Charting Institutions on Expanding frontiers

The nineteenth century Islam may be symbolised as the century of charismatic imams, but the twentieth century will be remembered as the century of organisations. Structures, offices, and constitutions have proliferated in the Muslim community like never before. Every town or locality boasts some organisational structure to serve both general and specific Islamic needs. Whether it is welfare, mission, education or leadership, an organisation somewhere sees to its need.

Taking a long view of the organisational structure of the Muslim community, we may want to ask how these organisations contribute to the ethos of Islam in South Africa. Apart from the nitty-gritty of presidents, secretaries and members, what palpable and tangible quality can we think of as the product of Islamic organisations? How do they shape Islamic life in South Africa? What kind of institutional legacy are the organisations building for Islam in South Africa?

The questions are complex cannot be fully answered in a short review. However, the questions provide a framework for reviewing leadership as an important aspect of the Muslim community in South Africa. Like welfare and education, scholars, imams and ulama are located in organisations which determine what they do and what is expected of them. This review takes a broad look at leadership organisations to measure and evaluate their activities in the light of institutional establishment. The survey includes a short review of two organisations

interviewed, and then tackles one general question that challenges leadership organisations in general.

Muslim leadership organisations are primarily concerned with providing guidance and leadership to Muslims. By itself, we can here list a list of important functions like teaching the fundamentals of Islam, providing moral and ethical guidance in the form of *fatwas*, and managing and leading the important religious activities in the Muslim community. In each of these major areas, the various leadership organisations provide an important service. Educational facilities would be impossible to conceive without the assistance of the various Jamiats in northern regions of the country. Likewise, the *fatwa* committee of Muslim Judicial Council is always working at one or the other query. Most importantly, these and other organisations provide necessary leadership in mosques, sermons, marriage ceremonies, Sufi gatherings, too many to list here in full. These common activities indicate the broad-based framework which motivates and justifies a leadership organisation. They are the primary reason for their existence.

However, the institutional basis of leadership organisations is also driven by other concerns. In one way or another, there is also healthy and sometimes not so healthy competition among different organisations. From one point of view, they all seem to be performing the same functions: leading worship, issuing *fatwas*, and the like. On the other hand, they also differ in certain key respects, which seems to motivate and inspire their very existence. They claim greater authority because they have more organizations affiliated to them (the Islamic Unity Convention) or they represent the greatest number of mosques (the Muslim Judicial Council in the Western Cape) or they are more rational (al-Shura in the Western Cape) or more authentic (Jamiats in the north). These are claims made by the organisations, and have become the social

Comment [AIT1]: includes leadership organizations in the Western Cape, but also considers events and challenges that have transpired elsewhere in the country. The concern is not to present a detailed summary of each and every organization, but to capture the salient features of Islamic leadership organizations and their challenges as a whole.

Comment [AIT2]:

characteristics by which they are identified and distinguished from each other.

The Muslim Judicial Council (est. 1945) represents most of the *imams* in the Western Cape {Lubbe 1994}. Two major issues occupy its attention presently. It intervenes and makes major inputs on a state and government level. In fact, the MJC regards itself as the most favoured religious organization as far as the ruling government is concerned. It is called upon to open official functions and to submit contributions on moral and ethical issues facing Muslim in particular. In doing this, the MJC sees itself first and foremost as a religious organization representing the interests of Muslims. The actual content of the prayers and the contributions do not differ much from other organisations but the MJC's self-definition of being religious is a major step in South African Islam. Unlike most organizations, the MJC has clearly defined the field and focus of religion in the present dispensation. The South African government's critical engagement with religions has opened the way for such an approach.

The second concern of the MJC is what it perceives as the major attack upon its leadership legitimacy from the Islamic Unity convention (IUC). It accuses the IUC of surreptitiously introducing Sh`ism in the country, and sowing confusion and discord among the people. Representing over 336 organizations and boasting a National Ulama Council for itself, the IUC is certainly challenging Muslim leadership. The context over leadership, Muslim or otherwise, is part of any society, but events in the past two years have critically affected ordinary life in the Cape flats.

Since 1996, a battle for leadership has been raging in the Western Cape which has taken on violent proportions. The homes of the president of the MJC, Sh. Nazeem Mohamed, and UCT academic, Prof. Ebrahim Moosa, have been bombed. A leader of another prominent leadership organisation, Sh. A.

Gafieldien, was shot when he answered a knock on his door. Sh. Ahmed Sediq (MJC) was insulted and attacked at the Gatesville Mosque. Scores others have been threatened. It seems that in the midst of the battle against gangsterism and drugs, another war has also been stoked. An alliance of organisations and institutions including the IUC, PAGAD, Qiblah, Radio 786, and Muslims against Illigitimate Leaders (MAIL), have repeatedly and openly accused religious leaders of being religious gangsters, hypocrites, CIA agents. It does not appear that the Sunni-Shi`ite conflict as claimed by the MJC is the real issue involved here, nor the level of competence of the MJC members as claimed by its opponents. This is a proxy war over the particular relation between Muslims and the new South African state. The MJC want to preserve the Muslim community in a democratic South Africa; while the alliance against to court confrontation and battle with it. The MJC fails to register change in the Muslim community, while the alliance exploits the problems and challenges of change.

