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Contextualising Islam

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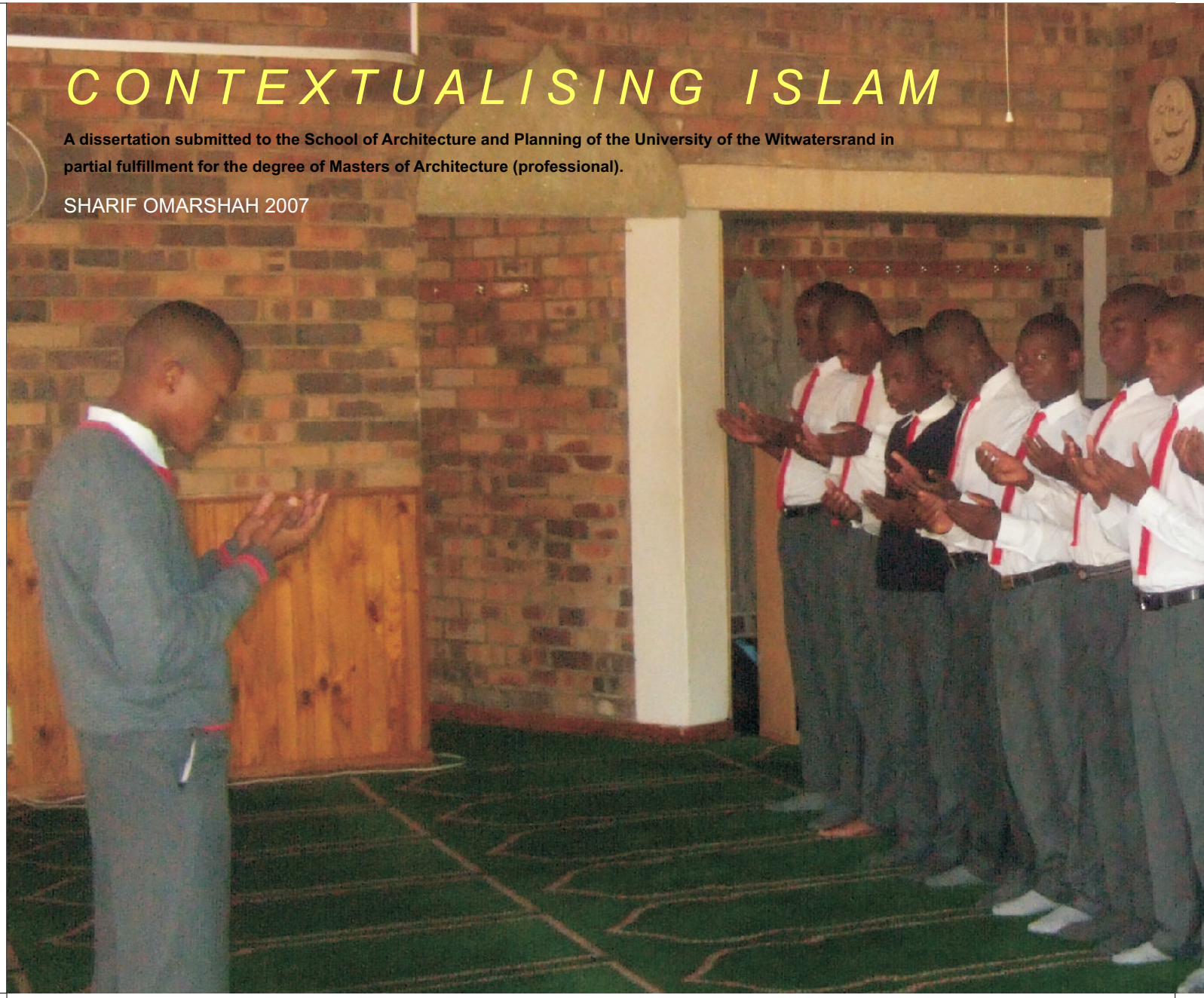
SHARIF OMARSHAH

FINAL SUBMISSION

CONTEXTUALISING ISLAM

A dissertation submitted to the School of Architecture and Planning of the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfillment for the degree of Masters of Architecture (professional).

SHARIF OMARSHAH 2007








بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



I DEDICATE THIS THESIS TO MY FATHER

I would also like to thank the following for their contributions to this thesis:

My family, for their support and without whom this would not have been possible.

All at Darul Arkam Markaz.

All at Gapp Architects and Urban Designers.

Thesis class of 2007 especially Aadill, Muhammed, Spelele, Spencer, Mike, Dipen, Vusi and Abdullah.

Paul Kotze, Muhammad Munchi, Loan Poulsen, Peter Rich, Melinder Silverman and all the staff at Wits University.

Most Importantly, my Creator for the ability He has given me and the opportunities He has afforded me. May He accept this from me and make it of benefit to those who read it.





DECLARATION

I **Sharif Ahmed Omarshah** student number **0005227E** am a student registered for the course Masters of Architecture (Professional) in the year **2007**. I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without permission and/or acknowledging the original source) is wrong. I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have stated explicitly otherwise. I have followed the required conventions in referencing thoughts, ideas and visual materials of others.

For the purpose, I have referred to the Graduate School of Engineering and the Built Environment style guide. I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source or the ideas or words in my work.

Signed.....

Date.....

