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Social Death and Resurrection: Conversion, Resistance, and the Ambiguities of Islam in Bahia and the Cape[1]

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I.

Not long before midnight on the evening of 24 January 1835, Muslim slaves and free blacks in the port city of Salvador, in the Brazilian province of Bahia, rebelled. In 1835, as throughout the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries, Muslim slaves and free blacks in the port city of Cape Town, in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, *did not*. *In Salvador, Muslims assaulted policemen and* soldiers, and stormed jails and military barracks, the symbols and very pillars of state authority. In Cape Town, they did not. In Bahia, the state, in its majesty, brutally crushed the rebellion and destroyed the Muslim community. Islam disappeared from view. At the Cape, neither Muslims nor their religion ever faced concerted state repression. Islam thrives to this day.

The historical trajectories of the Muslim communities in

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[1] The African Studies Center at the University of Florida and the Department of History at Vanderbilt University allowed me to present earlier versions of this essay. Many thanks to all participants for their comments. Achmat Davids, Azim Nanji of the University of Florida, Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton of the University of Virginia, and Kecia Ali of Duke University have offered indispensible advice. The phrase "Social Death and Resurrection" appears in Ran Greenstein's engaging article, "Racial Formation: Towards a Comparative Study of Collective Identities in South Africa and the United States," in Social Dynamics, 19, 2(1993).

Bahia and the Cape Colony contrast decisively, despite broad and significant similarities in their origins, growth, and social contexts. This raises an obvious question. What did these two communities do to precipitate such different outcomes? The answer hinges on the nature of the interaction between the two Muslim communities and the larger social order of which they were a part--on what, as Terence Ranger has put it, people did and with what consequences.[2] Two of the most important things that Muslims did in Bahia and at the Cape were to proselytize, with great success, and to make decisions about political engagement, with fateful consequences. Hence the questions of conversion and resistance (or accommodation) are central to determining why one community lived and the other died.

The recent publication of Joao Jose Reis's absorbing study of the Muslim slave uprising in Bahia[3] provides us with an opportunity to reexamine the ways in which historians of the Cape Muslim community have approached these issues.[4] The 1835

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[2] Terence O. Ranger, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," African Studies Review, 29, 2(June 1986), p. 14.

[3] Joao Jose Reis, Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The 1835 Muslim Uprising in Bahia, Arthur Brakel, trans., (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[4] I will direct most of my attention towards some of the most interesting recent scholarly work on Islam at the Cape, in particular, Muhammed 'Adil Bradlow, "Imperialism, State Formation, and the Establishment of a Muslim Community at the Cape of Good Hope, 1770-1840: A Study in Urban Resistance," (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988); Yusuf da Costa and Achmat Davids, Pages from Cape Muslim History, (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1994); Achmat Davids, "The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815 to 1915: A Socio-Linguistic Study," (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1991); Achmat Davids, "The Men of Power and Influence:

uprising lies at the heart of Reis's book, yet his analysis also involves lengthy and persuasive discussions of conversion and varieties of resistance. The literature on Islam at the Cape (which, to be fair, does not include a scholarly monograph such as Reis's) seems attenuated in comparison. No aspect of Cape Muslim history has received the sort of attention Reis and others[5] have lavished on the community in Bahia. Accordingly, a brief excursion along the byways of comparative historiography might show us ways of deepening our understanding of both the grounds for and meaning of conversion, and the nature, consequences, and ironies of resistance among Muslims at the Cape of Good Hope.

II.

Bahia and the Cape Colony were similar enough during the eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries to make comparisons possible and different enough to make things interesting. European colonial expansion created Brazil and the Cape Colony. The economies of both the Province of Bahia and the Cape were oriented towards transoceanic trade, and Salvador and Cape Town were the port cities of agricultural hinterlands and the hubs of regional economies. The societies greatly differed in size and wealth--the population of Salvador and its hinterland was over twice that of the Cape

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The Karmats of Constantia," unpub. mss.; and Robert C.-H. Shell, "From Rites to Rebellion: Islamic Conversion, Urbanization, and Ethnic Identities at the Cape of Good Hope, 1797 to 1904," Canadian Journal of History, XXVIII(December 1993), pp. 409-57.

[5] Citations.

Colony, and Bahia was one of the most important sugar-producing regions in the world, while the Cape economy mattered to few who did not call the colony home. But Bahia and the Cape shared a cycle of boom and bust. In both the 1820s and '30 were a period of economic gloom. The capital cities of Bahia and the Cape also had in common magnificent physical settings which distracted the eye of visitors from complex social hierarchies based on racial slavery.[6]

The presence of slavery allows us to extend our comparison. The economies of both Bahia and the Cape depended slave labor. Slave ownership was widespread, not merely the perogative of an elite. Both places also coped with the problem of incorporating newly imported unfree Africans into the social structure. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Bahia imported thousands African slaves each year. In the forty years following the abolition of the British slave trade in 1808, as many as 5,000 of "Prize Negroes" entered the Cape as legally free persons; they were treated, as Christopher Saunders has shown, as virtual slaves.[7] Both Bahia and the Cape were also home to significant free black populations composed largely of freed slaves and their descendants.[8] In societies dominated by settlers of European

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[6] This turn of phrase is cribbed from Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 3.

[7] Saunders citations.

[8] Until at least the end of the slave era, the Cape distinguished between free blacks and free persons who were descended wholly or largely from local indigenous peoples, most of whom were designated either "Bushman," "Hottentot," or "Bastaard Hottentot."

origin, slavery inevitably brought associated ideologies and practices of white supremacy. Though the racial ideologies of Bahia and the Cape differed in their specifics, each was governed by the assumption the whites shall rule and blacks shall serve.[9] Not surprisingly, neither society was particularly stable. Economic and political tensions and ideological restlessness, much of it related to slavery, unsettled both societies during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In all of this there is little, aside from the sheer beauty of the physical surroundings, to distinguish Salvador and Cape Town from Charleston or Kingston or New Orleans--nothing, that is, except the presence of self-conscious Muslim communities. Uniquely[?] in the history of European settler colonialism, Bahia and the Cape contained significant communities of free and enslaved Muslims.[10] The diverging destinies of the two Muslim communities should not be allowed to mask what were, until 1835, essential similarities. Both were minority communities within societies in which some form of Christianity was the state religion. The communities were

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[9] By "white," I mean to suggest a socially constructed category of persons who were regarded as being of wholly European ancestry and who were not, therefore, barred by color or ancestry from full membership in proper settler society. For the purposes of this sentence, not to be "white" was to be "black."

[10] Enslaved Muslim individuals could be found in numerous slave societies in the Americas, including the southern United States. But I am interested here in self-conscious, self-sustaining Muslim communities made up of slaves and freed slaves and their descendants. I would like to know of others in European settler colonies or former settler colonies in the Americas and elsewhere in the non-Muslim world.

largely urban. Both grew rapidly through conversion, attracting hundreds of social outsiders from Africa and Asia--*slaves, free blacks, and, at the Cape, Prize Negroes. (There* were, at the time, no white Muslims in Bahia or the Cape.) Local nomenclature implicitly acknowledged the way in which conversion could bring the embrace the outsider and make the stranger a friend. The terms by which Muslims were known--"Male" in Bahia and "Malay" at the Cape--had become divorced from the ethnicity to which they were originally tied and were linked solely to membership in multi-ethnic religious communities.[11]

Amid the similarities, there is, of course, the crucial difference: Muslims in Bahia rebelled, while those at the Cape did not. We need not linger over the question of why Muslims at the Cape of Good Hope did not mount an armed uprising and why the Brazilians did. The obvious answers, which lie in politics and demographics, are sufficient. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, when whites came to outnumber slaves and free blacks in Cape Town and in the colony, slaves alone outnumbered whites by 1.5 to 1 in Salvador and by nearly 2 to 1 in Bahia. There were 2.5 slaves and free blacks for every white person in Salvador and 4 for every white in Bahia.[12] The ongoing slave trade added roughly 7,000 persons a year to the slave population of Bahia. As a result, a large proportion of the slaves was African-

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[11] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 96-97; Bradlow, thesis, p. 111; Shell, "Rites to Rebellion," p. 422.

