Ahmed Deedat and Muslim-Christian Relations at the Cape, c. 1960-1980

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Abstract

This paper establishes the historical context of Muslim-Christian relations at the Cape, the role played by Ahmed Deedat in this relationship, and the public reaction to his role. It focuses in particular on his reaction to the polemics of various churches against Islam and the divisions among Muslims regarding Christian-Muslim relations. Opposition to Deedat among Muslims underscored deeper discursive differences between traditional Ṣalāḥu and those we may term ‘modernist’, even if in time they proved to be more traditional. Deedat’s influence was at its height between approximately 1960 and 1980. Thereafter, it began to decline, partly due to the emergence of new organisations and leaders in the Cape, who were involved in the wider anti-apartheid movement, due also to the fact that Deedat’s own gaze was shifting outwards towards the international Muslim world. If Deedat’s intention was to restore the confidence of rank-and-file Muslims, he succeeded for a period, but support for the very public ‘Deedat-style’ activities eventually declined. His recordings have remained popular and even appear to be increasing in popularity in the post-9/11 world.

Compared to my last visit to Verulam, I noticed a remarkable improvement in your health. We can only thank Allah for that. I was thrilled by your alertness and your awareness. My family and I miss the times spent communicating with you by means of the communication board. We miss the jokes and comments shared with you and we long to be there by your side once again.

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I recall your laughter ever so often and I have fond memories of the times shared with you, almost every night... Esam Mudeer, our son-in-law, interpreted from your communication board that “Cape Town, you made me.” At that moment you were crying and these words touched the hearts of everyone who was in the room as well. Everyone in Cape Town, by now associates the two of us because they know that when you are here, we are always together.... I want you to always remember, Uncle, that I’m still your ‘Abu-Bakr Siddique’ and my love and feeling for you will never change.” Salie Mohamed, 1997.

Salie Mohamed, a great admirer and close associate of Ahmed Deedat, expressed these sentiments in a letter fifteen months after Deedat suffered a stroke that prevented him from communicating with the world through speech. The ‘Great Communicator’, ironically, was silenced in the last years of his life and had to resort to a non-spoken mode of communication, namely sign boards. Salie Mohamed’s sentiments evocatively capture the unique bond between two special friends driven by a common purpose. Salie, according to an interviewee who wished to remain anonymous, not only thought that Deedat “was a great man but that he walked on water.” While Deedat created controversy in many parts of the world, his tours of the Cape provoked extra tension because Christian missionaries had aggressively campaigned against Islam since the nineteenth century and he was determined to reverse this trend.

Ahmed Deedat was born in Surat, India in 1918 and joined his father in South Africa in 1927. Due to financial constraints, he left school at an early age and took up a series of positions as a retail assistant in rural stores in various parts of Natal. It is said that in the mid-1930s, while working a few miles from Adams College, a Christian seminary on the Natal South Coast, Deedat became increasingly frustrated when he was unable to respond adequately to questions about Islam that Christian

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2 Letter from Salie Mohamed to Deedat, 29 August 1997. Esam Mudeer was married to Deedat’s adopted daughter. Notice that Salie refers to him as ‘our’ son-in-law.
students put to him. It was by chance that he came across a copy of *Izharul-Huqq* (‘Truth Revealed’), by Rahmatullah Kairanvi, which chronicled the latter’s debate with Reverend Founder in India in the 1860s. Deedat was inspired to begin a comparative study of Islam and Christianity. With his close associate G.H. Vanker, he established the Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC) in Durban in 1957. In time, with funding from the Middle East, it would evolve into the Islamic Propagation Centre International and Deedat would become a household name throughout the Muslim world.

David Westerlund summarised Deedat’s theology of religion through an analysis of his core works, ‘Is the Bible God’s Word?’, ‘Al-Qur’an: The Miracle of Miracles’, ‘What is His Name?’; ‘Christ in Islam; and Muhammad: The Natural Successor to Christ’. According to Westerlund, Deedat’s views on the Bible are similar to Protestant liberal theology. His views on Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur’an and Bible fall within the ‘orthodox tradition’. He identified the doctrine of the Trinity as the foundation on which Christianity was built and as its major problem. He regarded it as *shirk* (disbelief) and sought to refute it. Deedat was wedded to the classical Islamic idea of the Ahl Al-Kitab as people who received divine revelation through Moses and Jesus, but who subsequently distorted part of the message and neglected other aspects. Christians had deviated to such an extent from the original teachings that their salvation lay in converting to Islam. Deedat also argued that while the Bible contained the words of God, the Prophets, and historical accounts of events, and therefore had divine origins, the existence of several early manuscripts and translations and inclusion of the words of humans raised doubts about its validity as a record of Jesus’s life and teachings. The Bible was not, in Deedat’s opinion, “God’s word”.

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This paper is not concerned with Deedat’s theology per se but rather his association with the Cape, with particular emphasis on two sub-themes, namely the polemics of the Anglican and Dutch Reformed churches (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk - NGK) against Islam and Deedat’s reaction to these attacks; the second is the divisions among Muslims regarding Christian-Muslim relations. Deedat initially attracted somewhat ‘modernist’ Muslims. Muslim opposition to him underscored deeper discursive differences between traditional *ulam* and the new ‘upstarts’. Deedat was amongst the latter in the formative period even if, over time, he would prove to be a traditionalist. This paper first establishes the historical context of Muslim Christian relations in the Cape and then examines Deedat’s role in this relationship and the reaction of the public to this role.

“Slam’s kerk is die Zwart Man’s Kerk”

Islam and Christianity have had a presence at the Cape since at least the 1650s. As Robert Shell has shown, some of the 63,000 slaves imported to South Africa between 1653 and 1808, and many of the 2,000 political leaders from south and south-east Asia who were exiled in the Cape by the East India Company, were Muslims. The most famous exile was arguably Shaykh Yusuf. The first official Dutch Reformed Church was based in Cape Town as early as 1694. Islam was present in Cape Town and places like Robben Island and Constantia where some Muslim political exiles were based. The colonial authorities felt threatened by Islam and imposed strict penalties for anyone caught evangelising Islam. For example, in 1712-13, a Javanese by the name of Santrij had his tongue cut out before being burnt alive for evangelising Islam. Christian masters, on

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the other hand, did not carry out active proselytisation because they believed that they would lose the right to sell slaves who embraced Christianity.\(^6\) Between 1652 and 1795, most converts to Islam were male while most women converted to Christianity, mainly because there was a surplus of single Christian men who sought wives and therefore chose them from among the slave population. This trend was reversed during the nineteenth century when Muslim men, who were in many instances employed as overseers due to their abstention from alcohol, succeeded in accumulating wealth and hence became attractive to Christian women who may have married them for their wealth or lifestyle.\(^7\)

