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Editorial

Africa's variety of Arabo-Islamic Literatures – an overview

Oral and written literatures

Africa, in the words of Léopold Sédar Senghor is a creative continent where “giver and receiver meet” (quoted in Richard 2004: 21). It is indeed a continent that has been and continues to be the home of a plurality (and an exchange) of cultures. Africa's diverse religio-ethnic and linguistic communities have for generations expressed their communal feelings via a myriad of languages spoken along its lengthy coasts and vast hinterland. The expressions and emotions vented by these communities have been captured in the form of rich “oral literary traditions”. These traditions have been orally transmitted and disseminated by, among others, travelling bards, itinerant storytellers and roving poets. Alongside the production of written literature, the oral literary tradition has been accepted as a significant genre of literature.

These two types of literatures have indeed complemented one another prior to, during and after the colonial period; a period during which African communities witnessed the imposition and replacement of their local languages with those of the imperialists. As a consequence, Dutch, Portuguese, French, German and English became a part of the African continent. Nonetheless, the earlier African communities' contributions were recorded in historical chronicles as noted by scholars such as Kenneth W. Harrow (2000: 520) and evidence of their significant outputs have been encapsulated in the form embellished manuscripts. These manuscripts have been copied and distributed by scribes during the early centuries. And with the onset of the printing presses in different parts of the African continent these manuscripts were gradually replaced by printed texts particularly during the post-colonial era; a period when African societies gained their independence and actively produced their literatures to affirm their national identities. This stage in the life of Africa also coincided with a phase when religious literature, which featured prominently in both the poetry and prosaic texts, had to make way for the development and expansion of secular literature. When scanning the output of the literati in predominantly North African Muslim societies such as Egypt and Algeria, this becomes quite evident.

Since it will be well nigh impossible to summarize the varieties of literatures that have been produced over many centuries on the African continent by African (and Arab) scholars, an attempt will be made to offer selective glimpses into these in order to appreciate the legacy that has been left behind and one that was consciously ignored by orientalist scholarship (see Said 1978; Lang 1991); a theme that is touched upon by Hester du Plessis in this issue. Before proceeding further a brief word about Arabo-Islamic literature will be in order at this point since the issue gives special attention to this genre of literature. The term implies any type of literary work that has been written in the Arabic script – referred to popularly as the *ajami* texts – and any kind of literary piece that falls within the ambit of Islam. In other words, when discussing Arabo-Islamic literature the text should contain one of two elements; it may either be a work written on the African continent in Arabic that does not necessarily discuss Islamic identity or tackle an Islamic theme or it may be a work not written in Arabic but in any other African language (in the Arabic script) that use Islam as its major theme. Bearing the latter working definition in mind, it goes without forwarding any additional arguments that Arabo-Islamic literature therefore belongs to the family of African literatures that have been “written by Africans for Africans who share the same sensibility, consciousness, world-view, and other aspects of cultural experiences” (Ojaide 2004: 316).

At this juncture one cannot but fully agree with Tanure Ojaide’s (2004: 315) opening sentence in his article that “literature is a major form of art form through which people exhibit their culture”. Although African literature has made its mark in earlier times, it was not given the recognition it deserved in world literature; this has, however, changed during modern times. At present African literature – past and present – has acquired world-wide recognition for its contributions towards world literature. This rightful acknowledgment included earlier classics such as *Sundiata* and modern day works written by Africa’s Nobel laureates, namely Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) and Wole Soyinka (b. 1934–) (see Harrow 2000: 521–524; Richard 2004: 26–27; Beard & Haydar 1993; Ojaide 2004).

Literary outputs between northern and southern Africa

When reflecting upon Africa’s past, one cannot overlook the fact that the northern belt, which is presently associated with the Arab speaking world, is an integral part of the continent. Harrow (2000: 520) demonstrated that the connections between north Africa and the Sudanic belt have been multiple and this has been borne out by the historical chronicles such as *Ta’rikh as-Sudan* which was written by Abdur-Rahman As-Sa’idi (d. 1655). The chronicles not only tangibly documented the scholarly contributions of that time but it also illustrated how scholars