[12] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 4-6.

born.[13] By the turn of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of slaves and free blacks in the Cape Colony had been born there. No more than a few hundred Prize Negroes entered the Cape in any year.[14] The political turmoil in Bahia, and in Brazil as a whole, was severe, violent, and deadly. It involved wars (both civil and anti-colonial), riots, military mutinies, and slave rebellions. Brazilian society, including the ruling class, was deeply divided. With a single exception, the records of the Cape Colony contain nothing to match these exploits.[15]

Conditions in Bahia met several of the criteria which Eugene Genovese convincingly argues "suggest a [high] probability of slave revolt": a divided ruling class, more slaves in the population than free people, and a high proportion of African-born persons among the slaves.[16] It is not surprising, then, that the Brazilian rebells drew on what Reis refers to as "a tradition of resistance."[17] Kecia Ali points out that the Bahia revolt "came at the end of a cycle of revolts in and around... Salvador beginning in 1807.

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[13] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 93.

[14] Saunders citation.

[15] That exception being the Graaff-Reinet settlers' rebellion against representatives of the British colonial state in 1799. While the settlers and the government were at each others' throats, African servants seized the opportunity to revolt. [See Susan Newton-King and V.C. Malherbe, The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape, 1799-1803, (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1981).]

[16] Eugene D. Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution, pp. 11-12.

[17] Reis, Slave rebellion, p. 0000.

Although it was not the last slave uprising... it was the largest...."[18] There was a tradition of resistance at the Cape, too, but it was not one of collective armed revolt. Conditions at the Cape did not favor rebellion. The ruling classes were not deeply divided; slaves and free blacks did not heavily outnumber whites; foreign-born slaves did not outnumber those born into colonial slavery. It was possible to imagine a successful revolt in Bahia. At the Cape, it was not. The question of why one Muslim community rebelled, while its near twin declined, can be set aside. It will be more interesting to look at the ways in which slaves and free blacks in Bahia and the Cape used Islam to cope with the circumstances in which they were caught.

III.

Richard Elphick has recently lamented the marginalization of religion within South African historiography and had called on historians and other scholars to study "the thought and actions of religious people--their doctrines, rituals, spiritual experiences, individual and corporate mentalities--... with the utmost seriousness and... empathy."[19] While Cape Muslims have attracted historians' attention, it is not clear that they have always been treated with sufficient "empathy." We have full and convincing analyses of the worldly grounds for conversion--those which Shell calls

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[18] Kecia Ali, unpub. mss., p. 0000.

[19] Elphick, unpub. mss., p. 2.

"mundane and practical."[20] It is striking, however, that none of these discussions assigns a role to spiritual concerns. Conversion has been analyzed as if God had nothing to do with it. Interestingly, this is not how it looked to those few early converts whose words have survived. H.T. Colebrooke, a member of the Parliamentary commission that produced a number of reports on the Cape during the 1820s, met a slave who said of his conversion to Islam that "some religion he must have, and he is not allowed [by his master] to turn Christian."[21] Barnabas Shaw, a Methodist missionary, quoted two Muslim converts who saw things in much the same way: "we were left [by our masters] to seek a faith for ourselves."[22] This simple, eloquent testimony directs our attention towards spiritual matters. Let us take these converts at their word and see where it leads us.

Faith, we are reminded, is a fundamental part of human existance. Karen Armstrong writes that people began "to worship gods as soon as they became recognizably human." Their faith has allowed men and women to express "the wonder and mystery that seem always to have been an essential component of the human experience of the beautiful yet terrifying world."[23] Few worlds were more terrifying than the slaves', and, at least in the modern period, religion was

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[20] Shell, "Rites to Rebellion," p. 456.

[21] H.T. Colebrooke, "Note X," in W. Bird, State of the Cape, p. 349.

[22] R.L. Watson, Slave Question, p. 172.

[23] Armstrong, History of God, p. xix.

an important part of slaves' lives. Commenting many years ago on American slavery, Paul Radin wrote that slavery "was bound to leave the victims with a sense of degradation and sin...." Consequently, slaves adapted, recreated, and invented religions in which they found "cleansing and its concomitant rebirth...."[24] Conversion was not like applying for membership in the Rotary Club and cannot be understood as an exercise in pure pragmatism. Nor in pure mysticism.

Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, among many others, has insisted that any account of conversion must be multi-causal rather than monocausal.[25] Robert Hefner adds that conversion is a matter of "faith and affiliation." It implies "the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true" and "the acceptance of a new locus of self-identification, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity."[26] Converts will likely be motivated by both practical concerns--for instance, the desire to healed or to achieve a new, more satisfactory social status--and by spiritual concerns--for instance, the longing "to find meaning and value in life, despite the suffering that flesh is heir to,"[27] the need,

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[24] Paul Radin, "Forward," in Clifton H. Johnson, ed., God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves, (reprint ed., Cleveland: Pilgram Press, 1993), viii.

[25] Cited in Robert W. Hefner, "World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," in Robert W. Hefner, ed., Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 26.

[26] Hefner, "World Building," p. 17.

[27] Armstrong, History of God, p. xix.

that is, to find a more satisfying orientation towards the sacred and the profane.

IV.

Reis's analysis treats both the converts' spiritual strivings and their mundane concerns with considerable empathy. He begins his discussion by tracing the origins of the Bahian Muslim community. Despite the Muslims' leading role in the 1835 uprising, Islam was not the dominant religion among the slaves and free blacks of Bahia. All of black Bahia, it appears, was engaged in a search for a faith and an affiliation, and Islam was, instead,

> a heavyweight contender in a cultural free-for-all that also included the Yoruba orisha cult, Aja-Fon Vodun, the Angolan ancestor spirit cult.... [and] creole Catholicism...."[28]

Small numbers of Muslim slaves entered Bahia during the 200 years of the slave trade prior to the rebellion. But the first "big contingent" of Muslims arrived, Reis believes, only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most of the captives who arrived in Bahia in the first three decades of the century had been shipped out of Bight of Benin. Reis rightly ties this trade to "the severe political and religious disturbances" of the era, the West African jihads. The vast majority of the 7,000 slaves imported into Bahia annually were Hausa, Yoruba, and "neighboring peoples." Though they were victims of the jihads, a significant proportion were Muslim

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[28] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 97.

themselves.[29] These newly imported Africans came to form the core Bahia's Muslim community. All of the most important Muslim alufas (teachers and preachers) in early nineteenth-century Bahia were African-born and African-educated. Papers seized after the rebellion show that these men[30] were well-versed "in the language of the Koran..." and had been, Reis believes, members of an African intelligensia. This group included several of the leading rebels, "whose prestige, influence, and dominance cannot be underestimated."[31]

During the years leading up to the rebellion, the alufas proselytized vigourously and had won many adherents. Reis asserts that the Muslim community grew rapidly, though he supplies no figures. Both Salvador's urban environment and the psychological state of potential converts speeded the alufas efforts.

