South Africa's Institutions of Higher Learning: Their "Study of Islam" Programs

Muhammed Haron

Abstract

As a discipline, "Islamic studies" has attracted serious attention by a number of institutions of higher learning in predominantly non-Muslim societies. While southern Africa's communities witnessed the inclusion of "Islam" as a subject in the faculties of theology at various regional universities as well as Christian seminaries, Muslim communities have clamored for the appointment of Muslim staff at universities to teach courses on Islam. On the whole, these educational developments bode well for the teaching and studying of Islam regionally, even though the purpose and objectives for doing so differ radically from one institution to the other.

This essay first seeks to offer a brief insight into the teaching of "Islam" as a subject in theological/oriental/religious studies programs; it thereafter reflects upon "Islamic studies" as a social science discipline that has been included in the social science and humanities syllabus. It focuses on the BA Honors program to show the themes chosen for these programs and how scholars redesigned

Muhammed Haron is a South African-based associate professor in the University of Botswana's Department of Theology & Religious Studies, where he teaches religious studies courses; an associate researcher in the University of Johannesburg's Study of Islam program; and an executive member of the University of Cape Town's Centre for Contemporary Islam. He has authored, among other publications, *The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Relations* (2006), compiled/edited *South Africa's Muslims: Annotated Bibliography* (1997), and *South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: An Annotated Bibliography* (2009). In addition, he has co-edited *Islamic Civlization in Southern Africa* (2009); edited a special issue on "Arabo-Islamic Manuscripts" (in Africa) for *Tydksrif vir Letterkunde* (University of Pretoria, 2008); and edited a special issue on "Muslims in Southern Africa" for the University of Botswana's *BOLESWA: Journal of Theology, Religion, and Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2012).

and changed these programs to meet modern needs. Apart from using "social change" as its theoretical framework, it also brings *en passant* into view the insider/outsider binary that further frames the debates regarding the teaching and studying of Islam at these institutions in southern Africa generally and South Africa in particular.

Key words: South Africa, tertiary institutions, study of Islam, social change, insider/outsider

Introduction

For several decades southern Africa's Muslim communities[1] have been actively creating cultural organizations and establishing educational institutions to concretely preserve their identity as a religious minority within a largely Christian (and African traditional religious) environment. When criss-crossing the region from the east (e.g., Nampula in Mozambique) to the west coast (e.g., Walvis Bay in Nambia) or from the north (e.g., Harare in Zimbabwe) to the south (e.g., Cape Town in South Africa), one is bound to find an organization or institution set up to address the Muslims' socio-cultural and religious needs. Even though some of these have been recent developments, others appeared many decades ago and continue to serve the needs of the region's communities.

For example, Kuwaiti-born Shaykh Abdurahman As-Sumait (d. 2013) established The Africa Muslim Agency during the 1980s with the help of the South African missionary-focused worker Farid Choonara (d. 2011), a former Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (MYMSA) member. This humanitarian organization of sorts extended its branches far beyond southern Africa. The same applies to Suliman's Gift of the Givers, which has been working for several years with the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs to serve African communities as well as those enduring natural disasters and trauma in conflict states. Both organizations have shown their resilience and significance as bona fide Muslim social welfare *cum* humanitarian organizations.[2]

Muslims have also been well served in the educational sector, where their organizations and groups have made sterling efforts in not only setting up Muslim mission schools and *madari*s, but also in laying the foundations for Muslim (private) schools and post-school colleges since the late 1980s.[3] Specialists in education or Islamic studies need to explore this major phenomenon further. Therefore, this essay turns its attention to this theme, but with a focus on the higher education sector, with the idea of complementing studies that have dealt with Muslim education in general and, more specifically, at the tertiary sector.[4] Thus it reflects, albeit briefly, upon the teaching of "Islam" in

southern Africa's faculties of theology with special reference to South Africa, where these activities have been ongoing for several decades. It then zooms in on selected "Islam" programs that have been – and remain – operational at some South African academic institutions.

Social Change and Education: A Theoretical Framework

Before shifting its focus to the teaching of Islam in faculties of theology, this essay quickly brings into purview the notion of "social change" as an applicable theoretical framework to comprehend developments in the region's educational sector.[5] The term *social change*, as stated elsewhere, is an all- embracing phenomenon that has solicited some insightful responses from within the social scientific terrain. Fascinatingly, its use has transcended the discipline of sociology and appears in such other disciplines as history, political science, economics, and education. Since this is the case, McGuire points out that social change is also contingent on a number of interrelated (internal and external) social, economic, political, cultural, educational, and religious factors.[6]

Leaving aside the negative connotations (e.g., social conflict) associated with the term, this essay seeks to reflect upon the set of positive elements that social change continues to generate within the educational environment. In this regard, McGuire indicates that in general terms social change may refer to the social structural changes effected through social relations and social institutions.[7] In this regard, one may consider educational institutions as a significant social structure that positively effect and affect social change in all spheres of social life. Related to this, Arjomand has catalogued five processes of "social change" that help strengthen society's religiosity (i.e., its members' level of religious commitment) under favorable conditions within the nation-state; a state and a nation that have been affected and influenced by secularization.[8] Be that as it may, the one process that relates to this essay is "the spread of literacy and education." Arjomand underscores the critical role played by educational institutions in bringing about social change through, for example, the spread of literacy in an attempt to help transform and empower the nation educationally.