criss-crossed the Saharan desert to disseminate Islamic/scientific knowledge that have been recorded in the rich variety of unedited manuscripts still housed in many centres in Mali and Niger. These outputs have undoubtedly been stimulated by Arab/Muslim scholarship in North Africa led by outstanding scholars such as Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) who made their mark. Since North Africa was slowly Arabicized over many centuries, the Arabic language became the lingua franca and this resulted in it being viewed as an extension of the Arab world. Another outcome of this process led to the filtering down of Arabic into and beyond sub-Saharan region. Whilst the language was adopted by some scholars in the Sudanic belt, others creatively used the adaptable and pliable Arabic script to pen their works in the different local languages. For example, religious scholars employed this script to produce Hausa literature in West Africa (Richard 2004: 57–62; Sharawy 2005: 187–273), Swahili literature in East Africa (Richard 2004: 62–74; Sharawy 2005: 101–182) and Afrikaans literature at the tip of Southern Africa (Davids 1997; Haron 2003; and see Dangor in this issue).

At this point it is instructive to undertake a brief excursion of the afore-mentioned literatures. But prior to doing this it is necessary to insert a paragraph about the variety of rich Maghribi literature. This range of literature naturally concentrated on Islamic themes during the early centuries soon after it was Arabized by the wave of Muslim incursions across North Africa. With the intrusion of the French colonial powers into this part of the African continent, it slowly shifted its focus when it came under their influence. As a result of the latter's deep and lasting influence Arabic as a literary vehicle was muscled out and pushed to the periphery, and French was adopted as the linguistic agent. The creative Maghribian writers thus successfully produced their fictional literature in the French language after years of experimentation during the early part of the 20th century. The Maghribi writers felt fairly comfortable with use of French as a means of expressing a variety of themes and by the middle of the 20th century their literary output gained global recognition; a few creative writers such as Kateb Yacine (d. 1989), Assia Djebar (b. 1936–) and Tahar ben Jelloun (b. 1944–) became known for weaving into their writings a multiplicity of themes such as alienation and dispossession; Djebar, as a matter of information, forms part of Naomi Nkealah's study in this issue. Since the question of the Arabic language resurfaced in the public debates by the 1960s and 1970s, Arabic was viewed as an additional means to express their ideas. Whilst some continued to write in French, others experimented with Arabic. Bilingual writers such as Tahar Bekri (b. 1951) were able to gain fame beyond the Maghribian borders for their works in poetry and prose writings. Since some Maghribi writers experienced restrictions in their native countries, they migrated to Europe where they continue to reflect themes and issues that their fellow citizens in North Africa face (see Killam & Rowe 2004: 151–

154). Now that a brief but albeit unsatisfactory synopsis has been presented about the Maghribi literary contributions, we now turn our attention to the other mentioned literatures with the intention of highlighting, at least, selected significant works.

From the 13th century onwards West Africa was indeed the hub of socio-economic activities and interactions. Cities such as Timbuktu and Djenne emerged and became important nodal points that not only joined numerous trade routes but also gave life to a hive of African intellectual scholarship which came into close contact with the Arabic literary movement that swept across the Sudanic belt. This consequently led to the emergence of a vast body of literature that ignited intellectual activities in the region. The rich bibliographical compilations by scholars such as John Hunwick (1996; 2005) and the works published by the UK based Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation (www.al-furqan.com) bear testimony to the splendid literary heritage that the earlier African (Muslim) scholars left behind. Among the languages that benefitted from the intellectual interaction were Hausa and Fulani respectively; some of the leading linguists realized the adaptability of the Arabic language's script and they naturally adopted it to enhance and enrich their language. Helmi Sharawy's useful publication provide a selection of manuscripts that represent some of the languages that has been mentioned earlier; among the list Sharawy included one oral Hausa text that was extracted and reproduced. This particular text was first published and translated into English by S. Rattray, a British colonial administrator and anthropologist, in 1913, and for the purposes of this compilation he included an Arabic translation that was completed by Abdel-Hameed Hawwas. Sharawy also reproduced a Fulani text that was accompanied by a French translation; this text was taken from the work entitled *Zuhur al-Basatin fi Ta'rikh as-Sawadin* ("Flourishing of Gardens in the History of the Black [communities]"). One of the most prominent scholars, namely Usuman dan Fodio, was the subject of this particular Fulani manuscript. The literary harvests deepened and indeed re-enforced the presence of Islam and Muslims in West Africa.