> The relative independence of urban slaves, the presence of a large number of African freedmen, and the interaction between these two groups helped create a dynamic network and community for proselytizing and mobilizing.[32]

Slave and free Muslims preached, taught Arabic, and offered instruction in the Quran on streetcorners, the habitual

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[29] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 93-97. Reis does not consider the possibility that some of the newly arrived slaves were jihadists themselves who had lost the wrong battle. God's battalions did not win every encounter with the infidel, and large numbers of jihadists found themselves caught up in the slave trade. The presence of jihadists within the Bahia Muslim community probably affected their political posture, a point which remains outside Reis's analysis.

[30] Reis has little to say about gender. We will find a bit more in discussions of Islam at the Cape.

[31] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 98, 106-07.

[32] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 104.

gathering places of Bahia's Africans, in the homes of free Africans and, at times, in slaves' quarters. The houses of African freedmen also afforded protected space for Muslims to gather as a community, "for worship, meals, celebrations, and of course conspiracies."[33]

The objects of the alufas' missionary enthusiasm were African-born slaves and freedmen, people who shared the recent experience of being torn from their homes and forcibly enslaved. The kinship networks and social institutions that had sustained their former identities had been lost; they had become kinless outsiders, marginalized within the enslaving society and linked to it only through their masters. They had experienced social death.[34] Alienated from all that was Luso-Brazilian and Christian, many they turned to a more familiar community and religion in search of social rebirth. All or virtually all of the converts seem to have been African-born, having responded to the call of African alufa to join an African religion.[35] By 1835, the majority of converts, and most Muslims as well, were Yoruba, though many were Hausa or Nupe. What was true of the Muslim community as a whole was true of those who rebelled: nearly all were African-born, most were Yoruba, the smallest handful had been

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[33] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 104-05.

[34] Here I am following Moses Finley and Orlando Patterson [citations].

[35] Islam in West Africa had by this time been thoroughly indigenized. Citations.

tariqa]."[44] Hence during the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, there were several Muslim communities at the Cape--small, isolated, and organized around the practices of Sufi mysticism.

Bradlow's account initially received a cool response. One writer called it "interesting and imaginative," but "no more than hypothetical."[45] The problem, as Bradlow himself admits, is one of sources.[46] Early Cape Muslims produced no written documents that survive.[47] In building his argument, Bradlow relied largely on the oral traditions of the Cape Muslim community and on the presence in the immediate vacinity of Cape Town of several karamats, the tombs of certain shaykhs and imams who have come to be regarded as saints. He was, in addition, able to draw on Suleman Essop Dangor's brief 1982 biography of Shaykh Yusuf, which discusses his membership in the Khalwatiyyah, a Sufi tariqa, and provides translations of some of his devotional writing.[48] The oral traditions Bradlow collected trace the local origins of particular tariqa to one or another of the exiled shaykhs. Karamats in

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[44] Bradlow, thesis, pp. 120ff. Among the tariqa at the Cape, Bradlow mentions the Khalwatiyyah and the Qadariyyah.

[45] Andrew Bank, The Decline of Urban Slavery at the Cape, 1806 to 1843, (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1991), p. 111.

[46] Bradlow, thesis, p. 85.

[47] Many of the texts Shaykh Yusuf produced while resident in the Indonesian archipelago have survived and are housed in archives in Malaysia and the Netherlands.

[48] Suleman Essop Dangor, A Critical Biography of Shaykh Yusuf, (Westville, Natal-KwaZulu: Centre for Research in Islamic Studies, University of Durban-Westville, 1982).

Constantia, Macassar (Faure), and elsewhere on and near the Cape Peninsula have been associated with particular shaykhs and imams for nearly 300 years in some cases. For just as long, and up to the present day, the karamats have been places of pilgrimage for local Muslims, who come to venerate the saints and to be healed or blessed.[49] Thus Bradlow had seemingly hung his argument on slender threads. But they are not as weak as they might appear, and his contentions have recently been echoed by other scholars.

In a unpublished manuscript, Achmat Davids accepts the contention that the Constantia exiles, shaykhs Shah and Mahmud, established a tariqa, the Qadriyyah, at the Cape. He goes on to argue that Qadriyyah doctrines decisively shaped the beliefs and practices of the Cape Muslim community.[50] Elsewhere he links two of the most distinctive Cape Muslim ceremonies, the rampie-sny, which celebrates the Prophet's birthday, and the ratiep, a more elaborate rite which will be discussed later, to Sufi practices. He also argues that the ritual observed and described by the traveler Thunberg in 1772 was a rampie-sny, a rare piece of evidence linking the days of the early shaykhs to the more thoroughly documented period from the 1790s on.[51]

Yusuf da Costa also accepts the role of the Constantia

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[49] Citations. The veneration of saints and the visitation of their tombs is consistant with Sufi proactice elsewhere in the world. See Mervyn Hiskett, The Development of Islam in West Africa, (London and New York: Longman, 1984), p. 9.

[50] Davids, "Karmats of Constantia," pp. 7, 13-14.

[51] Davids, thesis, 29-30.

shaykhs in the planting of the Qadriyyah in the colony. He believes as well that there "can be little doubt" that Shaykh Yusuf "continued to practice [in exile at the Cape]... the religious rites and ceremonies associated with his order," the Khalwatiyyah, including the initiation of members. He traces the influence of Shaykh Yusuf's tariqa on Muslim burial rituals, as reported by a traveler in 1797 and as practiced in the Western Cape up to late twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, he writes, a large number of tariqa had been established, and their practices had become "part of the Islamic fabric at the Cape."[52]

It seems likely that the proposition that Sufi tariqa have been present from inception of the Cape Muslim community and that they have strongly influenced the development of local practices and beliefs will soon be generally accepted. However, the relationship between Sufism and conversion has yet to be addressed. This is regrettable because it may be the best way to bring the converts' spiritual strivings, and God, into the picture.

Bradlow's second period of Cape Muslim history begins as early as the 1770s, when "one begins to witness a shift in emphasis towards more overt, unified forms of organization."[53] This part of Bradlow's argument conforms to the earlier conclusions of Davids and Shell.[54] Substantial

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[52] Yusuf da Costa, "The Influence of Tasawwuf on Islamic Practices at the Cape," da Costa and Davids, Cape Muslim History, pp. 129-35.

[53] Bradlow, thesis, p. 126.

[54] Citations of early work.

growth in the size and cohesiveness of the Cape Mulsim community began in the late eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth. The Dutch colonial government's growing toleration of Islamic worship was one of the critical factors which contributed to this process.[55] The Dutch certainly did not welcome Islam, but neither did they try to destroy it. That by the 1770s Muslims regularly held services in private homes did not move officials to stop them. Indeed we know of these practices in part because two European travelers to the Cape described the ceremonies in their narratives.[56] By the 1790s, Muslims were holding open-air Friday services a quarry just beyond the Cape Town limits, unmolested by the authorities.[57] Finally, authorities did not interfere when local Muslims opened a madrasah (Islamic school) in 1793 and the first South African mosque in 1795.[58]

Of course factors internal to the Muslim community were as important as external ones in initiating and sustaining the community's growth in size and self-consciousness. Most importantly, newly opened schools and mosques laid the institutional foundation for sustained growth and

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[55] M.A. Bradlow disagrees vehemently with this contention, claiming that the late eithteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries saw a "ferocious" level of state repression. [Bradlow, thesis, p. 133.] He refuses to disentangle discrimination against and harassment of Free Blacks from the toleration of the religion most of them practiced, admitedly a difficult task, but one which must be performed. We shall see what true repression looks like when we return to Brazil.