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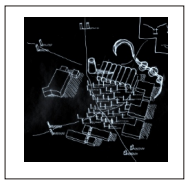



INTRODUCTION



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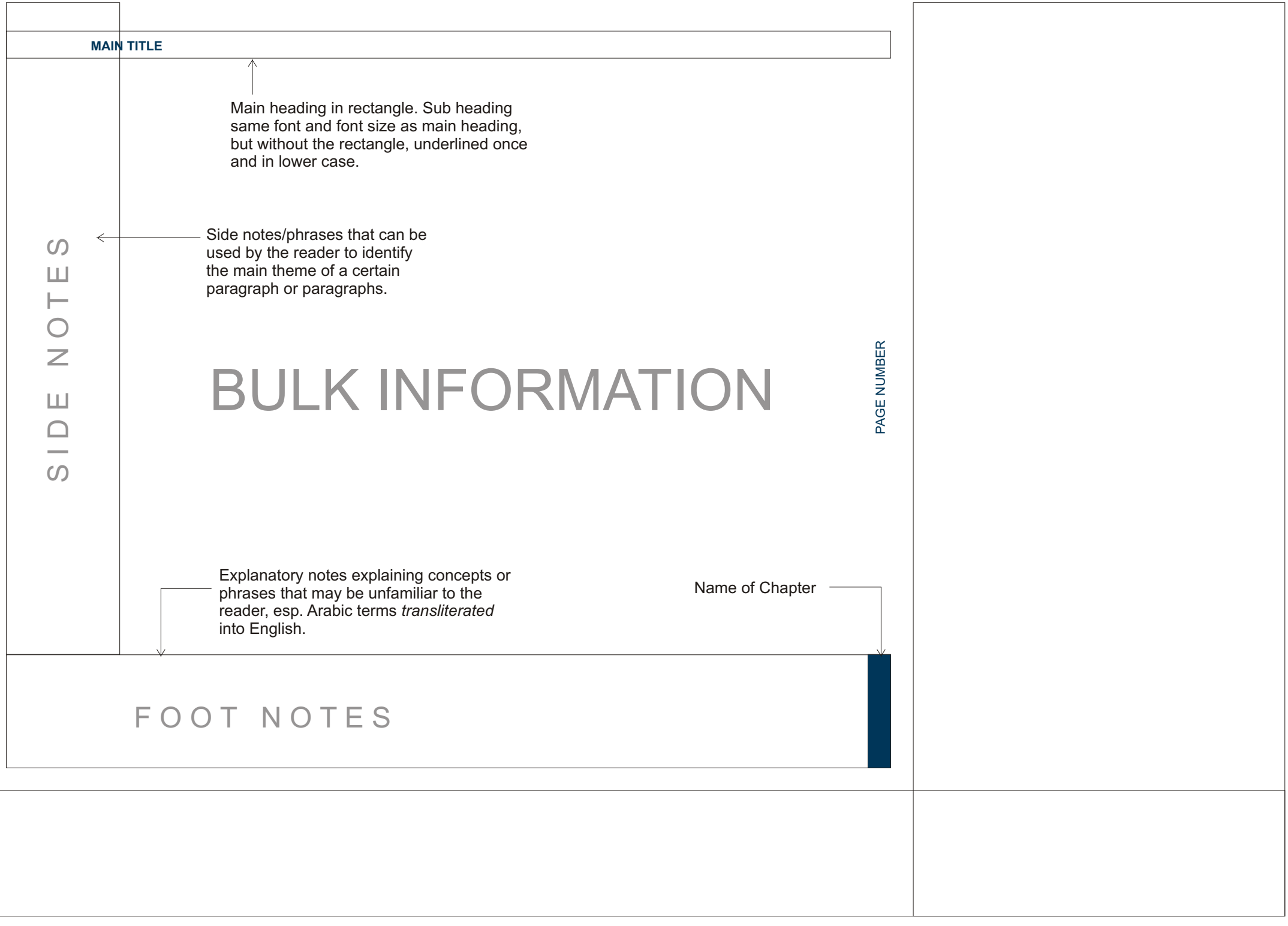
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Side notes/phrases that can be used by the reader to identify the main theme of a certain paragraph or paragraphs.
SIDE NOTES
BULK INFORMATION
PAGE NUMBER
Explanatory notes explaining concepts or phrases that may be unfamiliar to the reader, esp. Arabic terms *transliterated* into English.
Name of Chapter
FOOT NOTES

STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENT

FIRST SECTION OF THE DOCUMENT AND WHAT ISSUES IT DISCUSSES

This thesis has been divided into three parts or sections. The first part; the ***Introduction*** deals with the advent of Islam into South Africa and its early manifestation. This section will identify the main categories of Muslims found in South Africa, it will go on to discuss the effect of apartheid and the demise of apartheid on these communities and their spatial fragmentation. This section will also expound on the expansion of the Muslim population in South Africa and attempt to offer some reasons as to why there is such a rapid rate of increase.