The other organization that I had the opportunity to interview was the Majlis ash-Shura al-Islami which commands the loyalty of a number of mosques in the Cape Flats. Since 1997, it has offices in the Shurah Ikhlas Institute where it conducts a morning crèche, afternoon Islamic classes, a clinic for circumcisions, and evening adult classes. Once a month, it also convenes a court to determine family legal cases. In these functions it is not any different from other leadership organizations in the Western Cape, and must be a serious contender for leadership as such. However, ash-Shura's distinctive focus remains its stated desire to develop a rational understanding of Islam. This goes back to the particular outlook of its founder, Shaykh Shakir Gamieldien, who taught his students and the present leaders of the organization to understand Islam in an open, rational, and critical way. The rationalism of the ash-Shura seems to have given it a distinctive identity,

perhaps one that even shelters its followers from other trends.

Reviewing 1998, we also get a clear picture that the new South African State had thrown a number of challenges to which the leadership organizations are responding directly or indirectly. One of the major issues that have confronted Muslims in this country for a long time is the issue of consuming proper *halaal* meat slaughtered in terms of the Shariah requirements. From a sociological point of view, eating *halaal* is a boundary mechanism that includes Muslim abattoir workers, Muslim butchers and *halaal* authorities. These boundaries coincided with the racial boundaries of apartheid. The opening of the racial boundaries in democratic South Africa has led to some interesting changes, and some challenges.

More than ever before, Muslims are eating out and expecting to do so in accordance with Shariah requirements. Students at universities, in government, in the corporate world, are confronted with what they eat and drink with fellow South Africans. More restaurants and food suppliers have recognised this need, and many are prepared to obtain the necessary *halaal* certificates. However, a few problems have emerged over the last few years. Firstly, there are too many authorities issuing *halaal* certificates. Each and every Muslim leadership organisation is prepared to act as authority issuing a *halaal* certificate, sometimes in open competition with another. Exploiting the proliferation of authorities, some non-Muslim businesses in Kwazulu-Natal are bold to announce their own *halaal* signs. Consequently, the South African National Halaal Authority (SANHA) was formed in 1996 by most leadership organizations and Muslim butchers associations. It even made an attempt to control the proliferation of *halaal* certificates by announcing the registration of the term *halaal* as a patented trademark. Nobody would be allowed to use the trademark without its permission.

This did not happen due to some intractable problems. The Muslim Judicial Council of the Western Cape (MJC) has resisted joining the new body, and so did the IUC. Many complaints have been heard that the MJC does not properly service the establishments issued with *halaal* certificates, and that it driven mainly by the revenue that accrues from the issue of certificates. SANHA does not want to prevent bodies like the MJC to issue certificates, and so there appears to be some miscommunication or undue suspicion. The MJC has itself challenged members of the public and organisations to scrutinise its accounts for any misappropriation. The MJC's lack of continuous servicing seems to be a legitimate concern but its misappropriation of funds seems an exaggeration. Some of the exaggeration seems poised to engulf *halaal* certificates in the political leadership problems discussed above. If the question of supervision is not mananged, then it will become an intractable problem.

It appears that SANHA is taking the first step in the right direction, but the issue has raised some issues that need to be solved. Firstly, *halaal* certificates are issued on the basis of the religious credentials and knowledge of the organisations. This accounts for their proliferation. But they must also deal with the question of jurisdiction, regional or otherwise. This is not covered in the moral and legal requirements of the Shariah, but the question emerges when say when, both the MJC and SANHA issue or negotiate halaal certificates in a region like Kimberley. Thus, Muslim leadership will have to establish transparent policies that clarify their methods and their jurisdictions. Any criticism must be dealt with in an open way that does not force those dissatisfied to establish rival *halaal* authorities.

Secondly, if the question of competing and conflicting *halaal* certificates has been exacerbated with the breakdown of South African boundaries, then globalization will throw

its own challenges. It is widely known that many Arab countries follow a definition of *halaal* that differs from South African Muslims. It is only a matter of time before this issue reaches South African shores. At least the Jamiat in Natal is leading the way in this regard with its very extensive webpage (www.jamiat.org.za). It posts a newsletter and *fatwas* on a range of issues, and a weekly update with the Friday *khutbah* (sermon). The impact of the internet, as a super highway of information, must surely affect how its own Hanafi answers relate to other schools of law, or to modern Arab opinions. Will we see Muslims asking questions which some religious leaders have avoided for some time? The lack of progress and internal conflict on the *halaal* issue will hasten the issue of eating meat slaughtered by people of the book.

Thirdly, the *halaal* issue has raised the question of the financial stability and strength of some leadership organisations. From one point of view, the MJC is justified in using revenue raised for its own religious activities by issuing *halaal* certificates. The danger lies in that it seems to have become dependent on this revenue, which is presently affecting its judgement on the way forward. The MJC is certainly not alone in this regard, as other organisations also raise funds through the certificates. SANHA will have to deal with this is an open, transparent and responsible manner.

The *halaal* issue is a paradigmatic one for Muslim leadership organisations in the country. It raises questions about the social mobility of Muslims and its consequences for practising religion. Secondly, it raises questions about the particular extent of religious leadership and their competing jurisprudence. Thirdly, it raises questions about globalisation and which symbols Muslims will take into the future. Muslim leadership organisations are also working out their relationship with the country as a whole and the new government in

particular. This question provides us with an important indicator as to the broad trends shaping leadership organisations with regard to local political organisations.

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