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From Madrasah to Museum: A Biography of the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Abstract

In the past decade, there has been renewed interest in Arabic writing cultures in Africa, particularly the manuscripts created within these writing traditions. The study of these manuscripts, and of written documents in general, is dominated by philological and other textual approaches, which see the importance of the manuscripts at the level of content only. While such studies are invaluable, alternative approaches, such as those addressing the manuscripts’ broader and changing social and historical contexts, are necessary for greater understanding of them as objects in society.

This paper focuses on the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town, locally referred to as *kietaabs*, written by Muslims predominantly in the 19th century, in jawi (Arabic-Malay) and Arabic-Afrikaans. Inspired by the idea of a ‘biography’ of the archive and ‘the social life of things’, the study traces the life of the *kietaabs*, from their creation and original use, to their role in contemporary South African society, as objects of heritage and identity. It approaches the *kietaabs as objects*, emphasizing their movements, status and use, rather than their content.

This approach reveals distinct phases in the *kietaabs’* life, based on their use and status in society. It also highlights how changes in the greater context surrounding the manuscripts, such as educational reform, linguistic shifts and political change, influence the dynamics of their biography. From a methodological point of view, the study provides a novel way of approaching African Arabic manuscripts, and other archival materials, offering a lens through which to view not only the texts themselves, but their role(s) in a broader socio-historical context.
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Introduction

“Even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context”¹

Ebrahiem Manuel sits opposite me, about to embark upon his story. His living room is filled with material manifestations of his research: boxes overflowing with books and papers cover his entire sofa, newspapers and articles line the floor, and collages of images and texts hang on the walls and sit in the cabinets. The displays extend haphazardly throughout the house, culminating in his private museum in the back room. Aside from the displays, his house is very simple and somewhat bare. It is clear that he is consumed by his passion for heritage, and his personal journey of discovery. He speaks in an animated, almost theatrical tone, raising and lowering his voice, stressing certain syllables, alive as he tells his story² of ‘the ancient kietaabs’³.

The journey began in 1997, when Ebrahiem returned to South Africa after years at sea, working as a cook on shipping vessels. Upon his return, he began a quest to learn about his personal heritage, inspired by a dream he had had about his grandfather. This search led him to an old kietaab, given to him by an elderly aunt. This was not the first time he had come across the old book; he remembered seeing it as a child, amongst other kietaabs, stored out of reach of the children, on top of his grandfather’s wardrobe. It was inside this book that a possible key to his ancestors was to be found.

This significant find was a range of hand-written inscriptions inside the book, in Arabic, English, and an unknown script. The Arabic script and its corresponding English transliteration read “Imaam Abdul

² In recent years, there has been controversy surrounding Ebrahiem Manuel’s story, with many people disputing it. While I acknowledge the precarious nature of this issue and the fact that there are many ‘versions’ of the story of his manuscript, I have chosen to tell the narrative as my informant has described it to me. For information regarding the controversy see: Rian Malan, “War of the Red Kitaab,” *Noseweek* 88 (February 2007): 16-20.
³ Kietaab is based on the Arabic word ‘kitāb’, meaning ‘book’. However, in the local context, it refers specifically to documents (mostly manuscript/handwritten and printed books) in Arabic script commonly found among Cape Town’s Muslims.
Karriem, son of Imaam Abdul Jaliel, son of Imaam Ismail of Sumbawa”. Here was his family tree, starting from his great-grandfather and leading to two generations before him and, it seemed, their place of origin, the island of Sumbawa in eastern Indonesia. Ebrahiem then decided to go to Indonesia to solve what had become the mystery of ‘the ancient kietaab’.

With assistance from local supporters with contacts in Indonesia and government officials, he found his way to Jakarta in 1999. His search took him to several universities, and with the support of officials, he made his way to Sumbawa. Guided by dreams and ‘supernatural forces’, Ebrahiem eventually arrived at the village of Pemangong.

Upon entering the village, he came face-to-face with the village chief, Abdulatif Sirat. This man immediately ‘recognised’ him and said that Ebrahiem’s visit had been anticipated by the villagers. They claimed to know the story of Ebrahiem’s great-great grandfather, to whom the book belonged. This man, Ismail Dea Malela, was a Prince from the village, who had been caught by Dutch forces and exiled to the Cape. The villagers also said that a prophecy had been made, stating that someone would return to the village one day, looking for family names. They also immediately responded to the kietaab. The unknown inscriptions were written in a secret script that corresponded to that used in kietaabs from that village.
The kietaabs were united and Ebrahiem was declared a Prince. A celebration was held in his honour and he was given the title 'Lalu Ebrahiem Dea Malela'.

After spending four months in the village, Ebrahiem returned to South Africa with a mission to publicise his story and to 'right the wrongs' done unto his family by colonialism and apartheid. As part of this plan, he began to collect the various kietaabs belonging to the Muslim families of Simons Town. These books, along with souvenirs from his journey 'home' were then put on display at the Simons Town Heritage Museum, forming part of an exhibition on Ebrahiem's story. A personal journey had become a public display, and a collection of family heirlooms, forgotten but now resurrected, had become collective heritage.