Similar developments took place along the East Coast of Africa, where Arab Muslim traders conducted commercial activities with the peoples along the coast and shared their language and culture with the coastal communities; these interactions eventually gave birth to Swahili, which eventually became the lingua franca of the region. Some scholars argued that the contact between Arabs and East Africans was much earlier than the contacts that were made between West Africa and the Arab world. Leaving aside these critical debates, the Swahili language gave rise to a rich tradition of literature (see O'Fahey 1994; 2005b). An array of scholars made their inputs to enrich and beautify this language through the production of poetry and prose works and this resulted in these works being

duly acknowledged by scholars of world literature. Ibrahim Noor Shariff (1991: 39) highlighted the fact that since Swahili has been closely associated with Muslims many Islamic themes notably featured in both genres. He went on to state that for educational purposes Swahili religious scholars made ample use of traditional stories that concentrated on the lives of God's prophets in their prose texts (O'Fahey 2005b: 28–30). Harrow (2000: 524–528), who devoted a few pages to East African Literature in his chapter, described and discussed the importance and relevance of Swahili poetry and fingered Sayyid 'Abdullah ibn Nasir (d. 1810) as having been one of the major Swahili poets who wrote the memorable poem "Inkishafi" ("The awakening [of my soul]"). Incidentally, Sharawy (2005: 115–170) reproduced the poem which consists of 79 verses; it was taken from Hichens' English published text of 1972. In Sharawy's compilation the poem appears also in its transliterated form accompanied by a separate Arabic translation that was undertaken by the Azharite trained theologian, Abdel-Hay Salem. Apart from this significant poem, one other oft-recited religious poem that was composed by Shaykh al-Basayri was "Qasidat ul-Burda" ("Poem of the Mantle"); a poem that melodiously praises Prophet Muhammad and that is usually recited in religious gatherings. This particular poem, which was subsequently translated into Swahili, has regularly been recited not only along the East African coast from Kenya to Mozambique but also by South Africa's Muslims in the Cape. Even though South Africa's Muslims were not as prolific as their East African counterparts in the production of Islamic literature, they were nevertheless creative in making their contribution.

During the time when Swahili poetry and prose flourished by the middle of the 19th century, South Africa's Cape Muslims also began to innovatively employ the Arabic script for religious purposes using the creolized Dutch language, namely Afrikaans (Haron 2003). The nascent Cape Muslim community used this user-friendly, flexible script in order to write their religious texts in Afrikaans; this socio-linguistic engineering process was called Arabic-Afrikaans by Adrianus van Selms who stumbled across them in his research in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a matter of fact, it was Shaykh Abu Bakr Effendi's (d. 1880) famous *Bayan ud-Din* ("The elucidation of the religion") that gave Arabic-Afrikaans an enduring identity; this religious text, which was specially prepared for the Cape Muslims with the full financial support of the Ottoman Turkish government, was, according to Achmat Davids (1991), a linguistic feat that was never surpassed even though many other texts were produced between 1880 and 1958. Davids' fascinating study of Effendi's contribution showed how this Turkish Kurd scholar was able to successfully engineer the use of the script to accommodate certain sounds and letters that were not present in the Arabic alphabet. For further thoughts on Arabic-Afrikaans, one may have an overview when reading Suleman Dangor's article in this issue.