Taking these observations into account, one cannot overlook the fact that educational institutions play a pivotal role. For example, they continue to bring about social change in all spheres of life. While southern Africa's societies have benefited from the social change engendered by these institutions over the last fifty years and more, its Muslim communities have also gained despite

the educational disadvantages that they and the other oppressed communities encountered before and under apartheid (circa 1910-94) both in and beyond South Africa. At this juncture, the essay turns to the teaching of Islam in the faculties of theology as a viable area of study amidst all of the other educational developments taking place at the time. The discipline of Islamic studies was, however, officially introduced only in 1974 when the Department of Islamic Studies (DIS)[9] was formally established at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW). (UDW merged with the University of Natal in 2004 to form the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal [UKZN].) Thus, the year 2014 marks the fortieth anniversary of this discipline in southern Africa.

Teaching "Islam" in Faculties of Theology: Taking Missiological Turns

Prior to reflecting upon the DIS' unique story and picking examples from the region's other institutions of higher learning, this essay briefly addresses "the teaching of Islam" before the formal introduction of Islamic studies as a discipline. Interestingly, this educational effort formed part of what may be regarded as the first historical phase of this undertaking at southern African institutions of higher learning, a phase ironically initiated by the established faculties of theology affiliated with the various southern African universities and the handful of independent Christian (Dutch Reform and Anglican) theological seminaries. At all of them Christian missionaries, who were (and remain) outsiders[10] in relation to the "house of Islam," were the ones who taught Islam.

The main reason for including Islam in their curricula was quite obvious: to inform potential missionaries and priests about Islam's "diabolical nature" as a false religion and the danger it posed to Christian beliefs and practices across the region. *Die Kerkbode*, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa's official monthly mouthpiece, as well as its quarterly publication *Op Die Horison*, perpetuated these views throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the latter, J. Semmelink wrote a series of missiological articles that looked at "Islam en Ons" ("Islam and Us"). In this publication's December 1961 issue, Dominee Chris Joel Andries Greyling, who will be discussed below, assessed the "Sending onder die Moslems in Suid-Afrika" ("Mission among the Muslims in South Africa").

While these popular publications were consciously circulating and advocating obstructive opinions about Islam and Muslims, the faculties of theology at the University of South Africa (USA) and the University of Pretoria (UP) had set up missiological programs that included the teaching of Islam.

As a consequence, they developed the program further by working to establish dedicated departments of missiology in the various faculties to deal seriously with the region's non-Christian communities. The purpose behind offering courses on Islam (and other non-Christian religious traditions) was to inform potential priests and missionaries about Islam's false truth claims. The scholars who taught these courses were themselves missionaries who had no formal training in Islamic studies and therefore adopted a distinct missionary approach. This essentially meant that Islam was not treated as a religious tradition in its own right, as a tradition with its own unique religious markers and symbols, but as one that had to be viewed as a threat in South Africa and to the continent itself – "a false religion" that had to be kept at bay and prevented from spreading its wings among the southern African population.[11] The courses offered, although basic, were structured in such a way that the issues associated with Islam and its adherents were said to be mere myths and debatable facts. These departments of missiology to some extent complimented – although they were very different from – the Department of Semitics, which taught Biblical Hebrew and classical Arabic alongside other ancient Semitic languages. The Dutch-born scholar Adrianus van Selms (d. 1984) was one of those who taught these Semitic languages.[12]

Apart from being a consultant, in his capacity as a noteworthy Semiticist and philologist, van Selms devoted much of his attention to studying the unique genre of Arabic-Afrikaans literature at the Cape. In fact, he coined the phrase "Arabic-Afrikaans" and attempted to popularize its study. However, no one associated with the missiological programs saw how this genre could feed into their "Islam" programs, because they were ill-equipped to see the larger picture, and thus ignored the relevance and importance of these literatures and writings. Although confined to teaching these languages, he was, as far as can be ascertained, regularly consulted by his colleagues with regard to teaching Islam. Other than him, no one else really stood out in this area; nor were there scholars who pursued formal studies of Islam mainly at western European universities, where it formed part of the Department of Oriental Studies programs with which the faculties had some sort of official relationships.

By the end of the 1950s, a few mainly white male Afrikaners had graduated from the theological *cum* missiological programs that were largely based upon the ones offered at European universities (e.g., Leiden University and the Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam) that had reputable faculties of theology and flourishing missiological programs. Despite the inadequate and deficient knowledge of Islam disseminated by southern Africa's missiological programs, graduates such as the above-mentioned Dominee Chris Greyling en-

thusiastically embraced these ideas. He and Jacobus Naude, who entered this field by studying Semitics, took up the challenge of teaching Islam with their fairly rudimentary knowledge and truncated views of Islam and Muslims. Unlike Naude, Greyling trained as a missionary in the DRC and subsequently attained his doctorate in this area with a focus on how South Africa's Muslims perceive Jesus.[13] Thus armed, he automatically had the required license to teach Islam. Donning the appropriate academic garb, he began teaching this subject at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC), respectively.