[56] Dangor, Shaykh Yusuf, pp. 38-39.

[57] Davids, Mosques of the Bo-Kaap, p. 100.

[58] Davids, Mosques, pp. 100-101 and M.A. thesis, p. 37.

consolidation. Both Davids and Bradlow see the release from prison of Tuan Guru, an exile from the Ternate Islands and an extraordinarily learned Muslim scholar, as a key event in the reconfiguration of the community. Tuan Guru was instrumental in the creation of both the first madrasah and the first mosque at the Cape. Beyond that, he seems to have been the figure who reconciled the earlier tariqa-centered Islam of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the mosque-centered religious practice of the nineteenth and twentieth.

This reconciliation was possible, Bradlow contends, because Tuan Guru was thoroughly educated in Islamic law and, at the same time, well versed in Sufi traditions.[59] Davids would agree, noting that Tuan Guru's manuscript, "Ma'rifah al-Islam wa al-Iman" [Manifestations of Islam and Faith], composed while he was imprisoned on Robben Island, combines a discourse in Islamic law with an acknowledgement of his intellectual indebtedness to Muhammed Yusuf ibn al-Sunusi, a leading Sufi philosopher.[60] Davids argues that the "Ma'rifah" was in some ways the founding text of the Cape Muslim community because it created an ideological framework within which slaves and free blacks, many of whom were slaveowners,[61] could "function together [in a religous body] without threatening their respective stations in life." Tuan

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[59] Bradlow, thesis, pp. 4, 0000.

[60] Davids, "Alternative Education," in da Costa and Davids, Cape Muslim History, pp. 53, 55.

[61] On free black slaveowners, see, for instance, Davids, thesis, pp. 31-38.

Guru, a slaveowner himself,[62] offered slaves the possibility of upward mobility within the Muslim community and "a fair degree of protection from... harsh treatment" by their Muslim owners, while avoiding any condemnation of slavery as a moral wrong.[63] Davids does not ask how Muslim slaves and free blacks were able to get along before Tuan Guru's intervention.

Increasing official toleration,[64] a coherent ideology, and a growing institutional infrastructure laid the basis for extremely rapid growth in the number of Muslims at the Cape between 1800 and the de facto emancipation of the slaves in 1838. By the end of 1824 there were two large mosques in Cape Town and five smaller ones.[65] In the same year, the community supported three of four madaris, the largest enrolling 491 children and adults; by 1832, the madaris

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[62] Davids, thesis, p. 33.

[63] Davids, "Alternative Education," in da Costa and Davids, Cape Muslim History, pp. 48-49. Tuan Guru was well within the mainstream of Islamic thought. As Ralph Willis notes, "It must be rembered that Muhammed, the Prophet of Islam, was... a slaveowner.... And since the tenets of Islam are tethered so tightly to the sunna (model) of its Prophet, it is no surprise to discover that slavery [commands]... such a wide presence in the social annals of Islam." [Willis, Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Vol. I, Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement, p. viii.] The Quran itself "urges, without actually commanding, kindness to the slave and recommends, without requiring, his liberation by purchase or manumission...." [Bernard Lewis, Race and Salvery in the Middle East: An Historical Inquiry, p. 6.]

[64] The formal grant of religious freedom came in 1804.

[65] Evidence of Imam Muding, 13 December 1824, Imperial Blue Book, Papers Relating to the Condition and Treatment of Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa, 18 March 1835, p. 207.

numbered twelve.[66] The research of Robert Shell makes it clear that the growth of the Muslim population more than kept pace with the development of the community's infrastructure. Although Shell is probably too trusting of his evidence for the size of the population, at least until the census of 1842,[67] it is certain that the increases in the numbers of Muslims at the Cape were spectacular. From under 1,000 in 1800, the colony's Muslim community grew to 7,500 in 1842, with 6,500 in Cape Town alone. Most of this growth was through conversion, not natural increase or immigration.[68]

Having established remarkable extent to which Islam attracted converts in the early to mid-nineteenth century, Shell turns his attention to discovering why it was able to do so. He explicitly rejects the possibility that spiritual concerns and what he calls "cognitive factors" have anything to do with conversion in this period. The grounds for conversion were "quite mundane and practical." Converts, almost all of them slaves and Prize Negroes, became Muslims in an effort to overcome their "economic marginality" and "racial exclusion," to achieve a higher social status, to find a community with which to identify and by which to be embraced,

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[66] Davids, "Alternative Education," p. 51 and Imperial Blue Book, Papers Relating to the Condition and Treatment of Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa, 18 March 1835, p. 210.

[67] The sources Shell relies, to 1842, provide either very general estimates or numbers of dubious exactitude. They ought to be treated with a bit more caution. See the sources listed in Shell, "From Rites to Rebellion," fig. 1, p. 413. The derivation of the percentages given for numbers of slave and Prize Negro converts in 1822-24, fig. 2, p. 414, is particularly obscure.

[68] Shell, "From Rites to Rebellion," pp. 413-418.

to prepare to marry a Muslim spouse, and to be eligible for the solemn rites given the Muslim dead. Muslims, says Shell, offered "a cradle-to-the-grave range of social services." Converts came, finally, because the Muslim's claim that they welcomed all regardless of color, status, or ancestry was authentic, in great contrast to the claims of most local Christians.[69]

Shell has undoubtedly identified some of the most important grounds for conversion. The Prize Negroes of the Cape, like the African converts in Bahia, had only recently been stolen from their homes and thrust into a brutally alien environment. They, especially, were kinless outsiders. So too were were the slaves. Slaves and Prize Negroes would surely have sought membership in a community distinct from that of their masters in an effort of diminish their social marginality. A considerable degree of upward mobility was possible within the community of Muslims, even for slaves. Several Cape Town imams were freedmen, and Achmat van Bengal was still a slave at the time he was appointed assistant imam of the Dorp Street mosque.[70] It was not only in the Muslim community that a convert's status could improve; in some ways whites held "Malay's" in higher regard than other blacks.[71] And it is true that Muslim ceremonies to mark the stages of life--birth, marriage, death--would certainly have been

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[69] Shell, "From Rites to Rebellion," pp. 410-11, 456-57.

[70] Davids, thesis, p. 38.

[71] The reputation of Malays was mixed, as we shall see below.

attractive to those whose progress through life was otherwise unnoticed.[72] All of these are important considerations and must have been part of what led men and women to convert. Still, none of this advances us beyond William Elliot's 1829 discussion of conversion to Islam at the Cape.[73]

Elliot was a Protestant missionary and his profesional integity may have obliged him to discount the spiritual aspects of conversion to what he would have seen as the religion of the false Prophet. Nevertheless, he knew the Muslim community well, and his account of Islamic conversion is quite elegant, as far as it goes. He conceded that the "pomp and circumstance" of Muslim ceremonies did attract some converts. But the principal reason for conversion was "totally unconnected with religion." Slaves converted in an effort to negate the essence of slavery itself. Anticipating the best twentieth-century analyses of slavery, Elliot wrote that slaves are "not recognized as a member[s] of society," no matter how kindly they might be treated by their owners. They remained "base fragment[s], detached from the family of man." Conversion to Christianity brought little relief. A Christian slave

> may indeed be admitted into a Christian church, and may partake of the privileges of Christian communion. ...but excepting when he is within the walls of the church, he is scarcely more a member of society than when he was an

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[72] Shell is, however, wrong to suggest that non-Muslim, non-Christian slaves did not honor the dead with burial rites or celebrate the birth of a child. See, for instance, Robert Semple, Walks and Sketches at the Cape of Good Hope, (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1803), pp. 30-33.

