Voice of the Cape). I discuss this *mawlud* further in the final chapter.

[108] "Eid-ul-Fitr: Islam's triumph over Apartheid," *Muslim News*, 24 July 1984, 17-22.

[109] The government had proposed altering parliament so that Coloureds and Indians would have a modicum of parliamentary representation. However, the proposal still excluded blacks altogether, prompting an overwhelming number of Muslim activists to dismiss the changes as a crass attempt to co-opt the Indian and Coloured communities and as failing to address the systematic racism against the country's black majority.

[110] Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: a history of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000, 150-153.

[111] United Democratic Front, "UDF Supports 'Don't Buy' Campaign!" undated poster. Islamic ephemera collection, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

deriding *The Majlis* and the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal for their opposition to interreligious activism.[112]

Far less Islamist than Qibla in their politics, Call of Islam campaigned with the UDF in South Africa and established links to the African National Congress (ANC) in exile; connections to the ANC remain strong among the former members of Call of Islam. But the leadership of both Qibla and Call of Islam was distinguished by the near-absence of traditionally trained *`ulama'*.[113] While Qibla and Call of Islam were busy mobilizing Muslims in protests and marches, the criticism of the *`ulama'* continued unabated in Muslim public discourse. The editors of the Durban-based *Al-Qalam* claimed that divisive theological disagreements between Deobandis and Sufis played into the ruling regime's strategy of dominance: "The time has come again for the ulema to emerge from the theological barracks into the field of active politics and shahaadah where they belong and where the ummah expect them to give the lead … The colonialists during the occupation of Muslim countries have made it part of their strategy to divide the ulema on petty theological issues. The ulema soon found themselves dissenting over minor issues of fiqh, while the colonialists were replacing Islamic shariah as a basis of government, with that of their own."[114]

Another group contributed broadly to this anti-*`ulama'* and anti-Deobandi discourse: the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM). Founded in 1971 as the movement's mouthpiece,[115] the

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[112] "Imam challenges Ulama to take up the struggle," *Muslim News*, 27 September 1985, 5.

[113] In fact, many *`ulama'* criticized the Call of Islam's alignment with the secular United Democratic Front. See Jill E. Kelly, "'It Is *Because* of Our Islam That We Are There': The Call of Islam in the United Democratic Front Era," *African Historical Review* 41,1 (2009): 118-139, especially 124-126. Farid Esack, the charismatic co-founder of Call of Islam (along with Adil Jacobs, Ebrahim Rasool and Shamiel Manie), is an important exception; he studied at a *madrasa* in Pakistan and even joined the Tablighi Jama`at at the age of nine, but quickly became a full-time activist upon returning to South Africa in 1982. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 4-5.

[114] "The Ulema should lead," *Al-Qalam,* December 1982, 2.

[115] Muhammed Haron and Imraan Buccus, "*Al-Qalam*: An Alternative Muslim Voice in the South African Press," *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 1 (2009): 121-137.

Muslim newspaper *Al-Qalam* was explicit in opposing Deobandi hegemony in Natal and the

Transvaal. Growing in part out of the earlier Durban-based Arabic Study Circle,[116] the Muslim

Youth Movement first emerged in Durban in 1970. One of its agendas was especially vexing to

the Deobandis: Arabic study groups for reading the Qur'an. The MYM believed that reading and

understanding the Qur'an was an integral part of moral and political empowerment for Muslims;

conversely, Deobandis dismissed the Arabic study groups as "modernist" contrivances that

attempted to wrest authority of interpretation from the `ulama', noting that few if any members of

these circles had traditional *madrasa* training.[117]

One of the Muslim Youth Movement's strategies for mobilizing Muslim students was

holding mass rallies. The MYM released a 'rally manual', *Islam for All, Islam Forever*, for one of

these rallies held in 1983. It calls on students to resist "anti-Islamic forces" from within and from

without; among the "internal" forces, it lists bickering between Muslims over "trivial matters"

and the "Nafs - our own desires and self importance," and among the "external" forces it lists

"Jahili systems" such as Capitalism, Zionism, Marxism and governments that "oppress, exploit

and discriminate."[118] Like other organizations that opposed apartheid - and they varied widely in

how explicitly and directly they did so, the MYM often sluggishly - the MYM is, I would

suggest, best understood in the context of political Islam's peak during the 1980's. They

understood Islam as a comprehensive 'system': political, economic, social and ethical. This is

perhaps most evident in the Muslim Youth Movement's translation and publication of Abul A'la

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[116] See Shamil Jeppie, *Language, Identity, Modernity: The Arabic Study Circle of Durban*, Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007.

[117] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, 127-128.

[118] Muslim Youth Movement, *Islam for All, Islam Forever: Rally Manual*, 1 -4 April 1983.

Maududi's *Islamic Way of Life*.[119] *The Majlis* even suggested that the Muslim Youth Movement was attempting to import the "*mazhab*" (legal school) of Maududi.[120]

These myriad criticisms of the `ulama' generally, and the Deobandi `ulama' of Transvaal and Natal particularly, formed the backdrop against which we must understand the remaining two major public confrontations over between Deobandis and their antagonists during the 1980's.

Ebrahim Adam and the 'Barelwi Menace'

Numerous tussles between Tablighis and Barelwis transpired in the 1980's, precisely at the time when many South African Muslims were becoming particularly exasperated by the rhetoric from both sides. To take just a couple of examples, an imam in the Cape Town neighborhood of Mooi River was assaulted for siding with the Tablighi stance on giving *salams* to the Prophet Muhammad.[121] In Verulam, a predominantly Indian suburb of Durban, mosque trustees arranged for armed men to block the entrance of some one thousand congregants who had gathered to celebrate *mawlud* on the premises under the aegis of the Barelwi Ahle Sunnat wal Jammat.[122]

Then in January of 1985, Ebrahim Adam (b. 1938), a graduate of Deoband serving at that time on the Fatwa Committee of the Muslim Judicial Council, gave a lecture on Barelwis in the mosque at Bridgetown, a middle-class Muslim neighborhood in Cape Town.[123] Titled "The

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[119] Abul A'la Maududi, *Islamic Way of Life*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, Durban: Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, n.d. Khurshid Ahmad was a major figure within the leadership of the Jama`at-i Islami.

[120] "Maududi-ism," *The Majlis*, Vol. 2, Issue 7, 4.

[121] *Cape Herald*, 28 April 1979, 4. While not technically in the 1980's, this event is clearly part of the same epoch. The article reports, "The controversy is a long standing one which has split the Muslim community right down the middle, resulting in a series of violent incidents over the last few years."

[122] *Natal Daily News*, 23 February 1983.

[123] Ebrahim Adam studied in India from 1959 to 1971, and at Dar al-`Ulum Deoband from 1964 to 1969, becoming a Sufi initiate of Muhammad Zakariyya. When Muhammad Zakariyya and Mahmud Hasan Gangohi visited the Cape, Ebrahim Adam hosted them in Stellenbosch. Interview, Ebrahim Adam, 29 April 2010.

Barelwi Menace," Adam's lecture quoted the founder of the Barelwi school, Imam Ahmed Reza Khan, attempting to prove that Khan claimed the mantle of prophethood, citing excerpts from Khan's Urdu poetry in praise of the Prophet. Accusing Khan of claiming prophetic revelation (*wahy*) was a grave charge; claiming prophethood not only rendered one an apostate for denying the finality of Muhammad's prophethood but the charge was redolent of the Ahmadiyya, a Muslim movement that grew out of same South Asian milieu of the Deobandis and Barelwis and whose founder allegedly claimed to be a post-Muhammadan prophet.[124] Barelwis and Deobandis alike find a common opponent in the Ahmadiyya. The implication, furthermore, was not only that Khan himself was outside of the fold of Islam, but as far as Cape Town's Sufis were concerned, that anyone who follows Khan's teachings was also outside the fold. Adam also impugned one of Khan's foremost students, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, who traveled and taught throughout South Africa in the 1950's.[125] He stated that Abdul Aleem Siddiqui regarded Ahmed Reza Khan to be a prophet, based on a statement of Siddiqui's: "When I went to Arabia and envisioned it in scope and magnitude, I realized without a doubt that [Ahmed Reza Khan] was the Qibla of the non-Arab peoples." Adam repeated the statement in his 'Barelwi Menace' lecture and gave the following gloss on its meaning: "[The Barelwis] say Rasulullah is a Prophet unto the Arabs and Ahmed Reza Khan is a Prophet unto the non-Arabs."[126]

Durban's *Muslim Digest* called the lecture "the night that Molvi Ebrahim Adam made Allah a witness to his distortions, half-truths, lies and fabrications against great savants of Islam," and reprinted a pamphlet issued by the Cape Town Ahle Sunna wal Jama`a in which Maulana Ahmed Mukaddam, a Barelwi in Cape Town, and Abdur Rauf Soofie, of the Soofie family in

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[124] The authoritative source on the Ahmadiyya remains Yohanan Friedmann's *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

[125] See the reports from Durban's *The Muslim Digest*, "Our Patron Arrives in South Africa," "Durban's Great Welcome to his Eminence," and "30,000 Cheer His Eminence in Cape Town." *The Muslim Digest*, August 1952, 5-22.

[126] *Muslim Digest*, March/April 1985, 19-20.

Durban, "challenge MOULANA EBRAHIM ADAM to prove in public his derogatory statements that: Alal Hazrat Ahmed Raza Khan, Moulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, Shah Ahmed Noorani, together with the followers of the Qadiri Silsilah and all the SUNNIS, are KAAFFIR."[127]

Repeating the fears of a 'Wahhabi' infiltration of the Cape, the *Muslim Digest* commented:

> From the foregoing it becomes abundantly clear that Mr. Ebrahim Adam was bent on sowing the seeds of disunity in the Muslim community of the Cape. Mr. Ebrahim Adam should know that for 300 years there was no division in the Muslim Ummah here. They (the Muslims) of the Cape knew little about the Deobandi-Brelvi [*sic*] subject. But since the Deobandi Ulama, the like of Ebrahim Adam, had come to the Cape, the hymns of hate against the so-called Brelvis had begun. There are presently about 6 Deobandi Ulama in Cape Town. One wonders what will happen when more Wahhabi and Deobandi Ulama come to Cape Town.[128]

It is difficult to gauge the extent of popular anger towards this speech outside of Cape Town, but the *Natal Mercury* did report a violent clash, also in January 1985, at the historically Barelwi Grey Street Mosque in Durban. A member of the congregation told the police that members of the Tablighi Jama`at came into the mosque and proceeded to beat nine worshippers.[129] The Grey Street Mosque had been the site of similar clashes prior to this date; in 1981, three men were accused of assaulting eight other men in and around the mosque. A local paper reported the incident arose over disputes between "the traditionalists (Sunnis) and reformists (Tablighis)" but did not indicate whether the three accused were one or the other. The mosque permanently hired an armed guard to protect worshippers after the event.[130]

Local Barelwi Sufis convened a meeting on 4 March 1985 at the Ghousia Manzil, a Barelwi *khanqah* in Rylands Estate in Cape Town, inviting Adam to discuss the lecture publicly. Unsurprisingly, Adam did not show up at the meeting, perhaps fearing for his own safety. One of

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[127] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

[128] *Ibid.*, 16.

[129] *Natal Mercury*, 15 January 1985.

[130] *Natal Witness*, 23 September 1981, and *Natal Mercury*, 21 July 1981.

the speakers, Maulana Ahmad Mukaddam,[131] a Cape Town-based Barelwi scholar, shifted the

focus away from Deobandi versus Barelwi to 'Wahhabi' versus 'Sunni', a rhetorical strategy that

became increasingly common. "We are here to refute the allegations and show up his deliberate

distortions," he stated. "And it is not a question of Deobandi and Bareilly. It is purely a question

of Wahabism and Sunnism." A second speaker at the event, Maulana Abdur Rauf Soofie,

summarized Barelwi claims against Deoband but ultimately dismissed the debate as a politically

reactionary distraction from more pressing political matters in South Africa: "While bullets are

flying in Crossroads and Khayelitsha," referring to two black townships that bore the brunt of

apartheid security forces' violence, "and the world is looking at the [South African Defense

Force] shooting innocent people, this man finds time to tell a group of people that there is a very

big 'Barelvi menace' in this country."[132] In the following months, similarly, *Al-Qalam* printed a

series of letters from across the country, all of whom, like Abdur Rauf Soofie, charged that

contemporary South African politics left no room for 'Indian' theological quibbles. Amidst

glossy color photos from Palestine and Afghanistan and articles on Malcolm X and Steve Biko,

these letters assaulted the Deobandi `*ulama'* for their allegedly misguided politics.

The principle of the Deobandi *madrasa* Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle wrote in defense of the

Deobandi `*ulama'*: "These ulema and experts of Deen [religion] have acquired their sound and

true knowledge of Deen from those ulama of deen who are experts in their field … until this line

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[131] Ahmed Mukaddam is the current rector of the International Peace University of South Africa (IPSA), formerly known as Islamic College of South Africa (ICOSA). Mukaddam has been a major public presence in many of the debates and clashes and between Tablighis and Sufis in South Africa; he has sat on the panel of numerous Barelwi conferences through the years, in addition to serving as a special witness in the court case ensuing from the Azaadville *mawlud* incident. Mukaddam studied at the original *madrasa* of the Barelwi school, Dar al-`Ulum Manzar-i Islam in Bareilly, India. The *madrasa* was founded in 1904 by Ahmed Reza Khan himself and serves as the central institution of the Barelwi movement. Maulana Mukaddam endured the height of Deobandi-Barelwi polemics during the 1980's and remains deeply suspicious of the Deobandi movement. He defends the rhetorical merging of Wahhabi, Tablighi, Deobandi and Jalalabadi as "roughly synonymous ideas" and regards Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab's *Kitab al-Tawhid* as the direct inspiration for Muhammad Isma`il's *Taqwiyat al-Iman*. Mukaddam is concerned for what he calls the ongoing effect of a "Wahhabi thumb in Indo-Pak." Interview, Ahmed Mukaddam, International Peace University of South Africa (IPSA), 21 May 2009.

