

South(ern) African Research on Muslims and Islam: Aluta Continua

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INTRODUCTION:

The year 2005 appears to have been a fairly eventful year in terms of publication output by South African and non-South African scholars on Islam and Muslims. Research has continued unabated at the different tertiary institutions, as well as non-educational institutions, both in and outside South Africa. At the universities honours, MA and doctoral students have embarked on a few exciting research themes; some delved into classical translation and interpretive work, and others on contemporary topics. A significant development among post-graduate research is that there has been a marked shift from pure descriptive studies that characterized research during the earlier years when departments and programs were first introduced. Many contemporary research projects reflect a more investigative and analytical social scientific approaches; this bodes well for the discipline of Islamic studies in particular and the social sciences in general.

Apart from the funds that the National Research Foundation annually makes available for research via the tertiary institutions that apply for them, organizations such as the Muslim Hospital and Welfare Society in the Cape and the Arabic Studies Circle in Durban have also been instrumental in financing Islamic Studies research over the years. The research community was also given a further boost when the Shah Mohamed Scholarship Trust entered the arena by contributing financial awards to candidates working at the post-graduate level. Mr. Ebrahim Rhoda was a 2005 candidate, who received R10,000.00, for his fascinating research on 'The Strand Muslim community of the Cape'. Much of the mentioned post-graduate research, as well as those listed below, have been produced by scholars attached to tertiary institutions in South(ern) Africa.

New Educational Institutions

Towards the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005, the community witnessed the amalgamation of the two local theological institutions, namely the Islamic College of Southern Africa and Darul Arqam College. They worked towards the creation of an entirely new structure in the form of the International Peace University of South Africa (www.ipsauniversity.com). This came about after much deliberation between the administrators and other stakeholders of the mentioned institutions as well as those attached to Jam'iyyatul Qurra, the Mintin School of Development Studies, and the Shanaaz Parker Culinary Academy. This new institution, like all other intellectual outfits, has its detractors and supporters; however, the Cape community in particular and the South African (Muslim) society at large are curious to see in which way this new institution will make an intellectual impact within the next two to five years.

The administrators, one is certain, are aware that it is indeed an uphill task to make a fresh start and develop a new educational name brand; on the one level, they have to

compete with four major secular tertiary institutions in its neighbourhood, and, on the other, they have to rival well-established Muslim theological colleges, such as those in Newcastle and Azaadville as well as new ones, such as Dallas College (a Murabitun educational institution). For the new University to be competitive in this educational market, the institution's staff will have to upgrade their teaching and research skills at either the neighbouring institutions or abroad. And they will also have to undertake and share their research findings with a larger audience. If the International Peace University wishes to be different from other Muslim theological colleges, then research will have to feature as a key component in its academic programme and its students will have to be given the necessary support and supervision to assist them in achieving the desired goals. Whilst it is fine to scale up its international profile by signing 'memorandum of understandings' with institutions in Southeast Asia, this should not be a priority at present. The importance is to lay a strong foundation by creating an attractive and viable academic programme and building capacity through teaching and research.

Flagships such as the journal that the International Peace University produces should be given the necessary attention in order that it can draw the relevant contributions and avoid inbreeding. Before IPSA came into being, ICOSA's staff produced a journal in 2002 that demonstrates the types of issues its staff had been occupied with in terms of research. With the establishment of the new institution, the administrators changed the name of the *ICOSA Occasional Journal* to *IPSA Journal of Islamic Studies*; and instead of starting afresh the editor opted to continue with the numbering and thus brought out issue no. 4 during the early part of 2005. Whilst the journal is welcomed in the academic circles, the editor will have to put more effort into its presentation, contents and structure in order to raise the journal's standard. One step in this direction is to appoint an editorial board as well as an International Advisory Committee. The editor and the editorial board should consider appointing individuals from a number of institutions, particularly from those with which it has signed MoUs during the past few months. And one is quite confident that under the watchful eye of the International Advisory Board with individuals such as Dr. Tamimi, whom IPSA invited to present a 'Islam and Democracy' series in November 2005, and Professor Azyumardi Azra, with whom an MoU was signed in Jakarta, the journal will indeed make substantial input in the future.

One Day Seminar and Two Day Conference:

Coincidentally, Prof. A. Azra was invited with Professor Nabila Lubis to make a special one day presentation in Cape Town. This one day seminar, which was organized by the Indonesian Embassy in Pretoria and its Cape Town based Consulate, gave ample focus to Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari. It demonstrated the nature of the ties that presently exist between Indonesia and South Africa (particularly the Western Cape). The seminar, which was held at the Iziko Museum in Cape Town during March 2005, not only had the mentioned Indonesian scholars as the main paper presenters; it also had, among others, Professor Robert Shell (University of the Western Cape) and Professor Suleiman Dangor (University of KwaZulu Natal) who made valuable inputs. This low-key academic activity was the first of its kind – as far as is known - between Indonesians and South Africans.

Professor Dangor was also a key speaker at a ‘Political Islam’ seminar that was jointly organized by the University of Pretoria’s Centre for International Political Studies, directed by Professor Hussein Solomon, and the School of Politics at the University of KwaZulu Natal. This meeting, which took place on the 30th of July, was – in a sense - a follow up to the international conference that was organized by CIPS and held in Pretoria during November 2004. The available report indicated that a lively intellectual interaction ensued. A few weeks after this event, Professor Dangor was involved in setting up a panel that discussed issues of Islam and Muslims at the annual conference of the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES); this took place at the Pietermaritzburg campus of UKZN.

ENTRIES

The entries inserted in this list mainly cover those contributions that appeared during 2005. However, the entries that did not appear in previous *ARISA* lists have also been inserted. The reasons for this may be attributed to the fact that (a) some of the academic journals have fallen behind with their issues, and (b) the compilers of these lists have overlooked the mentioned publications in the process of their compilations. And since the compiler was aware of a few contributions that will appear in 2006, it was viewed as useful entries at this point.

The reader’s attention is drawn to the fact that a few entries with their focus outside the traditional ‘Islam and Muslims’ area have also been included. Since issues in the Southwest Asian and North African regions (and elsewhere) do impact upon South African affairs, it was felt that their inclusion will be of some interest. In addition, the compiler has also decided to include entries culled from a few popular publications that contained useful texts. A final word: the compiler wishes to thank all those scholars/researchers who contributed to this list of entries.

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Quotes:

“For the new University to be competitive in this educational market, the institution’s staff will have to upgrade their teaching and research skills at either the neighbouring institutions or abroad.”

“A significant development among post-graduate research is that there has been a marked shift from pure descriptive studies that characterized research during the earlier years when departments and programs were first introduced.”