[73] In this discussion of Elliot, I shall be drawing quite heavily on Watson, The Slave Question, p. 173.

> untaught heathen. There is a wide difference in colonial estimation between a Christian slave and a Christian man.

In stark constrast, a slave who converted to Islam became

> a real, not nominal member of an extensive society. ...It is not in the mosque alone that he feels himself a social being; in every house inhabited by a Musselman he finds a home and a brother.[74]

Here is a superb description of social death and (at least partial) resurrection. But it is incomplete. Elliot and Shell reject, at the same time that Bradlow ignores and Davids understates, compelling evidence that spiritual concerns brought many converts to Islam.

Shell ties his dismissal of spiritual motives for conversion to an attack on Robin Horton's influential thesis on *religious conversion in Africa*.[75] Twenty years ago, Horton drew on examples of religious conversion to monotheistic religions in small-scale African societies to argue that conversion from polytheistic beliefs to monotheism was likely to occur when previously isolated societies were brought into contact with a much wider world, for instance, through incorporation into an empire. Prior to the establishment of wider contacts, the social life of people in a small-scale society was largely confined within the boundaries of their "microcosm." In their religious practices, they paid considerable attention to lesser spirits,

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[74] Quoted in Watson, The Slave Question, p. 173.

[75] Horton's is the only writing on religous conversion that Shell engages. Perhaps for this reason he seems to believe that Horton's is the only theory that introduces spirituality into the equation and that his own foregrounding of "mundane and practical" motives for conversion consitutes a "quite new interpretation." [Shell, "From Rites to Rebellion," p. 410 and passim.]

the underpinners of the microcosm, and very little to a supreme being. When the boundaries of the microcosm began collapse and the "macrocosm" began to impinge strongly on everyday life, people experienced a crisis of the spirit.

The practices and beliefs associated with the lesser spirits could not explain or help people to control events the accompanied incorporation into the macrocosm. They began to pay less attention to the spirits and more to the supreme being, a god who transcended local boundaries and affiliations. As Horton puts it, people "groped toward a more elaborate definition of the supreme being and a more developed cult of this being" in an attempt to cope with the larger world of which they were now a part. This process, in his estimation, opened the door for both Christianity and Islam.[76]

Horton has come in for his share of criticism over the years. Research has shown that the crises that accompany incorporation into a macrocosm are not always catalysts for conversion and that religions oriented toward the microcosm sometimes "dig in, reorganize, and survive." Robert Hefner argues that Horton, nevertheless, "quite properly draws our attention to how incorporation into a larger social order acts as a catalyst for conversion [to monotheism] and the reformulation of indigenous religion."[77] Shell will have none of this. He claims not only that monotheism was "not

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[76] Robin Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion, Part I," Africa, 45, 3(1975), p. 220 and passim.

[77] Hefner, "World Building," pp. 21, 23, 28.

clearly understood" by Muslim converts at the Cape, but that conversion was "accelerated by magical practices and syncretistic mysticism quite unrelated to monotheism."[78] Quite the contrary. The madaris ensured that the converts' understanding of monotheism was surprisingly sophisticated. And it is precisely "magic" and "mysticism" that provide us with some of the best evidence of the intensity with which converts worshipped their (sole and unitary) God. This devotion gives us insight into the spiritual concerns that drew men and women to Islam.

It is hard to imagine a cohort of converts better educated in the tenets of their religion than the Muslim converts of the Cape. As we have seen, the first madrasah opened in 1793; three decadess later, there were several, the largest enrolling nearly 500 students. What lessons did the imams teach? "[T]o look up to God for all good, and to fear Him," said one of the imams. He taught his pupils "to read and write Arabic[,]" "to observ[e] the facts presribed by the Koran, [to attend] the service of the mosques, and [to make] their wives and children conform to these rites...."[79] Davids is able to expand on these remarks. The "Ma'rifah" of Tuan Guru was at the heart of the cirriculum. His grounding in Ash'arite theology led Tuan Guru to stress the "rational unity of God," and his exposure to the thought of al-Sunusi's Sufism allowed him to borrow a Sufi litergy that "proved the most popular and

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[78] Shell, "Rites to Rebellion," p. 411.

[79] Testimony of Imam Muding, 13 December 1824, Imperial Blue Book, 18 March 1835, p. 207-08.

convenient part of the manuscript for rote learning...." The litury became the "twintagh siefaats" (twenty attributes") that are a necessary to God and the twenty that are impossible for him. Student notebooks dating from the first decade of the nineteenth century and containing transcriptions of this litergy still exist in private collections in Cape Town.[80] Muslim converts at the Cape were well drilled, it seems, in the fundamentals of Islamic monotheism.

The magic and mysticism of the Cape Muslims cannot be separated from their monotheistic spirituality, that is, from Islam. It is true that "Malay magic," especially the power to heal, drew converts to the community--as the hope of being healed has drawn so many people to religion in so many different times and places.[81] "Malay Doctors" appear frequently in the street directories of early nineteenth-century Cape Town, and a belief in the power of Malays to cure (and to curse) was shared by many in the colony, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.[82] The "Ma'rifah" contain a number of presriptions for spiritual remedies. Were these doctors and prescriptions somehow unIslamic? Hardly. The prescriptions were normally composed of two elements, the earthly and the spiritual; physical remedies, often containing herbs, and

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[80] Davids, "Alternative Education," pp. 48-56 and Davids, thesis, p. 29.

[81] Steven Feierman; Ibrahim Abdulla.

[82] Achmat Davids, "'The Revolt of the Malays': A Study of the Reactions of the Cape Muslims to the Smallpox Epidemics of Nineteenth-Century Cape Town," Studies in the History of Cape Townm 5(1983), p. 67; J.W.D. Moodie, Ten Years, pp. 1:197-200; Lichtenstein, p. 1:107.

spiritual remedies, passages from the Quran toi be recited while the herbs were administer.[83] This "Malay magic," was it was known in the Cape, is often called "Islamic medicine" elsewhere.[84]

About 300 hadiths (traditions relating the deeds of the Prophet Muhammed) deal with medicine or related topics. Sufi shaykhs are especially associated with healing. Sufis believe that shaykhs are inspired by the Prophet, and therefore expect them to dispense medicine and medical advise. Ismail Abdulla notes that in West Africa and the Magreb, where Sufi orders flourish, the shaykh has become an important part of "the medical experience of... Islamic peoples...."[85] The same is true elsewhere in the Muslim world. The converts' desire to have access to Islamic healing is part of what draws them to the Muslim community. But far from being unrelated to monotheistic spirituality, this pragmatic desire to be cured cannot be separated from God, from whom the power to cure derives, and from the converts' faith in that God.

The Muslim practice at the Cape about which Shell is the

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[83] Davids, "The Revolt of the Malays: A Study of the Reactions of the Cape Muslims to the Smallpox Epidemics of Nineteenth-Century Cape Town," Studies in the History of Cape Town, 5, 1983, pp. 67-68.