The British conquest of the Cape in 1795 was followed by the arrival of the Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican churches. A mulatto slave-owner, Michiel Christiaan Vos, founded the South African Missionary Society in Cape Town in 1799. It was the first mission specifically for slaves. In 1812 the government passed a law that slave owners did not have to free slaves who embraced Christianity. Missions found it difficult to convert Muslims to Christianity and formed a ‘Mission to Muhammadans’ in 1824 to devote themselves to this task. The mission made little headway. The Scotsman John Philip wrote to the directors of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1831 that the “result of this formidable apparatus” was the “closing of any door before it opened”. Similarly, Petrus Borcherds of the NGK, which in 1824 established a synod independent of Amsterdam, wrote in 1861 that most freed slaves “attached themselves to the Mohammedans, with whom they were previously more or less connected”.\(^8\) Although the uninterrupted immigration of Christian Europeans and reduced conversion to Islam post-1840 meant that Christians far outnumbered Muslims in the Cape by the end of the nineteenth century, concern about Islam remained a feature of Christian discourse into the twentieth century.\(^9\)

\(^{6}\) Shell, ‘Between Christ and Mohammed’, p. 269.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., p. 272.

\(^{8}\) Ibid., p. 275-6.

\(^{9}\) Ibid., p. 277.
Fear that former slaves may convert to Islam became especially acute following the freeing of slaves in 1838. Anglicans, more than any other denomination, confronted the Islamic ‘threat’ from at least the middle of the nineteenth century. The Church of England acquired semi-official status at the Cape after the second British occupation in 1806, to the extent that the Test and Corporations Act, which in Britain denied the franchise to non-Anglicans, was occasionally enforced at the Cape. It was only after the arrival of Robert Gray as Bishop in 1847 that the objective of creating a church independent of the state was pursued vigorously.\(^\text{10}\) Gray undertook a five-month-long, three-thousand-mile journey around southern Africa.\(^\text{11}\) His list of challenges in the mission field included Muslims: “In and about Cape Town was a great number of Mohammedans, in part the descendants of the Malays whom the Dutch had brought from their East Indian Colonies, in part liberated African slaves; and even settlers were found to be lapsing to Islam.”\(^\text{12}\) To counter this, he bought a large estate five miles from the centre of Cape Town, later named Bishopscourt, which had been van Riebeek’s farm, and began training men for Holy Orders, built a school, and “plans were made for missions to the Mohammedans and the heathen”.\(^\text{13}\) Gray was concerned about former slaves embracing Islam and urged other Anglicans to strive to (re)convert them.\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{13}\) Ibid.

The Reverend Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot, who was in charge of the ‘Mission to Moslems’, expressed concern in 1900 that Africans were also embracing Islam. A Stellenbosch theologian, Gustav Bernhard Gerdener, suggested in 1915 that African migrant workers to the Rand were coming under the influence of foreign Muslim migrants: “the thousands of Moslems in the Rand compounds are enthusiastic propagators of their faith” and “many of the raw natives return to their homes strong under the influence of Islam”. An explanation for the Anglicans taking the ‘fight’ to the Muslims lay in geography and numbers. The three largest denominations in the Cape at the beginning of the twentieth century were the NGK, Methodist and Anglican. The NGK was mostly concentrated in rural areas and Methodists on mission stations. Anglicans had the largest presence in urban areas. Baptists, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans and LMS had much smaller membership.

A recent study by Matthee points to the wider political context that shaped the concern of missionaries about Muslims. In Cape Town in 1875, Muslims constituted 6,772 of Cape Town’s population of 17,004, almost a third. During the 1870s and 1880s a number urban reform measures were introduced. These were perceived by many Muslims as restricting their ability to practice their religion. This included the compounding of contaminated holy water, prohibition of Khatieb rituals, the threatened removal of cemeteries from municipal boundaries, and measures like fumigation and quarantining during the 1882 smallpox epidemic. It was Muslims like Abdol Burns and Jongie Siers who led the campaign against these measures largely because they felt that it constrained their ability to practice Islam. The English press associated opponents of these measures as the Dirty Party, and perpetuated stereotypes of Malays as “rowdy”, “deceitful”, and “thieving”. In 1884 there was a political alliance between Malays, Blacks and unemployed

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16 Cape Colony Churches in 1898: Baptist 6,777; Roman Catholic 17,508; Lutherans 44,111; LMS 41,409; Presbyterian 30,679; Anglican 89,650; Methodist 203,067; and NGK 225,517. See Davenport, ‘Settlement, Conquest, and Theological Controversy’, p. 55.
whites amidst public calls for the segregation of Malays. Thousands of Muslims participated in protests against the closing of the cemetery on Signal Hill; on 5 January 1886 around 3,000 Muslims participated in a march that turned violent but which forced the authorities to compromise on the cemetery issue. During the 1890s, Malay Muslims participated in politics with other Blacks through the Coloured Peoples’ Association.\textsuperscript{17} This upsurge in Muslim politicization formed a backdrop to the activities of the Anglican missionaries who, it may be argued, hoped to drive a wedge in this alliance by underscoring religious differences.

**Anti-Islamic literature**

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the responsibility of propagating Christianity was left to priests whose parishes were surrounded by large Muslim populations. This informal arrangement came to an end in 1911 with the appointment of Stephen Garabedian as the first director of the Muslim Mission Board under the command of the Diocesan Mission Board. The Board, which was only disbanded in 1976, campaigned resolutely to prevent conversions to Islam and simultaneously interest Muslims in Christianity. Garabedian, who held this post until 1922, was especially troubled by Christian women marrying Muslim men and forsaking Christianity.\textsuperscript{18} Anglicans published several books and pamphlets. Anglican parishioner A.W. Blaxall’s *An Outpost of Islam* (1927) evaluated previous attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity and suggested more efficacious strategies. This was followed by the Reverend A.R. Hampson’s *The Mission to Moslems in Cape Town* (1934) which chronicled his experiences of missionary work in the Cape.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{18} Pratt, ‘Anglican Church’s mission’, p. ii.

After Garabedian’s resignation, the work of the Muslim Mission Board was continued by Anglican women who targeted Muslim women and children through sewing guilds and children’s clubs. The Mission Board was given impetus after the Second World War with the appointment of Miss J.K. Leslie. She voiced concern about the threat posed by Islam to Anglicans, and disseminated propaganda to dispel the myth that ‘Muslims were a very fine set of people’, impress on Christians the seriousness of apostasy, ‘win back’ lapsed Christians, and prepare the converted for baptism. She wanted to publish ‘picture books’ since few converts to Islam were literate and had little knowledge of the Qur’an and Islam. To force the clergy to understand Islam better, an annual essay competition was held on comparative religion at the national theological colleges in Grahamstown and Umtata.  