The second part of the document falls under the heading of ***Context***; and this section can be divided into three sub - sections, namely:

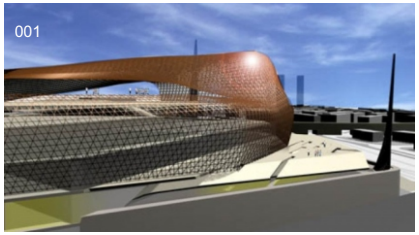
SECOND SECTION OF THE DOCUMENT AND WHAT ISSUES IT DISCUSSES

01. International Theoretical Context; this section deals with the current issues surrounding Islamic Architecture throughout the Muslim world today, and includes the following; explaining the term Islamic Architecture, expounding on the principle of *Tawhid* [1] as well as other fundamentals of Islam and their manifestation in Islamic/Mosque architecture, discussing role of the mosque within the community and its adaptability, and finally looking at contemporary mosque form and the way architects are interpreting history.

001: Proposed London Markaz in Newham next to the Olympic Complex.

002: Grand National Assembly Mosque in Ankara Turkey.

003: Corniche Mosque in Saudi Arabia







001 - 003; The images show three different approaches to mosque design which will be discussed later. (cited Dec 2007 http://www.archnet.co.za)

1. *Tawhid*: Transliteration of the arabic word for Unity and the Oneness of God.

02. **Contextualism:** This deals with the issue of relevant architecture and goes on to identify types of *contextualsim* and the approach taken by this thesis towards *contextualism*.


004 - ORLANDO LIBRARY


005 - BARALINK TAXI AND BUS RANK


006 - WALTER SISULU SQUARE



007 - HECTOR PETERSON MUSEUM

004 - 007; The images show the four contemporary architectural projects in Soweto Johannesburg. (Images by author)


008 - SOWETO (Image by Author)

03. **Physical Context;** This sub - section deals with the site chosen for this thesis, from a regional scale down to the neighborhood scale.

The **third section** of the document has been entitled ***Realisation of Concepts***, and deals with the design solution. It maps out the initial concepts their evolution and refinement into a final architectural proposal to the issue of Contextualising Islam.

INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION

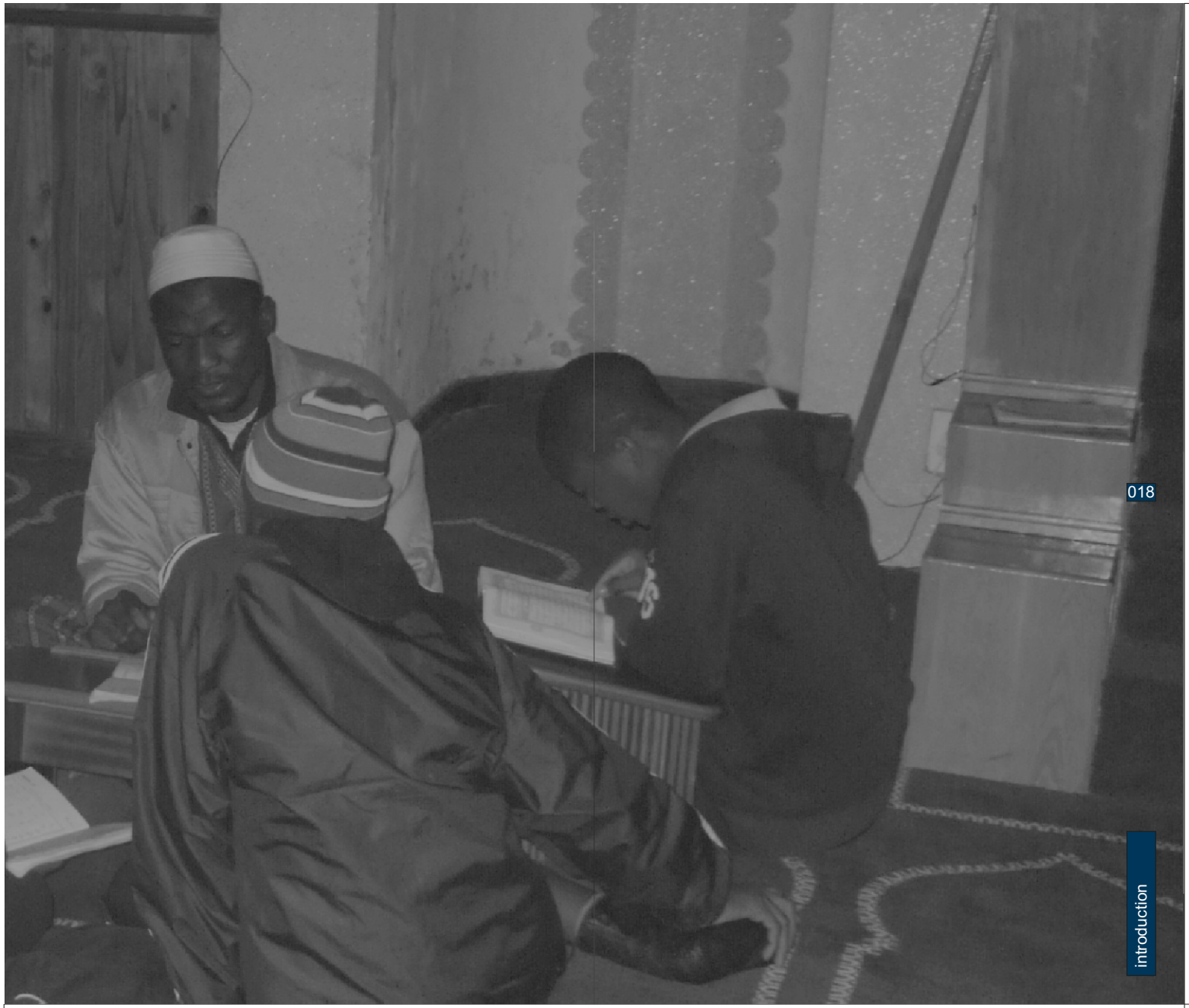
Being Muslim it was always my intention to use this opportunity to research Islamic Architecture, however my initial concept was a language school, realising the importance of the arabic language in Islamic Culture, I was to design an Arabic Language School.