[84] But as Ismail Abdulla points out, "Islamic medicine" is a problematic term since the Quran has little to say about healing and since many of the physicians who worked within the Islamic world and contributed to medical learning were Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. [Ismail H. Abdulla, "Diffusion of Islamic Medicine into Hausaland," in The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa, Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 177-78.]

[85] Abdulla, "Islamic Medicine," p. 190.

most skeptical is the ratiep. He acknowledges that this mystical rite brought converts into the fold, but he maintains that it was both syncretic and unrealated to monotheism. It was, he says, drawing on the authority of I.D. du Plessis,[86] "originally a Hindu dance from Bali."[87] Davids agrees that the ratiep was one of the "strategies" that shaykhs and imams employed in order to attract converts.[88] He sees it, however, as a synthesis of "two distinct cultural practices," Islamic mysticism and "animistic ritual practices."[89] There is another possibility, as Bradlow contends; it is possible that the ratiep, at least initially, was an orthodox expression of Sufi practice and belief.[90]

One of the earliest descriptions we have of the ratiep is found in the journal of George Champion, an American missionary who arrived in Cape Town in 1835. While on an evening walk through the streets of the city, he heard "a confused noise of singing, beating of drums etc."

> It was a ceremony of some Mahometans. I saw thro' the window 12 or 15 men seated around a small room, drumming & singing in a state of great excitement, while one of the number half naked was performing a variety of eccentric movements... & at the same time catching a chain which he threw into the air. At times the noise would wax louder & louder, & the dancer (or priest) would become so furious in his gestures... that I could easily

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[86] For a critique of du Plessis, see M.A, Bradlow, thesis, pp. 0000-0000 and Shamil Jeppe, "I.D. du Plessis and the Re-Invention of the 'Malay,' c.1935-1952," unpub. mss.

[87] Shell, "Rites to Rebellion," p. 426.

[88] Davids, "The Survival of Islam," in da Costa and Davids, p. 62.

[89] Davids, thesis, p. 30.

[90] Citation.

> imagine him a demon incarnate. This religion of the false prophet is increasing in Cape Town... in the opinion of all.[91]

This is recognizably the same ceremony as that described in two accounts dating from the middle of the nineteenth century. In one, after a period of chant, prayer, and dance, participants appeared to drive daggers into their body without drawing blood. In the other, a dancers held "red-hot chains," again after a period of prayer and incantation, and without injuring themselves.[92]

Not surprisingly, the ratiep has had a checkered career. Whites have sometimes seen it as a quaint and peculiar ceremony of colorful, but outlandish folk; in 1854, however, many called on the government to suppress it, complaining that the noise disturbed the peace of the city.[93] Even among the imams, it fell into increasing disfavor as the nineteenth century progressed,[94] perhaps because it became a mere entertainment devoid of religious significance. To understand how it was that the ratiep may have been a profound expression of Islamic devotion, we will need to know a little more about Sufism.

Sufism, "the guardian of the path of inwardness," is the form in which Islamic spirituality has most often "revealed

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[91] George Champion, The Journal of an American Missionary in the Cape Colony, 1835, Alan R. Booth, ed., (Cape Town: South African Library, 1968), p. 20.

[92] I.D. du Plessis, The Cape Malays: History, Religion, Traditions, and Folk Tales, (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1972), pp. 23-25.

[93] See Bradlow and Davids.

[94] Davids, thesis, p. 30.

itself in... history."[95] Its roots lie in the Prophet Muhammed's "powerful mystic experiences briefly described... in the Qur'an."[96] Like mystical movements in Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, "the Sufi path is a... discipline of mind and body whose goal is to directly experience ultimate reality."[97] Sufis believe that only in this way can men and women attain a true knowledge of God, knowledge beyond rational thought and human perception. The Sufi ideal is a "state of annihilation," "the systematic destruction of the ego [leading] to a sense of absorbtion in a larger, ineffable reality."[98] This state allows the adept to know "the One who is God in His absolute Reality beyond all manifestations and determinations, the One to whom the Quran refers as Allah."[99]

Sufis, like the mystics of other religions, insist that "the mystical journey can only be undertaken under the guidance of an expert... [who can] guide the novice past perilous places...."[100] Hence the shaykh, the spiritual master, is an "indispensible element" within Sufism, gathering

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[95] S.H. Nasr, "Introduction," in World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, Vol. 20, Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. xv.

[96] Fazlur Rahman, Islam, 2nd, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 134.

[97] John Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path, p. 101.

[98] Armstrong, History of God, p. 226-27.

[99] Nasr, "Introduction," p. xiii.

[100] Armstrong, History of God, p. 213.

disciples around him for instruction and initiation.[101] Sufis have adopted a number of disciplines to help the initiate attain a true knowldege of God. Fasting, silence, celibacy, and the rhythmic chanting of prayers and God's attributes (the dhikr) have been among the most common. Some tariqa use music, song, and dance in an effort to trigger ecstatic states. Sufi rituals are not "things which... automatically induce the ecstasy of seeing God face to face, but.. ways of freeing the soul from the distractions of the world."[102]

One of the oldest tariqa is the Rifa'iyyah whose ceremonies often involve dancing, the chanting of the dhikr, and, at the moment of ecstasy, falling "upon objects such as serpants or knives...."[103] These rituals have been associated with the Rifa'iyyah wherever it is found, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.[104] In Malaysia, one of the most distinctive Rifa'iyyah rituals is known as the dubbus, from the Arabic word for an iron awl; in parts of Indonesia it is called the rapa'i. During the dubbus members of the tariqa pierce their bodies with swords, knives, and iron awls. The point of rite is to demonstrate the power of God, which allows "the adept to come out of the ceremony without his body showing any evidence

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[101] William Stoddart, Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam, (New York: Paragon House, 1985), p. 56.

[102] Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab People, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 73-74.

[103] Rahman, Islam, p. 152.

[104] Abdur-Rahman Ibrahim Doi, "Sufism in Africa," in Islamic Spirituality, p. 293.

of having been harmed."[105]

There are, of course, clear parallels between Rifa'iyyah rituals and the ratiep. They have been part of Islamic practice in the Indonesian archipelago from the time Islam first arrived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They were, that is, part of the religious world in which the exiled shaykhs of the Cape came to maturity. Yusuf da Costa writes that it is "highly probable" that the ratiep has its roots in the practices of Sufi tariqa, though he ties it to the Alawiyyah, not the Rifa'iyyah.[106] Whatever its provinence, we have little reason to doubt that the ratiep was a sincere expression of Muslims' faith in their God and a genuine attempt to attain truer knowledge of that God. One important source lends support to this suggestion. Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, the earliest Muslim visitor to the Cape to have left us his impressions of the state of Islam in the colony, lived in the Cape Town home of "a worthy [free] Mussulman, who behaved to me with the greatest attention and kindness," for about six weeks, long enough to get to know the community well. He met "many pious good" Muslims, and said nothing about unworthy or unIslamic ceremonies and beliefs.[107]

The more we learn about the role Sufism played in the growth and consoldidation of Islam at the Cape, the more

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[105] Osman Bin Bakar, "Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World," in Islamic Spirituality, p. 272.

[106] Da Costa, "The Influence of Tasawwuf," p. 135.

[107] Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa, and Europe, during the Years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803, Vols. I and II, Charles Stewart, trans., (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), pp. 1:70-72.

probable it seems that we must revise our understanding of the grounds for and meaning of conversion. Of course converts came for mundane reasons (in nineteenth-century China such converts were called "rice bowl Christians"). But there was more to it than that. The spirit moved the converts as well. Historians of the Cape may someday follow Joao Jose Reis in saying that "in the crisis that slavery itself represented," the exiled, the persecuted, and the enslaved "flocked to Islam in search of spiritual comfort," solidarity, and hope.[108]

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[108] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 110.