[132] *Muslim News*, 15 March 1985, 8b.

of expert transmitters reached the Holy Prophet." [133] In response a "Concerned Sister" in Port Shepstone replied: "The Ulama, leave alone guiding Muslim communities, have accepted the colonial system. In fact they are executing the colonial plan against Islam. By this I mean they tell us that Arabic is too difficult to learn. They have divided the community on minor issues in Islam … What guidance have they given us in the recent tricameral elections? What guidance have they given us in our haraam/kaafir banking system?"[134] A community leader, Fatih Osman, gave a speech at the Deobandi Dar al-`Ulum Newcastle imploring the Deobandi `ulama' directly to "stand up for justice" and entreating them not to let internal squabbles distract them from political causes.[135]

Other letters declared that "infighting weakens the Muslim community" and called for an end to quarreling between Deobandis and Barelwis,[136] and that "These ulama go about causing dissension and dispute among Muslims by declaring some Muslims as kafirs and others as bidatees. Have they not any important work other than fiddling with these issues?" [137] Reports of the time suggested the gravity of these claims; shooting deaths by security forces led to massive protests by Muslims throughout the Western Cape.[138] The Kimberley Muslim Students Association released a statement for the `ulama' to go "out of the shell of big talk and empty words and move to the realm of deeds and action … to stop the fruitless and worthless bickering,

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[133] *Al-Qalam*, March 1985, 9.

[134] *Ibid*. Here she refers to the controversial tricamercal parliamentary elections of 1984, in which Whites, Indians and Coloureds were (unevenly) accorded votes but Blacks excluded from voting altogether. Many South African Muslims saw this as both an attempt to co-opt Indian and Coloured Muslims into an oppressive system and an affront to the dignity of the majority black population. The `ulama' councils in Transvaal and Natal, however, offered little advice on whether Muslims should participate or not. Discussion of the tricameral elections can be found, among other places, in Ebrahim Moosa's "Muslim Conservatism in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 69 (1989): 73-81.

[135] *Al-Qalam*, August 1986, 3.

[136] *Al-Qalam*, April 1985, 9.

[137] *Al-Qalam*, November 1985, 9.

[138] See "Muslims Rise," *Al-Qalam*, November 1985, 1.

trivialities and frivolities and move to the serious business of governance and dominance of

Islam."[139] One exasperated Muslim in Durban sent "an open letter to the Jamiatul Ulema of

Natal," declaiming against the political neutrality of the Deobandi `ulama' in humorous terms:

> You are the self-same Molvis who claim allegiance to the ulema of Deoband and
> bask in the glory of heroes like Sheikhul Hind [Mahmud al-Hasan] and Molvi
> [Husain Ahmad] Madani who courted imprisonment and torture during their anti-
> British campaigns. You relish quoting such anecdotes while lacking the mettle to
> commit yourselves to universal justice … Looking at Rip van Winkles like you,
> obsessed with the computation of sawaab [religious merit] and marriage to the
> Hoors in Jannat [virgins in paradise], there is little wonder that Karl Marx
> scathingly referred to religion as the opiate of the masses … In conclusion, you
> are only fit to issue fatwas on Halal chickens and the sighting of the moon. The
> former could be attributed to your chicken-heartedness. As for the latter, you are
> indeed moon-struck."[140]

Murder in the Mawlud: Azaadville, March 1987

For many South African Muslims, the outrage that met Ebrahim Adam's lecture on the

"Barelwi Menace" was minor compared to the reaction following disastrous events in 1987, a

year that one major Barelwi scholar cites as the watershed year for Deobandi-Barelwi divisions in

the country.[141] On 7 March 1987 a group of Tablighis stormed into a *mawlud* assembly in the

Johannesburg suburb of Azaadville and attacked the congregants.[142] One man, Sheikh Mohideen

Sahib, was killed and at least six others were critically injured. A week prior to the attack,

madrasa students had issued pamphlets calling for Muslims to "unite against Bid`a" and not to

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[139] South African Students Association, Kimberley, "Emergency Call to the Ummah," *Muslim News*, 27 September 1985, 4.

[140] "'Toothless' Ulema under Fire," *Muslim News*, 31 August 1984, 24.

[141] Interview, Abdun Nabi Hamidi, 22 November 2009. Maulana Abdun Nabi is an *imam* at the Imam Ahmed Reza Masjid in south Lenasia, where he was, at the time of the interview, involved in constructing a large Barelwi Dar al-`Ulum called Jamiatul Medina.

[142] The Muslim suburbs of Johannesburg were and remain major centers of Tablighi activity. The largest gathering of Muslims in the history the region took place in 1981 when approximately 15,000 Tablighis gathered in Lenasia for the annual *ijtima`* or gathering, as reported in *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 April 1981. We also know that *mawlud* celebrations in Azaadville resumed in the years following the incident. See "Moulood-un-Nabi (SAW) Calendar for 1413 AH," *Muslim Views*, August 1992, 7. This calendar lists Azaadville as having a *mawlud* on October 25 of that year.

attend the upcoming *mawlud* assembly. After the event, police remained on high alert to the continued potential for violence among mosques in the Transvaal. In Lenasia, the Barelwi-affiliated Saabrie Mosque retained a police presence in the weeks following the attack.[143]

The incident at Azaadville remains a potent symbol for many parties to Tablighi-Sufi clashes. Many viewed the attack not merely as an act of violence but as an almost sacred catastrophe; not only did Muslims assault other Muslims, but did so while the victims were in a state of ritual purity and while they performed *zikr*, the Sufis' 'remembrance' of God.[144] The immediate response was fierce. In Jan 1985, *Al-Qalam* had reported on a clash between Tablighis and Barelwis at the Grey St. Masjid in Durban and already predicted then that violence would ensue if the dispute were not resolved. After news of the Azaadville incident, *Al-Qalam* stated:

> The latest outbreak of violence between the Sunni [Barelwi] and the Tablighi
> Jamaats, has done violence to Islam, which stands for peace and tolerance. What
> can be more damaging to the spread of Islam in this country than the bad
> example of Muslims killing Muslims? In a country where inter-group violence
> has become rife, one would expect Muslims, by virtue of their faith which places
> great stress on brotherhood and unity, to set the example. Can we really afford to
> quibble while the country is burdened with greater problems which need the
> energies of the whole country, including Muslims? … The dispute between the
> Tablighi Jamaat and the Sunni Jamaat is more emotional than rational … *The*
> *theological debate which grips the two groups has been imported from the Indian*
> *subcontinent. It has nothing to do with real Islamic issues and the dynamics of*
> *the South African situation. The sooner we export this divisive theological*
> *nitpicking back to the Indian subcontinent, the better our chances of getting on*
> *with the task of building our country into a land where all the children of Adam*
> *will be honoured and their rights upheld.*[145]

Other groups used the fiasco to call attention to the broader struggle against apartheid. Ebrahim Rasool spoke on behalf of the Call of Islam, decrying that the attacks came "at a time when the Muslims were able to galvanize themselves into a force to take on even the apartheid state." A

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[143] *The Star*, 19 March 1987. The paper described the reasons behind the clash as follows: "The Deobandi Tabligh group disagreed with the Barelvi group which sought to spread the religion by singing praises to Mohammed. On Saturday the Barelvi group went through the streets of Lenasia singing and advertising their gathering."

[144] Interview, Ahmed Mukaddam, IPSA, 21 May 2009.

[145] *Al-Qalam* March 1987, 1. (emphasis added)

community meeting at the Habibia Masjid in Cape Town ended with a resolution demanding that "Darul Ulooms, organizations and institutions of the Deobandi-Tablighi Movement that are responsible for such aggression must be exposed."[146]

One angry letter from a Muslim in Overport blamed both Deobandis and Barelwis: "The highly politicized youth see no future in this sectarian and ideologically bankrupt Islam. The process of dawah to non-Muslims has been retarded considerably as nobody is attracted to this 'Indian' version of Islam. It is truly amazing that both these groups claim to be practicing the 'sunna' and yet none has challenged the illegal 'kufr' regime of Botha but each has declared Jihad on fellow Muslims. The Deobandi/Barelvi 'schools of thought' have so emasculated Islam that only an impotent shell remains … Ultimately the ulema of both factions are to blame."[147] The *Muslim Digest* likewise called for a resolution to "differences that have plagued for too long the Muslim community, especially the Deobandi and Bareilly groups."[148]

A certain M. Ahmed of Rylands in Cape Town inquired, "Are the present generation [*sic*] of Deobandis, in the guise of Bidat, dismantling the love of Nabi Muhammad (SAW), thereby aiding and abetting the enemies of Islam?"[149] A Sufi organization, The Saberie-Chisty Youth Society of Lenasia, took out a full-page banner in *Muslim Views*. "We condemn the mindless, barbaric atrocities perpetrated against fellow Muslims who were praising Nabi Muhammad (SAW) on 7 March in Azaadville," calling for the administration of mosques in the Transvaal to be transferred to committees tolerant of non-Deobandi viewpoints.[150]

An editorial in *Al-Qalam* by the Deobandi scholar Yunus Patel of Jamiatul Ulama Natal, written in the aftermath of Azaadville, mentions neither Azaadville nor the anti-apartheid

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[146] *Muslim Views*, March 1987, 2.

[147] *Al-Qalam*, 4 April 1987, 6.

[148] *Muslim Digest*, November 1986/February 1987, 2-3.

[149] *Muslim Views*, March 1987, 10.

[150] *Ibid.*, 8.

struggle. Characteristically, Patel maintains that Muslims must heed the simple principle to

"Strive to be kind, just and honest." He beseeches Muslims to avoid allegiance to any 'isms'

(communism, Marxism, capitalism, Zionism, Qadianism) as well as "casinos, cinemas, theaters,

immoral films, drugs, money lenders, and alcohol,"[151] but the lack of any direct engagement with

the most pressing issue of the day would seem to corroborate the accusations that Muslims made

against the local Deobandis.

Politicizing Sufism: The *Mawlud* and the *Halqa* in the 1980's and 1990's

At this key juncture in the middle of the 1980's, in the wake of Ebrahim Adam's lecture

and the assault on a *mawlud* celebration at Azaadville, and as anti-apartheid activism was

reaching its zenith, the public discourse on Sufism became imbricated with the discourse on

politics and the role of the `ulama'. On the one hand, the Majlisul Ulama, Jamiatul Ulama and

other Deobandis refused to participate in anti-apartheid politics and sometimes justified this

position in terms of their vision of Sufi ethics. For the Majlisul Ulama in particular, they

channeled Ashraf `Ali Thanawi's rejection of overt political engagement through Masihullah

Khan.[152] Hence *The Majlis* compared South African Muslim participation in "politics of the

kufaar" to Thanawi's condemnation of Muslim participation in politics with Hindus in India.[153]

The Majlis was opposed precisely to the very political upheavals that most enraptured

South Africa's younger Muslims. Its pages expressed almost no interest whatsoever in Palestine,

probably the single political topic that most galvanized the Cape's Muslims in particular. It

lampooned the Muslim Youth Movement, accusing it of supporting the "*mazhab*" of "Maududi-

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[151] *Al-Qalam*, May 1987, 8.

[152] On Thanawi's rejection of Muslim participation in anti-British political campaigns, especially the Khilafat movement, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf Ali Thanawi*, 39-44. Thanawi, like his pupil Masihullah Khan and Khan's followers in South Africa, was deeply critical of Muslims whom he believed were motivated only by political expediency.

[153] Unity?" *The Majlis,* Vol. 6, Issue 6, 1. Also see *The Majlis*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 8.

ism."[154] There is, in fact, a clear shunning of politics in general, and most of all transnational

Muslim political causes that end up pitting Sunnis and Shi`as together, or Muslims and non-

Muslims. *The Majlis'* essay "Muslims and Politics" summarily listed ten criticisms against

Muslim participation in '*kufr*' politics.[155] It is, of course, this avowed apolitical sentiment that

compelled many Muslim anti-apartheid activists to regard *The Majlis* as indirectly culpable for

apartheid itself. As *The Majlis* would often denigrate anti-apartheid politics as a form of

'*tashabbuh bil kuffar*' (imitating the unbelievers) alongside articles advocating the centrality of

proper beard length, it became readily parodied.

A case in point is the Majlisul Ulama's *The Interfaith Trap of Kufr*, written in response to

an interfaith seminar in Port Elizabeth. Using Ibn al-Jawzi's *Talbis Iblis* (*Satanic Deception*) as a

starting point, the text insists that Satan is constantly setting 'traps' for even the most otherwise

pious and upright `*ulama'*, and talk of 'interfaith' solidarity is among the most nefarious of these:

> Participation in a religious discussion with the kuffaar should be pure *Tableegh*
> and *Da'wat*. Muslims are not permitted to listen to the propagation of kufr. This
> is precisely what the inter-faith seminar involves. When a Muslim joins kuffaar
> preachers who propagate their baatil religions at the same gathering where the
> Muslim is supposed to propagate, and he sits with them on the same platform
> listening to their falsehood without having the right to refute it, then he aids and
> abets in the dissemination of kufr.[156]

It then attempts to dismantle some of the central tropes of Muslim-Christian dialogue, rejecting

the ecumenical interpretation of Qur'an 2:256 - 'There is no compulsion in religion' - that

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[154] *The Majlis*, Vol. 2, Issue 7, 13.

[155] It lists them as follows: (1) Muslim candidates stoop to get Hindu votes and visit Hindu temples, (2) sexes intermingle at political events, (3) "*kufr* songs" are sung at these gatherings, (4) "abuse and unedifying slogans" are chanted at such gatherings, (5) "Muslims voted for non-Muslims," (6) photography is used, (7) the *masjid* itself is used for political purposes, (8) non-Muslims are brought into the *masjid*, (9) these events involve "abuse, vilification and gheebat of Muslims by Muslims," and (10) the *ulama* who participate in such politics are "the worst of creation under the heavens and on the surface of the earth." See *The Majlis*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 5.