At the beginning of this year I was approached by a friend, who offered me a position as an assistant in a leadership academy based in Lenasia South, specialising in educating new Muslims in different areas of Islamic Sciences as well as allowing them to continue with their secular studies. The opportunity was one I did not refuse.

Dar ul Arkam Leadership Academy is a center of learning that currently has 15 students, and is also a mosque serving a section of the Lenasia South Muslim community. All the functions of the center i.e. the teaching, the kitchen, the residences, the ablution facilities etc. all take place in the mosque, with the doors to our rooms opening out onto the prayer hall of the mosque.

The term Dar ul Arkam simply means house of Arkam, and is in reference to a house that was owned my man called Arkam and used by the first Muslims in Makkah who would meet there in secret at a time when the Makkans were persecuting them, to learn the religion of Islam. Thus it was the first house of learning in Islam.

I have gained valuable insight into an area of study within Islam that I was not familiar with prior to being here, namely Islamic Propagation. Also because of the students I have been staying with I have come to know the need for such a center or similar facility within Soweto itself, from where most of the students come from. The students often complain about the immense lack of Islamic Centers of any sort in Soweto as well other township areas.



Islam is a purely monotheistic religion followed by approximately one third of the worlds population. The religion is largely misunderstood due to both internal and external factors.

Internally, Muslims themselves often portray their religion inaccurately due to their own misconceptions, as well as the many cultural practices they attribute to Islam. Externally there is a long history of mis-information regarding Islam, primarily a product of the Crusades as well as oriental historians who portrayed the Prophet Muhammed[1] (pbuh) as a "camel thief, a rake, sorcerer, a brigand thief, and even as a Roman cardinal furious at not having been elected pope, as a false god to whom the faithful made human sacrifices." (Haykal 1976; xliii). "The worthy Guibert de Nogent himself tells us that he (Muhammed) died through excessive drunkenness and that his corpse was eaten by pigs on a dunghill, explaining why the flesh of this animal and wine are prohibited." (Haykal 1976;xliii). This kind of blatant disregard for the truth is now common place within certain media bent on mis-informing their readers on Islam.

INCORRECT REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM.

This thesis is concerned with Islamic architecture, however it recognises the role Islam (the religion) played in the art and architecture of the Islamic world, and thus the need to briefly explain to the reader the principles of Islam upon which its architecture is grounded.

Islam was defined by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself, who lived in the 7th Century. His statements known as *The Hadith,* considered separate to the scripture he received (The Quran) were recorded and amongst these statements is a particular *hadith* known as '*the hadith of the angel Gabriel.'*

1. *Prophet Muhammed*; The final messenger of God descended from Abraham along the line of Ishmael, who recived through revelation the final book of God the Quran. It is also Islamic practice that when the name of the prophet is mentioned it be followed by the phrase - *'may God's praise and peace be upon him.'*

THE HADITH OF ANGEL GABRIEL

This *hadith* has been used by the Muslim world to define the religion of Islam. It is mentioned that the Prophet (pbuh) was seated amongst his companions in the mosque and he asked them if any of them had any questions, none of them responded. Then a man who appeared to have come from the desert sat directly in front of the Prophet (pbuh), with his knees touching the knees of the Prophet (pbuh). However what was unusual, was that his clothes were extremely white and his hair was extremely black though he had been traveling in the desert and should have been covered in dust.

The man went on to ask the Prophet (pbuh) what is faith. The Prophet (pbuh)replied that faith was to believe in God, His angels, the meeting with Him, His messengers, and to believe in resurrection. Then he further asked, “What is Islam?” The Prophet (pbuh) replied that Islam is to worship God alone and none else, to perform the prayers, to give charity, and to fast in the month of Ramadhaan. Then he asked, “What is *Ihsan*[1] (perfection)?” To this the Prophet (pbuh) replied, perfection is to worship God as if you can see Him, and if you cannot achieve this, then to know that He is looking at you. Finally the man asked, “When will the final hour be established?” The Prophet (pbuh) responded by saying that the answerer has no better knowledge than the questioner, and none but God knows its time. Once the man had left The Prophet (pbuh) then informed his companions that the man was the angel Gabriel who had come to teach them their religion.

According to Islam God created and nothing is uncreated but Him, He determines the past, the present, and the future. He is not bound by time, He is eternal, not born and not created, unimaginable. His knowledge and His power encompasses all.

1. *Ihsan:* Transliteration of the arabic word for *a stage of belief reached by an individual,* translated as a stage of perfection.