VI.

From conversion, we turn to its consequences, to the questions of resistance and accomodation. Reis does not address the possibility of accomodation among the Muslim slaves and free blacks of Bahia. There is no reason to. The community did not fit comfortably into the existing social order and expressed its discontent in starkly obvious ways. The modes of resistance that Reis identifies among the Muslims of Bahia are precisely those which social historians have learned to love: ideological resistance and open rebellion. Muslims did not fit easily into colonial society at the Cape either. They mounted an implicit ideological critique, but they did not rebell. This has led Achmat Davids to speak of a "ceremonial, rather than a resistant, Islam...."[109] Yet it is clear from his own writing, and from the work of Bradlow and Shell, that Muslims did energetically resist the oppresive circumstances of their lives. Davids seems to have misread his own evidence because he is looking in the wrong direction. Muslims at the Cape excelled not in rebellion, but in survival.

Historians of slavery in the New World (and in South Africa[110]) have increasingly been concerned with the slaves' struggle for the greatest possible autonomy in social reproduction, that is, in family and community life. This struggle for the simple right to exist is indeed resistance to the slaveowner's tendency, inherent in slavery, to seek to

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[109] Davids, "Alternative Educaion," p. 47.

[110] See Andrew Bank, Decline of Urban Slavery, especially pp. 98-141; Pamela Scully, diss.; John Edwin Mason, diss., and forthcoming.

control every aspect of the slave's life and being.[111] Reis does not explore this mode of resistance, perhaps because the Muslim community in Bahia did not survive. Historians of Islam at the Cape have also confined themselves to disscussions of ideological resistance and of the failure of local Muslims to engage their oppressors in armed struggle. Shifting the focus, momentarily, away from ideology and rebellion and towards an examination of the struggle over social reproduction may open an interesting, productive, and ultimately crucial line of enquiry.

Reis sees ideological resistance as a necessary prelude to open rebellion. Muslim slaves and free blacks were able to rise against the system which oppressed them and attempt to overthrow it because they had already rejected the fundamental assumptions that underpinned it. The Muslims' weapon of ideological resistance was their religion, a religion which played no role in legitimating slavery and white supremacy nor in reconciling the tensions implicit within the oppressive social structure. In situations such as this, Reis writes, it is "futile to separate religion from rebellion.... Rebellion begins when a religion sides with the oppressed." The slaves' embrace of Islam "proclaimed a schism, a radical separation from the seigniorial ideology," symbolically subverting the dominant order. Because Islam united slave and free black Africans of so many different

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[111] For an admirable treatment of the struggle for control over social reproduction in a slave society, see Jonathan Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," Journal of African History, 32(1991), pp. 277-312.

classes and ethnicities, it "confronted the Brazilian master with a full-length portrait of an undivided Other." A dangerous Other. When Muslims gathered to worship or to socialize, "they used these occasions to envisage a better world," and they did not "rule out the use of force to attain this... world."[112]

The decision to rebel emerged slowly; Muslim leaders

> shrewdly organized [their] revolutionary structure. While the number of converts and sympathizers continued to grow, [the alufas] evaluated their ranks, studied the political situation, and pondered when to revolt.[113]

The leaders of the uprising--the alufas who led Friday prayers, taught Arabic, and preached the word of God--determined that the time had come in late January 1835. Ramadan, the month of fasting and prayer, was nearing its end, and Reis suggests that the day of the revolt may have been coincided with Lailat al-Qadr, the anniversary of the night on which Mohammed received the first of the revelations, a holy day for Muslims. It was also a Sunday, the slaves' day of rest and escape from the direct oversight of their owners and employers. The rebellion was to begin at the crack of dawn; the goal was to seize control of Salvador. For a variety of reasons, things did not go as planned. Most importantly, the rebels were betrayed by freed slaves, at least two of whom were Yoruba, but not Muslims. By 10:30 Saturday evening, civil authorities had sounded a general alert. Patrols were sent in search of the rebels, and one

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[112] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 112-13.

[113] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 114.

stumbled across the assembled insurgents, hiding in the basement apartment of a free black. The rebels attacked the patrol--which fled, sounding the alarm as it ran--and the uprising began, early and doomed.[114]

The Muslims, who were armed only with knives, swords, clubs, and a few pistols, faced an enemy armed to the teeth with rifles and cannon. The rebels did not engage in indiscriminant violence. They attacked the jail and military barracks, not private homes, and killed only nine people, four whites, four mulattos, and one Afro-Brazilian. By morning it was all over. As many as 1,500 soldiers--infantry and cavalry--had been called out to suppress the rebellion, which in truth was more of an all-night riot. Of the 600 rebels who took part,[115] 70 of them were dead and many more injured. Hundreds were arrested; 289 were convicted of participating in the revolt and given sentences ranging from flogging (up to 1,500 lashes, to be administered at the rate of 50 a day) to imprisonment to death. The government summarily deported hundreds of free Muslims, to the south and to Africa. The community was destroyed.[116]

It had been, Reis argues, a Muslim plot which became an African revolt. Though most of the rebels were Muslim Yorùba, they attracted to their side African slaves and free blacks of

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[114] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 73ff.

[115] This was a tiny fraction of the 22,000 Africans in Salvador. Reis has nothing to say on this point.

[116] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 73ff., 206-07.

diverse ethnic origins and religious persuations. In contrast, only two mulattos and three Afro-Brazilians were among those arrested.[117] What did the rebels want? The evidence is scanty; "[t]he testimony of the accused says nothing about this matter directly." Reis does feel confident that "an egalitarian utopia" was not what the insurgents had in mind. The plan, after all, seems to have been to kill all whites, mulattos, Afro-Brazilians, and those Africans who did not join the uprising. (It is possible, Reis says, that the rebels planned only to enslave the mulattos.) They were determined to end white domination and considered mulattos and Afro-Brazilians the accomplices, not the victims, of whites. On the strength of the rebels' apparent willingness to see all Africana, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, as potential allies, Reis argues that the rebellion was not a jihad. It was a revolt against oppression and white supremacy, but not for Islam and not against slavery as a social institution.[118]

Reis may well underestimate the role religion played in the rebellion. Like many others, he is comfortable with Marx's claim that political struggle can take religious form--"Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and

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[117] Reis's explantion for the absence of mulattos and Afro-Brazilians--that they were too deeply embedded in the paternalism of the slaveowners--is not convincing, especially in the light of earlier mulatto and Afro-Brazilian slave revolts.

[118] Reis, Slave Rebellion, pp. 122-27.

the protest against real distress."[119] But he is not ready to concede that in this case religous struggle might have taken political form. Reis surprisingly overlooks evidence which suggests the centrality of religion in the revolt, surprising given the subtlty with which he treats religion in his account of conversion. All of the leaders and most of the footsoldiers of the rebellion were Muslim, despite the presence of some non-Muslim Africans among the participants. The rebels went to battle wearing the flowing white garments usually worn only during prayers and rituals and carrying amulets to assure success. The alufas who were instrumental in the spread of Islam in Bahia had been educated in a politically charged religious environment, West Africa in the days of the jihads of men like Usuman dan Fodio and al-Hajj Umar. For the jihadist, as for all Muslims, the ideal society was "a community of believers acknowledging the ultimate sovereignty of God, living according to His law, obeying His Prophet, and dedicating their lives to spreading God's will and law."[120] The jihadists felt that they had been charged with the responsibility of creating such a society. Usuman, a Sufi shaykh, believed that the founder of his tariqa, the Qadiriyyah, had appeared to him in a dream and "handed him the 'Sword of Truth,' to use against the enemies of God."[121] It may be that while God is missing in the story of

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[119] Marx, citation. Emphasis in original.