[156] Majlisul Ulama of South Africa, *The Interfaith Trap of Kufr*, Actonville: Young Men's Muslim Association, n.d., 17.

suggests "religious beliefs of others should be accepted and not decried,"[157] as well as the

common citation of Abraham as a 'father' of Judaism, Christian and Islam.[158]

What is especially noteworthy is *The Majlis*' defense of this stance in the language of

Sufism. At the same time that Deobandi scholars repulsed the call to become involved in anti-

apartheid politics, many also articulated this stance *in Sufi terms*:

> Those who clamour for Muslim participation in non-Muslim politics are short-sighted. *They lack true insight which is a quality of an Imaan adorned with the higher and beautiful angelic attributes which a Mu'min* [believer] *gains by companionship with Auliya* [Sufi saints]. Those Muslims shouting for Muslim participation in kufr politics are in the majority the followers of lowly desires and despicable motives … they are swayed by mob-rule and mob-opinion.[159]

In contrast, while activists assailed *The Majlis*, the Tablighi Jama`at and other Deobandis

for their seemingly 'apolitical' hesitance to confront the apartheid regime, Sufis in South Africa

organized along explicitly anti-apartheid political lines. In the wake of Azaadville, a letter

submitted to *Muslim Views* reiterated the 'rift' between the `ulama' and the Sufis: "When certain

Muslim scholars (Ulama) were creating schisms and hatred in the Muslim polity, the Sufis were

preaching love and harmony. When certain Muslim scholars indulged in declaring each other

infidel, the Sufis converted infidels to the fold of Islam."[160]

Farid Esack issued a popular manifesto, *But Musa Went to Fir-aun!* seeking to answer

Muslims' common objections to involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle, taking particular aim

at the apathy of conservative Deobandi `ulama' over the issue of interreligious activism. It is

implicitly written as a rejoinder to A. S. Desai of *The Majlis*, who singled out Esack in a series of

lengthy screeds.[161] When Esack writes "you talk about 'fighting under the banner of the *kuffaar*'

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[157] *Ibid.*, 40.

[158] *Ibid.*, 42. "Ibraaheem (alayhis salaam)," states *The Majlis*, "did not father the baatil religions of Judaism and Christianity. He did not originate a religion of shirk, kufr and idolatry."

[159] *The Majlis*, Vol. 6/7, Issue 2. (emphasis added)

[160] S. A. Arafi, "The Way of the Sufi," *Muslim Views*, June 1987, 10.

then it is nearly as if you want to say that we have lost out Islam … In fact, it is *because* of our

Islam that we are there," the 'you' to whom he refers is A. S. Desai. Esack writes, "To date, not a

single Muslim scholar or layperson has come out openly to support the apartheid system on the

basis of Islam. That, however, is not enough." He continues:

> Apartheid has not helped us to preserve out identity *as Muslims* but as Indians
> and Malays. It has ignored the fact that there are blacks who share our Islam with
> us but who are not allowed to share a complete identity with us ... If, on the other
> hand, our Islam is the most important thing in our identity, then Allah Himself
> has undertaken to protect it, and then we do not need [apartheid leaders] Botha,
> Malan, Rajbansi or Hendrickse to do it for us.[162]

Fatima Meer's foreword to Esack's text captured the extent of exasperation with the conservative

apoliticism of the `ulama':

> In Iran the *ulama* (theologians) lead the people in the revolution against the
> tyranny of the Shah. In India, they took the forefront in the resistance against
> colonial oppression. In South Africa the *ulama* have a reputation for reaction,
> narrow orthodoxy, narrow conservatism, and rigidity. They are known for
> keeping their noses safely buried in ritual and avoiding any controversy that
> might result in the slightest confrontation with the state.[163]

During this period the *mawlud* became politicized as the very devotional practices that

Deobandis had critiqued became platforms for opposing apartheid. Just a few months before the

Azaadville *mawlud* assault, an unnamed organization released a flier using a *mawlud* scheduled

for 16 November 1986 at the Habibia Mosque as a rallying point for global Islamic revolution

against oppression, both in South Africa and abroad, termed 'World Islamic Unity Week'. It

references a call from the Iranian Ayatollah Hussein `Ali Montazeri (d. 2009) for using the

mawlud as an occasion to draw the worldwide Muslim community into a common mission. It

beseeches South African Muslims to express solidarity with Muslims in Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon,

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[161] *The Majlis* detailed reply to Esack, "A Maulana's Batil Opinion," appeared in its Vol. 7, Issue 2 and Vol. 7, Issue 3.

[162] Farid Esack, *But Musa Went to Fir-aun! A compilation of questions and answers about the role of Muslims in the South African struggle for liberation*, Maitland, Cape Town: Clyson Printers, 1989, 2-5.

[163] Fatima Meer, in preface for Farid Esack, *But Musa Went to Fir-aun! A compilation of questions and answers about the role of Muslims in the South African struggle for liberation*, Maitland, Cape Town: Clyson Printers, 1989.

Afghanistan, with African American Muslims in the United States, and elsewhere. "Are not those who are languishing in detention without trial in apartheid South Africa, your and my brothers?" it asked of the *mawlud*'s supporters.[164] This politicization of the *mawlud* accrued a powerful symbolic resonance, invoked in similar terms long after the end of apartheid, as we will see.[165]

World Islamic Unity Week was endorsed by Qibla, the Muslim Youth Movement, the Call of Islam, several Islamic aid organizations, and - significantly - the Barelwi organization Ahle Sunnah wa Jammat. Conspicuously absent were the Transvaal or Natal Deobandi *`ulama'* councils. Similarly, a Cape *`alim* called for honoring the month of the *mawlud*, Rabi` al-Awwal, by working from personal reform to collective social reform: "Let us therefore endeavor - each in his own humble way - to reform ourselves, and then to bring about the Qur'anic Social Order based on the permanent values of freedom, tolerance, justice, equality, unity and brotherhood."[166] *Muslim Digest* editors called for "a united observance by the Muslims of the world of the birth anniversary of the holy Prophet Muhammad."[167] South African Barelwis responded by organizing a 'Meelad-e-Mustapha Conference' in Durban – a conference in Durban organized by the Barelwi Ahle Sunnat wal Jama`at of South Africa from 14-16 January 1983. A report claimed over 10,000

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[164] "International Islamic Unity Week: Commemorating the Birth of the Greatest Benefactor to Mankind-Nabi Muhammad (S.A.W.)," unpublished flyer. 16 November 1986. Islamic ephemera collection, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

[165] Using the *mawlud* as a socio-political platform continues today. During my research, for instance, I attended an all women's 'mass moulood' at Saldahna Bay, north of Cape Town, that was organized by the Islamic Unity Convention, an organization that is, in turn, closely affiliated to Qibla. The organizer of the *mawlud*, Magboeba David, explained to be that they see these *mawluds* explicitly as an effort to educate and empower poor women in the Cape through the Prophet's teachings. Most of the women there were disadvantaged Coloured Muslim women from the Cape Town neighborhoods of Mitchells Plain and Strand. The structure of the *mawlud* was standard, and culminated in the *qiyam*. I return to this fieldwork briefly in the final chapter.

[166] Muhammad Faaik Gamieldien, "The significance of Rabi-ul-Awwal," *Muslim Views*, September 1990, 13. This rousing call for political action during the time when Muslims are celebrating the *mawlud* is especially interesting since Faaik Gamieldien became, in later years, one of the most vocal critics of the *mawlud*, as the final chapter explains in detail.

[167] "Mecca Ulema Should Reconsider Fatwa Against Meelad-un-Nabie", *Muslim Digest*, July/August 1982, 193.

Muslims attended the *mawlud* at the Soofie Saheb tomb at Riverside in Durban.[168] Many also

reacted strongly to a *fatwa* condemning *mawlud* from the Saudi *`alim* Shaykh Aziz Bin Abdullah

Bin Baz, chairman of the Muslim World League who later became Grand Mufti of Saudi

Arabia.[169] The Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal allegedly reprinted this *fatwa* in South Africa, and the

Imam Ahmed Raza Academy promptly issued its own rebuttal.[170]

Significantly, the Claremont Main Road Masjid, which had by this point become a major

center of anti-apartheid activism in Cape Town, issued a booklet on the political ramifications of

the *mawlud* celebration. The Claremont Main Road Masjid dates to 1854 and holds an immense,

if often controversial, stature among Muslims at the Cape.[171] Under the leadership first of Hassan

Solomons, a towering figure in the anti-apartheid movement and later in the ANC, and later

Abdul Rashied Omar of the Muslim Youth Movement, the Claremont Main Road Masjid was the

locus of several intersecting strands of Muslim anti-apartheid activism.[172] The booklet introduces

the *mawlud* liturgy with the following statement rejecting the Deobandi criticism of *mawlud* as an

illicit innovation, while acknowledging the effect of Deobandi critiques:

> Despite the attacks on such a customary practice as *bid`a sayyi-a* (evil
> innovation) by conservative puritanical movements, *mauled* [*sic*] celebrations
> continue to be a popular activity all over the Muslim world. Our position vis-à-
> vis the debate has been a pragmatic one … We concur that neither the Prophet
> Muhammad nor his companions ever celebrated his birthday, and that it was an
> innovation which was introduced centuries after his demise. We believe, in

[168] "Meelad-e-Mustapha Conference' in Durban," *Muslim Digest*, Jan/Feb 1983.

[169] See Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 186-187 for a discussion of Baz's *fatwa* against *mawlud*.

[170] I say 'allegedly' as I have not been able to see a copy of the *fatwa* myself. This claim comes from Sunni World, *An Attack on Our Sunni Beliefs by the Wahabi/Deobandi/Tablighi Sect and Our Reply*, Durban: Sunni World, n.d. 7. For the Imam Ahmed Raza Academy's response, see http://www.sunnah.org/ publication/salafi/mawlid_refute.htm.

[171] In August of 1994, the Claremont Main Road Masjid invited the female African-American Muslim scholar Amina Wadud to give a pre-*khutbah* talk on women's rights in the mosque, becoming at that time the first mosque in the world to allow a female to address a mixed-gender audience. Many activists applauded the move, while *`ulama'* almost uniformly condemned it. The issue was debated vociferously in the August and September 1994 issues of *Muslim Views*, *The Majlis* and *Al-Qalam*.

[172] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*, 56-58.

consonance with Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi however, that innovation in itself has not been *a priori* condemned by Islam … It is our considered view that *mauled* celebrations has [*sic*] been and continues to be a revitalizing institution for our local community, and as such can be classified as a good innovation (*bid`a hasana*). We need to be clear however that it is not an obligation, and that its format is pliable (subject to change and reform).[173]

In some ways, we might locate this politicization of the *mawlud* in what Schimmel called "a shift in the mystical and mythical orientation of the *maulid* celebrations, toward a more practical, timebound emphasis on Muhammad's political and social achievements, his moral behaviour, and his intelligent way of organizing the communal life" that began in the nineteenth century.[174] Regardless, here we see a devotional practice abhorred by the Deobandis become a platform for political engagements that they find equally abhorrent.

During the same period in which the *mawlud* took on a political hue, activists called for organizing local '*halqas*', literally 'circles', for the purpose of collective *zikr* and for discussion of activist strategies. While these local 'circles' did not always have explicit Sufi inflections, classically the *halqa* has been closely associated with Sufism.[175] Predictably, as the popularity of South African *zikr halqas* peaked, *The Majlis* came down strongly against it, labeling it a practice of "Barelwi Bid`atis."[176]

In 1988 several Muslim leaders called for the creation *zikr halqas* for the explicit purpose of supporting those in held in detention by the apartheid government, specifically Achmad Cassiem, leader of Qibla, and Yusuf Patel. Calls for the *zikr* circles came from the president of the Muslim Judicial Council, Shaykh Nazeem Mohammed, and the director of the Muslim Youth

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[173] Claremont Main Road Mosque, "Mawlud an-Nabi: Poetry in Honor of the Prophet's Birth," Islamic ephemera collection, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

[174] Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 158.

[175] This is especially true in the Indian Sufi context. For a discussion of the *halqa-i zikr* among Sabiri Chishtis, see Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 194-196.

[176] "The Bid'ah of Halqah Thikr in the Musaajid," *The Majlis*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, 8.

Movement, Ebrahim Moosa.[177] A similar strategy for mobilizing Muslims along Sufi lines came from the Call of Islam. Farid Esack's popular pamphlet "The Struggle" encouraged self-reflection and purification, the formation of activist *halqas* in the struggle against apartheid, and greater awareness of the intimate link between personal decisions and politics. The author describes an incident from his childhood when apartheid security forces asked him why he was not as politically quiescent as the Tablighis. "Years ago - when I was still in school - the Security Police wanted to know why I could not be as decent as 'die ander mense met die kort jurkies en die lang baarde' ['the other men with the short tunics and the long beards'].”[178]

Not unlike Deobandi discourses, Esack deploys the quintessentially Sufi vocabulary of *tazkiya* in linking self- and social-transformation; what distinguishes his approach from Deobandis' is the entirely different approach to political engagement: "We are then called upon to become participants in history and instruments in the Hands of Allah," he writes. "We must understand that this participation does not take place in an ideal environment or in a vacuum, but in a situation of conflict; a situation which has been reinforced by division, corruption, selfishness and hunger for power. Challenging this whilst struggling on the road to *tazkiyyah* (self transformation) will enable us to become subjects in history and not merely objects.”[179]

The Muslim Student Movement also recognized the power of the *halqa* in organizing against apartheid, calling for students to form activist circles (*halaqat*). For the MYM, the *halqa* was both the "epicenter of the Islamic Movement's programme" and "the base for ideological training." Like the Call of Islam, they linked disciplines of the self to personal transformation and, by extension, social transformation: "Effectively the Halqah is the base from which a change in the individual should lead to a change in society and the reconstruction of the entire social

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[177] "Call for Dhikr to Show Solidarity," *Muslim Views*, March 1988, 3.

[178] The Call of Islam, *The Struggle*, Cape Town: Call of Islam, 1988, 12.

[179] *Ibid.*, 14.

order in accordance with the Islamic system of life."[180]

Contesting Deobandi `ulama' in the twilight of apartheid

The early 1990's were a euphoric period for many Muslims, as the ruling government unbanned political parties and released political dissidents, and South Africa's Muslims prepared for their first democratic elections in 1994. The excitement of the first half of the 1990's quickly gave way to the grim realities of 'post' apartheid South Africa; Muslim anti-crime vigilantism, largely in the form of PAGAD, dominated attention and Deobandi-Sufi clashes largely disappeared from view during this period.[181] Even if public clashes subsided, debates *about* the politics of Deoband in South Africa continued unabated.