In a 1946 sermon at St Michaels and All Angels in Observatory on the subject ‘Cape Town – Christian or Moslem?’, the Reverend Roseveare suggested that Islam was anti-Christian and that Muslims were fatalistic because they did not view God as a “Father God” but as all-powerful. He added that Muslims lacked morals except those laid down by ‘powerful’ members of society. Males were thus dominant over females, practised polygamy and divorced easily. The Reverend Roseveare urged his congregation to “proclaim the Truth with all our might to those who have been deceived by false prophets”. The sermon was subsequently published as a book. Canon R.H. Birt followed with a pamphlet titled ‘Win Our Moslems To Christ! A challenge to our Church People at the Cape’ in the early 1950s in which he advocated that Christians live among Muslims to convert them, and urged white Anglicans to minister aggressively in Malay areas. In 1956, the Reverend E.L.B. George told

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21 Ibid., p. 199.
23 Pratt, ‘Anglican Church’s mission’, p. 200. The designation ‘Malay’ was used in the racially divided South Africa to refer to ‘Coloureds’, another contentious term, of the Muslim faith.
the Anglican Synod of the Diocese of the Cape that Christians were “lapsing in their hundreds” but that little could be done until the “whole Church became concerned about the matter”. Muslims, he added, made “great play of the brotherhood of mankind”, which the Church was struggling to counter. Several other pamphlets were published by the Anglican Church, including the anonymously authored ‘The Cross or the Crescent’ in 1959.

The 1959 Report of the Cape Town Diocesan Mission to Muslims warned Parish congregations to “be awakened to the Moslem menace. Only the clergy can rally them”. The Reverend George Swartz replaced Miss Leslie as fulltime missionary to Muslims. Swartz, a Bachelor of Arts graduate from the University of Witwatersrand, who had worked at St. Paul’s Church on Bree Street, was determined to ‘defeat’ Islam and proceeded to the Church of England theological college, St Augustine’s College in Canterbury, Kent, in June 1960 to study Islam under Canon Kenneth Cragg, a pioneer of the study of Muslim-Christian relations, and author of several books on Islam.

Around this time, Stellenbosch University established a committee under Dr. Hensham to study the doctrine and history of Islam. This was timely, according to reporter Jan Burger, because Islam was “a force not to be underestimated.”

This concern with Islam and Muslims and this hive of activity was due a (mis)perception that large numbers of Christians were embracing Islam and that it was necessary to understand the religion and history of Islam and gain an insight into the Muslim faith in order to counter the perceived tide of conversions to Islam by discrediting the belief system of Islam.

The ‘good and evil’ contrast between Christianity and Islam in Christian publications and the speeches of ministers outraged many Muslims in the Cape.

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25 His publications include The Call of the Minaret (1956); Counsels in Contemporary Islam (1965); The Event of the Qur’an (1971); Palestine: the prize and price of Zion (1997); Muhammad in the Qur’an (2002); The Qur’an and the West (2006).


28 Ibid.
The real and perceived Anglican attack on Muslims was taking place in an increasingly volatile political context. The National Party (NP) had come into power in 1948 and was busy implementing racial segregation, which was justified theologically through the NGK, which came to be the ‘official’ religion of the NP. The NGK viewed Blacks as racially and intellectually inferior, and in 1953 it established a state theology justifying apartheid.  

The NGK also published anti-Muslim literature. G.B.A. Gerdener, who had worked among Muslims from 1913 to 1917, published a guide for missionaries entitled *Onder de Slamsen in de Kaapstad: Afval en Strijd*; Dr. Samuel Zwemer’s *The Moslem menace in South Africa* (1914) suggested ways to combat the spread of Islam; while the NGK appointed A.J. Liebenberg to undertake house-to-house calls among Muslims.  

Subsequent publications like *Cross and the Crescent* (1965), Ben J. Marais’ article ‘Die Kerk en die Islam in Afrika’ (1965); and David Newington and Hubert C. Phillips’ *The Shape of Power in Africa* (1965) were concerned about the threat posed by Islam, “the secret weapon of Satan”, if Christians did not “reach the heathen”.  

The NGK caused a huge uproar among Muslims when its ‘Confessions of Hajee Abdoella’ alleged, among other things, that the Prophet had ordered murder and plunder; had told his followers to kill non-Muslims; that since all the Prophet’s sons had died, he was cursed by God; and that the Prophet made Khadija’s father drunk in order to marry her. G.H. Vanker, Deedat’s associate, branded the booklet a “wanton and irresponsible attempt to discredit the Muslim faith. We do not want the book banned as this would not serve any useful purpose. What we want the Dutch Reformed Church to do is come forward with Hadjee Abdullah and discuss the book, its contents and charges in the open”.  

Other Muslims joined Vanker in challenging these publications. Imam Abdullah Haron, editor of *Muslim News*, remarked that the booklet “inflicted the severest wound anyone can have the heart to inflict…. No true Muslim will tolerate an insult upon his faith, no matter from what source it comes. And let this not be an empty threat to the powers that...
be, that a true Muslim fears no other might than the Almighty Allah”.
Shaikh Nazeem Muhammad of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) called
the booklet “really cheap missionary work to poison innocent people’s
minds against another faith”. He “assured them that they would get no
dividends”.

This is the context in which Deedat entered the fray. Like Muslims in
India a century earlier, Muslims of the Cape too were stirring against
perceived Christian provocation, and like Mawlana Kairanvi a century
earlier, whose story had inspired him, Deedat was determined to breach
the Anglican fortress. In a situation where Christians seemed to hold the
intellectual aces, Deedat’s no-holds-barred style was welcomed by
ordinary Muslims who felt that they had been on the defensive for too
long. Deedat’s actions must be placed in a larger context in three important
ways.

First, as Kate Zebiri points out, most Muslim “writings on
Christianity, regardless of the geographical location, portray it as a more
or less exclusively Western phenomenon”. Christianity was
consequently perceived, as Ataullah Siddiqui has suggested, as a ‘White
man’s’ religion and as part of the ‘arsenal’ of Western modernity, and
therefore ‘part of the problem and not the cure’. Economic, political,
social, and technological subservience to the West over the past few
centuries has created deep-seated anger among many Muslims and their
anti-Western feelings have shaped Muslim responses to Christianity,
which in some minds is seen as synonymous. Second, Ataullah
Siddiqui suggests that Muslims are ‘disadvantaged’ in theological

31 M. Haron, ‘Imam Abdullah Haron: Life, Ideas and Impact’, MA dissertation,
University of Cape Town, 1986, p. 211.
32 Muslim News, 4 August 1961.
33 Kate Zebiri, ‘Muslim Perceptions of Christianity and the West’, in Lloyd
V. Ridgeon (ed.), Islamic Interpretations of Christianity, pp. 179-203 (London:
34 Ataullah Siddiqui, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century
35 Ibid.
disputations with Christians since they accept Christians as *Ahl al-Kitab* (‘People of the book’) and Jesus as a Prophet, and tread warily, while Christians do not have similar constraints. Finally, Muslims have lacked a central institution to represent them since the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate after World War One. Dialogue with Christians consequently took place at local levels and often through individuals who were unable to match the human and material resources available to Christian missionaries. This combination of factors (activity of missionaries, perceived attacks on Islam, and limited resources) made the Cape a fertile ground for Deedat.