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Image 2: Informational panels in one corner of Ebrahiem Manuel's home museum

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4 ‘Prince Ebrahiem of the House of Dea’
5 Muslims, including freed slaves, artisans and Indian immigrants, had begun to settle in the Simons Town area in at least the early 19th Century. However, in 1967, as a result of the Group Area Act, the Muslim community was forcibly removed from the area, despite strong opposition from the inhabitants of Simons Town. These removals led to social, emotional and other forms of dislocation in the lives of those forcibly removed. Boet Dommisse and Tony Westby-Nunn, Simon’s Town: An illustrated historical perspective. (Simons Town: Westby-Nunn Publishers, 2002), 148-149.
The *kietaabs* of Cape Town are 19th century manuscripts that collectively constitute the literary output of the Muslim community of Cape Town during this period. They are also remnants of an Islamic writing culture no longer practised in South Africa. The manuscripts include religious works, talismanic guides and student notebooks, found today in Muslim households throughout Cape Town. I first encountered these manuscripts in 2008 when, as a researcher in the Tombouctou Mss Project, I carried out a pilot study on the Arabic-Afrikaans and *jawi* (Arabic-Malay) manuscripts of Cape Town.6 Through the study I came into contact with and observed several manuscript collections and their owners. While recording their information, taking photographs of their collections and chatting with them over tea, I came to hear many manuscript stories, including that of Ebrahiem Manuel.

Ebrahiem’s story and the journey of his *kietaab* in particular have gained a significant amount of media attention.7 His remarkable story, despite the recent controversy surrounding it, is still the subject of articles, books and even theatrical performances.8 It represents, for some, the historic ties between South East Asia and South Africa, once thought long past but, instead, laying dormant and waiting to be rekindled. For others, it is a testament to the atrocities of the Dutch East India Company, separating families and destroying social systems. For others still, the story is one that affirms the importance of the *kietaabs* and their centrality to Muslim heritage in Cape Town.

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6 This work was part of a project on Arabic writing cultures on the African continent. See: Saarah Jappie, “Tombouctou Mss Project Report on Arabic & Arabic-Afrikaans Manuscripts in CapeTown” (Unpublished report, Tombouctou Mss Project, 2008).

7 Many articles have been written about Ebrahiem’s story, both in South Africa and in Indonesia. See, for example: Michelle Dennis, “Dream leads royal Ebrahiem from Grassy Park to a sultan's palace,” *Southern Mail*, 26 July, 2000; Rosihan Anwar, “Keturunan Sumbawa di Afzel,” *Kompas*, 09 May, 2005.

Personally, I view the story of Ebrahiem Manuel and his *kietaab* as a key example of an emerging social process surrounding many of the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town. This process, which has become particularly visible in the last 16 years, is a kind of rediscovery and subsequent reappraisal of the *kietaabs*. It involves their elevation from the position of ‘family heirloom’ to the more socially-elevated status of ‘collective heritage’ and ‘archival object’. These documents, once used as everyday objects in the life of a subaltern community in South Africa and now the only traces of a writing culture no longer practised there, have become (potential) museological artefacts.

It is from my initial observations of this phenomenon that the inspiration for this study originates. Having established that the *kietaabs* are undergoing a shift in value and a change in their role as social objects, I decided that it would be relevant to explore the ‘how’s and the ‘why’s of this process – to historicize this contemporary phenomenon. In so-doing, I have chosen to focus on the manuscripts as historical subjects with biographies of their own, to be traced and analysed.

Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the life of the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town, from the time of their production to their current status in contemporary Cape Town. This exploration covers two main issues: firstly, it looks at how the *kietaabs* have become objects of identity and heritage and, secondly, how these particular manuscripts managed to survive until today, despite the fact that many others like them were destroyed, and the writing tradition they were part of ended. In dealing with these questions, I pay particular attention to the manuscripts’ shifting status and changing social roles over time. I also deal with the greater social, cultural and historical factors influencing these developments, as well as the *kietaabs’ influence on their context.

This approach highlights the importance of the *kietaabs* as objects of social and historical relevance. It also brings to light various other themes, actors and events of significance. Thus, through telling the life-story of the manuscripts, other histories also come into focus, including that of slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, literacy and education of subaltern communities, academic activism, the development of Islam in Cape Town and identity articulation in post-apartheid South Africa. These themes are intricately entangled
in the life of the manuscripts, appearing, fading out, and reappearing at different stages in their life story.

Before embarking upon a discussion of the approach and content of this study, it is necessary that I provide some background information on both the community in which the *kietaabs* emerged, the Muslim community of Cape Town, as well as the literary tradition that the manuscripts form part of, the *ajami* writing tradition. Both of these aspects are significant to the story of the *kietaabs*, as well as the various other themes referred to above.

The Muslim Community of Cape Town

In discussing the Muslim population in contemporary Cape Town, it is more fitting to speak of communities, rather than a singular Muslim community. These multiple communities consist of those who trace their roots to the early Muslim community at the Cape, the descendants of Indian immigrants to Cape Town in the 19th century, black South African converts, as well as more recent Muslim immigrants from other African regions. It is the first group – the descendants of the early Muslim community – that is of most relevance to this study.