A controversy at a mosque in Paarl near Cape Town erupted in 1991, involving at first, not disputed Sufi practices but the right of an imam to appoint officials in the committee administering the mosque. Evidently the dispute quickly devolved from one about executive power within the mosque committee to one about the imam's views on politics in the 'new' South Africa. The imam, Shaykh Rafiek, had spoken out against Muslims' activism alongside non-Muslims, openly criticized Qibla and the Muslim Youth Movement branch in Paarl, and even banned his congregants from attending the annual death of Imam Abdullah Haron, the early activist who died at the hands of apartheid security forces in 1969.[182] Taking this line had become common; *The Majlis* had previously rejected taking Imam Haron as a model, stating that

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[180] Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, *From Where Shall We Begin?* Durban: Muslim Youth Movement, n.d. 13.

[181] PAGAD has received a good deal of critical and scholarly attention in recent years. See for instance, Suren Pillay, "Problematising the making of good and evil: Gangs and PAGAD," *Critical Arts* 16, 2 (2002): 38-75; Sindre Bangstad, "Hydra's Heads: PAGAD and Responses to the PAGAD Phenomenon in a Cape Muslim Community," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, 1 (2005): 187-208; as well as Keith Gottschalk, *Vigilantism v. the State: a case study of the rise and fall of PAGAD, 1996-2000*, Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2005. Most of this literature approaches the PAGAD phenomenon from the perspective of terrorism and security studies, rather than its invocation of Islamic symbolisms and language in its activism.

[182] *Muslim Views*, September 1991.

'martyrdom' for a '*kufr*' cause is not martyrdom at all."[183] A certain Y. Abrahams of Paarl wrote: "These people want to change our deen [religion] and say Muslims must go to the townships and help the black kuffaar [unbelievers] and to tell our children to fight and make trouble against the government. They demand our Shaykh to talk about politics or things going on in the world, Israel and wherever. Israel has got nothing to do with us, a good Muslim do not [*sic*] concern himself with other people's business ... Shaykh [Rafiek] was right in banning the Imam Haron commemoration. Today, Imam Haron, tomorrow Imam Khomeini to lead our youth astray."[184]

In the ensuing debate, Cape Muslims unleashed a torrent of anti-Deobandi sentiment. "It is well known that the distorted Deobandi-Islam, backed by Fahd's American petro-rials has successfully penetrated Transvaal and Natal," wrote a Muslim from Athlone. "However, I find it very disturbing that such 'Islam' is propagated in nearby Paarl ... The solution to stopping this menace has to be through the education of such Shaykhs, Imaams and the public and to warn and reveal to them how the Deobandis (with the aid of imperialists) are preventing Islam from successfully opposing injustices in this world."[185] A woman from the Cape township of Gugulethu noted that Y. Abrahams dared to call the blacks "kufaar" even "at a time when the white boers [Afrikaner farmers] have stopped calling us 'kaffirs'," the slang designation for blacks ultimately derived from the Arabic word *kafir* and which most South Africans consider offensive to the point of being nearly unutterable.[186] She continues:

> I would like to advise you, my Muslim brother, please learn the real Islam and
> take it to the black people of this country. Why are we only good for you as
> customers in your shops, as servants in your homes but not as fellow oppressed

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[183] "A Sinful Claim," *The Majlis*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 1 and 9. This piece takes issue with *Al-Qalam* for that paper's criticism of a *khutba* by a Port Elizabeth *imam* that *Al-Qalam* construed as support for the apartheid regime. The subject was, in the *Majlis'* own words, the "hardship and disaster which Muslims suffered at the hands of the 'oppressed' blacks."

[184] *Muslim Views*, September 1991, 35.

[185] *Muslim Views*, October 1991, 18.

[186] The word is perhaps akin to the 'n-word' in American English, but unlike that term, it has not been subversively re-appropriated by those to whom it referred, which may contribute to its continued 'unspeakability'.

and fellow Muslims? We have been dehumanized for a very long time now, and it will only be through Islam that all people will really be liberated. Not the 'American Islam', the Islam that says pray, fast, perform Hajj and keep quiet. NO! I am talking about the Islam that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) practiced, the Islam that stood for justice, peace and love. In that order.[187]

Thus, on the eve of South Africa's transition to democracy, a wide swath of the country's Muslims had aligned against the Deobandi *`ulama'* and their perceived ineffectual response to the political exigencies of the time. Debates between Deobandis and Barelwis continued unabated throughout this period, but they did so against a growing surge of Muslims who felt disenchanted with the debates that they carried out in public view. Many Muslims saw ongoing feuds over *mawlud* and *`urs* festivities as bringing the South African Muslims towards an impasse. Pamphlet wars, meetings, lectures, and debates did not resolve these disputes; they only enflamed the tension between both sides. While many placed the onus upon the Deobandi *`ulama'* for the social damage of these quarrels, some blamed the Indian *`ulama'* as a whole. This chapter has attempted to trace the delicate contours of these shifting polemical positions.

South Africa's Sufi legacy was at stake in these polemics. Some Deobandis defended their aloofness from politics in terms of their Sufi ideals, while their detractors defended their political engagements in terms of Sufism as well. At stake also was Sufism itself: who claimed the authority to define it, and on what grounds? The final chapter will show how debates over Sufism changed in the post-apartheid period.

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[187] *Ibid*.

CHAPTER SIX

New Rivalries, New Rhetoric: Sufism, Media and 'Heritage' after Apartheid

On Sunday, 31 December 2000, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)

screened a documentary on Muslims in the Western Cape.[1] What made this documentary on Cape

Muslims stand out among others was the portrayal of pilgrims at the shrine of the Sufi saint

Abdurahman Moturu on Robben Island, the island off the coast of Cape Town on which the

apartheid government kept its most important political prisoners and which remains today both a

potent symbol of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement and a popular tourist destination. The

documentary depicted pilgrims placing their foreheads on the tomb as if in prostration. Such a

seemingly insignificant gesture of piety sparked a firestorm that lasted for weeks, involved every

major Muslim publication in the country and even one of its largest newspapers, the *Cape Argus*.

The ensuing clash is a lens onto conflicting dynamics within the South African Muslim

community over reverence for its Sufi saints, the political legacy of anti-apartheid activism and

even the nature of monotheism itself. More than mere doctrine was at stake; competing interests

among South African Muslims scrambled to claim a voice in a newly diversified post-apartheid

mediascape. It was as much as clash over who could claim the authority to represent 'Islam' to a

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[1] I have not been able to see this documentary myself, despite contacting SABC in an attempt to procure a copy. As I outline below, I have gleaned information about this event through reports in local Muslim media and major newspapers in the Cape.

post-apartheid South Africa as a clash over doctrine.[2] The clash was certainly a "competition and struggle over the meanings of symbols," but it was also a struggle over authority to decide what constitutes a symbol in the first place.[3] The fact that some Muslims place their foreheads on Sufi saints' tombs is not 'news'; it became newsworthy precisely because of the circulation of this image in local media, and the ensuing battle over whether, and to what extent, the action represents normative Muslim piety.

The visual and aural space of media compounds this struggle over defining symbols and gestures. In this context, as I will show below, participation in contested rituals takes on a sort of "performative reflexivity," to borrow from Victor Turner.[4] Indeed, many of the participants in Sufi devotions in the Cape are acutely aware of these contestations. While the Muslim who placed his forehead on the tomb of Abdurrahman Moturu unwittingly became a 'performer' of a contested practice, in a more quotidian sense, participants also perform their vision of devotional normativity every day that they attend local `urs events and engage in practices that they know are widely contested ones. Participating in these practices becomes a way of self-consciously reasserting the 'cultural heritage' of Cape Sufism, a means of claiming it from hostile critiques, as we will see.

The post-apartheid proliferation of religious media, and the religious publics they call into being, enabled an expansion of the very parameters of participation in Deobandi-Barelwi debates over Sufism, to the point that community-wide debates over *mawlud* or 'grave worship' now involve individuals who were not traditionally partisans to them; in the Cape, for example,

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[2] One could compare this to a similar contestation over the control of media between Sufis and their critics in 1930's Morocco. Salafi-inspired critics were driven as much by a need to domesticate and control the media 'spectacle' of public Sufi rituals in newspapers and photographs as they were by doctrinal opposition to Sufism. See Emilio Spadola, "The scandal of ecstasy: communication, Sufi rites and social reform in 1930's Morocco," *Contemporary Islam* 2, 2 (2008): 119-138.

[3] Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 9.

[4] Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York: PAJ Publications, 24; quoted in Nilufer Göle, "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, 1 (2002): 173-190, at 183.

debates over the legitimacy of *mawlud* occur annually in various media, and the principal antagonists are rarely identified as 'Deobandi', 'Tablighi' or 'Barelwi' as they often were in earlier polemics. In short, Muslims who, several generations ago, may have been unaware even of the existence of 'Indian' debates on Sufi devotional practices are now 'expected' to have opinions on them. This is especially ironic in light of the widespread call to 'export' these debates back to the Indian subcontinent during the apartheid era.

This chapter reveals, moreover, new shifts in the ways Sufis in South Africa have defended their practices on the ground. As we saw a politicization of Sufism in the late apartheid era, in this chapter, we will see a largely *post*-apartheid reimagining of the Cape's pioneering Sufis as essential elements of a composite South African Muslim 'culture' and as erstwhile 'freedom fighters'. As I explain below, the Deobandi critique of Sufi devotions as 'culture' takes on a new meaning as Sufis, particularly in the Western Cape, self-consciously reasserted the 'cultural heritage' of Sufi sites. In the following, I will place this discursive shift in the context of post-apartheid constitutional frameworks that granted Muslims access to new media outlets and guaranteed their 'cultural rights'.

Media, Law and Muslim Publics: Before and After Apartheid

To understand how new forms of media enabled new means of debating Sufi devotional practices, it is necessary to understand the restrictions on such debates under apartheid and, more broadly, the kinds of official 'publics' that the state authorized. During apartheid, the government rigidly policed any potentially subversive expressions of religious sentiment in public. To the extent that Muslim publics existed under apartheid, they are most accurately understood as *counterpublics*, manifest not through officially authorized venues but in subversive, unauthorized ones, ranging from manifestos distributed in mosques to Muslim newsletters constantly threatened with closure, from mass protests in the townships to the highly politicized funerals of

martyrs to apartheid's aggression.[5] Under apartheid there was no 'religious' radio or television

aside from what the government-run South African Broadcasting Corporation deemed

acceptable.[6]

Religiously mobilized identities would have clashed with the officially sanctioned racial

publics that the apartheid government went to great lengths to foster and maintain. We can

witness this most prominently in the apartheid government's policy of 'separate development'.[7]

The basic notion behind 'separate development' was that South Africa was comprised of multiple

cultures that each possessed its own distinctive 'essence', an essence that should be nurtured but

strictly prevented from intermingling with others. In the 1950's, the doctrine of "separate

development" began to make its distinct imprint on urban space and on forms of cultural

expression, including media.

One can see this most clearly in the government's policy towards its Indian population.

The government finally granted formal citizenship to Indians for the first time only in 1961 and

subsequently sought to encourage the idea of Indians as a singular, unified and separate cultural

enclave. It provided official venues for Indian music, dance, and film, and subsidized religious

performances and the study of Indian classic texts at universities, such as the University of

Durban-Westville, at the time reserved almost exclusively for Indians. The government even

supported an Indian radio station, Lotus FM, with programming in Hindi, Tamil and Urdu that

cautiously avoided nearly all forms of overtly religious programming.

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[5] Shamil Jeppie has noted the impact of funerals for Muslims killed by security forces in 1984 and 1985. The Cape Flats became the scene of major rallies of upwards of 15,000 people during this period. See his "Amandla and Allahu Akbar: Muslims and Resistance in South Africa, c. 1970-1987," 3-5.

[6] Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Mediated Religion in South Africa: Balancing Air-time and Rights Claims," in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, media and the public sphere*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 261.

[7] A propaganda pamphlet issued by the South African Information Service in 1966, *Progress through Separate Development: South Africa in Peaceful Transition*, spells out this notion in detail. For a detailed discussion of separate development, see for example, Charles Hamm, "'The Constant Companion of Man': Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music," *Popular Music* 10, 2 (1991): 147-173.

The anthropologist Blom Hansen has argued that the policy of 'separate development' aimed to convert "race into space" and thereby create "practices whose alleged incommensurability would, in turn, justify the project of separation itself. In this way, apartheid sought to produce its own cause - that is, to make effective the distinctions the state claimed were natural."[8] Instead of allowing religious publics to flourish openly, apartheid assimilated religion to the larger taxonomies of race. Apartheid era censuses reflect the 'natural' conditions they sought to foster in the public domain and in urban space. While the government recorded the religious affiliations of its citizens, the totalizing racial schematic of the apartheid census renders religious affiliation nearly inconsequential in terms of the everyday exigencies of the state. Race became the arch-criterion according to which sub-criteria such as religious affiliation were quantified and arranged.[9]

The demise of apartheid upended this project of 'separate development' and created new identitarian anxieties in its wake. By the 1980's, these boundaries had already begun to fray. As Farid Esack stated: "Apartheid has not helped us to preserve our identity *as Muslims* but as Indians and Malays. It has ignored the fact that there are blacks who share our Islam with us but who are not allowed to share a complete identity with us."[10] With the end of apartheid, we witness an abrupt shift from subversive religious publics to officially authorized ones. Muslims began to mobilize in new forms of media not as Indians or Malays, but *as Muslims*.

New legal dispensation and rights discourses enabled these post-apartheid Muslim publics to emerge. The post-apartheid South African constitution finally came into effect on

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[8] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Melancholia of Freedom: Humour and Nostalgia among Indians in South Africa," *Modern Drama* 48, 2 (2005): 297-315, at 301.

[9] In the 1970 population, under the racial group 'Bantu', respondents are offered the possibility of the full gamut of Christian denominations, but neither 'traditional' African religions nor Islam are offered as a possibility for blacks, hence the category of 'other/unspecified' ends up constituting 32.06% in 1960 and 28.44% in 1970. When the category of 'other' comprises nearly a third of one's respondents, it seems, it may be wise to recalibrate the categories offered. South African Department of Statistics. *Bevolkingsensus 1970: Kerkverband*. Verslag No. 02-05-03, 99.

[10] Farid Esack, *But Musa Went to Fir-aun!*, 2.