**Salie Mohamed and Deedat**

There were some Muslims in the Cape who were concerned about the activities of Christian missionaries and saw in Deedat someone who could champion their rights and were willing to support him. They were looking for the ‘tools to fight back’, according to Mustaq Abdullah. Salie Mohamed (d. 2000) was one such person. Salie was the son of Mohamed Essack Dawray who had migrated to South Africa in 1914. He tried his hand at various ventures before settling in Claremont, a suburb of Cape Town, where he opened the Rosmead supermarket in 1923. Essack Dawray established and contributed to various mosques both in Cape Town and, as was the case with most first-generation migrants, his native India. He also served on various Jamaat Societies. His son Salie (full name Salie Mohamed Essack Dawray) continued his father’s involvement in various Islamic organizations. Together with Shaykh Deen, a graduate of Al-Azhar in Egypt and imam of the St Athens Road mosque in Athlone, he periodically toured South Africa to discuss matters of concern to Muslims. According to Mustaq Abdullah, Salie was concerned about the activities of Christian missionaries during the 1940s and 1950s which he was determined to challenge and stamp out because he feared that failure to do so may lead to the incorrect impression that

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36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 “Salie” was his preferred and known name but Deedat always referred to him as Saleh in person and in correspondence.
Muslims did not have answers to the questions raised by missionaries and that this would possibly raise doubts among Muslims about their faith.39

Deedat was introduced to Salie in Cape Town during the 1950s by Muhammad Zubair Sayed of Sayed & Sons in Belgravia Road, Athlone, whose family founded Muslim News in 1960 under the editorship of Imam Abdullah Haron.40 Sayed is an interesting figure in his own right as his family’s deep involvement in Islamic work dates back many centuries. He is a descendant of the Uthmani family from the village of Dabhel in Gujarat, who were one of only two Urdu-speaking families in that village. The Uthmani family have a family tree dating back to the twelfth century when the family moved to Zafrabad (Jaunpur) during the reign of the Khilji Dynasty (1290-1320), subsequently settling in Navsari and later Dabhel. Their religious reputation in the village is legendary. Many miracles are attributed to family members, graves of eminent members of the family are well known to this day, and the mosque and

39 According to Mustacq Abdullah, “Salie Mohamed was naturally religious. His Fitrab was so that he was going to put Islam first in his life and he made sure he was to influence others by just meeting up with them. As for my Grandfather, Mohamed Essack Dawray … your average Muslim businessman who came to trade in South Africa in 1914 for a better life; probably as conscious as you and me… and he was a very strict disciplinarian. But I must still meet a man that was so conscious of his Maker [as] Salie Mohamed; everything, and I mean everything (his getting up, his eating, his business, his meetings) was planned around his Salaah. Just the other day a Christian man serving on the board of Cafda (Cape Flats Distress Association) came to the supermarket and commented how they had to arrange meetings around Asr and Maghrib Salaah-because of its changing times in the Cape – knowing full well that at the time of Salaah he would just get up and leave if the meeting lingered on into the Wagt [prayer time]. One of his famous sayings: ‘Islam does not teach us discipline; Islam is Discipline!’ ‘You must not make excuses not to make Salaah; Salaah must be the excuse to break what you are busy with’”. [e-mail correspondence, 11 October 2008.]

40 The first edition was published on 16 December 1960. Muslim News was firm in its opposition to apartheid for most of its existence (1961-1986) and faced State harassment. Some editions were banned, while many associated with the newspaper were victimised in one way or other: amongst others, Imam Abdullah Huron, Raslud Sayed, Gulzar Khan and Abdul Qayyum Sayed.
well which they built still exist, known respectively as ‘Mia ni Musjid’ and ‘Mia ni Kuwo’. Around the turn of the twentieth century several members of the family immigrated to South Africa. Abed Mia Uthmani, for example, settled in Ladysmith in 1900 where his benefactors were the firm of M.M. Amod & Co. He wrote many books on Islam and dispensed Hakimi medicines.41

Abed’s paternal uncle, Jalaluddeen Uthmani (d. 1936), who was a shipping agent who plied his trade between Mumbai and Port Saeed, arrived in South Africa in the 1890s. He lived in the then South African Republic for a few years before settling in Woodstock in the Cape where his hosts were the Parker family. Jalaluddeeen, who was also an Alim, had two sons, both of whom were born in India, Ahmed Saeed (b. 1910-1983) and Mohammed Zubair (1906-1974). They arrived in South Africa in the 1930s, returned to India to marry and eventually made Cape Town their home after spending some years working for the Mia family in the Transvaal, who, like them, were from the same village. Mohammed Zubair started the Islamic Publications Bureau in 1952 following the visit to South Africa of Aleem Siddiqui (1892-1954). Siddiqui acquired the informal title of “Roving Ambassador of Islam” because he visited Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, and many other countries where he helped to establish mosques, madrassahs and newspapers / magazines. These include Muslim Digest and Ramadaan Annual (Durban, South Africa), The Real Islam (Singapore) and Prophets Birthday Annual (Mauritius).42 Aziz Gool, Abdul Kader Palekar, and Salie Mohammed were all part of the network that was involved in Islamic publications.

Sayyid, according to Salie’s nephew Mustacq Abdullah, met Deedat when the latter was a furniture salesman with Victoria Furniture Mart, a position that required him to travel throughout the country. When Deedat approached Sayyid to publish one of his early works, Sayyid agreed on

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41 The family tree is included in Zuleikha Mayat’s recent publication History: Muslims of Gujarat (Durban: Women’s Cultural Group, 2008), pp. 32-35. Additional information was obtained from Z. Mayat (11 October 2008) and Farid Sayed (12 October 2008).

condition that he undertake a lecture tour of the Cape. It was Sayyid, according to Abdullah, who called Salie one day and told him that he had arranged a meeting with “a person who would interest his religious work and even enhance it.” At their very first encounter, Salie would later say, he had marked Deedat as “a jewel I cannot lose”. Thereafter, when Deedat toured the Cape, he would sleep over at Salie’s home. Abdullah remembers that “we, as children, took advantage of his company. Uncle Deedat would sleep for four hours at night and an hour after the midday Asr salah and the rest of the day was super-charged electricity! If you wanted to see the ‘real’ Deedat, you had to have a meal with him before or after a lecture or debate; that was when one got the best out of him.”

Salie’s support for Deedat is remarkable given that his customers were mainly white Christians and there was always the prospect of a backlash. According to Mustacq, he never harboured such thoughts because of his “absolute faith in God as the provider”. Mustacq cites as examples Saleh’s decision to stop selling cigarettes in the supermarket when an Imam advised that it was makrooh (undesirable), even though there were financial considerations. Salie, like Deedat, was alarmed at what he regarded an ‘Anglican onslaught’ and helped to organise Deedat’s meetings. When Deedat provided details of an impending visit, Salie “would take care of the rest”.

