

Three Pedagogical Approaches to Higher Islamic Education in South Africa

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Abstract

This article covers the historical background of Islamic education in South Africa, and deals more specifically with three institutions of higher Islamic education in the Western Cape: the Madina Institute, the International Peace College South Africa, and Dār al-'Ulūm al-'Arabīyyah al-'İslāmiyya (the Strand Seminary). These three institutions have been chosen partly because they have not been studied before, and partly because they were founded after South Africa became a democratic country in 1994. They share the common concern that Islamic education should imbue students with traditional Islamic knowledge, which is important for their faith, salvation, and identity. However, they also reveal certain important differences in their aims and pedagogical approaches.

Keywords

Islamic education, Western Cape, pedagogical approach, tertiary education, Madina Institute, Peace College, Strand Seminary, Islamic studies, South Africa.

This article deals with three institutions of higher Islamic education in the Western Cape: the Madina Institute, the International Peace College South Africa, and Dār al-'Ulūm al-'Arabīyyah al-'İslāmiyyah (the Strand Seminary). These institutions emerged after Apartheid ended in 1994. Previous research on community-inspired institutions of higher Islamic learning has only examined institutions that were founded before 1994.¹ This is therefore the first comparative study of institutions founded after significant social and political change in South Africa. The article examines their common features and identifies their differences, especially with respect to their pedagogical approaches to teaching Arabic and Islamic studies.

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1 See Yasien Mohamed, "Early Islamic Education and Approaches to Teaching Arabic in South Africa", in: Yasien Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town 1997, pp. 1-19, here: pp. 1ff.; Haron and Mohamed, "The Theory and Practice of Islamic Education", in: Yasien Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town 1997, pp. 17f.; Muhammed Haron, "The Arabic Programmes of Four Community-Based Colleges", in: Y. Mohamed (ed.), *The Teaching of Arabic in South Africa. History and Methodology*, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 1997, pp. 134-145, here: p. 136.

1 Historical Background

Muslims arrived on the southern tip of Africa in 1658 from the Indonesian archipelago. The next 150 years saw an influx of political exiles, convicts, and slaves from the islands of Southeast Asia and indentured labourers from parts of India. These communities established the foundations of the Muslim community in South Africa, sometimes referred to as the Cape Malays. The most notable political exile was Shaykh Yusuf from Macassar (d. 1111/1699). He was banished to the Cape in 1694 and became a symbol of the founding of the Muslim community in South Africa. A century after his arrival, Muslims were finally allowed to establish their own mosques and Islamic schools (*madrāsas*). Another, distinct group of Muslims arrived from India from 1860. They served as British indentured labourers on sugar plantations, and later became independent traders, merchants, and street vendors. Indian Muslims contributed to the building of mosques, schools, and cemeteries, and have since lived mainly in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.²

The first figure to be associated with Islamic education in South Africa, Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam (d. 1222/1807), known as Tuan Guru, was exiled from Indonesia. After his release from Robben Island Prison, he established the "first mosque" and Islamic school (*madrāsa*) on Dorp Street in Cape Town. In 1860, Shaykh Abu Bakr Effendi (d. 1298/1880), an Ottoman scholar who had been sent to the Cape by Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I at the request of the British Queen Victoria, established a school of higher Islamic education. This was the precursor to the Islamic seminaries (Dār al-'Ulūms) and community-based colleges.

To this day, the madrasa remains an institution of Islamic education for children in South Africa. They learn the basic principles of Islam, including the recitation of the Qur'an. Since the 1960s, Muslim parents have expressed greater interest in their children attending state universities to pursue a Western education. This nevertheless did not affect the madrasa education, which has continued to provide a primary source of preserving the Islamic faith and practice in South Africa for more than three centuries. The Muslim community, although only two percent of the country's population, has maintained its identity as Muslims, and today their members play a significant role in all spheres of South African society.³

During the Apartheid period, two Islamic institutions of higher learning emerged. The first was the Dār al-'Ulūm Newcastle (Newcastle Seminary), and the other was the Islamic College of Southern Africa (ICOSA). These two institutions were the precursors to the Strand Seminary and the Islamic Peace College South Africa (IPSA), respectively.

The Newcastle Seminary followed the Deobandi *Dars-i Nizami* syllabus, which teaches traditional Islamic knowledge, including Arabic grammar, the Prophetic Tradition (*ḥadīth*), Sacred Law (*sharī'a*), and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*). These

2 See Mohamed, "Early Islamic Education", pp. 1ff.

3 See *ibid.*, pp. 1ff.