FIRST WAVE OF MUSLIMS FROM SOUTH EAST ASIA

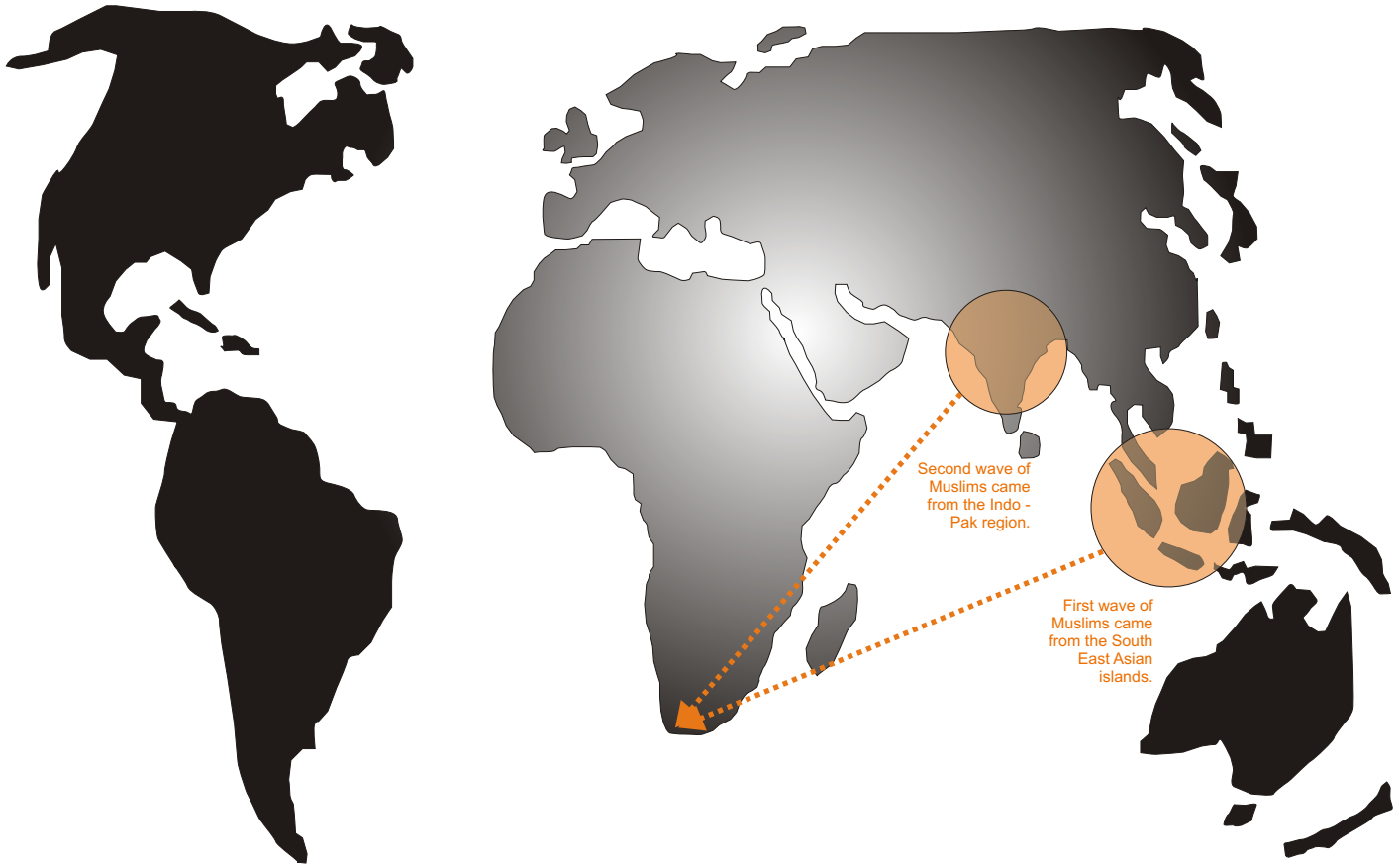
ISLAM first reached South Africa through Arab traders and African immigrants, however according to main stream history Islam arrived in South Africa from two different sources: Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pak region. The first wave of Muslims arrived as slaves from Java and Malaysia (later they also came from Ceylon, Madagascar, & India). The slaves were brought in from other colonies as cheap labour, but there was also a contingent of them who were actually prisoners of war. Within Tidore (Indonesia) there was an on-going *jihad* [1] against Dutch occupation, lead by the former ruling family of Indonesia. Thus captives of war were deported as slaves to Cape Town. One such captive of war was **Abdullah ibn Qadi Abdussalaam** [2], who played a prominent role in the establishment of Islam in the Cape. The first mosque aptly called Masjid al Awwal [3] was completed in 1778.

SECOND WAVE OF MUSLIMS FROM THE INDO - PAK SUB - CONTINENT

The second wave of Muslims arrived in 1860 from British controlled **India**, they too were brought in as cheap labour, this time to work on the sugar cane plantations, since the black population were not receptive to the idea. Majority of the Indians were settled in Durban. These indentured Indian labourers were on 3 year working contracts (later extended to 5), after which they had two choices; either to go back home, or to receive a piece of land equivalent to the cost of traveling home, most chose the latter. (Fisher R, Le Roux, & Mare 1998: 109)

After **gold** was discovered in Johannesburg, many of the 'Free Indians' moved to Johannesburg, (now accompanied by a number of Indians from the Subcontinent who paid for the journey themselves), where they settled in areas such as Fordsburg, Pageview, Newtown, and Fereirestown. Many of them opened retail shops in these areas and became an important component in the commercial system of Johannesburg. (Docrat, 1986: 09)

1. *Jihad*: Transliteration of the arabic word for *struggle* used mainly to refer to a holy war.
2. *Abdullah ibn Qadi Addussalam*: also known as Tuan Guru, taken captive by Dutch imperial forces and exiled to the Cape.
3. *Al Awwal*: Transliteration of the arabic word for *the first*.



