**‘Islam is a way of Life’: Everyday practices and the politics of ‘Indian Muslimness’ in post-apartheid South Africa**

Good morning everyone. I’m going to speak today on my proposed study for my PhD. My presentation today is explores the studies of Islam and Muslim life in South Africa and proposes a potentially fruitful framework for an ethnographic study of Muslim women’s lives in South Africa in light of some of the issues, debates and questions that have arisen in the study of ‘Muslim lives’ in the broader global literature. The ideas I present here are preliminary issues that are also shaping the proposal of my broader Doctoral thesis.

These debates are occurring within the broad field of the ‘anthropology of Islam’ where the most significant problem identified has been that many studies on Muslim societies tend to be analytically framed by a West/Islam or religion/secularism dichotomy, which has methodological consequences and limits the kinds of conclusions that follow.

For example Schielke (2010), Bangstad (2011) and Gourgouris (2008) take issue with Saba Mahmood’s work on Muslim women in the mosque movement in Egypt for a number of reasons including the following methodological ones. My ethnographic study 1) explores the lives of Mahmood’s informants only within the space of the mosque thus presenting us with a convenient picture of their ‘pious’ lives, but no sense of what their lives are like outside these spaces and 2) she chooses to focus on Muslim women who are presented self-evidently as ‘pious’ and are paradigmatically taken as the most authentic or ‘true’ Muslims. For Bangstad and Schielke, it is precisely these methodological choices, of having particular kinds of informants and studying them ethnographically in particular kinds of spaces, that allows Mahmood to keep intact the West/Islam dichotomy.

For Bangstad, what we require instead is an “…anthropological conceptualization of the lives of contemporary Muslims in a globalized and hybrid world – in which the religious and the secular, the non-Islamic and the Islamic intersect…” (Bangstad 2011: 44). There are all kinds of silences that arise from perspectives that “…fram[e] Muslims first and foremost as religious beings…silences about what happens in the spaces between secularity and religiosity among Muslims, about class and social status, and about modes of Muslim sociality which are not primarily religious…” (Bangstad 2011: 34). Following Seyla Benhabib, Bangstad encourages us to see that, “[Muslim] ‘traditions are not unities with clearly definable borders but hybrid conversations and argumentations’ (2002: 194). “With the globalization of the modern media as well as of financial capital, and increased transnational flows, postcolonial Muslims live less as Leibnitzian ‘windowless monads’… encapsulated and enclosed in their own ‘forms of life’, than ever before” (Bangstad 2011: 42).

We see then how crucial good or illuminating methodological choices are, as well as how important the empirical is in bringing the ambivalences of subjectivities – without drawing "arbitrary dividing line[s] between religious pursuits and other pursuits" (Schielke 2010: 14) – to light.

*What is Islam? A South African context*

I am going to attempt to capture fragments of answers to the question of the meanings of Islam within the South African context through literature on Muslims here, in order to illuminate the rich opportunities that this context provides to speak to some of the issues that have been raised in the international literature on the 'anthropology of Islam'. I also want to show how my study can further our understanding of how, through which discourses, images, and practices and with what effects global practices of Muslimness are locally appropriated.

In Ishtiyaq Shukri's novel *The Silent Minaret* (2005), Islam in its South African incarnation becomes the language of resistance. According to Tina Steiner, Shukri's use of the symbol of Sheikh Yusuf of Macassar in the novel means that "the history of Islam in South Africa [becomes] synonymous with the struggle against [both colonial and apartheid] oppression" (Steiner 2012: 172). The anti-colonial, anti-apartheid South African Islam of Shukri's novel, represented in other works such as Goolam Vahed's 'Muslim Portraits: the anti-apartheid struggle' (2012), is certainly a useful discourse in a post-apartheid context where the past looms large and communities are at pains to find authentic 'struggle' credentials, but cannot hold as an all-encompassing characterization of Islam here.

Indeed, the multiplicity of Islam in South Africa makes it difficult to speak of it in the singular, or represent it as one thing. This multiplicity is not unrelated to the diverse history and origins of Islam in South Africa. According to Baderoon "South African Muslim communities consist largely of the descendants of enslaved and exiled people who were brought to the Cape Colony from East Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia from 1658, the descendants of traders and indentured labourers who arrived from India from 1860, Black and white Muslim converts as well as a small community of immigrant Muslims from other parts of the African continent" (Baderoon 2012: 239). Vahed and Jeppie's (2005) paper titled 'Multiple Communities: Muslims in post-apartheid South Africa', also points to this multiplicity, elaborating on how these communities are hierarchized and/or fractured along lines of race, class and access to various forms of economic and social capital. The image of Islam that emerges from Goolam Vahed's nuanced historical writings on Indian Muslims in Durban (along with scholars such as Shahid Vawda (1994) who wrote on Islam in an African Township in Durban and Sultan Khan (2009) whose provocatively titled paper 'Children of a lesser God' addresses the divided economic histories and its legacies for Indian Muslims in Durban) provide a more complex picture of the

meanings of being Muslim in South Africa – in terms marked particularly by race and class divisions.

There exists therefore in the South African context, as Baderoon puts it, an "entanglement of Islam with contemporary politics, colonial and apartheid history, and post-apartheid nation-building. This entanglement of Islam and culture counters assumptions of a monolithic religious identity or history… reveal[ing] instead the complexities and tensions within South African Muslim communities and the ways in which they are affected by the same political processes that shape other elements of South African life" (Baderoon 2012b: 168).