Today, the descendants of the early Muslims make up part of the larger so-called ‘coloured’ population. Historically, this community has been referred to by a variety of different terms, including ‘Mussulman’, ‘Mohammadan’, ‘Coloured Muslims’ and ‘Malay’. However, nowadays they are commonly referred to as ‘Cape Muslims’ or, more controversially, ‘Cape Malays’. This community traces their ancestry to slaves, convicts and political exiles forcibly brought to the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch East India Company, between 1652 and 1807. Not all slaves, exiles and convicts brought to the

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9 These immigrants came to Cape Town from the late 1860s and were referred to as ‘passenger Indians’, to distinguish them from indentured labourers.

Cape were Muslim. However, a significant number of them did adhere to Islam, and many more converted while at the Cape.

Given the misleading term ‘Malay’, it is often assumed that the geographical origins of these people lie in the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay Peninsula. While a significant number of slaves, and several influential convicts and exiles, originated from various places in the Malay-Indonesian world, the early Muslims at the Cape hailed from all over the Indian Ocean rim. This is illustrated clearly by statistics on slave origins. Historian Robert Shell notes that from 1652 – 1808, approximately 63 000 slaves were imported to the Cape from around the Indian Ocean Basin. Of this number, the majority of slaves (26.4%) were imported from other parts of mainland Africa, particularly East Africa; approximately one quarter were brought from India and Madagascar respectively; and just under a quarter (22.7%) originated from the Indonesian Archipelago.11 That the Muslim population was originally referred to as Malay, despite their diverse origins has been explained on the basis of their lingua franca, Melayu, and the appropriation of the word ‘Malay’ to mean ‘Muslim’ in the Cape context.12

Popular tradition has it that the spread of Islam was pioneered by devout, aristocratic political exiles, dethroned by the Dutch in their Eastern possessions.13 While these exiles were influential in promoting Islam to those in their local surroundings, and also in establishing a mystical Islam still characteristic of Islam at the Cape, their ability to spread Islam was limited.14 This was primarily due to their deliberate social and geographical isolation from the general population, particularly the slave population, by the VOC.

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14 One of the most celebrated Sufi Saints and anti-colonial fighters is Sheikh Yusuf Taj al-Khalwaty of Makassar, Indonesia, commonly referred to as Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar. He is still recognized by many as the founder of Islam in South Africa, and annually many Muslims pay homage to him at his gravesite in Zandvliet, Cape Town. He has also been used as a link between contemporary Indonesia and South Africa. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 4.
Instead, religious leaders or *imams* at the Cape came from among the freed *bandieten* or convicts, who had more freedom of movement and were able to integrate more easily with the subaltern population.\(^{15}\) While the convicts were the leaders, the majority of the early Muslim population were slaves\(^{16}\) — both those sent to the Cape and, later, locally-born slaves. The growth of Islam amongst the slave population, especially male slaves, accelerated particularly between 1770 and the early 1800s and by 1832 almost one third of the Cape’s population was Muslim.\(^{17}\)

From the late 18\(^{th}\) century, following the demise of Dutch rule at the Cape, Islam started to become more formalised, through the building of mosques and schools. Although religious freedom had not yet been granted, the first official Muslim school, the Dorp Street Madrasah, was opened in 1793 by Imam Qadi Abdussalaam, a freed Eastern Indonesian political convict who became one of the most influential Muslim leaders at the Cape. Then, in 1798, the Auwal Mosque\(^{18}\) was established on the same premises. It was also around this time that the production of *jawi* *kietaabs*, particularly those used for didactic purposes in the madrasah, began to increase.

In the 19\(^{th}\) century, the public practice of religion was unbanned (1804) and the official Islamic establishment, particularly the *imamate*, grew. The community of *imams* was initially dominated by freed convicts and their descendants, who took the lead in establishing mosques and becoming *imams* to their respective congregations, consisting of both slaves and ‘free blacks’.\(^{19}\) During this period, the *imams* became figures of religious authority and influence, performing a central role in Muslim society. As Jeppie explains, the performance of public ritual was central to establishing power relations and the *imams*


\(^{17}\) These slave conversions may have been for a variety of reasons, including the appeal of Islam as a religion of resistance and ‘authentic universalism’ to those in bondage, as well as other personal reasons. However, an important external factor for the growth of Islam during this period was the deliberate lack of Christian education imparted to slaves by slave owners, for economic reasons. That is to say, a baptised slave would have to be freed, and new slaves would consequently need to be bought. This was not a price many were willing to pay. See: Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 356-362.

\(^{18}\) ‘Auwal’ is the Arabic word for ‘first’. As indicated by its name, this was the first mosque built in South Africa.

\(^{19}\) The term ‘Free Black’ or ‘vrijzwarten’ refers to manumitted slaves.
used ritual to ‘reiterate and represent their authority in an ongoing way’. The imamate at this time was characterised by hierarchy, and was hereditary, with the position of imam generally passing from father to son. This system of transmission was often the cause of the religious disputes common during this period, as well as an increasing number of mosques.