In the paragraphs above reference was thus far made to a select group of languages that have employed the Arabic script as a vehicle to convey the socio-religious and historical ideas and events of earlier periods. However, when the focus moves to the modern day period, there is a clear shift in linguistic policies within most of these communities; many – if not all – opted to use the Latin script at the turn of the 20th century; this shift coincided with the secularism gaining prominence and becoming an important theme in literature. As a consequence of these linguistic and literary developments, religious – especially Islamic – literature was gradually muscled out of the texts and pushed to the margins. These developments implied that when secularised Muslims became creative writers, they opted to tackle socio-political issues from a purely secular point of view in their poetry, novellas, short stories and theatrical works. This was the trend throughout much of the 20th century and as has been demonstrated in the brief studies published in, for example, Douglas Killam & Ruth Rowe's edited *Companion to African Literatures* (2000). However, towards the close of the 20th century with the resurgence of religion, Islamic themes slowly slipped back into the creative writing sector in different parts of the continent. Here mention may be made of just two examples to reflect this trend: in West Africa the Senegalese novelist, Mariama Bâ (1929–1981) who wrote in French, weaved Muslim women characters into her famous 1980 text *Une si longue lettre* (*So Long a Letter*) that won the Noma Award for publishing in Africa (Harrow 2000: 534–536). In this novel it was inevitable that she had to touch upon Islamic as a significant sub-theme; a similar tendency was noted in the novels such as *Confessions of a Gambler* and *Sachs Street* by Rayda Jacobs, the South African novelist who writes in English (see Manuel 2003: 68–69). It is contributions such as these that have opened and stimulated other aspiring creative writers to consider bringing the theme of Islam into mainstream writing. This particular theme has not only gained ascendancy in the novels but also in short stories, theatre texts, and poetry.

Before winding up and drawing this discussion to a close, it might be edifying and prudent to say a few words about contemporary Islamic literature that have been produced in local languages such as English, Afrikaans, Hausa, and Swahili across the African continent (see Khan 1987). Although this genre of religious literature has been – and perhaps justifiably so – ignored by literary critics since they fall outside the ambit of creative writing, it still behoves them to, at least, acknowledge and mention the existence of this type of literature. This genre includes works that cover, inter alia, texts on Islamic devotion, theology, jurisprudence, Sufism and translations of the Muslims' sacred text, namely the Qur'an. To date this vast collection of fairly good quality Islamic publications remains unrecorded and consequently by-passed unnoticed. Scholars are thus urged to make a concerted effort to reproduce them from the catalogues of publishing

houses and institutions; the main objective of this exercise is to not only list them in informative and user-friendly compilations but to also track and monitor the extent of the output in the different African languages particularly in the sub-Saharan region and evaluate critically the nature of the output.

Even though it is not the intention to record a representative list of this genre of literature in this introductory piece, it was thought that it would perhaps be very revealing to briefly make reference to two of the sub-divisions within this rich genre. The one sub-division that social science – or more specifically religious studies – scholarship has not sufficiently explored and studied is the literary production of Sufi scholars. The attempts of Louis Brenner (1984), R. S. O’Fahey (1990), and Knut Vikor (1995) have, however, been important studies that contributed towards filling these gaps in West, East and North African Sufi studies; there has not been anything noteworthy on the same subject in Southern Africa (see Vikor 2000: 464–465). The other sub-division is that of the production of Qur’anic scholarship (i.e. commentaries and translations) on the continent in local languages. Although attention has been given by a few scholars, no extensive work of note has been produced that underscore the nature of such scholarship in African Muslim communities. Nonetheless, in this section we reproduce selections of translations of portions of the Qur’an that have appeared in, at least, two of South Africa’s local languages. Since the Qur’an has been exceptionally central to and indeed deeply influential in Africa for generations, it has retained that coveted position to this day. Consequently, translations of this sacred text – from the original Arabic – appeared in a variety of Africa’s widely spoken languages such as Hausa and Swahili; although some translations were rough versions of the original text, there were others that were refined and beautified by the translator(s) with the purpose of sharing and disseminating God’s word. The samples hereafter have been taken from Afrikaans and Xhosa respectively; they offer a taste of the work of individuals who were not seasoned translators but individuals who were passionately driven by their religious beliefs to make available portions of God’s word in the local languages.

Two specimens of the Qur’anic chapter titled “Al-Ikhlās” (“Sincerity”) were extracted from an unpublished and a published Afrikaans translation; the first was undertaken by the now defunct Pretoria based Universal Truth Movement at the beginning of 1960. The translation project was supervised by Maulana Abdur-Razzak, who hailed from Ladysmith (Natal), with the assistance of – as far as we were informed – Adrianus van Selms, the late professor of Semitics at the University of Pretoria. The second is the one that was completed by Imam Baker with the assistance of Pieter Muller in 1961; the latter has gone through many prints and issued by the International Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban, South Africa (Haron 2006: 26–27). Both translations of this short chapter appear below; this is

the 112th chapter of the Qur'an (cf. Haron 2006b: 133–155). These Afrikaans translations are followed by a translation of the same chapter in Xhosa – the latter was extracted from The Ahmadiyyah Muslim Mission 1989 publication entitled *Selected Verses of the Holy Quran in Xhosa*, and a translation rendered into English by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (2004: 444).