Both of these professors, "outsiders" as far as the teaching of Islam is concerned, were understandably deeply influenced by the theological thinking and missiological trends that had been transferred from Europe and derived from them their inspiration and ideas. Predictably, they adopted the Orientalist (cum missiological) approach so eloquently explored by Edward Said (d. 2003) in his well-circulated and widely read *Orientalism* (1978). It may, as a matter of fact, be stated that all of southern Africa's university-affiliated departments/faculties of theology, as well as the departments of Biblical studies and departments of science of religion housed in the region's faculties of arts/humanities, modeled their teaching courses and programs along European (Orientalist) lines. Hence one would come across the names of such authors as William Muir (d. 1905) and titles of texts that had adopted a jaundiced approach toward the teaching and reading of Islam and Muslims.[14]

Even though these academic practices continued for a while, questions were bound to be raised – and this is indeed what happened when Muslim groups began to protest what such outsiders as as Greyling, who had only a fragmentary knowledge of the Islamic tradition and its adherents, were teaching. At the beginning of the 1970s, a time that may be said to have coincided with the global resurgence of Islam and Muslims, groups of Muslims living in the region began to question this approach to the teaching of Islam. In their opinion, these courses should be taught by qualified and bona fide insider Muslim scholars, as opposed to outsiders who had been trained in missions. This was indeed a major challenge, because many young Muslims were entering the universities and some of them were considering enrolling for courses on Islam that could meet the requirement for their degree.

UDW's "Islamic Studies" Program: Its Rise and Fall

The time when Islamic studies as a program was mooted coincided, to a certain extent, with the initial call launched by some academics to form a religious

studies program.[15] As it was being tailored to fit into the new educational developments taking place, some academics began clamoring for departments of religious studies (DRS) as an alternative to the respective departments of oriental studies (DOS) and science of religion (DSR) found in some South African tertiary institutions. The rationale for creating DRS was in line with what was going on in Europe and, more importantly, to adopt a phenomenological approach instead of the orientalist one adopted by the DOS scholars or the purely scientific one pursued by the DSR scholars. Bearing the formation of DRS as a fresh structure in mind, the essay returns to the question of "Islamic studies" that formally came to life in 1974.

Muslims generally celebrated the establishment of this structure; however, some dissenters felt that one could not teach Islam within an impure and tainted environment. These voices belonged mainly to those conservative theologians who argued that Islam, as a subject, should be taught in institutions such as the Dar al-'Ulum – theological institutions that had roots in South Asia and had migrated, along with their adherents, to the United Kingdom, South Africa, and elsewhere, where they have mushroomed and blossomed. For the record, the first Dar al-'Ulum was set up during 1973 in Newcastle (eastern South Africa). Its very presence as a Muslim educational institution of higher learning ushered in an important educational development.[16] At present, various Muslim groups and individuals have set up more than twenty such institutions in South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.[17] Their supporters argue that they are in a far better position to disseminate the teaching of an unadulterated Islam than are the university programs.

The history of the department essentially goes back to the Natal Muslims led by UDW staff member Cassim Lakhi, who recommended that the Islam program be accommodated as a separate discipline within the university's academic structures. At that time UDW, which formed part of South Africa's racist educational system, was restricted to South African Indians. Thus any non-Indian who desired to study a course or a program not offered somewhere else might, with the apartheid Ministry of Education's permission, be allowed to pursue his/her studies at UDW. So when UDW established the discipline of Islamic studies, the program automatically created an opportunity for non-Indian Muslim students to register, something that the racist authorities had neither foreseen and nor really wanted.

Nevertheless, the Lakhi-led committee suggested, among other things, that Islam as a course should be taught by an adequately trained insider who possessed the relevant academic credentials. Since no specialist could be found in southern Africa, the committee searched for an appropriate person and even-

tually learned about Temple University-based Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (d. 1986)[18] through MYMSA'd networks. After extensive consultations with al-Faruqi, the committee handed in a proposal to UDW's administration that requested the formation of a fully fledged Department of Islamic Studies, as well as a Department of Arabic, Urdu, and Persian, instead of the course being taught in DOS and DSR.

Al-Faruqi, who was intimately familiar with the American academic scene, recommended that Sayyid Salman Nadvi, who had a doctorate in Islamic studies from the University of Chicago, be appointed. The Durban-based Muslim lobby group readily accepted the idea, and Nadvi joined UDW in 1974. Once in this position, he began to build the program by adopting an acceptable historicist approach that differed from the emerging social scientific approach. As the leading scholar in Islamic studies, he began with his small supportive team to circulate *Al-'Ilm: A Journal for Islamic Studies* that, unfortunately, ended its life when he retired in the mid-1990s amidst many other radical changes in the tertiary sector during the post-apartheid era. That aside, one of his important initiatives was to provide a carefully selected list of prescribed books that would help students acquire a fair insight and overview of the evolution of Muslim societies. One, for example, noted that he included Fazlur Rahman's (d. 1988) readable text simply titled *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Although he also prescribed the writings of such leading orientalists as H. A. R. Gibb (d. 1971), he sometimes offered alternative readings and understandings of these texts. Nadvi, however, constructed a syllabus from the undergraduate to the post-graduate level that reflected the evolutionary process through which Muslim societies passed as their empires rose and fell.