The disputes between the various congregations became so serious that, in 1862, a religious advisor to guide the Muslims at the Cape was sought by the Victorian authorities. In 1863, this guide came in the form of Abu Bakr Effendi, an Ottoman Kurdish scholar who adhered to the Hanafi school of law, which would prove to be problematic in the predominantly Shaf’ite Cape. In his time, Effendi attempted to ‘reform’ the Muslim community, targeting education, literature, dress and the promotion of the Hanafi tradition. By the time of his death in 1880, Effendi had gained a following in Cape Town, and made significant contributions to the community, including the composition, publication and promotion of Arabic-Afrikaans literature for Islamic educational purposes.

Late 19th and early 20th century Cape Town was marked by growing urbanisation and industrialisation. These developments had consequences for the Muslims, with reform taking place particularly in the fields of education and official organisations. Historically, the Muslims in Cape Town were the city’s skilled artisans. However, competition from European immigrants and the need for more advanced skills in an industrialising society compromised their socio-economic position. Yet, the education available to Muslims could not provide these skills adequately. Given the State’s deliberate choice not to improve education for children of ‘coloured’ races, reform from within was required. Under the leadership of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, Muslim ‘mission schools’, offering

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23 Here the term ‘coloured’ refers to all non-white people.
modern, secular education based on Islamic values began to be established.\textsuperscript{24} Besides leading to the advancement of skills in the Muslim community and their greater integration into a modernising world, the growth of such education also coincided with the gradual decline in Arabic-Afrikaans literacy.

During this period, formal representation of the community, by way of organisations, was also established. The numerous bodies founded to organise the affairs and articulate the concerns of the Muslims included the Malay Cemetery Board (1886), the South African Moslem Association (1902) and the Cape Malay Association (1922).\textsuperscript{25} The representation of community concerns was particularly relevant in this period, as segregationist policies were on the rise and the social position of the Muslims, as ‘coloured’ people was compromised. These organisations took different stances in their representation – some represented both the ‘Malay’ community and the newer Indian community, whereas others focused on the ‘Malays’ only. The latter both strengthened existing divisions between Indian and ‘Malay’ Muslims and contributed to the discourse of ‘Malayism’, which emerged in the 1920s.

The ‘Cape Malay’ identity was invented to secure preferential treatment for ‘Malays’ over the general ‘coloured’ population and other Muslims. The identity was based on the idea of the ‘Malays’ as a pure group of ‘good’ oriental subjects. It was promoted by organisations such as the Cape Malay Association and supported by Afrikaner Orientalist intellectuals like I.D Du Plessis and politicians such as D.F Malan,\textsuperscript{26} who used the idea of the ‘Malays’ to support the fashioning of their own Afrikaner identity. That is to say, the idea of a separate Oriental people supported the notion of South Africa as consisting of separate nations, including their own distinct Afrikaner nation.\textsuperscript{27} The term’s use was essentially part of a political strategy to maintain a secure socio-economic position for

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item \textsuperscript{24} See Mogamed Ajam, “The Raison D’etre of the Muslim Mission Primary School” (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 1986).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Tayob, \textit{Islamic Resurgence}, 81.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Jeppie, “Reinvention of the Malay,” 19.
\end{thebibliography}
‘Cape Malays’, through a ‘special and privileged relationship’\textsuperscript{28} between this group and white elites.

Yet, this play on identity politics was mostly unsuccessful and the ‘Cape Malays’, officially classified a sub-group of ‘Coloured’, did not escape discrimination under apartheid. Just one example of this discrimination was the mass forced removal of a significant number of Muslims from their homes. Under the Group Areas Act (1950) many ‘Cape Malays’—except those living in the ‘Malay Area’ of the Bo-Kaap—were forcibly removed from their homes when the areas they lived in were declared ‘White’.\textsuperscript{29} They were moved out to areas on the Cape Flats, which had significantly detrimental effects on social, economic and personal levels. Today, most Cape Muslims still live in areas on the Cape Flats.

With the strengthening of apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s, and the rise of radical anti-apartheid groups, particularly among the youth, official ethnic and racial categories were rejected. This was true also of the term ‘Cape Malay’. In fact, Jeppie demonstrates that the ‘Cape Malay’ subject was already beginning to be challenged in the 1950s, by movements such as the Muslim Teachers Association and later the Cape Muslim Youth Movement and the Claremont Muslim Youth Association. Instead, the religious-identity markers ‘Muslim’, or, as initiated by community historian Achmat Davids, ‘Cape Muslim’ were consciously used.\textsuperscript{30} Of course, these labels were also brought under scrutiny and the ‘Cape Malay’ subject was never completely eradicated.

The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), a major force in anti-apartheid politics in the late 1960s and 1970s, stimulated the rejection of ‘Cape Malay’ and other ethnic identities by politicised members of the oppressed. The BCM viewed these identities as part of the apartheid government’s strategy of divide-and-rule, and their assertion as an act of collaboration; it therefore called on the oppressed instead to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Bangstad, \textit{Global Flows}, 43.
\item[29] This included the infamous removals of District Six, as well as other areas of contemporary white privilege, including Claremont, Constantia and Simons Town.
\item[30] Vahed and Jeppie, “Multiple Communities,” 255.
\end{footnotes}
identify themselves as ‘Black’. This call was most readily taken up by the youth, including young politicised Muslims.