Al-leglaas Die Reinheid van Geloof	Al-leglaas Die eenheid	Al-Ikhlās Isahluko	Ikhlās Purity [of Faith]
1. In Die Naam van Allah, die Almididige, Algenadigde	1. In die naam van Allah, die Barmhartige, die Genadigde	1. Egameni lika-Allah uSolufefe, uSozinceba.	1. In the name of God, Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.
2. Sê: "Hy is Allah. Die Een en Enigste,	2. Sê: Hy, Allah is EEN.	2. Yithini, "Ungu-Allah, ekukuphela kaKhe;	2. Say: He is God the One
3. "Allah, die Ewige, Absolute	3. Allah is Hy op wie almal vertrou	3. "U-Allah, Ozimleyo, Othandazwa ngu- wonke-wonke.	3. God the eternal
4. Hy is verwek, nog is Hy verwek.	4. Hy verwek nie, ook is Hy nie verwek nie;	4. "Akazali naYe Akazalwanga;	4. He fathered no one nor was He fathered.
5. "en daar is niemand aan Hom gelyk nie.	5. en niemand is soos Hy nie.	5. Kwaye akukho namnye ufana nafe."	5. No one is comparable to Him.

The above cited examples demonstrate to what extent the Qur'an can be regarded as a significant literary work in its original form as well as in its translated form. For the Muslim theologians the Qur'an should be essentially viewed as God's and not as humanely created work of art. It should therefore not be treated like a literary piece of work that can be subjected to post-modern literary criticism. Even though this orthodox position reigns supreme, contemporary Muslim scholarship has accepted the opinion that the translated parts of the Qur'an may be considered contributions in the arena of creative literature. Literature – divine or human – may be subjected to all sorts of literary criticism that should be applied to demonstrate the richness of the Qur'anic contents and style. Unfortunately, in this special issue there is no article that gives special attention to the literary dimensions of the Qur'an on the African continent. The issue, however, contains a few articles that offer critical assessments of creative and philosophical works that have either been penned in Africa or influenced African Islamic philosophical thought.

Articles in this special issue

In this special issue the contributors explored the ideas captured in the Arabo-Islamic literatures they analysed with the intention of sharing the religio-cultures contained in these literatures with their readers. There is little doubt that Africa is a continent where civilizations converged and cultures connected over many centuries. The Islamic civilization and Arab culture penetrated the northern part of the African continent and manoeuvred their way into the fabric of sub-Saharan Africa. Because of this process, the Arabo-Islamic lifestyle became enmeshed with sub-Saharan cultures and brought about phases of renewal and transformation among the communities located in these regions. It is hoped that this special issue will not just be an enriching and insightful exercise, but one that will surely be an educational one; one that will bring about a better understanding of African communities and cultures through an interpretation and analysis of their literary productions or via pieces of translations that represent their religio-cultural writings.

This special issue of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* turned its attention to Africa's Arabo-Islamic literature, which has gradually been capturing the imagination of social scientists during this era of the "war-on-terror" campaign; a campaign that has unashamedly been pushed ahead by the current U. S. A. administration disregarding the sentiments and feelings of the Africans. In this issue, the journal was able to essentially attract a variety of articles that may be divided into two broad categories. Whilst the first set of articles falls within the comparative literary studies genre, the second set of articles forms part of the manuscript/document studies sector. The former set of texts offers a detailed analysis of short stories, poems, philosophical Islamic texts, and art work, and the latter set provides a description and translations of selected manuscripts and documents.