February 4, 1997 and replaced the Interim Constitution of 1993. There are two aspects of this new legal environment that are germane here. First, one of the key tasks of the post-apartheid government was reapportioning airtime in radio and television to reflect South Africa's religious diversity.[11] To this end, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, or IBA, was created in March 1994 to distribute and regulate religious broadcasting licenses. In the coming years, numerous Muslim radio stations emerged through the IBA, including Voice of the Cape and Radio 786 in Cape Town, Radio Ansaar and Radio Azaania in Durban, Radio Islam and The Voice in Johannesburg, among others, that would become major sites for public debate over Sufi devotional practices.[12] Second, the constitution ensured that "persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right … to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language."[13] Such broad language was used to great effect to protect Sufi saints' tombs against destruction in the 1990's, as I explain further.

Mawlud on the Radio, 'Grave Worship' on TV: New Parameters of Religious Debate

Precisely because there was competition within the Muslim community to take advantage of the expansion of officially authorized religious media, there was a heightened concern among Muslims to represent their sectarian interests to a wider South African public. This new competition frames how we ought to understand a proliferation of public debate about Sufi devotions in radio and television.

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[11] Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Mediated Religion in South Africa: Balancing Airtime and Rights Claims," 169.

[12] For a general survey of post-apartheid Islamic radio in South Africa, see Muhammed Haron, "The South African Muslims Making (Air)Waves During the Period of Transformation," in David Chidester, Abdulkader Tayob and Wolfram Weisse, eds. *Religion, Politics and Identity in a Changing South Africa*, New York: Waxmann Publishing, 2004, 125-160.

[13] *Constitution of South Africa*, 1996, Section 31 (a).

Debating the legitimacy of celebrating the Prophet's birth has become a standard feature of the month of Rabi` al-Awwal across South Africa. Here I will use one of these debates in March of 2010 to foreground how the frames of debate over Sufi devotions have expanded since the end of apartheid. The Voice of the Cape, one of two Muslim radio stations in the Cape, broadcast a debate over *mawlud* and the nature of *bid`a* on 25 March 2010. The debate had initially been planned as a live *munazara*-style discussion between Hafiz Fuzail Soofie of Durban, a representative of the Barelwi-inclined Chishti Nizami Habibi Order of Pietermaritzburg, and Faiek Gamieldien of Cape Town, a controversial Salafi-inclined graduate of Al-Azhar. I attended what many thought would be a live debate over *mawlud* at Masjid al-Quds in Gatesville, Cape Town on 24 March. It turned out that Faiek Gamieldien refused to debate in person, and so his recorded rebuttal aired on Voice of the Cape radio the following day.

Hafiz Fuzail located the celebration of *mawlud* in the very theodicy of Islam; the first sin of Satan was rejecting the birth of the Prophet Adam. It is an honor that a Muslim owes to all prophets and, he argues, firmly established in the Qur'an itself:

> If to commemorate, to honor, to salute the day in which a *nabi* is born is the *sunna* which is established by Allah Subhana wa Ta'ala in the Holy Qur'an, then to remember the *milad*, to commemorate the *milad*, to celebrate the *milad*, to observe the *milad* of the Holy Prophet (S) is in keeping with the mood, and the spirit, and the word of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, from the point of view of the terminology of Shari`a, to speak about the *mawlud*, to remember the *mawlud*, to salute that day, to regard the day as important, cannot be a *bid`ah* from a Shari`a perspective, because it has its source, it has its roots, it has its origin in Qur'an.[14]

Shaykh Fuzail then put forth two criteria for what constitutes "*bid`a zalala*," an 'illicit innovation': it must, first, have no origin and no proof or precedent in the Qur'an and *sunna*, *and* must, secondly, contradict the Qur'an and *sunna*. The practice of singing praises of Muhammad during the *mawlud*, he added, is firmly established through God's own praise for his Prophet in the Qur'an. What was remarkable about Shaykh Fuzail's argument was how little it referenced the Deobandi-Barelwi arguments for and against *mawlud* and how much it relied on direct

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[14] Hafiz Fuzail Soofie, lecture at Masjidul Quds, Gatesville, Cape Town, 24 March 2010. The lecture aired live on Voice of the Cape.

reference to the Qur'an and *hadith*.

Shaykh Gamieldien began his rebuttal[15] with similar use of the Qur'an, referencing Qur'an 5:3 in his own words: "Today I have completed your *din* for you" so, he added, nothing can be "added or subtracted" from it, and *mawlud* is an addition to the religion. Gamieldien invoked Jalal al-din Suyuti's *fatwa* on *mawlud*, stipulating only that it should consist, firstly, of recitation of parts of the Qur'an, secondly of excerpts from *sirah*, thirdly of account of wonders that took place during Prophet's birth, and fourthly, of a meal, after which everyone should disburse and nothing else should be done. He elaborated:

> I regard *mawlud*, which I have celebrated all my life, as a meritorious act if done properly and if it consists, first, a lecture on the biography and life of the Nabi (S) his beautiful birth and his beautiful ending, and the occasion is used to exhort Muslims to show their love of the Nabi by following the Qur'an and the *sunna* of our beloved Prophet ... The issue is not about the celebration of *mawlud*. The issue is about the excesses, the *ghuluw*, 'extremism', which has entered into our community in the celebration of *mawlud*, and ultimately in the name of Islam.

The 'extremism' in question includes, among other things, the "wasting of money," holding of all night vigil prayers, since the only "all-night *tahajjud*" (reading of the Qur'an) that Muslims are commanded to do, he explained, is night of *laylat al-qadr* during Ramadan, and speaking at the *mawlud* about issues that have nothing to do with Islam.[16]

Significantly, Gamieldien strayed from *mawlud* to reflect more broadly on graves and their veneration, asserting that the Prophet Muhammad taught the height of a grave should not exceed "the span of a hand" in order to distinguish Muslims' graves from those of idol-worshippers. "Speak to Allah directly," he pleaded. "In *sujud* [prostration], there is no screen between you and Allah Ta'ala." How is it that Satan, he asked, spoke directly to God, asking for respite until the Day of Judgment, but we think that pious Muslims are unable do so?

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[15] Faiek Gamieldien, lecture on Voice of the Cape, 25 March 2010.

[16] For example, in Gamieldien's words, that "the Prophet stuck his hand out of his grave and greeted somebody," which speakers did actually discuss during a separate *mawlud* that I attended at Masjidul Quds in Gatesville on 26 February 2010.

In this debate, there was no mention of, and virtually no reference towards, classic Deobandi and Barelwi argumentation over *mawlud*. The issue of standing in respect of the Prophet (*qiyam*) did not arise, for instance. Debating the issue on the radio, moreover, expanded the parameters of debate beyond its traditional partisans; in the days following the debate, the chat forums of Voice of the Cape and other local websites buzzed with discussion about *mawlud*. To the extent that debates over *mawlud* are part of the popular discourse, it is perhaps inevitable that such debate will be articulated in terms that are easily accessible to Muslim publics. As Eickelman and Piscatori have suggested, the frame of these public debates incorporate not just *`ulama'*, but "self-ascribed religious authorities, secular intellectuals, Sufi orders, mothers, students, workers, engineers, and many others."[17]

A similar controversy brought new interlocutors into the purview of debates over 'grave worship', this one also involving Gamieldien. His central place in these debates, not as a Deobandi scholar but as a Salafi, points to the shifting terrains of participation in anti-Sufi polemics and counter-polemics. No longer the sole domain of Deobandi scholars and their 'Indian' interlocutors, in the post-apartheid era, many who were not classical partisans in these debates became, in a sense, 'obligated' to have an opinion on them.

The SABC documentary of 31 December 2001, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, unleashed a fierce war of words among the Cape's Muslims; at least forty letters criticizing or defending the Cape's Sufi shrine devotions were printed in local newspapers.[18] The controversy surrounding Shaykh Gamieldien was significant enough to elicit a response directly

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[17] Eickelman and Salvatore, preface in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, xii, quoted in Abdulkader Tayob, "Muslim Public Claiming Heritage in Post-Apartheid Cape Town," *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 24/25 (2004/5): 78-104, at 80-81.

[18] Wahbie Long and Don Foster did a 'discourse analysis' of 41 of these letters. See their "Dissension in the Ranks: The 'Sufi'-'Wahhabi' Debate," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 17, 1 (2004): 67-93.

from a major Sufi of the Alawi order with close ties to Cape Town, Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki, whose spiritual patronage is responsible for the creation of Cape Town's Al-Zawiya.[19]

Here I will do a close reading of one of these venues, the *Cape Argus*, to tease out the plethora of overlapping positions and discourses at work in this controversy. The letter that initiated this war of editorials was Shaykh Gamieldien's letter to the *Cape Argus* that, besides labeling these practices as *shirk*, militated directly against the post-apartheid re-envisioning of Sufism as 'cultural heritage' in the Cape, and sought to reclaim the anti-apartheid mantle from the Sufis. Unlike discourses of the apartheid era, when Deobandis' critiques of Sufi devotional practices went hand-in-hand with their critiques of political engagement, critics like Gamieldien are cashing in on political capital that Muslims earned after the end of apartheid. Speaking of the image of Muslims at the `urs of Sayyid Moturu on Robben Island placing their foreheads on the tomb, he wrote:

> I wish to state clearly and categorically that this kind of 'shrine-worship' or 'shrine-honouring' has absolutely nothing to do with Islam as a religion nor with its sense of spirituality. In fact Islam abhors such practices as shirk (ascribing partners to Allah) which is an unpardonable sin. Islam prides itself on its uncompromising monotheism and the absence of forms and figures in its sacred spaces.
>   The erection of shrines to the dead and the veneration of such shrines are anathema to those fundamental beliefs. In fact the eradication of pagan beliefs and the physical destruction of all forms of idolatry were the central focus of the calling of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) … And to add further insult to injury the present shrine was constructed by the apartheid regime in 1969, two hundred and fifteen years after the death of Sayed Abdurahman Moturu, also known as Hadji Matarim, who is supposed to be buried there. *This was yet another elaborate ploy by the apartheid regime to keep the Muslims in spiritual serfdom.* Many are the Muslims, but few are those who have accepted Islam.[20]

Responses invoked the Cape Sufi 'heritage' that Gamieldien had indirectly denigrated. One called for "utmost respect for our forebears" and the "legacy left by our ancestors," insisting that his reverence for the Cape's Sufi saints is nothing but the most sincere kind:

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[19] http://www.sunnah.org/aqida/cape_town_wahabi/complete_refutation_shaykh_faiik.htm.

[20] Sheikh Faaik Gamieldien, "Islam prides itself on monotheism," *Cape Argus*, 8 January 2001, 11. (emphasis added)

I am proud to continue the legacy by teaching my children about the Muslim political exiles and their successes in building a strong community. The shrines are the only remnants of a proud history that came under severe pressure by colonialism and apartheid. That the Muslim community survived, even flourished, bears testimony to the role played by these great and inspiring leaders. Let me be clear about one of the sheikh's accusations. My attachment to the shrines has absolutely nothing to do with 'shrine worship' or compromising my belief in monotheism as his seems to suggest. The sheikh's views are sad and small-minded. I urge him to rethink the link between the shrines and the Muslim community's survival at the Cape under harsh and repressive conditions. I trust he will replace his puritanical condemnation with greater respect and understanding.[21]

Such responses to Gamieldien reframed Sufi devotions as 'cultural heritage', in accord with the

prevailing 'cultural rights' discourse that the post-apartheid constitution enshrined in 1996, and

which Muslims used to defend Sufi gravesites, as I explain below. A letter from Nisaar Dawood,

the editor of *Al-Qalam*, underscores this Sufism-as-culture argument explicitly:

In his letter that appeared in the Cape Argus on Monday, January 8, 2001, Sheikh Faaik Gamieldien seems to demonstrate very little understanding of the *interconnectedness between religion and culture*. In his scathing criticism of people who visit and pray at the Karamats (Muslim shrines), he fails to understand that the expression of Islam and many of its rituals is fundamentally linked to the *cultural heritage* of the local population.[22]

Other rebuttals to Gamieldien appealed to the notion, popular in Barelwi rhetoric, that visiting

saints' tombs is not 'worship' at all but mere 'reverence':

Once again we find that another Aalim (a Muslim scholar) has found the time and energy to further divide the already splintered Muslim community of the Western Cape … Muslims do not worship the saints (may God bless them) but honour them for bringing the light of Islam to all dark corners of the world and leading our foregathers away from idolatry and paganism. God Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, has chosen them to serve Him and spread His Word. Is it not irresponsible for this learned sheikh to say that the apartheid regime constructed the shrine at Robben Island 'to keep the Muslims in spiritual serfdom' while at the same time vehemently discouraging visits to the shrine?[23]

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[21] Mogamad Fuad Norodien, "Visits to Muslim shrines defended," *Cape Argus*, 11 January 2001, 13.

[22] Nisaar Dawood, Acting Editor, *Al-Qalam*, "Visits to Muslim shrines defended," *Cape Argus*, 11 January 2001, 13. (emphasis added)

[23] Chairman, Cape Mazaar Society, "Stop this campaign of misinformation," *Cape Argus*, 19 January 2001, 11.

A Barelwi scholar and chairman of the Sunni Ulama Council contributed a now-familiar response, comparable to Abdun Nabi Hamidi's rebuff of the Majlisul Ulama:[24] criticisms of Sufi devotional practices are purely theoretical and have no grounding in what actually happens at the shrines. "I do not think that Gamieldien has ever been to a celebration of this nature because of his complete ignorance of what happens at a tomb of a holy one. Allah is praised, Our Beloved Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) is praised and salutations sent upon Him whereafter Allah is asked to bless his friend who lies resting in his tomb. This does not impute partners to Allah because the intention to do so is not present."[25]

Two sorts of responses *supported* Gamieldien's claims. First, in a new slant on the classic Deobandi criticism of Sufi shrines as *israf*, a 'waste' of money, one sort said that funds spent on the shrines' upkeep could be better spent tackling the needs of post-apartheid South Africa. "It is ridiculous to ask people to donate R 500 000 to restore a shrine when thousands are starving," one participant in this conversation claimed. And if one is going to cast the Sufi saints as erstwhile freedom fighters, then why not "build a shrine to Imam Abdullah Haroon and to Hector Petersen, as the Soweto uprisings are directly responsible for us being able to introduce Muslim Personal Law on our statute books today?"[26]

The second kind of support for Gamieldien was far more grounded in classic Deobandi critiques, invoking the Barelwis and particularly critical in its interrogation of 'culture':

> Cultural influences, which do not conflict with Islamic teachings, are tolerable. However a cultural practice, which leads to the corruption of Islamic beliefs, is totally forbidden. It is this that worship at shrines was the main focus of the learned Sheikh's condemnation … Sheikh Yusuf, our esteemed forefather, would certainly have frowned upon these practices, which are clearly not Islamic, but obviously have their origins in various religions of the East. *One only has to witness some of the rituals of the Barelwi sect in India to appreciate the truth of Sheikh Faiek's arguments*. …Grave worship is not merely evil, but is Satan's

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[24] See pg. 200, n. 37.