*The materiality of 'culture' and 'heritage'*

In trying to account for Islam in the everyday lives of Indian Muslim women in Durban, Vahed and Waetjen in their book, 'Gender, Modernity and Indian Delights: the Women's Cultural Group of Durban, 1954-2010' (2010), provide a picture of middle and upper class Indian Muslim women who were very much engaged in the processes of cultural and community reproduction. It is a complex picture of women who in the 50s, 60s and 70s would stage Indian cooking and fashion shows for white women in Durban to attend, showcasing an ethnicized, 'authentic' Indian culture which could be proudly claimed and performed (a claim to authenticity that is echoed in Sharad Chari's (2006) study on the relationship between Coloured and Indian identities in Merebank and Wentworth in Durban, where amidst the 'insecurity' of a post-apartheid context, Indian subjectivities can make claims to an 'authentic' Indian identity through a tangible, material 'culture' coming from elsewhere). The significance of the materiality of culture for particular identity claims is also evident in Joan Wardrop's (2012) study on Indian Muslim women's food culture and culinary practices in Durban, which explores "reassertions of cultural identity through the transmission of food knowledges and culinary techniques" (Wardrop 2012: 221).

Similar to the function that food has of enabling claims to an 'authentic' or 'pure' identity, Green and Murray show how, starting in the 90s, stronger claims by Muslims over the karamats in Cape Town are simultaneous with claims of association with being 'Cape Malay', a designation that had previously been eschewed (Green and Murray 2012). There is a new concern with 'heritage' as reflected in dispute over the histories of kramats which are "…also [disputes] about descent, about the ownership of stories, and about visibility and legitimacy in the post-apartheid space" (2012: 209-210).

The search for culture is also a search for 'authenticity', but for some Muslims, 'culture' and 'tradition' are eschewed, in a search instead for 'modernity' or 'progress', and again this finds expression in and through shifting (rather than preserving) religious practices. Shamil Jeppie's (2007) book 'Language, Identity, Modernity: the Arabic Study Circle of Durban', is about a

language group started by upper-middle class Indian Muslim men in the 1950s, speaks to the power of language – from Urdu to Arabic as a medium through which to learn and imbibe religion among Indian Muslims – that this group advocated for and how this shift is connected to class configurations, and to claims towards 'modernity' and away from 'tradition'. The eschewing of 'tradition', 'culture' and certain ritualistic practices such as the Mawlud celebrations have been studied by different scholars including Vahed (2001) in the context of Durban and by Bangstad (2007) in the context of Cape Town, as part of power struggles over the religious authority to define what is 'properly' 'Islamic'.

There is a tendency, when studying Muslim 'cultures' or identities, of producing what Bangstad has called the "culturalization of politics" (Bangstad 2011: 33) (of the postcolonial and poststructuralist left), which he says is premised "precisely on an obscuring of class and social relations". This is the sense one gets when reading some of the *Social Dynamics* papers on Islam and the everyday in South Africa. Wardrop for instance claims that her participants' accounts and experiences reflect "the quiet sensibilities of a small Durban culture which defies the pressures of modernity and the impact of Westernising consumer glitz in continuing to articulate and sustain its own deeper values" (2012: 222). Yet Islam in Durban, and indeed in South Africa more broadly is as implicated in and subject to the broader processes of capitalist and consumerist social value as any shifting subjectivities in the national context. The aim is to understand how these tensions between religiosity and capitalist value are manifested and negotiated in the everyday material lives of Muslims. This encroachment of capitalism into the daily material lives of Muslims is captured in the essay 'The Azaan clock' by Imraan Coovadia, who reflects on the meaning of a stronger, more visible presence of Islam, through objects of religiosity in his parent's home (Coovadia 2012).

Fatima Asmal, in her 2012 documentary titled 'Muslim Identity in South Africa' (a tellingly encompassing choice of title), which aired on SABC2's Reflections of Faith programme paints a picture of post-apartheid Islam in South Africa where there is a kind of democratization of Islamic knowledge, and ownership over this knowledge which new technologies have enabled, giving young middle class Muslims access to a variety of discourses on Islam, and taking religious authority away from its traditional (male) sources and authorities. Yet Nina Hoel's study on Muslim women and their consultations with religious authorities on matters pertaining to divorce in Cape Town shows us that this is an authority which still wields a great deal of power (Hoel 2012).

Bangstad's study on post-apartheid Islam in Cape Town is skeptical of the idea that technologies and globalization have enabled an easy 'democratization' of Islam, arguing instead for an exploration of the ways in which male religious authorities have sustained and reworked

their claims to authority under changing conditions (see Bangstad 2007). Brandon Ingram's study on the Tableegh Jamaat movement in South Africa and specifically in Gauteng shows how the local version of Islam that the movement proffered under apartheid linked it to India in a way that produced and enabled a moral distance from the South African political situation (Ingram 2011). This therefore shows us that a particular globally operating Islamic ideology, operating as it does across numerous continents does not have independent or universal meaning, but instead comes to mean something within and through localized appropriations of it.

For Vahed the post-apartheid linkage between the local and the global for the Indian Muslim community occurs through what he calls "new manifestations of piety", which occur through greater adherence to particular forms of religious dress and increased overseas travel on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia (2001). For Rehana Vally (2001), the post-apartheid period is characterized by shifts in dress styles, which she says reflect a re-orientation on the part of Indian Muslims from India towards Saudi Arabia, and away from 'Indianness', towards 'Muslimness'.

How we make sense of these shifts in post-apartheid South Africa must be empirical, historical and ethnographically rich in the sense that the answers we seek to provide are textured in explaining *how* embodied practices of Muslimness are manifested, and with what effects, rather than why. This, I argue is a significant part of explaining the *meaning* of embodied practices of Muslimness in post-apartheid South Africa.