[120] Esposito, Straight Path, p. 35.

[121] Hiskett, Islam in West Africa, pp. 227, 248.

conversion in the Cape Colony, He (or She) is missing from the Reis's account of resistance in Brazil.[122]

VII.

The Cape Muslims of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not rebell, but they did resist the ideologies and institutions which oppresed them. Even Davids implicitly acknowledges this, despite his claim that Islam at the Cape was concered with ceremonies, not resistance. Bradlow argues that the establishment of Islam at the Cape and the growth of the Muslim community were processes

> permeated throughout by profound ideological and political considerations; considerations that embraced subtle yet fundamental challenges to the prevailing structure of ruling class hegemony....[123]

The shaykhs and imams created an ideology, grounded in religion, which challenged "the hegemony of capitalist social relations."[124] This was not "an ideology of anti-colonial resistance...." Rather the shaykhs interpreted "the brutal harshness of the prevailing social relations" for their followers

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[122] This is similar to the position taken by some older interpretations of the uprising in Bahia. Citations.

[123] Bradlow, thesis, p. 2.

[124] Bradlow, thesis, p. 132. Bradlow does not make a plausible case for either the existence of a hegemonic ruling class ideology (not likley given the divisions within the local ruling classes) or of "capitalist social relations." The last can hardly describe the Cape during the eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries given the centrality of slavery and other forms of unfree labor and the underdeveloped nature of capital markets.

"in a manner appropriate to mystics...."[125] It is a pity that Bradlow does not expand on this final point. Islam must certainly have allowed the believer to develop a sense of personal identity that derived not from the racist assumptions of colonial society, but from his or her understanding of a omnipotent, eternal, and loving God. One wonders what the consequences of this might have been both for the individual and for society as a whole.

Andrew Bank takes us a little further in this direction. Islam, he contends, "was a religion (both ceremonial and secular) that cut across boundaries of status and ethnicity, while maintaining those of race and class."[126] His argument compliments David's discussion of the role the theology of Tuan Guru played in creating a community ethos which accomodated the interests of slaves and slaveowners.[127] The Muslim community, as Banks sees it, did not discriminate between the enslaved and the free or between those of Asian or African descent. But Islam did reinforce the boundaries separating blacks from whites and the underclass from proper settler society. Islam

> amplified the distance between [white] owner and slave so as to separate the slave's identity from... the dominant class ideology, and simultaneously drew slaves closer to a particular strata of the urban underclass: free blacks.[128]

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125 Bradlow, thesis, p. 130.

126 Bank, Decline of Urban Slavery, p. 119.

127 See above.

128 Banks, Decline of Urban Slavery, p. 119.

The ideology of Cape Muslims, then, could not defend slaves from slavery, but it could protect blacks for the degrading assumptions of white supremacy. One of the consequences of the Muslims' ideological resistance was the formation of a self-concious community of "Malays" who, whatever they were, were neither Christian nor white.

Resistance was not merely a matter of ideas, it was embodied in ritual as well. Davids provides us with an important insight into the nature of the ratiep. He argues that this Sufi ceremony, in which adepts achieved a state of devotional ecstasy and then drove sharp instruments into their body or grasped red-hot chains without injuring themselves, must have been particularly appealing to slaves. In it, they would have experienced a "tremendous... power over their bodies, despite their bondage...."[129] Davids goes no further, but we can build on this observation.

One of the essential features of slavery was the owner's control over the slave's body. It was a body to be bought and sold, whipped, fed, and raped, and, of course, put to work. In performing the ratiep, the slaves resisted this; they engaged in what Jean Comaroff has called "the ritual reconstruction of the body." Discussing religious practice under apartheid, she writes that

> when expressions of dissent are prevented from attaining the level of open discourse... ritual provides an appropriate medium through which the values and structures of a

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[129] Davids, "The Survival of Islam," p. 63.

contradictory world may be addresed and manipulated.[130] For slaves, the ratiep may well have represented a rejection of their owners' claims over their bodies. Slaves reasserted their ownership of their bodies, of themselves; they took them back from their owners and gave them instead to their God in worship. Secondarily, perhaps, the retiep was a denial of the reality of physical pain. The pain and injury that slaves risked inflicting on themselves during the ratiep was far more severe than the punishment that any but the cruelest owners would administer.

None of those who have written on Cape Muslim history have suggested that the creation of the Muslim community was in itself an act of resistance. Yet as we have seen, the struggle for the fullest possible autonomy of social reproduction, for autonomy in family and community life, may be the form of resistance most characteristic of slavery in the Atlantic world. It is a small irony that in the same book in which he argues that Islam at the Cape was "ceremonial, rather than resistant," Davids devotes an entire chapter to the Muslim community's struggle to survive.[131] Davids sees only that the community never sought to capture political power, but instead sought to withdraw from it. Yet this attempt to withdraw and to create an alternative society, this rejection of settler society, was indeed an act of resistance. Rather it was a permanent state of resistance,

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[130] Comaroff, Body of Power, pp. 196-97.

[131] Davids, "Alternative Education," p. 47 and "The Survival of Islam," passim.

requiring many individual and collective acts of resistance over the life of the community. The Muslim community at the Cape did not merely survive. It carved out and defended space, both physical[132] and ideological, in which the Muslim community could sustain itself in the face of the indignities and injustices it and its members faced. As in Brazil, Islam at the Cape attracted slaves and other outsiders not because it promoted "social revolution," but, as Reis puts it, because it

> fostered a revolution in the lives of its followers. It made them want not to be slaves or inferiors; it gave them dignity and it created new personalities for its members.[133]

VIII.

The final point is an ironic one. In Brazil the white opinion of Islam was uniformly negative. Sentiment at the Cape was mixed. Many whites seem to have regarded Muslims, both slaves and free, as particularly prone to crime and to have viewed them with "jealousy and suspicion."[134] On the other hand, another school of thought seems to have been able to find some good in Islam. And it may have been precisely their strict

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[132] I am intrigued by the circle of karamats enclosing the Cape Peninsula and within which, an oral tradition attributed to Tuan Guru tells us, Muslims are protected from fire, flood, earthquake, famine, and plague. [Bradlow, thesis, p. 73.] How are we to understand this Muslim appropriation of colonial and indigenous space?

[133] Reis, Slave Rebellion, p. 114.

[134] Report on the Police, Records of the Cape Colony, vol. 35, p. 38.

adherence to one of the tenets of their religion that earned Muslims such favorable attention. William Wright, an Anglican priest who was detested by local whites because of his abolitionist sentiments, wrote that Muslims made up the "more respectable" portion of the slave population, in large part because they did not drink. H.T. Colebrooke was another who praised the "sober Malay." "[W]hether he be in freedom or slavery," Colebrooke claimed, "he worked with more diligence... than the sottish free-born Englishman."[135] Is it possible that in making slaves better people, embuing them with a sense of self-respect, Islam also made them better slaves? Was the price of the Muslim community's survival indeed an accomodation with slavery? Was acquiescence embedded in resistance?

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[135] H.T. Colebrooke, "Note X," in Bird, State of the Cape, p. 377.