

Research Africa Reviews, Vol. 6, No. 3, December 2022

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Muhammed Haron & Ardhya Erlangga Arby (Eds.). 2021. *Evaluating Shaykh Yusuf Al-Makassari and Imam ‘Abdullah Tidore’s Ideational Teachings: Reinforcing Indonesia – South Africa’s Relations*. Pretoria: Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia. 266pp. ISBN 978-1-991223-71-5 (Print) and ISBN 978-1-991223-72-2 (Electronic).

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I approach this critical review with the intention of trying to do justice to the respective legacies of two iconic Muslim personalities; both were respectively exiled to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company during the late 17th and 18th centuries. Appreciating the depth of research and effort that went into compiling this work and critically evaluating the arguments that have been put forward by the authors in this edited work, I draw the connections between the themes of the text, its central threads, and the respective geographical contexts. In so doing, not only do I intend to draw inspiration from these figures whose lives were conditioned in many ways by colonialism, but I also aim to reflect on the relevance of their ideational teachings for our times.

I approach this review as someone who, admittedly, knew very little about Shaykh Yusuf Al-Makassari (d. 1699) and Imam ‘Abdullah ibn Qadi ‘Abdus Salaam (d. 1807), commonly known as Tuan Guru. Be it because of not having grown up in the Cape, or of having had very limited exposure to sources that could teach us about their lives in a meaningful way, it is a slightly embarrassing admission. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the authors and editors of the book for saving me from any future embarrassment and providing us with a means of deepening our knowledge of these Shaykhs, their lives, their teachings, and the worlds which shaped them and which they in turn shaped.

Given the roles that they and their descendants played in laying the foundations for the preservation and practice of Islam in colonial contexts, it is incumbent upon all of us (and our generation, particularly) to reflect on what we can do to strengthen and build on these foundations, considering the persistence of coloniality, i.e., of long-standing patterns of colonial power, in shaping our contexts¹. My hope is that this book might prove to be invaluable in this regard.

I also approach this review as a Muslim who is deeply passionate about decolonization. For some time now, I have tried to grapple with questions such

¹Maldonado-Torres (2007).

as: what does it mean to be Muslim in the context of a society that is struggling through the legacies of colonialism and apartheid? How might we come to terms with the effects that these systems have had (and continue to have) in conditioning our theologies and practices of Islam? What will it take for us to not only disentangle ourselves from systems that perpetuate harm, but to actively work towards the realization of dignified, decolonial futures, not only for ourselves but for future generations? I raise these questions because it was in the process of reading this book that two things became abundantly clear: i) these questions are not necessarily new; and ii) the examples of Shaykh Yusuf, Imam Abdullah, and the communities that supported them may prove to be instructive in this regard.

As Ministers Naledi Pandor and Marsudi note in their opening remarks, the book “has been written in the context of the colonization of Africa and Asia”². While each chapter explores this context from different perspectives, be it in terms of Shaykh Yusuf’s guerrilla warfare against the Dutch³ or Imam ‘Abdullah’s (somewhat ironic) characterization of the Cape of Good Hope as *Makan al-Huzn* (a Place of Sadness),⁴ there appears to be broad consensus amongst the authors about the inseparability of colonialism from the conditions of these Shaykhs’ lives, their teachings, and – by extension – the foundations that they laid. Through these accounts, we are offered new levels of insight into both the brutality of colonialism, as well as strategies of resistance that were grounded in Shaykh Yusuf’s and Imam ‘Abdullah’s respective theologies.

The book is divided into two parts, focusing on Shaykh Yusuf and Imam ‘Abdullah respectively. Despite living close to a century apart, during which time colonial control of the Cape became rapidly consolidated, both figures “complemented each other in various ways”⁵. The arrangement of the book, in turn, reflects this complementary relationship to a large extent. The placement of Azra’s and Abd Rahman’s chapters at the beginning of Part One provides some helpful context to the life of Shaykh Yusuf, considering the lengths to which he travelled, the scholars from whom he benefited, and the socio-political realities in which he was implicated.

From reading these chapters, one gains an impression of Shaykh Yusuf as a scholar who broadened the definition of what it means to be a scholar; as one who was not confined in his pursuit of knowledge to any singular location or ideology, but who took full advantage of the global scholarly networks that existed to broaden and deepen in his understanding of the plurality of *turuq* that characterized the *Ummah*. The grounding of his resistance to Dutch colonial rule in this knowledge, which resulted in his banishment to Ceylon⁶ and the Cape of

² Pandor (2021: 9).

³ Azra (2021) and Abd Rahman (2021).

⁴ Morton; Rakiép & Rakiép (2021).

⁵ Haron & Arby (2021: 23)

⁶ Today’s Sri Lanka.

Good Hope, demonstrated both a deep sense of responsibility and a willingness to sacrifice in the Path of Allah.