He would arrange venues, print and distribute pamphlets, and place adverts in local newspapers. The youngsters in the family, like Salie’s sons Bashier (deceased), Abu-Baker, Adam (deceased), Essack, and nephews Mustacq, Kamaaludien and Jaffer, “would literally paint the town with posters and pamphlets announcing Deedat’s lecture tours”. Deedat and Salie faced many obstacles, both from within and outside the Muslim community. The MJC’s opposition to Deedat made it difficult to arrange venues for lectures, as most were Council-owned Civic Halls. Salie often booked

43 Abdullah, Mustacq Ahmed. Nephew of Deedat’s friend in the Cape, Saleh Muhammad. Interview, 9 January 2002; E-mail correspondence 26 November 2007.

44 Ibid.
venues under different names to break the ‘unofficial ban’ on Deedat. Maree, a council employee at the time, “gave endless flak. He sabotaged the sound system of the Good Hope Centre for one meeting and this led to our partnering with Parkers Sound from then on,” Mustaq recalled.45

Salie also assisted Deedat in raising funds for the IPC as he had the trust and confidence of the local business community. Unfazed by criticism from Christians and Muslims, Deedat continued to lecture in the Cape. In the early years he would travel in his old “beaten-up” 1950 VW Beetle. Beaten-up it certainly was! IPC minutes dated 6 May 1963 record Mohamed Nazeer Alli complaining that R140 had been spent on repairing the vehicle in the previous five months. Deedat reminded him that that was because “the car has done 129,000 miles travelling all over the land for the collection of funds. The car has gone too old but owing to lack of funds at present, it is not possible for the Centre to get a new car”. As Deedat drove from Durban to Cape Town, he would stop in many small towns along the way to raise funds. Meticulous records were kept of every cent raised and spent.

Deedat fondly referred to Salie as ‘my Abu Bakr Siddique’, in reference to the close bond between the Prophet and Abu Bakr Siddique, his close friend, confidante, and first caliph of Islam. Saleh and Deedat forged a lifelong bond. They travelled together to many parts of the world, including lecture tours to India, England, East Africa, and the Middle East. Mustaq Saleh recalled that when he and his parents and brother arrived in Durban on a ship from India in 1958, Deedat picked them up at the harbour and took them to his home in Iron Street, Verulam. While the home was ‘humble’, the ‘warmth’ with which they were received ‘was without comparison’. Deedat would call Salie every Friday after the midday Jumu’ah prayer for a ‘mini-strategy meeting’ before each sat down to lunch. They discussed what had transpired during the week and the activities in the week ahead. Saleh was visited by many Muslims needing help with their ‘missionary problems’, hence the weekly

45 Ibid.
telephone calls to Deedat. Saleh himself mastered issues surrounding comparative religion and often debated with missionaries, according to Mustaq. Lectures and debates were preceded by readings from the Quran and many Qari’s launched their national and international careers through Deedat’s meetings. The chairpersons of some of the Cape meetings, George Gibbs and Imam Anwar Baker, had an unenviable task trying to control difficult audiences. Gibbs was labelled a ‘traitor’ by Anglicans because they felt he was too impartial during the 1978 tour. Imam Baker, who suffered a severe stroke in 2004, was described by Mustaq as “judicious and unyielding to both Christians and Muslims alike who tried to disrupt and take over the meetings at question time”.46

Deedat tours the Cape, 1960 and 1961
During Deedat’s tour of the Cape in September 1960, before a crowd of around 20,000 at the Green Point stadium, he challenged the Reverend Joost de Blank, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, to a debate ‘to clear the air’ about his book Cross or the Crescent. The Reverend Van Rensburgh of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reverend Father McBride of the Anglican Church, who were in the audience, accepted the challenge, which was to be hosted by the Orient Study Club.47 When the Orient Club wrote to the churches before Deedat’s 1961 tour to finalise dates and issues to be debated, the NGK accepted the challenge, but there was no response from the Anglican Church. Muslims were critical of the failure of the Anglican Church to respond. Imam Abdullah Haron, for example, wrote in Muslim News that ‘hundreds of people’ were asking why the Anglican Church was refusing to meet with Muslims: “I am amazed that the responsible church is keeping itself at bay after throwing mud at a religion and its Prophet who revere Jesus Christ more than the Christian’s Bible.” Deedat too was “disappointed”: “I take my hat off to the Dutch Reformed Church who had no part in the early attack, to come

46 Ibid.
forth and discuss the matter amicably. After all a Symposium is not a place where one expects attacks and counter-attacks.”

Deedat’s debate with Ds. Dawie Pypers of the NGK at the Green Point Stadium in July 1961 was followed by public lectures on topics like ‘What the Bible says about Muhammad’, ‘Christ in Islam’, ‘Was Christ Crucified?’, and ‘Jesus – Man, Myth or God?’. The Cape tour created a huge furore. The Anglican Church condemned Deedat who returned to Durban the day after the lecture. The MJC was left to face their wrath. While the MJC condemned Deedat’s methods and dissociated itself from him, the support of ordinary Muslims was unanimous. As far they were concerned, it was the disparaging remarks of Anglicans that made confrontation unavoidable. Deedat was a “ready-made solution” for poverty-stricken Muslims of the Cape Flats, according to Mustaque:

In the 1960s people were very enthusiastic about the meetings. Not once was the hall empty. It was always full to the brim and large numbers of people even stood outside. Parker’s Sound knew that they always had to place extra speakers outside the halls. The people were at fever pitch and the atmosphere was electric. This was the case every time Deedat visited. This was partly why the ulamœœ opposed Uncle Deedat. They were jealous. They could barely draw an audience, yet this man from Durban would come out of the blue, send out some pamphlets and draw thousands. Even the City Hall was too small for him. At Good Hope Centre, 8,000 people were present and many more were outside. We never imagined this. We never bused anybody. They came on their own, because they had a need in their lives. At the same time Uncle Deedat never condemned the ulamœœ He always said that people who wanted shahadah should go to the ulamœœ

48 Muslim News, 4 August 1961.
49 Abdullah, 9 January 2002; E-mail correspondence 26 November 2007.
Haron contextualises the reaction to Deedat cogently in his study of Christian-Muslim relations in the Cape:

Before passing any form of severe judgement on Deedat, it should be clarified that Deedat felt that his hard approach vis-à-vis the soft approach had to be adopted since the missionaries showed no respect for the Islamic tradition and its adherents.... On the whole, the Muslims gave Deedat a warm reception because they identified with his concerns and held the view that these missionaries had to be dealt with in a harsh manner; and as far as they were concerned Deedat was leading the way and setting the example of how to deal with missionaries when they try to drag the Muslim away from his religion.50