[25] Ebrahim Khan, Chairman, Sunni Ulama Council, "Allah is best guide on shrines," *Cape Argus*, 22 January 2001, 11.

[26] S. Ismail, "Shrine money misdirected," *Cape Argus*, 16 January 2001, 11.

age-old trap door to polytheism. Sheikh Faiek's departure from the traditional Cape Muslim scholar's silence in the face of numerous un-Islamic tendencies among Muslims is welcomed with much relief and optimism.[27]

Gamieldien responded, finally, with the lapidary rhetoric typical of Salafi critiques of Sufi practices: if it is not explicitly authorized in the Qur'an, it cannot possibly be justified:

> By Islam I mean the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, and not the man-made Islam of Mr. Dawood when he says 'Muslims from various cultural backgrounds can only enrich the existing practices and understanding of Islam', nor the Islam of Mr. Norodien who urges us 'to rethink the link between the shrines and the Muslim community's survival at the Cape under harsh and repressive conditions'. May I remind Mr. Norodien that the survival of all depends on the Grace of Allah and on nothing else, least of all shrines of bricks and mortar … There is no 'interconnectedness between religion and culture'. *There is only Islam, ad Din or way of life, revealed by the Divine, whose system of belief can therefore never be subject to 'critical questions'.*[28]

In explicitly calling Islam a 'system', Gamieldien locates his attack on shrine-based devotions in the language of ways 'Islam' itself is objectified, seen as a totalizing system of thought and practice.[29] It is a form of thinking about Islam that resonates far more deeply with Salafi and modernist discourses about Islam as a total socio-political system than it does with Deobandis' traditionalist approach; Deobandis have, for the most part, consciously eschewed this sort of language, as I discussed in the second chapter. But more importantly, the language that Gamieldien uses here points to new parameters for debating Sufi devotions and new vocabularies for how those debates take place after apartheid.

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[27] Mohammed Riaad Akhalwaya, "Religion and culture need clear distinction," *Cape Argus*, 19 January 2001, 11. (emphasis added)

[28] Sheikh Faaik Gamieldien, "Survival of all depends on Grace of Allah, not shrines of brick or mortar," *Cape Argus*, 23 January 2001, 13. (emphasis added)

[29] For a now-classic discussion of how 'Islam' has been objectified and systematized in contemporary discourses, see Dale Eickelman and John Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 42.

Devotional Piety after Apartheid: *Mawlud*, *Kramats* and the Cape Sufi 'Heritage'

The end of apartheid saw an efflorescence of Sufism in South Africa and particularly in the Cape, what one scholar has called a "post-apartheid Sufi resurgence" in South Africa.[30] Numerous renowned Sufis have established local branches of their orders in Cape Town, discussions about Sufism abound on the Cape's Muslim radio stations, and the number of local *zikr halqas* has expanded dramatically.[31]

In this period, the Cape became a major regional center for the Chishti, Naqshbandi, 'Alawi and Qadiri Sufi orders, though the groundwork for this shift was evidence long prior to this era. Sayyid Mehboob Ali Shah introduced the Chishti Nizami line to South Africa as early as 1968. He was a *khalifa* of Sayyid Faqir Muhammad Shah, successor to Habib Ali Shah of Hyderabad, and a local Chishti branch was founded in honor of Faqir Muhammad Shah.[32] Sayyid Mehboob Ali Shah died on 25 October 2005 and is buried in Cape Town.[33] More recently, the Cape Town visit in 1997 of Shaykh Muhammad bin `Alawi of Mecca solidified the `Alawi order in the Cape.[34] Shaykh Muhammad Nizam Adil al-Haqqani of the Naqshbandi Haqqani order arrived in 2000 to integrate the local Naqshbandi order, led by Yusuf da Costa and Hasan Walele, into its network. During their visit they accepted initiations from local Muslims and visited the *kramats*, while broadcasting their *zikrs* live on the Voice of the Cape radio station.[35]

An important part of this growing interest and participation in Cape Sufism is a revival of *mawlud* historiography. Historians of Cape Islam know that Muslims have celebrated *mawlud*

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[30] Armien Cassiem, "Post-Apartheid Sufi Resurgence," *ISIM Review* 19 (2007): 38-39.

[31] Abdulkader Tayob, "Turning to the Core: Sufism on the rise?" *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*, 2 (1999): 11-13.

[32] *Muslim Views*, May 2003, 11

[33] *Muslim News*, October 2005, 4.

[34] *Muslim Views*, May 1997, 1.

[35] Muhammed Haron, "*Da`wah* Movements and Sufi *Tariqahs*: Competing for Spiritual Spaces in Contemporary South(ern) Africa," 277-278.

there for generations, but with the surge of interest in Sufism after apartheid, new historiography

of the *mawlud* emerged as well. A widely revered Cape historian, Achmat Davids, researched the

history of *mawlud* celebrations in the Cape and revealed the rich history and unique features of

Cape *mawluds*. The first, Davids argued, could be dated as early as 1772. Introduced by Shaykh

Yusuf, the Cape *mawlud* was, in David's view, perhaps the first means by which Cape Muslims

staked a visible claim on the land: "It was on a Moulood occasion - in 1772," Davids concluded,

"when Islam was first visibly seen to be present in the Mother City," as Cape Town is often

called.[36]

The Cape boasts numerous 'moulood jama`ahs', neighborhood-based clubs that organize

local *mawlud* celebrations each Rabi` al-Awwal. A recent comprehensive guide to these clubs

lists twelve men's *mawlud jama`as* and seventy-one women's *mawlud jama`as*, each with its own

name - The Red Crescents, Ubuntu, Summer Roses, White Water Lillies, Jawahiriyyas, to take a

few examples.[37] Cape *mawluds* have distinctive features that perhaps exist nowhere else, such as

the practice called *rampie-sny*, the 'cutting of the orange leaves', in which women and girls cut

the leaves of orange plants into small strips, which are then scented with rose and lemon oils, and

finally wrapped into small bundles using colorful kite paper. These sachets are then distributed

among the participants. Some Sufi orders developed their own *mawlud* liturgies in the Cape; the

most widely used were those of Tuan Sayyid, whose `Alawi liturgies gained popularity through

the Cape in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Davids argues that the Cape *mawlud* -

despite unique cultural 'accretions' such as the *rampie-sny* - is a strictly orthodox form of

celebrating the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad:

> Moulood celebration is virtually as old as the history of Islam at the Cape.
> Regarded by some as an innovation, Mouloods were part of the Shari`ah-centric
> Tasawwuf brought to the Cape in these early years. These Mouloods provided

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[36] Achmat Davids, "Practice of Moulood has deep roots in the Cape," *Muslim Views*, June 1998, 10.

[37] "Moulood Jamaahs 2002," *Boorhaanul Islam*, March-June 2002, 64-69. See also Davids and da Costa, *Pages from Cape Muslim History*, 140.

opportunities for communal gatherings, and helped to strengthen the commitment
to the unitary being of Allah.[38]

Despite this confidence in the normativity of *mawlud*, others have expressed a deep concern that

its critics have begun to impact local opinion towards the practice.[39]

Beyond its historical and cultural resonance in the Cape, *mawlud* became, for some, a

seminal form of democratic, post-apartheid political engagement. In a 1999 article, "Our jihad is

to apply the Seerah," *Muslim Views* opined that "Moulood-un-Nabi is a celebration of the birth of

the world's greatest benefactor ... Muslims have a role to play in this new democracy and we have

to find the means to use the example of Muhammad (SAW) in order to become a responsible

Muslim minority."[40] Some began to conceive of the *mawlud* as both an opportunity to uplift and

proselytize among South Africa's poor and an annual re-commitment to the politically

revolutionary nature of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings:

> With the new South Africa that we are entering in, the upholders and observers
> of *Mauloodun Nabi* (Prophet's Birthday) functions should add a NEW
> DIMENSION to such functions, which would also serve the purpose of Da`wah
> (inviting to the Message of Islam) among the indigenous people of the country …
> The organizers of such functions should call upon Muslims to bring with them to
> the functions they attend their gifts, both in cash and kind, that anybody normally
> takes to somebody's birthday function, but *these gifts taken to the Prophet's*
> *birthday should be distributed … among the non-Muslim needy attending such*
> *functions* … The upholders and observers of *Mauloodun Nabi*, therefore, have a
> great role to play in the new South Africa.[41]

Applying the *mawlud* to post-apartheid political participation was a double affront to Deobandis:

not only politicizing the *mawlud* (and here it is worth recalling Thanawi's invectives against a

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[38] Achmat Davids, "Practice of Moulood has deep roots in the Cape," *Muslim Views*, June 1998, 10.

[39] Imam Abdur Rashied Omar, "Maulid al-Nabi: Celebrations and the Next Generation," *Boorhaanul Islam*,
March-June 2002, 23-24.

[40] *Muslim Views,* June 1999, 1.

[41] Mohammed Makki, "Reply to Sheikh Najaar's Article about Maulood-un-Nabi," *Muslim Digest*,
February-March 1994, 263.

mawlud that serves any purpose, however noble, other than praising the Prophet),[42] but doing so in order to advocate for greater political participation among South Africa's Muslims.

One can see the political utilization of *mawlud* festivities in contemporary *mawluds* in the Cape, as I observed at one of the annual 'Mass Womens' Mouloods' hosted by the Islamic Unity Convention Women's Forum, an organization affiliated with Qibla. Founded in 1996 and airing annually on Radio 786, these *mawluds* are expressly designed to unite small, neighborhood-level 'moulood jama`ahs' into a single, large celebration of a tradition that "kept Islam alive and united the oppressed" under apartheid and now aims "to establish a just social order."[43] The organizer called the event a "voice of and for the oppressed of South Africa," telling me "we praise and thank Allah that we could also feed them on this day, while celebrating the Prophet's birth, because one cannot speak to people about spirituality if they are hungry."[44] The participants were a mix of Coloured and black women from the 'Cape Flats', the vast region beyond central Cape Town where the apartheid government consigned most non-whites. One woman told me "you must understand the women's role in [*mawlud*], for as long as we have honored Nabi in this country," mentioning *rampie-sny* and other aspects of local *mawlud* in which exclusively women participate.[45] Another woman at the event, from Mitchells Plain, said that she had been coming annually since the late 1990's. She described the celebration of *mawlud* in the Cape as "the best way for us to honor our Nabi" but equally as a "a dying tradition." But the tradition was dying, she said, not because of widespread criticisms of *mawlud*; if anything, "the things that these people say about the 'moulood', they make us stronger. They make us realize how we must protect this tradition."[46] In fact, the perceived decline, in her view, came from a younger

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[42] See pgs. 59-60.

[43] "Islamic Unity Convention Women's Forum Annual Mass Moulood Celebrations," unpublished flier, n.d.

[44] Email correspondence, Magboeba Davids, 28 April 2009.

[45] Unidentified woman, IUC Women's Forum Mass Moulood, 26 April 2009.

generation failing to understand how this sort of devotional piety related to their immediate lives. Nearly all of the women with whom I spoke, however, were well aware of the *mawlud* as point of controversy, some referencing the *mawlud*-related discussions on Cape Muslim radio stations throughout the month of Rabi` al-Awwal.

At the same time that the *mawlud* was defensively reenvisioned in terms of Cape heritage, a similar debate coalesced around the role of the Cape's Sufi saints' shrines, known locally as '*kramats*'. An index of this interest is the prominence of the Faure Kramat festival, which routinely attracts over 40,000 pilgrims and has grown dramatically after apartheid.[47] The Cape's Muslims have visited the circle of tombs surrounding the city for generations. In 1934 a local naturalist, K. M. Jeffrey, wrote one of the first surveys of the so-called '*kramats*' and described them as a 'Holy Circle' surrounding the Cape.[48] What is especially remarkable about these local shrine pilgrimages is, first, how not all of these early pioneers of Cape Islam were Sufis - in fact, we know very little about most of them - and as in Sufi devotional practices elsewhere, certainly not all of those who participate in shrine-based devotions are Sufis *per se*.

Concern for preserving the *kramats* certainly predates the end of apartheid. The most important body for organizing their preservation is the Cape Mazaar Society, founded in February 1982 on the occasion of the `urs of Abdul Qadir Jilani.[49] In its early days, it was instrumental in building or repairing the *kramats* as they existed at that time. By the early 1990's the Cape Mazaar Society had successfully repaired the *kramats* of Abdurahman Motura on Robben Island, Sayed Jaffar at Oudekraal, and Sayed Mahmood at Constantia. It also organized `urs festivals in

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[46] Unidentified woman, IUC Women's Forum Mass Moulood, 26 April 2009.

[47] "Faure Karamat hosts successful Easter festival," *Al-Qalam*, May 2001, 5.

[48] K. M. Jeffreys, "The malay tombs of the holy circle," *Cape Naturalist*, 5, June 1938.

[49] "Committee to care for 'Kramats'," *Muslim News*, 3 Sept 1982, 11. It was established after Shaikh Kaderi of Kensington, Cape Town, retired. He had personally cared for the shrines of Abd al-Rahman Matura on Robben Island, hence the Cape Mazaar Society called for his replacement with a community-based effort to maintain the shrines.