It was only with the winding down of the anti-apartheid struggle in the early 1990s, and the advent of democracy in 1994, that identity debates were re-opened, and racial and ethnic identities reclaimed and rearticulated. These rearticulations have been on many levels, including that of heritage. It is partially within this context of Cape Muslim identity rearticulation and related heritage endeavours that the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town are entangled. Again, developments in the life of the *kietaabs* are following larger trends in the Muslim community’s development. However, besides being deeply rooted in the Muslim community of Cape Town, these manuscripts are also grounded in a larger, global written tradition – that of *ajami* texts.

*The ajami writing tradition*

The term *ajami* originally meant ‘Persian’ in Arabic, but also came to mean ‘non-Arab’, or ‘foreign’. In the context of writing cultures, it refers to the use of the Arabic script to record languages other than Arabic. As the majority of the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town are written in Arabic-Afrikaans and *jawi*, they fall into the broader field of global *ajami* literature.

The spread of the Arabic script occurred concurrently with the expansion of Islam, through trade, conquest and proselytising. During its spread, the Arabic script was adapted to such a wide range of languages that, in its reach, it was second only to the Latin script.31 Thus, we find regions in South East and Central Asia, Eastern Europe and West Africa, all having adopted the Arabic script to inscribe local languages.32 As can be expected, the nature of Arabic-script use in these areas varies significantly. In some cases, particularly in areas where languages were previously unwritten, the Arabic script became the main form of literacy, producing a large body of literature. However, in others the

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32 Examples of languages that developed *ajami* systems are Hausa, Yoruba, Spanish, Polish, Vietnamese, Songhay and Swahili.
script came to coexist alongside another writing system, in which case the *ajami* was a minority script. Furthermore, while *ajami* writing cultures persisted in certain regions, in others it existed only temporarily. This is especially so in situations where the *ajami* coexisted alongside a more dominant writing system, such as the case of the Cape of Good Hope.

At a regional level, *ajami* writing cultures have been, or are still, in use in a wide range of African countries. It has been estimated that between 25 and 35 *ajami* systems exist in Africa. This includes countries like Mali and Niger in West Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya in East Africa, and Mozambique and South Africa, in Southern Africa. The *ajamis* used at the Cape, particularly Arabic-Afrikaans, are generally considered among the ‘African *ajami*’ writing cultures. While I agree with this categorisation, their history is somewhat different to that of many African *ajamis*. Furthermore, the genealogy of these writing cultures also includes them in another branch of *ajami* writing cultures – that of South East Asia, as will be discussed below.

In many cases – both on the African continent and globally – the *ajamis* used in a specific area were originally developed in that region, as they accommodated a local language. However, the development of *ajami*-use at the Cape presents a very different case. The Arabic writing system was brought to the Cape through forced exile and slavery. The slaves and exiles who first used the Arabic script at the Cape were not native Arabic-speakers themselves, having come from South and South East Asia. In fact, some of them were already literate in an established *ajami* writing system: *jawi*. Over time, *jawi*-usage grew at the Cape, being adopted mostly by other Muslims. Because the Malay language was one of the main *lingua francas* at the Cape, particularly among the Muslim slave, exile and free black population, *jawi* naturally came to be used as its written

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33 A seminar on ‘*Ajami* in Africa’, coordinated by the Tombouctou Mss Project and held in Timbuktu on 14 & 15 December 2009, brought together African and international scholars working on various African *ajami* traditions. Collectively, the group put together a list of all known African *ajami* systems, which numbered 28.

34 Evidence shows that slaves and other forced migrants brought to the Cape were also literate in other scripts, including Tamil and Buginese. See: Nigel Worden and Gerald Groenewald, ed., *Trials of Slavery: Selected documents concerning slaves from criminal records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705-1794* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents, 2005), and Archie Dick, “The ABC Book of Jan Smiesing,” in *From Diaspora to Diorama*, ed. Robert C.-H. Shell (Cape Town: Ancestry 24, 2008), CD-ROM.

35 The other *lingua francas* were Malayo-Portuguese and Dutch.
counterpart. The spread of its use, which continued until the mid-1800s, was mainly through Islamic education in the madrasah system. Thus *jawi*, a ‘foreign’ *ajami* in many ways, came to be used at the southern tip of Africa.

However, *jawi* would later be replaced by another, locally-developed *ajami*, in line with broader linguistic developments at the Cape. By the mid-1800s, students in madrasahs were already transcribing their lessons in a new language, proto-Afrikaans. This language, based on Dutch and influenced by local Khoi and slave languages, including Malay, had come to replace Malay as the main language used by Muslims at the Cape. Despite the linguistic shift, a major palaeographic shift did not occur and many Muslims still used the Arabic script in written communication. However, the script was then adapted to fit the new language, and Arabic-Afrikaans was developed. While Arabic-Afrikaans was later to be further altered by the visiting Ottoman scholar Abu Bakr Effendi, in its early form the script would have been based on its *ajami* predecessor, *jawi*. Thus, there is a strong argument for the South East Asian roots of *ajamis* at the Cape.