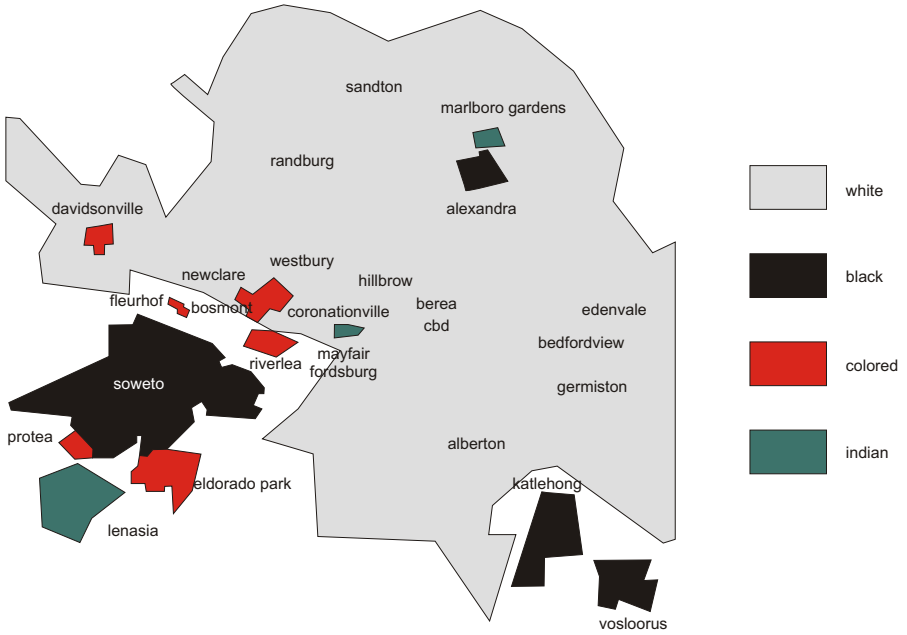
009 - Mapping showing where early Muslims in South Africa mainly came from.

GROUP AREAS ACT AND ITS EFFECT ON THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF MUSLIMS

The **Group Areas Act**, once apartheid had been established, spatially divided the Muslim population into two; one being *'colored'* or *'malay'* and the other *'indian'*. The former group were mainly the descendants of the first wave of Muslims from the South East Asia islands, and the latter group were the descendants of the second wave of Muslims who arrived from the Indo - Pak region.

'Indian' areas (of Johannesburg); Marlboro Gardens, Mayfair, Fordsburg, Lenasia.

'Colored' or *'malay'* areas (of Johannesburg); Davidsonville, Newclare, Westbury, Bosmont, Fleurhof, Coronationville, Riverlea, Protea, Eldorado Park.



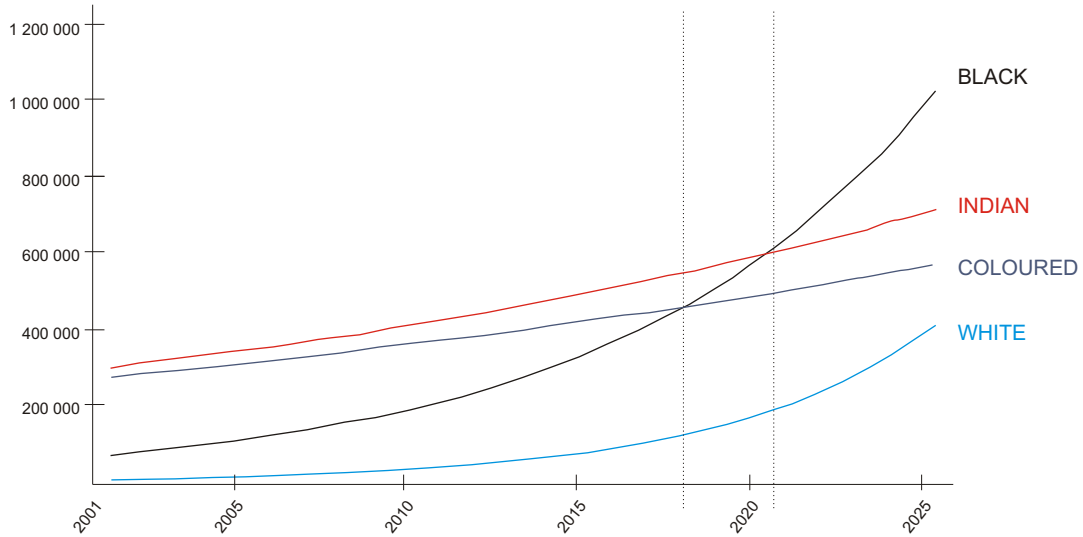
010 - GROUP AREAS after Beavon (2004; 214)

NEW MAKE UP OF JOHANNESBURG MUSLIM POPULATION

Post apartheid South Africa has seen major changes in it's Muslim population. Firstly there has been a huge influx of **African immigrants** into South Africa, to quantify them is impossible since the majority do not have legal status. Most of the immigrants come from Muslim nations, or nations with almost 50% of there population being Muslim. The mosques in Johannesburg are no longer dominated by Muslims of Indian heritage, there is now a large contingent of Somali, Sudanese, Nigerian, Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Malawian Muslims.