Cape Town and Durban.[50] But it published its first guide to visiting the Cape's Sufi saints' tombs only in 1999, amidst a burgeoning interest in Sufism in the Cape.[51]

The Cape Mazaar Society's guide to visiting the *kramats* exhibits the flexibility of the Cape Sufi saints' legacies for contemporary Muslims. It highlights the "long established culture" of visiting the circuit of saints' tombs as orthodox Islamic practice at the same time that it promotes them as tourism, with different organizations offering their own angle on the *kramats* in the guide's prefaces.[52] Shaykh Nazeem Mohammed of the Muslim Judicial Council said the council "would like to be placed on record as supporters of Sufism and its tenets" and even signs off on the legitimacy of *"urs shareef"* at the tombs.[53] The language here - going 'on record' - strongly suggests the MJC is concerned about amending its previous record of criticizing local devotional practices.[54] The Barelwi-leaning Habibia Soofie Masjid lent their support for conserving the memory of the "pioneers" of Islam in the Cape, while the Cape Town Tourism Authority (Captour) promoted visiting the *kramats* for residents and tourists alike.[55] In this single text, we see multiple overlapping, if perhaps sometimes conflicting, claims on the Cape Sufi 'heritage'.

In the late 1990's, a concerted effort formed to defend a quintessential 'Cape' Islam as traditionalist in orientation, set in contrast both to a perceived rise of Wahhabi Islam globally and

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[50] "Mazaar Society Anniversary: Preserving the Heritage," *Muslim Views*, September 1992, 2.

[51] For a sense of this interest, see "Sacred Shrines," *Muslim Views*, October 1996.

[52] Cape Mazaar Society, *A Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape*, Cape Town: Cape Mazaar Society, 1996, 5.

[53] *Ibid.*, 6.

[54] Sindre Bangstad argues the MJC takes a self-consciously centrist position in debates about Sufism in the Cape, offering tacit approval of practices such as *mawlud*. See his *Global Flows, Local Appropriations: Facets of Secularlisation and Re-Islamization among Contemporary Cape Muslims*, ISIM Dissertations, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007, 222-226.

[55] Cape Mazaar Society, *A Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape*, 7-8.

Deobandi polemics locally.[56] But the most serious threats to the *kramats* came not from

Deobandis or Salafis but from developers who sought the valuable land where many of them lay.

Cape Muslims successfully utilized the new legal parameters for cultural preservation to halt

development plans around the *kramats*.

In 1965, Oudekraal Estates (Pty) purchased a large plot of prime real estate at Oudekraal,

overlooking the Atlantic seaboard on the eastern slope of Cape Town's iconic Table Mountain,

land where over numerous Muslim graves sit, including several important *kramats* dating from

the eighteenth century, some of which are surrounded by other graves.[57] Why development on the

land did not proceed earlier is unclear, but in 1996, the owners proposed a residential

development there. Massive protests followed, with a coalition of opponents organized under the

name Environment Mazaar Action Committee (EMAC). In October 1996, over 50,000 people

demonstrated in opposition to the development.[58] In 2001, Oudekraal Estates (Pty) took action

against the Cape Town City Council, the South African Heritage Resource Agency and the

National Parks Board.

The High Court ruled against the plaintiffs on the basis of 'cultural rights' that Muslims

had over the site, after expert witnesses and aerial photos of the site taken as early as 1945

showed footpaths leading to the site, sufficient to assert that Muslims had since "time

immemorial paid homage to the kramats and graves."[59] Opponents of the development invoked,

among other laws, the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 that protects gravesites,

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[56] Auwais Rafudeen, "Revival of traditional Islam," *Muslim Views*, April 1998, 13.

[57] For a crucial analysis of this case in terms of post-apartheid law, see Abdulkader Tayob, "Muslim shrines in Cape Town: Religion and Post-Apartheid Public Spheres," in Barbara Bompani and Maria Frahm-Arp, eds. *Development and Politics from Below: Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State*, Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 56-73. See also Margaret Beukes, "A Tug of War between Heritage Conservation and Property Rights: Some Success at Last for Heritage Conservation - City of Cape Town V. Oudekraal Estates (Pty) Ltd. [2007] Jol 20887 (C)," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 16, no. 1 (2009): 67-83.

[58] "1000s oppose desecration of shrines and the environment," *Muslim Views*, September 1996, 1.

[59] Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa, *Oudekraal Estates (Pty) Ltd v The City of Cape Town et al.* Case 25/08, 3 September 2009, section 41.

particularly those of cultural and historical significance or that belonged to previously

disadvantaged populations.[60]

In its judgment, the Supreme Court noted how the *kramats* are part of the fabric of Sufi

devotional piety in the Cape, referencing both Muslims' veneration of the site and their view of

the 'friends of God' interred there:

> They have special religious and cultural significance to the members of Cape
> Town's Muslim community. Two of the graves are kramats. A kramat is the
> grave of somebody who, among adherents of the Islamic faith, is regarded as
> having attained, through conspicuous piety, 'an enlightened spiritual situation'.
> Such person having thus been a 'friend of God', the spirit of God is to be found
> at the site. The kramats and other graves on the land are also important cultural
> symbols in the Muslim community of its history in the Western Cape going back
> to the era of slavery. Many of the graves are those of escaped slaves and some of
> the kramats are the burial sites of spiritual leaders of the community during those
> times. It is believed by followers of the faith that by spending time at these sites
> they can enhance their own spirituality.[61]

In its adjudication on this issue, the court clearly invoked a complex web of religious, social,

cultural and historical factors, pointing out that "grave sites are sacred to Muslims" and that "the

Muslim faith abhors exhumation."[62] Under apartheid, moreover, Muslims were "politically,

socially and economically disadvantaged because of repressive and disempowering apartheid

policies and were therefore unable to effectively assert and protect their interests."[63] The decision

to halt the development had to consider both the "freedom of religion" and "culture of members

of the Muslim community."[64]

Efforts to re-envision the 'holy circle' of *kramats* as an indelible part of Cape heritage are

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[60] National Heritage Resources Act, 1999, section 36, 3 (b). *Staatskoerant van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika*, Vol. 406, No. 19974, 60. The act stipulates that no one may "destroy, damage, alter, exhume, remove from its original position or otherwise disturb any grave or burial ground older than 60 years which is situated outside a formal cemetery administered by a local authority."

[61] Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa, *Oudekraal Estates (Pty) Limited v. The City of Cape Town et al.* Case 41/2003, 28 May 2004, sections 14 and 15.

[62] Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa, *Oudekraal Estates (Pty) Ltd v The City of Cape Town et al.* Case 25/08, 3 September 2009, section 41.

[63] *Ibid.*, section 48.

[64] *Ibid.*, section 39.

ongoing. As of 2010, the Cape Mazaar Society had applied to Heritage Western Cape, a

governmental council that identifies Cape heritage sites and ensures their preservation, to acquire

landmark status for the *kramats*,[65] an effort that the Muslim Judicial Council has also publically

supported.[66] This application is now pending, but upon approval, it will help ensure that future

development projects do not impinge on the territory of the *kramats*. The process is the latest

move in a post-apartheid mobilization to protect local Sufi sites, to which even a local Deobandi

scholar, Taha Karaan, a graduate of Deoband who directs the Dar al-`Ulum al-Arabiyya al-

Islamiyya in Strand, has made concessions. Speaking on Voice of the Cape radio in 2007, Karaan

stated:

> If that kabr [grave] is part of our history, then it needs to be preserved and holds a
> certain sentimental value. However, some take it beyond sentimentality to a
> spiritual value, which is where people differ and one needs to hear both sides of
> the argument ... If this was regarded as a heritage site, then it is Islamically
> permissible to visit it. Although we differ on the spiritual value of visiting it,
> there is agreement that such places should be respected. If this is regarded as part
> of a community's history, then visiting such places is even encouraged.[67]

Here Karaan attempts to negotiate a space between condemning certain devotional practices that

exceed mere 'sentimentality' and assenting to the popular imaginary that views these shrines in

terms of Cape Muslim heritage.

Support for the *kramats* as heritage sites is not limited to activists and local Muslim

organizations, but is part of local discourses among participants in Sufi festivities at the sites, as I

was repeatedly told during my attendance at two `urs festivals at the tomb of Nurul Mubeen, one

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[65] The council's website is http://www.capegateway.gov.za/eng/directories/public_entities/1063/72512 (last accessed on 14 March 2011). A Voice of the Cape report on the process, dated 22 June 2010, can be found here: http://www.vocfm.co.za/index.php?section=news&category=vocnews&article=53726 (Last accessed 14 March 2011).

[66] See the Voice of the Cape report, dated 17 September 2009: http://www.vocfm.co.za/index.php?&section=news&category=&heritagenews=&article=48603 (last accessed 14 March 2011).

[67] Quoted in Abdulkader Tayob, "Muslim shrines in Cape Town: Religion and Post-Apartheid Public Spheres," 64. I made repeated attempts to interview Taha Karaan for this research, but he did not return any of my requests.

of the Oudekraal tombs that had been slated for demolition.[68] The *kramat* of Nurul Mubeen is situated at the top of a circuitous path consisting of ninety-nine steps, one for each of the Islamic names of God, and consists of a small tomb with ablution facilities on the side. No one fully knows the history of the Nurul Mubeen *kramat* complex. The Cape Mazaar Society believes that he was among the Muslim slaves banished to the Cape, arriving in 1716 to be incarcerated on Robben Island. According to popular legends, he miraculously escaped Robben Island, either by swimming or by walking across the water to the mainland, and remained in the isolated hills where his grave stands today.[69]

Before the `urs* began, an elaborate four-hour ceremony, men gathered and chatted amongst themselves inside the tomb, a green cement building with wooden double-doors leading into a space with stone floors and Persian-style carpet, while women and children sat and conversed outside. Behind the shrine, a cooking crew prepared a massive cauldron of lamb biryani for about three hundred guests. The tomb itself is covered in ceremonial sheets at all times, with four white columns at the four corners of the tomb adorned with fresh flowers. A plaque identifies Nurul Mubeen in Arabic as a "perfected saint" (*wali kamil*) and contains the verse from the Qur'an, beloved by Sufis, 'Behold! Verily on the friends of God there is no fear, nor do they grieve' (Qur'an 10: 62). Most participants touched the cloth over the tomb upon entering the shrine and then touched his hand to the forehand. Some left small offerings near the grave, mostly incense, rose water or bags of sugar. After a series of Urdu *na`ts*, a boy distributed perfume on the right hand of the participants, while another man came through to collect the booklets of *na`ts*, kissing each.[70] Next a lengthy *sama`* began, culminating as men adorned the

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[68] On 29 March 2009 and 20 February 2010.

[69] Cape Mazaar Society, *A Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape*, 29-31.

[70] One of these, a *na`t* by a certain Anwar Farkh Abadi, was distributed as a flier. A poem in praise of the Prophet, like standard *na'ts*, this one also reflects on the nature of 'worship' (`ibadat*) and states: "Worship is to live in this world in such a way that one's vision is upon the Ka'aba but in one's heart is Medina. By God, this indeed is servanthood (*bandagi*)."

tomb with a new set of shrouds; each shroud passed between the hands of the participants in a complete circle before it was finally laid upon the tomb. The ceremony concluded with all the participants facing Mecca and performing `asr salat* inside the shrine. Afterwards, everyone assembled outside to eat and converse with friends and family.

As is clear from earlier discussions here, the participants engaged in activities at the tomb that would certainly irk reform-minded critics of the `urs*: the use of shrouds, circumambulating the tomb, leaving sugar, kissing the shroud, and praying inside the tomb, to name a few. But participants roundly dismissed these criticisms when I mentioned them. Participants in the `urs* had many different reasons for attending, but overwhelmingly, they professed not only to honoring the saint with their attendance, but viewing the `urs* as an opportunity to celebrate Cape Sufi history. One man, a retired engineer from Athlone, had come every year since regular *'urs* festivities had begun, though he could not recall how many times exactly. He believed that the saint was alive in the tomb and could hear his *du`as*. I asked him if the saint was able to grant requests or if he relays requests to God; the man replied that, as far as he is concerned, the spiritual mechanics of making supplications were irrelevant: "The saint … is closer to Allah than any of us. I don't know how he is able to do the things that he does. Only Allah knows that. But we come here to offer our honor and respect and *du`as*. We have done it this way for years." Another man, an accountant from Rylands Estate, viewed the `urs* not only in terms of Sufi devotions but equally in terms of remembering the tribulations of those "who brought Islam to South Africa. Without them, we would not be here."

Some of the participants were not only aware of Deobandi critiques of these practices but had formed complex, self-conscious defenses of them. One participant claimed that the British colonial powers in India and the Middle East were complicit in the rise of the Deobandis, the Tablighis and the Wahhabis – in his view, all possessing roughly identical ideologies. At the same time, he upheld certain aspects of the Deobandi critique, suggesting that those who performing *salat* directly to the *shaykh* and or pray directly to him are "completely ignorant." He

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dismissed such obvious transgressions as the result of "Hindu influence" on Sufism. When I

asked him about his devotion to Nurul Mubeen, he proceeded to narrate a story from the life of

the renowned early Sufi Junaid al-Baghdadi (d. 910) of a sort that is anathema to most Deobandis.

He told of a time when a man was traveling with Junaid as the two came to a river. Junaid tells

his companion, "Recite 'Ya Junaid' as we walk across the water." Miraculously, they begin to

walk across. Then Satan approaches Junaid's companion and whispers, "Say 'Ya Allah' instead,"

and as he does so, he begins to sink into the water. Junaid scolds his companion: "Why did you

stop saying 'Ya Junaid'? I am saying 'Ya Allah' but I know God – you do not. You say 'Ya

Junaid' and go through me." The story illustrates one view of a highly contested matter in Sufism,

that of 'mediation' (*tawassul*) between worshippers and God by way of a Sufi saint, as well as

taking the names of Sufi saints in various litanies. Deobandis, such as Gangohi, debated fiercely

over the permissibility of saying 'Ya Rasulullah', 'Ya Shaikh Abdul Qadir [Jilani]' or 'Ya

Junaid'.[71]

By and large, it was abundantly clear that there is both widespread cognizance of

critiques of these practices, and the imperatives of defending against them. Yet participants at

these `urs festivals did so on their own terms, not with recourse to legal argumentation, as

Barelwi and other `ulama' have had, but to popular forms of legitimacy, what could perhaps be

called 'normativity by tradition', or even 'normativity by numbers'. It is the notion that popular

memory itself confers legitimacy on these practices. While they reject the legal arguments against

`urs, participants did not offer counter-arguments on those terms. Rather, participants had

recourse to 'tradition' and a vision that sees celebration of these Sufi saints' legacies as a crucial

form of reverence, and one now protected by the legal dispensation of the post-apartheid state.