The BA Honors program, as reflected in table 1 on the following page, clearly illustrates that Nadvi was greatly influenced by the historicist approach. Each paper in this fairly broad course highlights the fact that the curriculum was designed to give the candidate a fair but somewhat shallow overview of the sections covered in each paper. At this point, I give one example that underlines the point. When one evaluates the first paper, which concentrated on three significant themes (i.e., the *sīrah*, the Qur'an, and the Hadith literature), one asks how well a candidate would understand each one, taking into account the fact that they are, in themselves, vast and detailed. In this instance, he placed them together and thus had to cover the rudimentary (instead of the detailed) aspects of each theme.

With hindsight, one would wish to argue that each theme should have been dealt with separately in the form of three separate but interrelated examination papers. If this had been the case, then one is certain that the candidate's

Table 1. UDW's BA Honors Program in Islamic Studies

UDW BA Honors in Islamic Studies (Year Four)	
Apart from the four papers that the candidate was expected to complete, he/she had to complete a Research Paper. This paper, which had to demonstrate research technique and methodology, had to be on an approved topic from Islamic history.	• Paper 1: Life of the Prophet, the Qur'an and the Hadith. • Paper 2: Islamic Law, Islamic Political Thought, Islamic Theology, Islamic Philosophy or Sufism • Paper 3: Contempoary Islamic Problems or a Critical Study of the LIfe and Work of any Islamic Personality • Paper 4: Readings in original texts from the following: Sufism, *Tasfir*, *Hadith*, Law, and History

insights and comprehension would have been far from superficial. Nonetheless, table 1 reveals the following: (a) the candidate had to become familiar with an array of themes during the course of one year[19]; (b) it was almost impossible for him/her to come to grips with each theme, which implies that he/she would have a superficial instead of an in-depth understanding of the themes; and (c) that while this wide coverage provided the candidate with an overall view of the formation of Muslim society and the variety of strands that exist, he/she had to make sense of the complex issues encountered when studying the course. Below is an example of the BA Honors Course offered between 1974 and 1984.

Despite the program's inherent shortcomings, it managed to attract a sizeable number of Muslim candidates who successfully furthered their interest in and beyond the field. A few of Nadvi's students who completed the undergraduate and postgraduate courses stand out, chief among them Suleiman Dangor who, as a result of Nadvi's influence, remained devoted to Islamic history. Dangor was, in fact, the professor's first doctoral candidate and the one who finished all of the courses and programs with him. Consequently, after his graduation he joined the department and remained there until his retirement as a full professor of Islamic studies. During his tenure at UDW/UKZN, he witnessed the rise and fall of DIS; although the program was not entirely abandoned, many of its courses were retailored to fit into the freshly constructed semesterized programs. Toward the end of the 1990s, Dangor, Tahir Sithoto, and others were accommodated into a new

UKZN structure: UDW and UN were amalgamated. Be that as it may, Dangor is known for his research on Shaykh Yusuf al-Khalwati (d. 1699) and many other texts on South African Islam. The second noteworthy graduate was Abdulkader Tayob who, like several others, preferred to follow the social scientific approach when he joined the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Department of Religious Studies in 1989. After completing his doctorate in religious studies at Temple University, upon his return he joined UCT and eventually became a full professor in that department.[20] The third individual was Yasien Mohamed who, incidentally, was involved in UCT's DRS for two years (circa 1986-88) before Tayob joined as a full-time lecturer. Mohamed is currently the Arabic studies professor in UWC's Department of Foreign Languages.

Although all of them have become well established international scholars in Islamic studies, Tayob and Mohamed seem to have made a special mark in the fields they chose to research. After an initial focus on Muslim historiography, Tayob began to show an interest in African Islam; hence, the establishment of a National Research Foundation chair in "Islam, African Publics, and Religious Values."[21] Apart from his *Islam in South Africa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida: 1999), he also ventured to publish, among others, *Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009). Mohamed, who began by teaching Arabic as a foreign language, went on to demonstrate a passion for Muslim philosophy. He has illustrated this in a variety of interrelated published articles as well as his co-edited work on Muslim philosophy. But the work that has stood as a significant award-winning text was his doctorate *The Path to Virtue: A Translation, with a Critical Introduction, of al-Raghib al-Isfahani's al-Dhari'ah ila Makarim al-Shari'ah* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2006), he completed under the supervision of Hans Daiber at Frankfurt-am-Main University.

Reference to these three scholars underlines the point that even though UDW's historically oriented Islamic studies program had its shortcomings, it eventually produced scholars who made their marks in Islamic studies in southern Africa and South Africa in particular. Perhaps it is best to now shift the focus of this essay to the study of Islam at three other institutions.