Secondly, the so called 'indian' and 'colored' Muslims are **relocating** to suburbs previously demarcated as 'whites' only, creating a vacuum that is more often than not fulled by either foreign Muslims or job - seekers from Durban and Cape Town.

Thirdly, the **increase** in the Muslim population amongst indigenous South Africans has been tremendous, with some estimating that they will become the major Muslim population group by 2022.



011 - EXPECTED MUSLIM GROWTH
(The Muslims of Khylitsha by Wahbie Long - research paper)

All three above mentioned factors provided this thesis with a starting point, but only one could be chosen, as all three initiate different architectural responses, due to the suburban context of each of the groups mentioned.

The first group are primarily found in the traditional Muslim suburbs of Johannesburg as well as in Yeoville and the CBD.

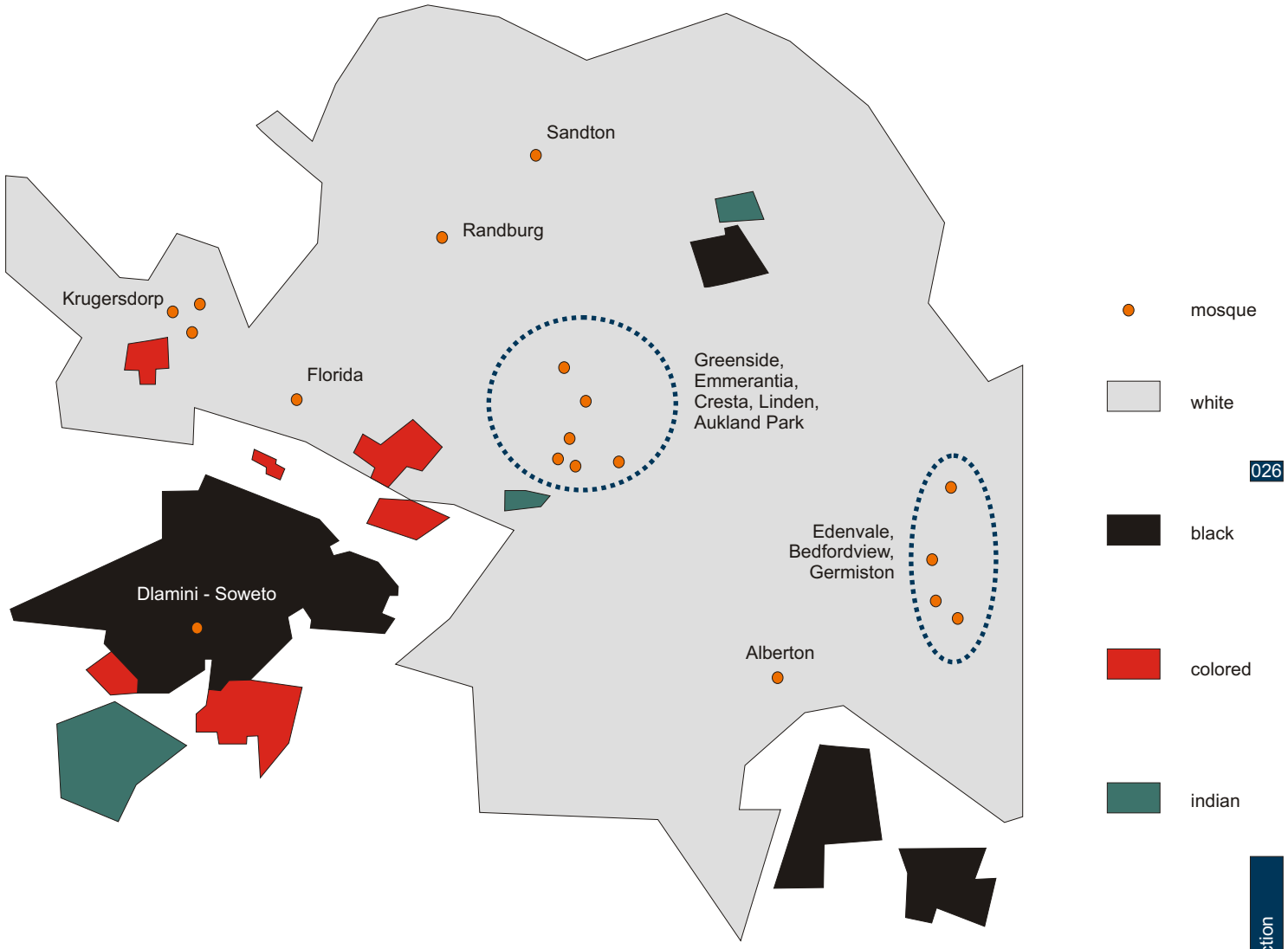
The second group are found in the more affluent suburbs of Johannesburg.

And the third in the townships, the decision to concentrate on the indigenous population in South Africa and to work within the township was made so as to keep with in the overall theme of this thesis; i.e. **Contextualisation.**

The map (fig. 012) shows new Gauteng mosques (built after 1994) in relation to previous group areas. Mosques in traditional Muslim suburbs have not been mapped. Also mosques shown are only those that have registered with the **South African Council of Muslim Theologians**.

What the map shows is the changing built fabric of previously white only areas, it also gives us an indication as to the numbers of Muslims who are now moving out of their previous group areas.