Arabic-Afrikaans, as with many other *ajamis* world-wide, was eventually replaced by the dominant Latin script in the 20th century. How and for what purposes both *jawi* and Arabic-Afrikaans came to be used will be discussed in detail later in this thesis. However, what is important here is that the *kietaabs*, as the subjects of this study, are remnants of both of these *ajami* writing cultures.39

Traditional methods of studying *ajami* and other Islamic manuscripts tend to focus on the manuscripts as written texts. More specifically, these approaches emphasise what information the ‘manuscript as written text’ reveals through content and form. This includes the scholarly and literary transmission of religious sciences, historical works and poetry, as well as artistry and modes of production reflected in styles of illumination and illumination and

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36 Also referred to as ‘Creole Dutch’ and ‘Cape Dutch’.
38 In fact, one Arabic scholar at the Cape has claimed that Arabic-Afrikaans should be renamed ‘Jawi-Afrikaans’. See: Yasin Mohamed, *The teaching of Arabic in South Africa: History and methodology* (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, Department of Arabic Studies, 1997).
39 It should be noted that while *jawi* ceased to exist in South Africa, the script is still in use in various other parts of the world, including Malaysia, Indonesia and southern Thailand.
calligraphy. Other studies focus on manuscripts as written texts in relation to other texts, such as research on public and private manuscript collections. These kinds of studies are invaluable and still lacking in the case of the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town. However, for the most part, I have chosen to deviate from these kinds of methods in this study. Based on my particular experience of the social world of the kietaabs, I have chosen an historical and ethnographic approach to the manuscripts, focusing predominantly on their social use and movement, rather than their form and content.

Theoretical Approach

The inspiration for this particular reading of the history of the kietaabs of Cape Town comes from two theories, that of ‘the social life of things’ and ‘archival biography’. This study does not strictly follow either of these approaches, but rather borrows certain concepts and methods of analysis suggested in each of them.

Arjun Appadurai’s theory of ‘the social life of things’ is concerned primarily with commodity exchange. It promotes the idea of analysing commodity exchanges from the viewpoint of the things that are exchanged, rather than the traditional focus on the form and function of economic exchanges. The theory highlights the value of focusing on social objects and the movement, phases, paths, divergences and so on that they traverse in their ‘social life’ as a means to shed light on the greater social context in which this social life occurs. While Appadurai’s work focuses particularly on commoditization, which is not the main focus of this study, I attempt to extend the basic ideas and concepts of this theory to the movement of Islamic manuscripts in Cape Town.

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41 Other work that has deviated from the traditional method of approaching Islamic manuscripts includes: Alexander Horstmann, “Nostalgia, Resistance, and Beyond: Contested Uses of Jawi Islamic Literature and the Political Identity of the Patani Malays,” The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies (20) (2002); 111-122 and Shamil Jeppie, “Introduction: Travelling Timbuktu Books,” in Timbuktu Script & Scholarship: A catalogue of selected manuscripts from the exhibition, ed. Tombouctou Manuscripts Project & Iziko Social History Collections Department (Cape Town: Iziko Museums of Cape Town for the Department of Arts and Culture), 13-20. The former study explores the links between the use of jawi texts and Patani identity in contemporary Southern Thailand, while the latter discusses the production and circulation of manuscripts in Timbuktu, Mali.
42 Appadurai, “Commodities and the politics of value,” 3-63.
The main concepts borrowed from Appadurai are that of the ‘social history’ of things and the ‘cultural biography’ of things. The former refers to the movement of specific classes of things, in this case manuscripts, through different contexts and uses over time. The latter refers to specific things, for example a particular manuscript, and its changing use in its unique social life. While a particular object has its own biography, there are larger dynamics affecting the whole class of object that go beyond the biography of particular objects. As Appadurai puts it: ‘A particular relic may have a specific biography, but whole types of relic, and indeed the class of things called “relic” itself, may have a larger historical ebb and flow, in the course of which its meaning may shift significantly’. In this study, I pay particular attention to the social history of the manuscripts as a ‘class’ of objects, but have also incorporated examples from the cultural biography of specific manuscripts.

While ‘the social life of things’ deals primarily with the social movements of things, ‘archival biography’ goes beyond this, considering the entire life of an archive or archival objects, including their physical creation and reshaping, their private life and public life. In dealing with this concept, I draw on the work of both Carolyn Hamilton and John Randolph. These works developed independently and take different approaches; the former is predominantly concerned with the methodological challenges of ‘doing’ biography, while the latter applies the concept of biography to an existing archive. Despite their different concerns, Hamilton and Randolph seem to be in general agreement on the basic concept. For both, the notion of the biography of an archive is about tracing how an archive, as a subject of history, moves through time, changing physically and developing new meanings. In particular, it explores how, during the course of its life, the archive both affects and is affected by its greater context. This aspect of mutual-influence can be seen to extend upon Appadurai’s theory, which stresses how the

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43Ibid., 34.  
44 Ibid.  
45 Carolyn Hamilton, “The Public Life of an Archive: Archival Biography as Methodology” (Paper, Archive and Public Culture Workshop, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2 September 2009).  
47 This is the Bakunin Family Archive in Russia.  
context affects the object but not necessarily how the object affects its context.

Furthermore, archival biography allows for the incorporation of the private, sequestered life of the object, which is not accounted for in ‘the social life of things’.