RAU/UJ's Study of Islam Program[22]: Continuity and Change

When Islamic studies as a discipline got off the ground at UDW, by 1979 Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) – now called the University of Johannes-

burg (UJ) – had set up a Centre for Islamic Studies that, in addition to being located within the Department of Semitics, also established the annual *Journal for Islamic Studies* in 1981. (It moved to UCT's Centre for Contemporary Islam during the mid-1990s.) Naude, although an outsider, was the key figure and driving force behind establishing this center and the journal. I mentioned above that Naude, in contrast to Greyling, was trained not in Christian theology, but in Semitic studies. As a specialist in this area, he, like many others, had a tendency to approach the study of religion and culture from a philological rather than a phenomenological perspective. This can be seen in the journal's articles.

As an Afrikaner orientalist who supported the apartheid state's socio-religious and political policies, Naude was fairly diplomatic in his dealings with the conservative Muslim community. But despite his diplomacy, such emerging youth groups as the MYMSA severely reprimanded him for his approach to Islamic studies. This viewpoint was reflected in anAfrikaans-language article, "Islam as a challenge to the Church and State," published in *Skrif en Kerk* (1986), one of the academic publications of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk.[23]

Naude gradually lured the apolitical Muslim theologians in Johannesburg and the surrounding area into taking an interest in what he had to offer academically. Some of these theologians, who realized the importance of being academically armed, took up the challenge. One of them was Mufti Abdulkader Hossein, a graduate and former lecturer at the Newcastle Dar al-'Ulum (est. 1973); he is presently the legal advisor as well as a presenter on Muslim affairs for the popular Channel Islam International, a Johannesburg Muslim-owned and managed radio station. Although other Afrikaner scholars supported Naude, he was eventually succeeded by Abdurahman Doi (d. 1999), a professor of Islamic law in Nigeria, former director of the Centre for Islamic Legal Studies at Ahmedu Bello University (Zaria, Nigeria), and author of *Shariah: Islamic Law* (London: Taha Publishers, 2008; revised and expanded by Abdussamad Clarke). Doi came to play an important role in the center and the department by bringing into the post-graduate program several Muslim theologians Among them Mohamed Docrat, who earned his doctorate and lectured there for about three years while new developments at this level were underway.

The post-graduate BA Honors program offered at RAU's Centre for Islamic Studies was somewhat different in certain respects from the one on the menu at UDW. Before highlighting these, it is perhaps instructive to reproduce the program.

Table 2: RAU's BA Honors Program in Islamic Studies

RAU's BA Honors in Islamic Studies (circa 1980-1990)	
1. Die Lewe en Werk van Mohammed	8. Die geskiedenis van die Moslems
2. Die Koran	9. Die verspreiding van Islam
3. Die Tafsir	10. Die skone kunste soos beoefen deur die Moslems
4. Die Tradisiewetenskap	11. Die studie van n relevante taal (bv. Persies, Siries, Swahili, Turks, Urdu)
5. Islamitiese Jurisprudensie	12. Die studie van die bybehorende kultururhistoriese agtergrond to die studie van n relevante taal
6. Islamitiese Teologie	13. Islam en die politiek
7. Islamitiese Filosofie	14. n Toepaslike tema in oorleg met die Hoof van die Sentrum

The program consists of fourteen examined papers; however, the candidate is expected to do only five from the catalogue of themes. If one compares RAU's program to the one offered at UDW, it appears that Naude was more realistic in terms of his offerings for (1) instead of lumping two or more themes in one paper, he gave each one separate attention; (2) the research paper was not compulsory, as was the case with Nadvi's UDW program. In other words a UDW student was expected to complete four papers as well as write a research paper, whereas at RAU one could register for any five papers on the menu and the research paper (i.e., paper fourteen) was, like all the others, optional; and (3) Nadvi at least encouraged the candidate to pursue research, whereas Naude left it open to the student – an oversight. In any case, the question that one would have liked to raise, bearing in mind that Naude was trained in Semitic and not Islamic studies, was who could teach all of these courses if some candidates opted for the non-traditional ones, some of which appear in column two? Since I could not find the relevant statistics, I cannot provide an informed answer. By the mid-1990s, Naude had moved out of RAU's teaching sector and into its administrative structure to serve in a different capacity. During that same period, Doi continued with the traditional academic tasks of teaching post-graduate candidates and supervising their theses.

Since the university's name change from Rand Afrikaans University to the University of Johannesburg (UJ), its new administrative leadership has sought ways to bring about radical changes in the academic sector by renaming pro-

grams and departments and, more importantly, attracting scholars, pursuing research, and remaining a critical academic player in the competitive southern Africa tertiary education market. One of the policies that it pro-actively adopted was to locate scholars who could make a major difference to the programs offered. In the newly named Department of Religion – note not *Religious* – Studies, therefore, it wanted an internationally recognized scholar to present the Islamic studies program. It so happened that Farid Esack, then based at Harvard University after having spent a few years at other American academic institutions, was interested in returning to South Africa. Therefore, UJ invited him to consider and he politely accepted the post as professor in the DRS' "study of Islam" program.