Notice also that there is a mosque that has been built in the township of Soweto, Dlamini Mosque in Dlamini just off Old Pochefstroom Road. This is also a product of the demise of apartheid since during apartheid the only religion recognised in the township was Christianity.



012 - PREVIOUS GROUP AREAS OVERLAID WITH CURRENT GAUTENG MOSQUES
after Beavon (2004; 214)

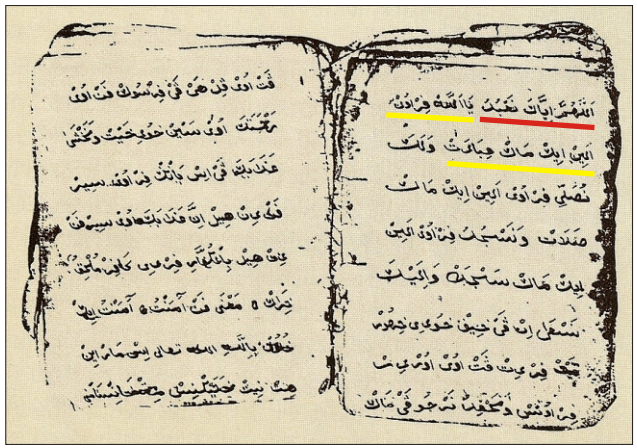
As mentioned earlier Imam Abdullah ibn Qadi Abdusalaam, known as Tuan Guru, was a captive of war from Tidore in Indonesia, he was transported to the Cape (more than 100 years after the first Muslims who landed in 1652) in 1780 on April 6 as a state prisoner, and was incarcerated on Robin Island. (Mahida 1993;06 - 09)

THE FIRST QURAN IN SOUTH AFRICA

While in prison he wrote out the entire Quran from memory as well as authoring a treatise on Islamic jurisprudence. Thus one of the earliest, if not the earliest expression of Islam was this hand - written copy of the Quran, (currently in the hands of his descendants in Cape Town). (Mahida 1993;09)

AFRIKAANS INITIALLY LANGUAGE OF THE OPPRESSED

The language of Afrikaans developed amongst the slaves (majority of whom were Muslim) in Cape Town, and was a medley of all the languages spoken in the Cape. The Dutch initially disapproved of the language and tried to maintain pure Dutch amongst the elite. However by 1815 Afrikaans became the medium of communication and education amongst the Muslims, with the first written documents in Afrikaans being Muslim student note books and manuscripts. The documents were written in Arabic script but phonetically they were Afrikaans. (Worden, Hetyningen, & Bickford - Smith 1998;127)

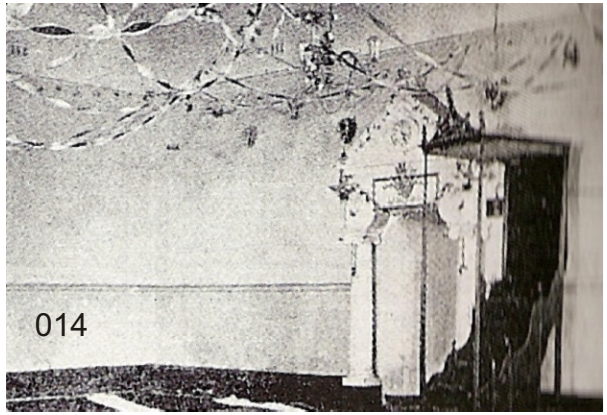


013 - Pages from a students book. (after Worden, Hetyningen, & Bickford - Smith 1998;127)
That which is underlined in red is Arabic, and means ‘Oh Allah you alone do we worship’.
That which is underlined in yellow is written in Arabic but when read out the sounds and words are Afrikaans, and means ‘Jaa Allah vier oeai (‘U’) a - leen iek maak ‘iebadaat (worship).

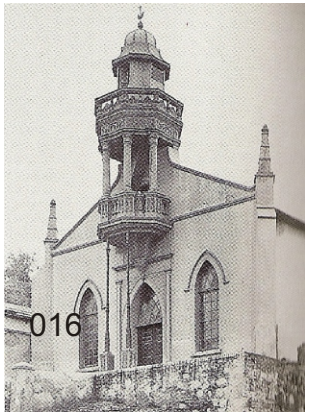
THE FIRST MOSQUE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Once Tuan Guru was released from prison he established a *Madrassah* [1] in Dorp Street in Cape Town, which played a major role in the conversion of slaves in the Cape to Islam as well as the Free Black community. The school was initially operated from a warehouse, and did not become a mosque until 1875 when the then British Governor looked more favorably at the Muslims request for a mosque, which was long denied to them by the Cape authorities. The mosque was called Awwal Masjid and was the first mosque in South Africa. (Worden, Hetyningen, & Bickford - Smith 1998;127)

The second mosque in the Cape was The Palm Tree Mosque and was founded by Jan van Bougies, and was a breakaway from the Awwal Mosque after van Bougies failed to succeed Tuan Guru as Imam. The first mosque to be built on land that had been commissioned by the government for that purpose was the Jami Mosque on Chippini Street, built in 1850. (Worden, Hetyningen, & Bickford - Smith 1998;187)







014 - Awwal Mosque interior, 015 - Palm Tree Mosque, 016 - Jami Mosque. (after Worden, Hetyningen, & Bickford - Smith 1998;126, 127, 188)

1. *Madrassah*: Transliteration of the Arabic word for school.