This popular memory has reimagined the Cape's Sufi ancestors as erstwhile 'freedom

fighters', in a manner that expressly links the Sufi 'heritage' with Muslim politics in South Africa

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[71] Gangohi submitted, for instance, that invoking the name of `Abd al-Qadir Jilani in a Sufi *wazifa* is not technically *shirk*, but is impermissible on account of "resembling *shirk*" (*mushabbuh bi-shirk*). Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, *Fatawa-yi Rashidiyya*, 67-68.

today. There are of course precedents for this reimagining during the apartheid era. On the

occasion of founding the Cape Mazaar Society, we see a rousing, emotional depiction of the

saintly predecessors as martyrs:

> Brought to the Cape as political prisoners or slave labour, every effort was made
> by the Governors at that time to stifle these crusaders who rebelled against
> exploitation in the land of their origin. These saintly personages were mercilessly
> chained and detained in solitary confinement and suffered the most inhumane
> forms of punishment. Confined to pitch dark, wet and icy cold dungeons, they
> were chained down on solid blocks of granite stone, bared and whip-lashed and
> left lying there surrounded by the stench of the dead and decaying bodies of their
> comrades. Despite all this, *La ilaha illalahu Muhammadur Rasool lul Lah*
> remained on their breath.[72]

This narrative anachronistically imposes anti-apartheid politics onto the Cape's Muslim

forebears, those who despite arriving here "with chains around their necks, leg-irons and hand

cuffs on their wrists … *brought with them a supra-national ideology of liberation … the ideology*

of ISLAM." [73]

But after apartheid, this narrative was stamped with the imprimatur of none other than

Nelson Mandela himself, who lauded "Shaykh Matura, from whose karamat on Robben Island, as

prisoners we drew deep inspiration and spiritual strength when our country was going through its

darkest times," explicitly imagining the Cape's Sufi saints as 'freedom fighters': "Our country

can proudly claim Muslims as brothers and sisters, compatriots, freedom fighters and leaders,

revered by our nation. They have written their names on the roll of honour with blood, sweat and

tears."[74]

Taking the previous two chapters together, how can we evaluate the public reception of

the Deobandi critique? And how have the new parameters of debate affected the tone and contour

of classic polemics and counter-polemics, of those that transpired in texts and those that took

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[72] "Committee to care for 'Kramats'," *Muslim News*, 3 September 1982, 11.

[73] Cape Mazaar Society, *A Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape*, 11.

[74] Nelson Mandela, "Muslim Renewal," in *In his Own Words*, Kader Asmal, David Chidester and Wilmot
James, eds. New York: Little, Brown and Co. 2003, 337-338. The speech was at the Intercultural Eid
Celebration in Johannesburg, 30 January 1998.

place in lecture halls and public assemblies? I have argued that Deobandis lost popular support in

South Africa, not only through their criticism of - and public confrontation with - other Muslims

during the heyday of anti-apartheid activism, and not only by refusing to mobilize against

apartheid, but even by justifying *that refusal to mobilize* in terms of their vision of Sufism. At the

same time, a massive number of South African Muslims not only mobilized against apartheid, but

justified *their* mobilization using Sufi vocabularies and by politicizing Sufi rituals and the

legacies of local Sufi saints. The post-apartheid 'Sufi resurgence' in the Cape coincides with what

appears to be a tarnishing of the Deobandi 'brand'. From a historical perspective, whether this is a

case of causation or one of correlation is up for debate. But it seems indisputable that South

Africans did not merely reject Deobandis' critique of Sufism, but indeed, that they rejected

Deobandi *'ulama*'s leadership, and by extension, their very authority to lead. At the same time,

despite calls by some during the apartheid era for 'exporting' debate over *mawlud* and `*urs* back

to the Indian subcontinent, these debates clearly remain deeply entrenched in Muslim public

discourse in South Africa. If anything, debate over these contentious issues has expanded widely,

incorporating new interlocutors and new vocabularies.

CONCLUSION

Sufism as a Moving Target

On Thursday evening, 7 October 2010, a group known as Tehrik-e-Taliban claimed

responsibility for two explosions that rocked the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Pakistan's port

city of Karachi.[1] The bombers chose Thursday deliberately, as visitors gather at shrines

throughout South Asia at dusk on Thursdays to celebrate the beginning of *jum`a* and to

participate in communal Sufi *dhikrs* or listen to *qawwali sama`*. At least seven died instantly,

while at least sixty-five were injured. It was the first time that Taliban had struck this shrine, and

coming on the heels of attacks on Sufi shrines in Lahore some three months earlier, the

brazenness of attacks on large Sufi shrines in major urban centers was especially alarming. These

bombings are part of a crescendo of violence directed at Sufi shrines in Pakistan in 2010 alone.

In truth, we may know very little about the motivations behind these bombings, but

regardless of who is responsible, and regardless of whatever ideology allegedly motivates them,

Deoband will inevitably shoulder some of the blame in the popular imagination. And while

Deobandi critiques are undoubtedly responsible in part for the antipathy that some Muslims feel

towards Sufi shrines, it is crude to blame Deoband directly for the violence, and even cruder to

suggest that these attacks are borne of an alleged Deobandi antipathy towards Sufism *as a whole*.

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[1] Huma Imtiaz, "Sufi Shrine in Pakistan is Hit by a Lethal Double Bombing," *The New York Times*, 7 October 2010.

Ultimately, the violence, both physical and ideological, that surrounds Sufi devotional practices calls for renewed attention to Sufism as an ongoing site of contestation in contemporary Islam. Surely, to some degree, Deoband's approach to Sufism militates against Western liberal sensibilities, particularly liberal discourses of what Sufism is – or perhaps more appropriately put, of what Sufism *should* be. Deobandis' connections to the Taliban and the deeply traditionalist hermeneutic lens through which Deobandi scholars read contemporary politics, gender, and even the agency of the self, combine to render Deoband an object of ridicule in some circles, and a source of Islamophobic anxiety in others.

But we must take Deobandis' claims to representing Sufism seriously. By this I do not mean that scholars of Islam must ratify theirs as the 'true' Sufism, to the exclusion of other practices and forms of piety that fall under the rubric of Sufism. What I do mean is that Deobandis have made a powerful claim on how to define it. Accordingly, this dissertation is a call to reflect critically on 'Sufism' as a category, in all its manifestations, be they 'mystical', experiential, ethical, political, institutional, or otherwise. 'Sufism' is a diverse, internally contested, constantly debated, entity. Accordingly, Robert Rozehnal astutely calls for understanding Sufism "as a verb rather than a noun. Sufism is not a static, homogenous 'thing' that can be studied in isolation. Rather, it is a discursive tradition and an embodied practice that is experienced in discreet temporal and cultural locations."[2] And in *locating* Sufism, we must be attune to subtle changes in how Muslims debate Sufism, from within and without, in multiple settings, whether privately in the confines of a Deobandi *madrasa* on the outskirts of Johannesburg or publicly on the radio in Cape Town.

Besides calling for attention to 'Sufism' as a complex discursive terrain, this dissertation also points to new developments in the study of Islam. Is it, I submit, not sufficient merely to reconstruct the textual history of a debate; we must discern how that debate is appropriated and contested in public contexts. We must collapse the "sterile dichotomy of texts and practices" to

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[2] Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound*, 14.

recognize the reciprocities between them and the forms of authority, power and legitimation that move "out of contexts into texts and out of texts into their contexts."[3] To this end, I have shown ways that the Deobandi critique was altered by the contexts in which it was received – or more precisely, rejected – in South Africa, as polemicists attempted to translate the nuance of Thanawi's argumentation, for instance, into readily accessible terms, into forms that could be consumed on a mass scale.[4]

And how individual Muslims 'talk back' to this critique is also essential. What the `ulama' have said about an issue is important; what students, activists, teachers, mothers, workers have said about the same issue is equally so. The Deobandi critique of Sufism originated as a largely textual debate, but in South Africa, it became one debated in mosques and lecture halls, on the radio and at Sufi festivals. The 'Deobandi critique' met fierce resistance in South Africa, but not only from their classic antagonists, Sufis of the Barelwi tradition. It also met an entirely different form of resistance from Muslims who claimed to have little stake in these 'Indian' debates, who rejected the very terms of the debate, even as public debate of *mawlud* and `*urs* became unmoored from its 'Deobandi' articulations and became issues about which South African Muslims generally are 'expected' to have an opinion.

The terms of debate continue to shift. South African Barelwi scholars defended their baroque devotionalism with recourse to the same legal hermeneutics as the Deobandis; they are, after all, *'ulama'*. While the nuance of these arguments escape popular discourse, popular defenses of these practices are perhaps just as 'normative' as juristic ones. To borrow Katherine Ewing's phrase, we must attend to the "everyday arguments" of `*urs* pilgrims as much as we

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[3] Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, "Religion, Language and Power: An Introductory Essay," in Nile Green amd Mary Searle-Chatterjee, eds. *Religion, Language and Power*, New York: Routledge, 2008, 9.

[4] Deobandi English-language polemics' use of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and their relative lack of invoking the Hanafi legal tradition, is an index of this shift. Moosa has suggested that Deobandi scholars have been far more willing to argue based solely on the Qur'an and *hadith* in debates with the Ahl-i Hadith Jama`at-i Islami. I think he is correct here, but I would add that one can make the same observation about their public polemics, to the extent that arguing a position to a mass-audience almost *necessitates* arguing from the Qur'an and *hadith*. See Ebrahim Moosa, "Introduction," *The Muslim World* 99, 3 (2009): 427-434, at 429-430.

attend to the arguments of Deobandis and Barelwis.[5] Defenses of Sufi devotions, like critiques of them, are multi-layered and polyvalent, and I suggest here that we give due attention to public, popular discourses on Sufi devotions, just as we give to textual, scholarly discourses. We must ask, then, to what extent does massive popular participation in a controversial practice *lend* it normativity? While *`ulama'* continue to claim the authority to adjudicate on legal contentions, should we not also consider the extra-legal forms of argument that prevail in popular discourses?

More broadly, mass support for Sufi devotional practices continues unabated globally, despite powerful critiques from various circles. Deobandi scholars have been critiquing the *`urs* for nearly a century and a half, yet the *`urs* of Mu`in al-Din Chishti regularly attracts numbers of Muslims comparable to the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca.[6] In Pakistan, devotees of Ali Hujwiri and Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkar will continue to gather in massive numbers at their shrines, among many others, despite the real, existential risks of doing so. And in South Africa, support for Sufi devotional practices is unrelenting despite an ideological and physical onslaught. It is impossible to predict precisely how these current struggles within Islam will play out. Regardless of what that future yields, Sufism, however one defines it, will remain central to the spiritual lives of countless Muslims.

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[5] Katherine Ewing's work has examined, among other things, the tensions within individual subjectivities that reformist critiques have engendered. See her chapter, "Everyday Arguments," in *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Sainthood*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, 93-127.

[6] Usha Sanyal, "Tourists, Pilgrims and Saints: The Shrine of Mu'in al-Din Chisti of Ajmer," in Carol E. Henderson and Maxine Weisgrau, eds. *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism, Heritage and the Seduction of History*, Hampshire, England: Ashland, 2007, 183.

For confidential interviews with madrasa students:

- How long have you been a student at the madrasa?
- What do you study at the madrasa? What classes have you taken? Do you study with multiple teachers or a single teacher?
- How would you describe your day-to-day life at the madrasa? What does a typical day look like? What is your schedule? Do you live at the madrasa? If not, where do you live? And when do you arrive and when do you go home?
- Do you study books in Arabic? Urdu? English? Other languages? How good is your knowledge of these languages?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where are your parents from? Grandparents? Great-grandparents?
- Have you traveled outside of South Africa? If so, where?
- What do your parents do?
- What do you want to do after you complete your education at the madrasa?
- Do you have Deobandis in your family? Or are you the first to attend a Deoband madrasa?
- What is Sufism? What does this mean to you?
- Have you studied anything at the madrasa that you identify as related to *tasawwuf* (Sufism)?
- Do you have any Sufis in your family?
- Do you have a Sufi shaykh?
- Have you ever visited a Sufi hospice (*khanaqah*)? If so, when? Where? What did you do there? Did you go alone or with parents or friends? How long did you stay?
- Have you ever visited the tomb of a Sufi? If so, when? Where? What did you do there? Did you go alone or with parents or friends? How long did you stay?
- Have you ever celebrated the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*milad sharif*)?
- Have you ever celebrated the death anniversary (*'urs*) of a Sufi?

For madrasa personnel (instructors, muftis, directors):

- How long have you been involved with the madrasa?
- For teachers: What do you teach at the madrasa?

- How would you describe your day-to-day life at the madrasa? What does a typical day look like? What is your schedule? Do you live at the madrasa? If not, where do you live? And when do you arrive and when do you go home?
- Where did you grow up?
- Have you traveled outside of South Africa? Have you traveled to Pakistan or India?
- Where are your parents from? Grandparents? Great-grandparents?
- Have you traveled outside of South Africa? If so, where?
- What do/did your parents' do?
- What is Sufism? What does this mean to you?
- Have you taught anything at the madrasa that you identify as related to *tasawwuf* (Sufism)?
- Do you have any Sufis in your family?
- Do you have a Sufi shaykh?
- Have you ever visited a Sufi hospice (*khanaqah*)? If so, when? Where? What did you do there? Did you go alone or with parents or friends? How long did you stay?
- Have you ever visited the tomb of a Sufi? If so, when? Where? What did you do there? Did you go alone or with parents or friends? How long did you stay?
- Have you ever celebrated the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*milad sharif*)?
- Have you ever celebrated the death anniversary (*'urs*) of a Sufi?
- For muftis: What is the dominant subject about which you receive fatwas? Do you receive requests for fatwas concerning specialized matters of Sufi practices? (Such as *ziyarat, zikr, muraqabat, tasawwur-i shaykh*, *'urs*, use of *ta'wiz*)
- Have you requested fatwas from the Deoband madrasa in India? If so, concerning what?

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