This appointment has resulted in many interesting and exciting developments that have been narrated in a complementary text.[24] Therefore, this essay will pay great attention to the post-graduate honors program to show how he brought about change and transformed the course. But before reflecting upon table 3, which consists of the few compulsory and optional modules for the refurbished BA Honors program, it should be added that Esack and his team, which includes Shaheed Mathee (who holds a doctorate from UCT) revised the program in such a way that it gives attention to classical issues and also tries to balance the modules with contemporary aspects. To help Esack create and attract students to this new BA Honors program, the DRS introduced a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program before accepting a candidate. Over the past few years, this innovative and very successful approach has brought into the system a number of students from different academic and professional backgrounds. This has been a fascinating experience for both the department and for those who have entered the program.

The menu, as it appears, is quite attractive because it takes into account the issues that communities encounter due to the onset of globalization and other processes, all of which have affected and transformed them. Unlike the other two programs seen above, this one requires candidates to not only produce a research paper but, more importantly, also to become acquainted with the "Method, Theory, and Critical Terms in the Study of Religion." This class essentially reflects upon theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and pivotal terms that candidates generally come across while studying any religious tradition. A look at the two earlier mentioned programs shows that only the one at UDW requested students to become familiar with methodology; however, it mentioned neither theory nor the importance of the field's critical terms. One example that immediately comes to mind is the department's title, Department of Religion Studies, which is, in itself, debatable.

Table 3: UJ's BA Honors in Islamic Studies

UJ's Honors Islamic Studies
Compulsory Modules
1. Method, Theory, and Critical Terms in the Study of Religion 2. Research Essay
Optional Modules
1. Introduction to the Qur'an and Major Themes 2. Critical Issues in Contemporary Islam 3. Islamic Law and Its Application in a Liberal Democracy 4. Islam and Gender Justice 5. Studies in Hadith 6. Islamic Spiritual Tradition

In any case, the module helps candidates become informed about the various methods and theories employed in the humanities and social sciences. The optional modules are also interesting in that students are able to engage with contemporary issues; during 2014, for example, module three intends to look at "The Shari'ah and its Application in a South Africa Liberal Constitutional Democracy." A few decades ago it would have been unthinkable to offer such a module and to consider it worth pursuing. The same applies to the "Islam and Gender Justice" module. In fact, both of these modules affect the lives of the candidates – if they are insiders – quite acutely and draw on both classical and contemporary developments to inform them as to how they should deal with these themes/topics. After this overview of developments at RAU/UJ, it might be prudent to visit the University of South Africa (UNISA), which has a correspondence program at the BA Honors level. I will discuss how it differs from the residential tertiary institutions in the following section.

UNISA's "Islamic Studies" Program[25]: Deconstruction and Reconstruction

UNISA, like the South African Theological Seminary, is one of those unique institutions in southern Africa – a distance-education institution with a senate that chose, in 1988, to offer an undergraduate course in Islamic studies. This decision meant that the university had to develop a full program from the undergraduate to the post-graduate levels. One of UNISA's pioneering figures was H. J. Dreyer, who was then associated with the Department of Se-

mitics that hosted the program – a somewhat strange arrangement since the university also had a Department of Science of Religion. According to Dadoo's observations, it appears that from 1989 until 1991 the undergraduate program was very similar to what was being offered at UDW. After joining in the early 1990s, he and those who became department members later on, as well as other individuals, formed part of UNISA's restructuring or reconstruction team. Out of this came the Department of Arabic and Religious Studies, which now offers the "Islamic studies" program. While this new structure is welcome, it naturally contains certain defects. Nonetheless, it appears that this is a more suitable home than the Department of Semitics, in which the program was located for a number of years.

By the end of the 1990s, Dadoo and his colleagues – all of them insiders – had taken charge of the program. When he wrote his reflective essay on UNISA's program, Dadoo undertook a fairly critical approach by broadly reflecting upon Islamic studies at UNISA and only marginally comparing it to what was taking place elsewhere in the region as regards programs and methods. On the latter point, he criticized Tayob's History of Religions approach. Be that as it may, Dadoo and his team constructed a BA Honors program that was in line with similar programs elsewhere. When glancing at its courses, one gets a clear sense of how they tried to balance the program by attempting to accommodate both Islam's classical and the contemporary aspects. Unlike UDW/UKZN and RAU/UJ, both of which restricted the candidates to only four modules and a mini-thesis or research paper, UNISA does not clearly indicate such elements; rather, it is assumed that all candidates are expected to complete five papers plus a research essay. By 2000 Dadoo and his team had approved some technical changes and developed other attractive offerings for the correspondence students. One of these was a research method paper that was comparable with what was happening in other UNISA programs. Table 4 (on the next page) presents one such example.