Within the biographical framework of this study, there are two specific recurring themes that thread through the story of the life of the manuscripts: status and publics. The issue of status manifests itself in two predominant ways. In the first instance, status is related to function, or the role the *kietaabs* acquire through their function, at a particular period in their biography, for instance that of ‘practical object’ or ‘research object’. As will be outlined shortly, the study is structured according to these statuses. The second instance, which appears in more subtle ways, is related to social standing, namely the value or status the *kietaabs* acquire in society over time. As I aim to demonstrate, there is an increasingly formal status, linked to an accretion of value, acquired by the manuscripts as their life progresses. This elevation of status is linked to broader social dynamics, particularly the developing social standing of the Cape Muslims over time.

Besides attaining various levels of status, the *kietaabs* also address and are exposed to different audiences. In analysing this issue, the work of Michael Warner on ‘publics’ is particularly useful. For Warner, ‘a public’, distinct from ‘the public’, is a discursive social grouping which comes into being through texts and their circulation. A single text, whether it is written, spoken or otherwise, cannot create such a social grouping. Rather, a public comes into being through the ‘concatenation’ of texts over time. Furthermore, society is comprised of multiple – in fact an infinite number – of publics and also counterpublics, which are discursive social groupings that are in tension with larger publics in society and hold a status of subordination. As will emerge at various points in this study, due to various contextual factors, the *kietaabs* reach different publics over time. This begins with a very precise, minority group, or counterpublic. Then, particularly as secondary texts about the *kietaabs* begin to emerge and are circulated, creating a

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51 Ibid., 90.
52 Ibid., 56.
‘concatenation of texts’, larger, more mainstream publics are addressed. Thus, the kind of public attentive to the kietaabs is a core aspect of the dynamics of their developing life.

Methodology and sources

This study was carried out using a combination of research methods, including textual analysis, interviews, participant observation and historical analysis. While somewhat unconventional, this methodological mix enabled me to gain an understanding of the kietaabs as material objects, to understand and experience their current social life and to place them in a broader historical context, and therefore trace their biography.

For the purpose of following the kietaabs’ life story, it is important to have a background understanding of the subjects themselves – their material make-up, their content and also their aesthetic qualities. In order to understand the manuscripts in this manner, a section of my research draws from the methods of traditional manuscript study, including philology, codicology and palaeography. Given that this aspect was not the main focus of the study, I have limited the scope of this section, providing a general overview and then a limited in-depth analysis of specific texts. With regards to the former, I provide an overview of the dominant characteristics, particularly palaeographic and codicological features of Cape kietaabs, based on examples that I had access to during my research. Then, I embark upon a close textual analysis, drawing mainly from philological inquiry. This analysis is of three different texts, one from each of the manuscript categories I have established, namely religious works, talismanic works and socio-historical works. I analyse these texts at a macro level, looking at the general structure – both visual and verbal – of each text, and then go on to look at specific characteristics of each text, including linguistic traits, themes and images. This information is intended to offer an acquaintance with the manuscripts, even for those who have not seen them first-hand.

To be able to understand the contemporary social life of the manuscripts, I had to observe them in their everyday life. I thus undertook a long-term ethnographic study, seeking out kietaab collections in Cape Town, interacting with their current custodians and observing their movements and visibility in contemporary society, including in local
media, heritage events and cultural organisations. This research began in June 2008 and lasted until roughly June 2010, with degrees of intensity of the research varying over the course of this period. Besides being a part of and observing this scene, I also engaged in more explicit forms of investigation, through interviews – both formal and informal. My main sources from this research are thus personal observations and interviews.

My entrance into the world of the *kietaabs* was a slow one. This work was not just a case of accessing official archives and libraries, but also entering people’s homes and, to an extent, their lives. As is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the majority of *kietaabs* are stored in private, family collections in homes scattered over the greater Cape Town area. Thus, gaining access to these manuscripts, and even to certain individuals, involved a great deal of negotiation, rapport-building and networking. In the beginning, it was a matter of ‘cold calling’ individuals who I had found out (through hearsay or reading) had manuscript collections, and then requesting to meet them. Generally, after an initial meeting of guarded chatting over tea, I would maintain contact with the individual or family and, once they had deemed me trust-worthy, I was able to view their collections and discuss them more intimately. Once I had gained the trust of certain influential individuals, families, and even cultural groups, it was easier to gain access to other manuscript owners and, sometimes, to view their collections. Over the course of my research, I came into contact with at least fifteen families with *kietaab* collections, however close interaction occurred with approximately half of them.

I take the trust of my informants seriously and have been conscious of issues of ethics and privacy since the outset of my study. I have been open regarding my research and have explained the aims and processes of the study, provided updates on the progress of my work and issued copies of recorded interviews to my informants where possible. I have respected the privacy and guardedness of individuals during both the research process and the writing of this thesis. I photographed manuscript collections and recorded interviews only where I was authorised to by the informant, and have included in the thesis only materials that I have been permitted to use. I have referred to
individuals by their real names, except in cases where I have been asked to conceal the identity of the informant, in which case I have used a pseudonym.53

The families and individuals who I chose to focus on were, for the most part, those who had already been active in the kietaab/heritage ‘scene’ in one way or another. This included having their collections published in a catalogue or included in an exhibition, or being actively involved in community heritage events and organisations. In addition to these family collections, I was able to access and observe the three publicly-held manuscript collections in Cape Town.