The first in the comparative literary studies genre is Naomi Nkealah's article, "Reconciling Arabo-Islamic culture and feminist consciousness in North African women's writing". She takes us on a trip to North Africa where she explores the theme of silence and voice in selected short stories by two women writers, namely Alifa Rifaat and Assia Djebar. The latter hails from Algeria whilst the former comes from Egypt. Both of them analysed women representation in the two mentioned Arab nation-states where patriarchy is still dominates. Nkealah's analysis unpacks the short stories and demonstrates how different strategies have been employed by these Arab/Muslim women to counter gender oppression. It is quite evident from Nkealah's critical assessment that even though the female characters in the narratives encounter diverse and opposing contexts, there is one definite strand of commonalities that cannot be ignored and that is the desire and need to be liberated from the "constricting fetters of patriarchy". A comparative reading of the selected stories attributed to these two writers reveals in the case of Rifaat's

characters they resort to silence as a means of self-preservation, in the case of Djébar's protagonists they employed techniques that ranged from writing to outright protest; these, according to Nkealah, demonstrated the women's – and, of course, the authors' – rejection of gender-based segregation. Despite the differences in their respective approaches, both short-story writers have made an invaluable contribution to the North African feminist literary tradition during the contemporary period.

The second article by Saddik Mohamed Gohar takes us to Sudan where he investigated the dialectics between homeland and identity in the poetry of Muhamed Al-Fayturi and his master, namely Langston Hughes, an African American. The main purpose was to stress their common attitudes toward crucial issues integral to the African and African American experience such as identity, racism, enslavement and colonization. Saddik argued that when reviewing Hughes's early poetry he depicted Africa as the land of ancient civilizations with the idea of strengthening and deepening African American feelings of ethnic pride during the Harlem Renaissance. Saddik, however, highlighted the fact that Hughes' idealistic image of a pre-slavery, a pre-colonial Africa, vanished from his poetry after the Harlem Renaissance and it was replaced with a more realistic image of Africa during the colonial period. The article, moreover, showed that unlike Hughes, who attempted to romanticize Africa, Al-Fayturi rejected a romantic confrontation with the roots. Interrogating western colonial narratives about Africa, Al-Fayturi reconstructed pre-colonial African history with the intention of revealing the tragic consequences of colonization and slavery upon the psyche of the African people. Saddik pointed out that these two poets' attempts to confront the oppressive powers which aimed to erase the identity of their peoples. They explored areas that overlapped between the turbulent experience of African Americans and the catastrophic history of black Africans – in the process the two poets dismantled the colonial narratives and erected their own cultural mythology.

In the third article, which incidently does not actually discuss literature that had been penned on African soil, Yasien Mohamed dealt with the metaphor of the dog in Arabic philosophical literature. Mohamed made use of four important early Arabic philosophical sources that are both in the original Arabic and in Arabic translation; they are Miskawayh's (d. 1030) *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* ("Refinement of Character"), al-Raghib al-Isfahani's (d. 1060) ethical treatise, *al-Dhari'ah ila Makarim al-Shari'ah* ("The Means to the Noble Qualities of the Law"), Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Galen's *Ethics*. Basing himself on these important philosophical works, he discussed the metaphor of the dog in the light of a wider imagery of the rider and the horse, which, according to him, vividly demonstrated the dynamic relationship between the three faculties of the soul (i.e. the rational,

irascible and concupiscent faculties). Mohamed gave foremost attention to the irascible faculty, which represents the emotion of anger; and the metaphor of the dog is used with a positive connotation to refer to this emotion.

On a very different literary journey, Hester du Plessis surveyed what she termed “Oriental Africa” in the fourth article. In her study she acknowledges that Arab culture and the religion of Islam permeated the traditions and customs of the African sub-Sahara for centuries. And she also noted that when the early colonisers from Europe arrived in Africa they encountered these influences and spontaneously perceived the African cultures to be ideologically hybridized and very different from the ideologies of the west. As far as she is concerned, this difference progressively endorsed a perception of Africa and the east being “exotic” and was as such depicted in early paintings and writings. She thus argued that this depiction contributed to a cultural misunderstanding of Africa and its inhabitants. She therefore briefly explores some of the facets of these early texts and paintings by looking at them from two sides. From the one, Du Plessis discussed the construction of the “other” as it had been reflected in textual interpretations. She analysed the scripts by early Muslim scholars who critically analysed early western perceptions. And from the other, she examined the works of travel writers and painters (circa 1860–1930), who created a visual embodiment of the exotic. She reviewed these taking into account the politics behind the French Realist movement that developed in France during that same period. In concluding her analysis, she investigated the construction of “exoticness” as represented by the literary descriptions and visual art depictions of the Orient’s women.