Missionaries attended Deedat’s talks with well-prepared questions in a coordinated effort to undermine him. However, as Mustaq pointed out, he was unfazed and the “audience loved it because they knew that the missionaries would get banged”. Part of the reason for the MJC’s reaction may have been a reluctance to create barriers with fellow-Blacks who were Christian. The MJC publicly declared that apartheid was a heresy. Together with the Muslim Youth Movement, Cape Town, Claremont Youth Association, Cape Vigilant’s Association, Young Men’s Muslim Association and individual Muslim leaders, they adopted the Call of Islam declaration on 7 May 1961:

For too long a time now have we been together with our fellow sufferers subjugated, suffered humiliation of being regarded as being inferior beings, deprived of our basic right to earn, to learn and to worship according to the divine rule of God. We can no longer tolerate further encroachment on these, our basic rights and therefore we stand firm with our brothers in fighting the evil monster that is about to devour us....51


The heightened opposition to apartheid was to reap many tragic victims. One of these was Abdullah Haron (1923-1969), Imam of Claremont mosque, who did extensive work in surrounding African townships and did not survive to tell the tale of his encounter with the Security Police following his arrest on 23 May 1969. He was denied access to his family and died on 27 September 1969 in police custody. Officially, the cause of death was his ‘fall’ from a staircase in prison, but those who made his ‘ghusl’ (washing of the body) told a different story. His Janazah (funeral) prayer was attended by 30,000 people. He had been detained for almost four months without trial. Imam Haroun was chairperson of the MJC at the time of his death and his death resulted in a polarisation between conservative and progressive members in the Muslim Judicial Council.

**Reaction to the 1975 tour**

The MJC would consistently distance itself from Deedat. After Deedat’s 1975 tour, it issued a statement dissociating itself from his lectures through its president, Shaykh Muhammed, who told *The Argus* that the MJC disagreed with Deedat’s use of the Bible to prove that Islam was correct. He called on Muslims to boycott the lectures because Deedat’s method was un-Islamic. Yet, *Muslim News* reported, “thousands of people attended these lectures, many people could not gain admittance to the halls due to lack of space”. Many Muslims interviewed by *Muslim News* took issue with the MJC. Mrs Hadji Karrim, a correspondent to the paper, regarded the MJC’s call for a boycott “un-Islamic. I wonder if the MJC signed a secret pact with a Christian priest-class”, she wrote. “The lectures caused no friction. The Priest and Clergy are afraid because they are spreading false teachings of Christ.” S. Seira, secretary of the Muslim Assembly, admonished the MJC for distributing anti-Deedat pamphlets.

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without discussing the matter with him. It was Dr. Hoosen Kotwal who first mooted the idea of establishing the Muslim Assembly. It was launched in 1967 by the likes of Kotwal, Mohamed Zubair, Salie Mohamed, Rashid Sayed and other Muslim professionals in Cape Town who, while focusing mainly on education and welfare, also took umbrage with some of the policies and attitudes of Islam. M.G. Hendricks, president of the Muslim Students Association (MSA), regarded Deedat’s “academic approach as excellent”. H.G. Allie, Pipe-major of Habibia Siddique Muslim Brigade told reporters that the people of the townships felt that the MJC had “failed them once again. I personally learnt much from Deedat’s lectures. Deedat was just fantastic. He is simple. The halls are too small for his lectures”. Shaykh Abdulkarrim Toffar of the Institute of Islamic Studies was another who rejected criticism of the MJC:

Mr. Ahmed Deedat is undoubtedly an authority on the Bible and we can virtually state without contradiction that he is the only Muslim in the world that can speak authoritatively on the Bible. In fact, he is more well-versed in the Bible than born Christians and their Clergy. We are invited to call unto Islam by wisdom, wise reasoning and proof and one of those ways is to prove factually your opponents’ weaknesses from their own vital sources. That is how Mr. Deedat’s lectures were seen – it’s lamentably pitiful that the Clergy had to get so emotional. It is therefore wrong to have issued pamphlets from mosques banning people from attending the lectures due to the ‘repercussions’. The reason is simple – when the Clergy come with their Bibles, our learned cannot reply and that is embarrassing to their status. Our Clergy should know how these Clergy, especially the Apostolics, swear the Prophet’s name in trains and the Grand Parade. They got a good dose of medicines for it in the recent series of lectures which they won’t forget soon.

56 Ibid.
58 Muslim News, 4 July 1975.
59 The Argus, 26 June 1975.
60 Muslim News, 4 July 1975.
The statements of Sheik Toffar and others quoted here reveal the tensions and politics between Salie-Deedat vs the MJC. Sheik Toffar often played the middle role. Sheik Toffar would play an important role in Muslim life at the Cape over the next four decades, including being one of the founding members of the first Islamic Radio station at the Cape, Radio 786 in 1995. During the early period he was an ‘outsider’ to the ulam politics in Cape Town, being one of the earliest graduates from a Jordanian institution, as opposed to the majority of ulam who either studied on the Indian sub-continent or lacked a formal qualification. As Farid Sayed, current editor of Muslim News and Views, noted, when Shaykh Toffar returned from Jordan as a young imam, there was a great deal of publicity as he had what many regarded as “genuine qualifications … a certificate.” Sheik Toffar was more scholarly in his approach and wanted to raise the intellectual level of Islamic discourse. This did not endear him to other ulam of the city who subtly avoided or shunned him. Sheikj Toffar did not join the MJC but formed his own Institute of Shariah Studies in Salt River in 1972. The gap between him and the MJC has slowly narrowed over the years.

The Cape tour of 1975 was also important for another reason. Deedat would always relate that there were two occasions when he was not sure how to respond to a question. The first was during the 1975 tour, when he was asked by a student at Stellenbosch University: “What good can come from violence by chopping off the hand for stealing?” As he slowly made his way to the microphone Deedat was unsure what to say, “but Allah gives help! Allah gives Hidayah!” He asked the questioner whether he was Christian. When he said, “Yes I am”, Deedat responded: “Then you should know better the outcome after suffering; your Lord Jesus suffered violently on the cross and it redeemed you from sin! You should know better than to ask a question like that!” Mythology or not, the story has become part of local folklore.

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62 Abdullah, Interview, 9 January 2002; E-mail correspondence 26 November 2007.
Controversies did not deter Deedat. According to G.H. Agjee, Deedat’s nephew and longtime member of the IPC, as far as Deedat was concerned, a ‘polite’ approach was inappropriate because Islam was facing a ‘total onslaught’. It was his duty, he felt, and that of every other Muslim, to challenge Western perceptions of Islam and awaken Muslims from their slumber. The colonial context, imperialism, apartheid, and massive resources at the disposal of missionaries led Deedat to conclude that the struggle was between two unevenly-matched protagonists. He was determined to confront Christian missionaries on his own terms. At the heart of the dispute between Deedat and his Muslim adversaries was the proper method of da’wa, which literally translates into ‘summons’ or ‘call to live according to God’s will’. Deedat’s Muslim critics felt that his approach was impairing relations between Muslims and Christians. They took the position that it should be “conducted in a calm, respectful manner, protected from the kind of passions that would vitiate the act and the social benefit that it seeks to realise”.