Apart from the earlier observations, it might be useful to comment on the contents of at least two of the listed courses. The Qur'anic sciences course has been designed to equip the honors students to (a) acquire a firm understanding of the Qur'an and its related sciences, (b) acquaint them with methods of assessing contemporary trends, (c) evaluate the interaction among these sciences and current socio-human sciences, and (d) familiarize them with the methodological tools employed and used in these sciences. The purpose of "Contemporary Muslim Society," alternatively entitled in the new program as "Contemporary Islam," is to allow students to specialize in contemporary issues related to Islam and Muslims. These were therefore automatically con-

Table 4: UNISA's BA Honors

Old Program	**New Program**
1. Qur'anic Sciences	1. Qur'anic Sciences
2. Hadith Sciences	2. Hadith Literature & Criticism
3. Shari'ah Studies	3. Contemporary Islam
4. Contemporary Muslim Society	4. Research Methodology & Religious Hermeneutics
5. Muslim Thought (subdivided into philosophy & mysticism	5. Research Report
6. Short Research Paper	

nected with one of the following subfields: Shari'ah and Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, theology and mysticism, and the state of Muslims in the Horn of Africa. One is not certain why the module restricted itself to that region, since Muslims populate much of the African continent. However, it could be that one of the individuals (viz., Iqbal Jhazbhay) involved in teaching this particular course wished to design it in a way that that would enable him to further explore his own area of specialization with his students.

Mention was made of Dadoo's statement that students had asked for a "Research Method" course; thus the department provided one. Although it consists of three sections, of which the students may choose only one, those specializing in Islamic studies can choose only the last option: research methodology for religious studies, hermeneutics, and methodology in Arabic and Islamic studies. Aligned with this course is the "Research Report," an approximately 7,000-word essay. It is, however, not clear why the department calls it a "report," since *essay* – or perhaps *mini-thesis* – would be more appropriate. Nevertheless, the underlying idea here is to reinforce, among other elements, the students' critical thinking and scientific evaluation.

To bring this section to a close, it might be useful to quickly draw upon Dadoo's statistics as regards the number of students who registered for the BA Honors program and the others (i.e., the MA and D.Litt et Phil post-graduate programs) between 2001 and 2011. It appears that despite the deconstruction and reconstruction processes undertaken at UNISA, the department did not attract post-graduate students at the turn of the new millennium, a reality that did not reflect well in the early years when the BA Honors and the other post-graduate programs were available. Looking at the BA Honors statistics that Dadoo provided, it is embarrassingly clear that the department did not produce one honors student between 2001 and 2005. The change came in 2006, when three students registered; during

2010 and 2011, these numbers shot up to 12 and 16, respectively. This numerical shift clearly reveals that the program has successfully attracted a number of students during the last four years, a reality that bodes well for its future.

Closing Remarks

In this essay, an attempt was made to reflect critically upon the "study of Islam" programs in South Africa's universities and, to some extent, throughout the region. Although it was not possible to assess the developments regionally as desired, the academic outcome in South Africa has impacted the region's tertiary institutions. This being the case, the essay focused on the study of Islam in the country's higher education sector to both complement the handful of studies that have covered the tertiary sector and to emphasize that this discipline has been taken rather seriously in South Africa – a country that has not, as yet, been affected negatively by policies of securitization and commercialization seen elsewhere, such as in the United Kingdom.

I began by reflecting, albeit briefly, upon the idea of how educational institutions remain instruments of social change. This theoretical framework laid the basis for evaluating the role of faculties of theology in the teaching of Islam, a course that was taught not by Muslims, but by Christian missionaries in the dedicated departments of missiology. This discussion acted as an important backdrop for analyzing three specially selected programs on "Islam" that were part of the academic menu at UDW/UKZN, RAU/UJ, and UNISA. Apart from having shared insights into the development of this program at these three institutions, it specifically zoomed in on their BA Honors in Islam/Islamic studies programs that have, of late, attracted the attention of interested stakeholders. It is hoped that other researchers will explore this important issue further.

Endnotes

1. M. Haron, "Southern African Muslim Communities: In Context and Scholarship," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa*, ed. M. Haron and S. E. Dangor (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2009), 27-43.
2. S. Sadounia, "Humanisme spirituel et ONG islamiques en Afrique du Sud," *Afrique contemporaine* 3, no. 231 (2009).
3. M. Haron, "Muslim Education in South Africa," *Muslim Educational Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1988): 41-56. For a broader overview and insight into earlier studies on Muslim education, the following (somewhat dated) edited work may be con-

sulted: Yasien Mohamed, Abdul-Majied Mohamed, and Suleiman Dangor, eds., *Perspectives of Islamic Education in South Africa* (Johannesburg: World Muslim League, 1991).