The next contribution by Mustapha Keraan and Muhammed Haron in this issue is a study and translation of selected Sufi literature attributed to Shaykh Yusuf Al-Khalwati Al-Maqassari (d. 1699) who had made his mark in Southeast Asia as a heroic Sufi shaykh figure because of his valiant battles against the Dutch; the shaykh was subsequently captured and sent into exile by the Dutch to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and thereafter to the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa’s Cape Town) where he eventually died. As a renowned sufi shaykh he wrote a numerous manuscripts on theology and *tasawwuf* (Sufism) that have circulated and influenced many of his companions and students; some of these have been directly attributed to him whilst others have been copied by his scribes who had been his disciples. Thus far no claim can be made that any of the translated sufi treatises, which had been accredited to the shaykh, have been penned at the Cape. It has, however, been argued that his mere presence had an indelible impact upon the psyche of the nascent Muslim community. And it is, moreover, heavily speculated that despite the shaykh’s restrictions at the Cape of Good Hope, he was able to disseminate his ideas via oral tradition to a handful of exiled and enslaved individuals

and in this manner influence, to some degree, the politico-theological thinking of the emerging Muslim leadership at that time. Although the shaykh's unique story and literary production has been investigated by a few scholars in Southeast Asia, further archival research still needs to be done by others to assist researchers in reaching more definitive conclusions about his writings. In any case, the three manuscripts translated and briefly discussed in this article give a glimpse into the nature of his theological and Sufi thoughts and it also provides some inkling into Cape Muslim thought.

Since the shaykh was subsequently revered and indeed admired by the nascent Cape Muslim leadership, some of them who were inspired by his presence creatively employed the Arabic script to produce basic and informative religious literature. This is the subject of Suleman Dangor's article. Dangor's descriptive article provides an overview of the emergence of this genre of literature which has come to be popularly known as "Arabic-Afrikaans" literature. In this article Dangor lists the titles of some of the manuscripts that have been identified by researchers of Cape Muslim history. And he highlights, amongst others, the challenges of transcribing Afrikaans phonetically into the Arabic script. The experiences of the Cape Muslims are not unlike those of Muslim communities in the southern African neighbourhood.

When moving from the tip of southern Africa to the northern part of Mozambique, then we witness a different story unfolding. In Mozambique the government's archival department has successfully been able to house a number of valuable extant archival records and historical sources that shed light on the northern Mozambique's rich social history where a sizeable Muslim community resides. What has been fascinating about the preserved records is that some of the correspondence/ documents have been written in the local language using the Arabic script. Liazzat Bonate highlighted the fact that the northern Mozambican Muslim population employed the Arabic script for writing in KiSwahili and local African languages for centuries. Bonate, who was assisted by a local shaykh in desciphering the contents of the correspondence, indicated that this practice continues to this very day in their private correspondence. In her analyses of the two transcribed and translated letters from the collection of the Mozambique Historical Archives she was able to demonstrate to what extent these letters served as the evidence of historical occurrences and provided an inkling of pertinent issues.

And the final entry in this special issue takes us back to West Africa where we encounter the variety of unpreserved manuscripts of Timbuktu. Mary Minicka, who presently heads the South African Conservation Technical Team that supervises the Timbuktu Rare Manuscripts Project, shares her thoughts on the project; a project that considered as the first cultural project of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and one that was given full support by South

Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki (see Mbeki 2005: 33–35; 2006: 62–68). Minicka starts off by introducing the legendary city of Timbuktu. On this journey she informs us about the revered status of the city's celebrated scholars such as Ahmed Baba as well as the rich literary heritage for which the city has achieved unrivalled fame. Apart from highlighting scholarship as a significant and important social tradition in Timbuktu, she provides an understanding of the Islamic manuscript tradition by offering insights into the Islamic literary culture. Minicka sheds brief light on the destruction of libraries and loss of manuscripts before discussing and analysing Muslim scholarship's materials such as the paper's history and watermarks. Towards the concluding part of her illustrated article, Minicka confines her discussion to outlining the structure of Timbuktu's Islamic manuscripts and ends off by explaining the South African conservation technical team's difficult task in comprehending the indigenous craft traditions, on the one hand, and creating and making conservation replacement covers for the badly damaged manuscripts, on the other.

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