These vibrant debates largely took place outside the mosque space, and often through the media, especially in Muslim-owned newspapers like Muslim News, Al-Balaagh, Majlis, and Al-Mujaddid, as well as ethnic newspapers like Graphic and Leader, and the distribution of pamphlets and ephemerals. Often the controversy had to be settled in court.

Also interesting is the response of younger Muslims who, deriving inspiration from the works of Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi and others, formed organisations like the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (1970) and Muslim Students Association of South Africa (1974). The MYM organised several youth camps at As-Salaam while Deedat was based there during the 1970s. Many members of the MYM came to “have a high regard for him”, according to Fuad Hendricks, who was a member of the MYM and subsequently went on to become a director of the MYM and later the IPCI. Young Muslims, according to Hendricks, were “fascinated with Deedat’s passion to share the faith, fascinated with his ideas, and fascinated with the way he presented them”. As young Muslims

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63 Hirschkind, Ethical Soundscape, 132.
who felt under siege because of Muslim subservience internationally, the ‘swaart gevaar’ and ‘very hostile’ interpretation of Christianity in South Africa, they were captivated by Deedat’s intellect in his area of specialisation – comparative religion – by his ‘valour and heroic approach’, and above all by ‘his piety’. “Yes,” adds Hendricks, “only those who were close to Deedat appreciated his deep spirituality, reflected by his closeness to the Quran and the life of the Prophet.” Young Muslims were looking for a “hero to confront what was perceived as the ‘enemy’. They could not do so in technology and science, where the West was far superior, but could do so at the level of faith”.64

Deedat, Peerbhai and Makki
Deedat toured the Cape in January 1978. He delivered lectures on ‘Christianity, Communism or Islam? Which has the Answer to the problems in South Africa?’ and ‘The Qur’an or the Bible? Which is God’s word?’ The Cape Herald captured the furore over this tour with its headline ‘Storm over visit by Muslim Scholar’.65 There were angry responses from both Muslims and Christians. At the Cape Town City Hall on 20 January 1978, Deedat angered Christians with his alleged statement that ‘if all the people in the world were created by God in the likeness of Mr. Vorster, it would have been a very ugly world indeed’. Vorster was then prime minister of South Africa and Deedat was probably articulating a sentiment felt by most Black South Africans.66 According to Mustaq Abdullah, members of his family like Sayed and Salie Mohamed (d. 2000) were harassed by the government following the speech. Salie, who had also been confronted by the notorious Security Police when Imam Haron was arrested, was again harassed when Deedat made this (in)famous “if all were to look like Vorster” speech. At the Athlone Civic Centre, addressing the topic ‘Qur’an and the Jews’, Deedat quoted from the Bible and Qur’an to depict Jews as a shameful race. At the Kensington Civic Centre, speaking on ‘Jesus, the Prophet of Islam’,

64 Interview, 16 October 2007.
65 The Cape Herald, 11 February 1978.
66 Ibid..
he said that the Christian belief of turning the other cheek was impractical. “Just turn the other cheek and see what happens.” The media interpreted this as advocating violence against the state.67

According to a media report, Adam Peerbhai, director of the Islamic Centre of Cape Town, challenged Deedat but was “shouted down by Deedat who told the audience that he was a Judas”.68 The video recording of the Cape tour distributed by the IPC did not include this exchange.69 This was part of the editing process, critics allege, that Deedat’s team used consistently to portray him in a positive light. Peerbhai, who had been a consistent critic of Deedat from the very beginning,70 was a well-known teacher, keen sportsman, and author. He wrote a book on cricket, called Cricket Coach (1958), and also penned works on comparative religion, the best-known being Glory of Jesus in the Koran (1950) and two booklets Hadis Text on the Second Coming of Jesus and Missing Documents from the Gospel of Barnabas.71 When Peerbhai moved to Cape Town he became a madrassah teacher at the Addison Street Mosque in Salt River. In March 1977, after Deedat provoked a Muslim-Christian controversy, Peerbhai urged the Natal and Transvaal Jamiatul Ulema to follow the lead of the MJC and condemn Deedat. Then “the entire support of the Deedat-type lecturing would stop”, he wrote,” “and save Muslims of South Africa from a greater shame and possible bloodshed, which I foresee in the near future”.72

Following one of Deedat’s lectures, five Christian evangelists drove through Bryant Street with a loudspeaker condemning Islam. Eyewitness Solly Levy, a prominent Cape Town figure, told a reporter for Cape Herald...
that there would have been bloodshed had cool heads not intervened. Levy complained that Deedat was undermining inter-faith relations. “You don’t go around attacking another man’s religion”. In response to Christian complaints, E. Jakoet of the MJC told Cape Herald that his organisation had “washed [its] hands of Mr Deedat. We don’t agree with his policy. We preach tolerance and we have told him once before that we want nothing to do with him…. He was lucky he wasn’t beaten up”. Peerbhai strongly criticised Deedat and held a lecture on 31 March 1978 on “all the beautiful things” mentioned about Jesus in the Qur’an in an attempt to “restore the good relationship between Christians and Muslims”.

Deedat regarded the coverage of the tour in the January 1978 issue of the Muslim Digest (pp. 15-19) defamatory and sued Makki Publications and Pinetown Printers for R10,000. Mohamed Makki (1909-2003) was one of Deedat’s harshest critics. He was born in India and immigrated to South Africa in the mid-1920s with his father Essop Suleman Vadachia. In 1934 he invited his former teacher Siddiqui to South Africa and took him on a lecture tour throughout the country. Siddiqui conferred the title ‘Makki’ upon Vadachia and initiated the publication of a monthly periodical Muslim Digest and the Ramadaan Annual, which ran for sixty-five years from 1934. Muslim Digest had a wide reach and regularly criticised Deedat’s mission. Makki’s opinion of Deedat is best summed up in a 1986 editorial ‘Pretender to the ISLAMIC THRONE’:

Deedat really represents nobody but himself. He does not represent the Muslims of the world; he does not represent the Muslims of South Africa; he does not represent the Muslims of Natal; he does not represent the Muslims of Durban; he does not represent the Muslims of his own little town of Verulam either where he resides, and in fact the Trustees of the Verulam MOSQUE have even banned

73 Cape Herald, 11 February 1978.
74 Cape Herald, 4 March 1978.
76 The Qur’an is organised according to verses revealed in Makkah or Madinah. The part revealed in Makkah carries the title ‘Makki’ and the remainder ‘Madani’.
Deedat from making a speech in the only Muslim Mosque in his own home town.  