4. This essay should therefore be read in tandem with published and unpublished papers (see endnote 5). One such text is M. Haron, "Islamic Studies at the University of Cape Town" *Journal for the Study of Religion* 2, no. 2 (1989): 57-63; M. Haron, "Arabic and Islamic Studies Research in South Africa," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (1991): 363-77; T. Sonn, "Arabic and Islamic Studies Research in South Africa," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 11, no. 2, (1994): 274-81; A. Tayob, "Islamic Studies in South Africa," *Scriptura* 53, no. 2 (1995): 65-72; A. Tayob, "The Academic Study of Islam at the University," *Perspectives of Islamic Education in South Africa*. Also consult R. Martin, "Islamic Studies: Its History," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), vol. 2; R. Martin, "Islam and Religious Studies: An Introductory Essay," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. R. Martin (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2001), 1-18; I. Ahmad, "Teaching Islamic Studies in the Non-Arab World: With or Without Arabic?" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2001): 273-85; B. Khir, "Islamic Studies within Islam: Definition, Approaches and Challenges of Modernity" *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 28, no. 3 (2007): 257-66.
5. I used this theoretical frame in an article that was recently published online. See M. Haron, "South[ern] Africa's Dar ul-'Ulums: Institutions of Social Change for the "Common Good"?" *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33, no. 3 (2014): 251-66.
6. See M. B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (New York: Wadsworth, 1997) and E. Moosa, "Social Change," in *The Islamic World*, ed. A. Rippen (London: Routledge, 2009), 565-75.
7. McGuire, *Religion*; Moosa, "Social Change."
8. S. A. Arjomand, "Social Change and Movements of Revitalization in Contemporary Islam," in *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change*, ed. J. A. Beckford (Paris and Beverly Hills: UNESCO and Sage Publishers, 1986), 87-112.
9. Alhough the story of the DIS' development and impact has been narrated elsewhere, it is instructive to briefly repeat it and add a few points in this essay. Cf. M. Haron, "Continuity and Change: The Teaching and Research of Islam in South(ern) Africa," *Africa Education Review* 9, no. 1 (2012): 595-609; M. Haron, "Southern African Islamic Studies Scholarship: A Survey of the 'State of the Art,'" in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, ed. A. Adogame, E. Chtando, and B. Bateye (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 219-38; M. Haron, "The Study of Islam in South Africa," in *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. J. Platvoet, J. Cox, and J. Alupona (Harare: Roots and Branches, 1996), 268-92.

10. Cf. R. T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999); J. I. Cabezon and S. G. Davaney, eds., *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004).
11. This was quite evident in 1986, when the white-dominated DRC Synod declared that Islam was a "false" religion; this issue was, however, not left alone. The Muslim community publicly protested and challenged this declaration and received wide-spread support from such leading anti-apartheid Christian theologians as Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak. Cf. M. Haron, *The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Relations in South Africa (ca 1960-2000): From Exclusivism to Pluralism* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006), 74-78.
12. See I. H. Eybers, ed., *De Fructu Oris Sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus van Selms* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971). The University of Pretoria also set up the Adrianus van Selms Memorial Lectures, which occasionally appeared in the *Journal for Semitics*. Also see obituary: A. S. van der Woude, "Adrianus van Selms (1906-1984)," in *Huygens Institute: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences Yearbook* (1985), 216-17.
13. Haron, *The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 54-59.
14. One noteworthy text that seems to have found its way into some missiological reading lists is Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim* (New York: Prometheus 1995).
15. Cf. M. Prozesky, "South Africa's Contribution to Religious Studies," in *The Study of Religions in Africa*, 229-51. It also appeared in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 70 (1990): 9-20. Also see M. Clasquin, "Religious Studies in Southern Africa: An Overview," *Journal for the Study of Religion*18 (2005): 5-22.
16. Cf. D. Reetz, "The Tablighi Madrassas in Lenasia and Azaadville: Local Players in the Global Islamic field." in *Muslim Schools and Education in Europe and South Africa*, ed. Abdulkader Tayob, Inga Niehaus, and Wolfram Weisse (Munster: Waxmann, 2011); M. K. Sayed, "South African Madrasahs Move into the 21st Century," in *Muslim Schools and Education*, 63-83.
17. See M. Haron, "Muslim Higher Education in Southern Africa: From Secular Tertiary Institutions to Dar ul-'Ulums," unpublished paper presented at the conference on Islamic Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa: Their History, Mission, and Role in Regional Development, Duke University, October 18-19, 2013. Also see M. Haron's report on Duke University's Islamic Center site: http://tirnscholars.org/2014/02/11/muhammed-haron-muslim-institutions-of-higher-learning-in-africa-and-the-way-forward.
18. See papers delivered at the "Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: An Exposé of the Legacy of a *Mujtahid* in the Modern Age" conference (June 6-7, 2010), jointly organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, the University of Westminister, and the Prince Al-Waleed Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University.

19. At the time when this course was introduced, the institution followed the old system that taught courses over a one-year period. This is no longer the case, for undergraduate and post-graduate courses are now offered as part of a semester system.
20. See the Centre for Contemporary Islam at the University of Cape Town, www.uct. ac.za.
21. See M. Haron, "Continuity and Change," 603.
22. See M. Haron, "The Study of Islam in South Africa," 277-79.
23. *Skrif en Kerk* 7, no. 2 (1986): 158-72. Also see J. A. Naude, "Islam as a Political Force in the Middle East," in *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 13, no. 2 (1991): 17-29; J. A. Naude, "Islam en Demokrasie," *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 34, no. 2 (1994): 118-29. See M. Haron, *The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 54-57.
24. See M. Haron, "Continuity and Change," 606-07.
25. Y. Dadoo, "Islamic Studies at a Mega University: Our Experiences at UNISA," *Muslim Education Quaterly* 24, nos. 2-3 (2011):1-15; M. Haron "The Study of Islam in South Africa," 280-81.