Mustafa attempts a “philosophical construction” of Al-Makassari’s thought, comparing his ontological and epistemological viewpoints with those of Hegel and Marx. While the chapter provides an overview of the branches of Western philosophy, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and ethics, it makes the questionable assertion that Shaykh Yusuf’s philosophy can be characterized as “modern philosophy” and can therefore be examined through the same paradigm as Hegel and Marx. The basis of the assertion is that, chronologically, Shaykh Yusuf’s philosophy “was born after the renaissance movement”⁷, meaning that he would have encountered the work of modern philosophers through the exchange of knowledge across scholarly networks. The assertion requires more substantial evidence with direct references to Shaykh Yusuf’s work.

A few of the authors focus on the substance of Shaykh Yusuf’s and Imam ‘Abdullah’s contributions to *tasawwuf* discourse, with some such as Sahib, Dangor, and Salie engaging in thematic reviews of their respective works and others focusing on select texts, such as Dadoo who applies critical discourse analysis to Shaykh Yusuf’s *Al-Nafha Al-Saylaniyyah fi l-Minha Al-Rahmaniyya* to situate the latter’s thought in the field of Islamic ethics and spirituality. Dadoo’s exemplary analysis of the themes, implications, and power relations embedded in the text enables us to access and engage deeply with Shaykh Yusuf’s contributions to Sufi discourse. For those, like myself, who may be unfamiliar with stages of *tasawwuf*, with what it means to be initiated into a *tariqah* or to be a *murid* (disciple) of a Shaykh, Sahib and Dangor’s respective analyses of recurring themes in Shaykh Yusuf’s work provide a useful and accessible introduction to these concepts.

Part Two, which focuses on the life of Imam ‘Abdullah al-Tidore/Tuan Guru, draws attention to the role and impact of the Imam’s institutionalization of Islam through the establishment of the first mosque and madressah in the country. The proximity of the Imam to those who had been enslaved at the Cape, his own experiences of being exiled on Robben Island, and the role that his teachings played in strengthening and supporting his followers through periods of immense trial and difficulty at the hands of the colonizing powers, form the basis of this section. Morton’s biographical overview of the Imam’s life from the point of his arrival at the Cape of Good Hope paints a bleak picture of the sort of environment in which Tuan Guru found himself. Morton effectively illustrates the brutality of life under colonial rule, drawing attention to the harsh conditions under which Tuan Guru was forced to operate. I noted that no explicit mention was made of the role that Sara van de Kaap played in establishing the first masjid by endowing the land of Auwal Masjid as *waqf* land.

⁷ Mustafa (2021: 99).

With reference to the work of Susan Newton-King⁸, Morton evoked questions such as, “what does it mean to be Muslim in a context wherein people are dying ‘complete social deaths’ every day, due to structural inequality, racism, xenophobia, gender-based violence, etc.?” In these respects, the Imam’s teachings have much to offer. As Morton argues, following in the Imam’s footsteps, perhaps it is in the building of “unifying social infrastructures” that we may find answers to some of these questions. While, in our time and context, I may not necessarily agree with the idea of “staying under the radar” as far as confronting these questions is concerned, as is implied by Morton’s framing of *wasatiyya*, there is still tremendous value in this regard.

In a similar vein, Salie elaborates on the role that Tuan Guru’s teachings played in the making and shaping of a unique Cape Muslim cultural identity. These teaching include “waging ‘an inner jihad,’ implementing diverse modes of faith, [internalizing] the Twenty Attributes of God [...] and engaging indigenous and diasporic practices and traditions”⁹. Against the backdrop of colonial domination, in which concerted efforts were made to not only subordinate people to white, Christian rule, but to remake entire communities in the image of Western modernity, the power, significance and liberatory potential of these teachings cannot be overstated. Such sentiments are echoed by Luqman and Muttaqin Rakiep¹⁰, direct descendants of Tuan Guru, who argue that the Imam’s teachings not only inspired hope in the face of colonial annihilation, but also functioned to empower transformative action grounded in the remembrance of Allah. The Imam’s transcription of the Qur’an from memory, coupled with the compilation of his *magnum opus*, the *Ma’arifat*, laid the basis for the building of an emerging community and the initiation of a ground-breaking educational system. Considering the fervency of Christian missionary activities, the propagation of Islam that stemmed from these endeavours is no small achievement¹¹.

In conclusion, we are deeply grateful to the authors and editors of this work for their efforts. The experience of reading this book has proven to be deeply enriching. While acknowledging the contributions of Muzdalifah Sahib, I would contend that a concerted effort needs to be made to redress the dominance of men’s voices in academic spaces and to ensure that we strive for a greater degree of gendered representation in this regard.

⁸ Newton-King (2012)

⁹ Salie (2021:188).

¹⁰ Rakiep (2021)

¹¹ Rhoda (2021)

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ISSN 2575-6990