Several explanations have been offered for the enmity between the men, aside from theological differences. Journalist Shafat Khan, who worked for the IPCI for a year in the late 1980s, points to competition for limited local finances and that the IPC “stole” Makki’s idea of publishing an Islamic calendar. Deedat and Makki were, according to Fuad Hendricks, one-time director of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), “two fish trying to swim in a small pond” as they competed for the community’s limited resources. Deedat’s success in procuring overseas funds exacerbated tensions. According to A.S.K. Joommal, editor of *Al-Balaagh*, both men “were headstrong and refused to concede an inch.”

When the matter was heard in court, Deedat was unable to specify the “particular words or statements” that he regarded as defamatory and the case was dismissed with costs. Justice H.J.O. Van Heerden found the article as follows:

The article would convey to the ordinary reader that Mr. Deedat was an ardent devotee of the Islamic faith with strong personal views in favour of Islam and with equally strong views against the other religions mentioned by him and that he was one to express his views in no uncertain terms and to seek support for them in the Bible and Quran. The reader would, on the other hand, also understand the article to be a critical account of Mr Deedat’s choice of subject matter and his manner of handling it. It would convey to him that the writer did not approve of Mr Deedat’s approach and methods in propagating Islam and that his disapproval was strongly couched. The reasons for the writer’s disapproval that would suggest themselves to the reader would be that Mr Deedat’s handling of the matter was liable to cast a bad reflection on Muslims and was likely to cause a rift between Christians and Muslims…. The reader even if he should not share Mr. Deedat’s views would not likely think anything the less of him. It follows, in my view, that the article was not *per se* defamatory.

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77 *Muslim Digest*, July-October 1986: 140.
78 Telephonic interview, 10 December 2007.
79 TBD, RSC 5A/3107, 116/79. Perhaps spell out what TBD stands for
Deedat amended his ‘Particulars of Claim’ and the matter was heard again in March 1981. Deedat’s counsel, Advocate M.P. Freemantle, told Justice John Didcott that Deedat would lead oral evidence on matters not specifically alleged in the revised ‘Particulars of Claim’. Justice Didcott declined this request and adjourned the matter to give Deedat an opportunity to specify what was defamatory in the reports. Deedat’s counsel requested that the case be adjourned sine die, that is, without a retrial date being set. In ordering Deedat to pay costs, Justice Didcott offered salutary advice to both Makki and Deedat:

It is fairly obvious that this is a longstanding dispute with an acrimonious history to it…. I suppose it is even arguable at least to say well, alright, the only thing to do is to fight it out to the death. But this is not just a private dispute. Plaintiff is a preacher and the first defendant is the proprietor of a religious publication. So we have got two members of the Muslim community in Durban having this fight. Both of them have got to take account…. Is it going to do the Muslim community, as a community, or the image of Islam, any good to have this kind of conflict? The public, at the end of it, does not really remember or care very much who won and who was right and who was wrong; all they know it that they witnessed an unseemly battle which will be published with fairly lurid headlines, and there will be an obvious attempt to sensationalise it because if anybody merely gives a report of a court case it is very dull. It is going to be embarrassing to the whole Muslim community of Durban; it is going to be damaging to the faith itself, to the image and reputation of the faith amongst outsiders. Leaders of the community have got a special responsibility to set an example to their followers to be sensible and to bring about peaceful solution to things with a minimal amount of damage.80

Deedat settled out of court with costs of R3,500 in August 1982. Makki had the last word. The Prophet, he said, tolerated abuse with a great deal of sabr (patience) and Deedat would have done likewise if his motives were sincere.81 Deedat and Makki, notwithstanding Justice Didcott’s advice, remained adversaries to the end.

80 TBD, RSC 5A/3107, 116/79.
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Conclusions

From the 1980s, Deedat’s profile and influence in the Cape began to decline. This was partly due to changing conditions among Muslims as well as a transformation in Deedat’s mission. Organisations such as Qibla (1981) and Call of Islam (1984), following on from the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (1970) and Muslim Students Association of South Africa (1974), provided alternatives to traditional ulam. The likes of Ebrahim Rasool, Farid Esack, Rashid Omar, and others were also involved in the wider anti-apartheid movement through the United Democratic Front (1983). At its October 1986 Annual Synod in Cape Town, the white NGK synod branded Islam a “false religion” and threat to Christianity “in South Africa, the African continent and the world at large”. The Synod was concerned that after the 1976 Soweto Rebellion some young Africans and Coloureds “saw Islam as an ideology to enhance the freedom struggle.”

Domine the Reverend Stoffel Colyn, chaplain general of the South African Police, condemned Muslims with statements such as “Muhammad rampaged through the land with a sword to spill the blood of all the children of God into the sand”; “Ismail, the slave son of the slave woman, Hagar, Abraham’s second wife, passed down a generation of Arab terrorists”; and “The Muslims are not your brothers in this country because if they can cut your throat, they will do it”. This too brought progressive Muslims and Christians closer together as they took a stand against the NGK. Farid Esack was a founding member of the South African Chapter of the World Council of Religion and Peace, which he headed with the Reverend Gerrie Lubbe. This was important for inter-faith cooperation. The Kairos Document of 1985, which “supported and empowered God’s poor and oppressed”, was another instrument of cooperation between Muslims and Christians.

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81 Muslim Digest, September/October 1982, p. 40.
82 Al-Balaagh, February/March 1987.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
At the same time, Deedat’s gaze was shifting outwards. From the late 1970s he was becoming known internationally, although it was his debate with Jimmy Swaggart in 1985 that catapulted him onto the Muslim stage as a transnational figure. Thereafter he seemed to spend his energies on travelling internationally to engage in debates and lectures, and raise funds for the organisation’s ostentatious headquarters in Durban. He did occasionally release videos (especially on Hinduism) that caused controversy, and suggested that Islam was under siege in South Africa, all of which helped to raise funds. The early Cape Deedat must be viewed in the wider context of the intrusive activities of the Anglican Church, white domination in South Africa and Western hegemony.

Deedat regarded silencing the Church as essential in order to undermine both Christianity and the racist political order. If Deedat’s intention was to restore the confidence of rank-and-file Muslims then, for a period, he succeeded. Black South Africans experienced perpetual humiliation. When Deedat stood on the platform and debated with Christians, he appeared as a ‘heroic’ figure full of ‘valour’ to many Muslims, according to Fuad Hendricks. It was exhilarating, many ordinary Muslims testified, to see him ‘browbeat’ his opponents.86 This explains why his audiences applauded and shouted ‘God is Great!’ even though there was no direct challenge to the racist system. In the local context, support for the very public ‘Deedat-style’ activities eventually diminished as it created tension between, for example, Muslim and Hindu Indians in KwaZulu Natal, or Muslim and Christian ‘Coloureds’ in the Western Cape. His various recordings, however, remained popular and even appear to have become more popular in the post-9/11 world.

86 Interview, 16 October 2007.