Besides viewing and discussing manuscript collections, I also took part in cultural activities connected to the kietaabs in order to examine the way in which the manuscripts played a part in these situations. This included attending community events such as seminars on local Muslim heritage issues and religious commemorations and celebrations.54 Furthermore, a large part of my observations were in the context of ‘Cape Muslim’ sociocultural organisations. I initially observed two of the dominant cultural organisations, the South African Melayu Cultural Society and the Cape Family Research Forum, but was later asked to officially join both groups. Membership in these organisations required attendance at monthly meetings, attending cultural activities and, once, even formally representing an organisation at a community event.55 While at times demanding, the experience of belonging to such groups offered a unique glimpse of the place of the kietaabs in broader discourses of cultural activism and heritage preservation in the Muslim community.

Although this kind of work was not technically ethnographic fieldwork, I chose to borrow from ethnographic research methods in my approach, particularly in the way I recorded my findings. To be specific, I tried to capture different experiences of being in

53 In most cases I chose the pseudonym myself, but in one case a specific pseudonym was requested by the informant.
54 Examples include the Annual mass-camp at the grave of Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, in Faure, Cape Town (April 2009), The Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereeniging’s seminar on ‘Muslim Contributions to Afrikaans’ (February 2010) and the Cape Cultural Gateway Market Day (October 2009).
55 I was asked to speak on behalf of the South African Melayu Cultural Society at a memorial concert for a deceased member of the society. While I never knew the man, the Chairman thought I was capable of speaking on behalf of the group.
the world of the *kietaabs* and Cape Muslim heritage through ethnographic writing. To this end, I kept a field diary of these experiences throughout the course of my research. This method was useful not only to process my own thoughts and observations of various situations, but also to articulate these experiences, which are crucial to understanding and gaining insight into the peculiarities of the social life of the *kietaabs*, for others. Some pieces of ethnographic reflection appear throughout the thesis, where relevant.

Once I had established an idea of the contemporary movements of the manuscripts, it was necessary to contextualise these observations in the larger framework of the life of the *kietaabs* – to historicise this biographical moment. In order to achieve this, I used a variety of sources, from secondary literature to primary oral-history accounts. Initially, I used individual accounts and family stories from my observations and interviews in order to map out what I interpret as the main stages in the life of the *kietaabs*. Then, based on these stages, I consulted relevant secondary literature to further illustrate the details of the ‘goings-on’ of these stages, as well as to provide information on the greater historical context of each stage. Given the purpose of the secondary literature to the study, I needed to consult sources on a wide range of subjects. Rather than provide a comprehensive overview of this literature, I have integrated it, where relevant, into the body of this thesis. In terms of secondary literature on the manuscripts themselves, Chapter 3 provides an in-depth overview of the main studies undertaken to-date.

*Chapter outline*

The structure of this study is built around the relevant life stages of the manuscripts, based on their shifting roles, as I see them. I begin in Chapter One with an in-depth introduction to the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town, as the subjects of the biography. The chapter begins by outlining the current situation of the *kietaabs* in Cape Town, including their number, whereabouts and condition. I then go on to address the manuscripts as material objects, providing insight into their material make-up and their aesthetic qualities. This analysis is followed by an overview of the texts in relation to their content. This section offers both a general overview, and an in-depth analysis of three specific texts.
Chapter two examines the transition of the manuscripts from ‘practical objects’ to heirlooms. In doing so, it outlines the context of the production of the manuscripts, and their original uses. It then discusses the decline of the ajami writing tradition at the Cape, as well as the fate of extant texts. The last part of the chapter looks at how the manuscripts became family heirlooms, and the nature of the private life of the manuscripts as heirlooms. This chapter has a particular focus on the early Muslim community at the Cape, and the gradual formalisation of the community over time.

In chapter three, I examine the evolution of the manuscripts as research objects, based on three main phases of research, defined by their distinct ideological underpinnings. This chapter highlights the developing public nature of the manuscripts through the growing number of secondary texts written about them, as well as the diversity of the ‘publics’ addressing them. It also offers an overview of the main body of literature addressing the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town.

Chapter four, the last substantial chapter of the thesis, explores the cultural life of the manuscripts, in particular their role as heritage objects and their use as archival evidence. In doing so, the chapter focuses on the manuscripts’ entanglement in Cape Muslim identity politics, and the heritage efforts resulting from this, at the level of both collective and personal identity.

The thesis concludes with the summing up and evaluation of the main arguments put forth. It then offers recommendations for further research into this area of study.
Chapter One: An Overview of Cape Ajami Manuscripts

It has taken me quite a few chats and visits to gain Hassiem Salie’s trust.1 Thankfully, he now deems me trustworthy enough to be allowed to view his manuscript collection. He has often spoken of the vastness of the collection, but I am still astounded by what lies before me. Possibly the largest personal collection in Cape Town, over twenty manuscripts of different sizes, shapes and quality cover the table. Some are very large notebooks on thick, yellowed European paper, inscribed in meticulous script in black ink. Others are small modern notebooks, somewhat tattered and filled with what looks like rushed jottings. He smiles warmly, observing me all the time. I can see that he is eager to see my personal reaction to his collection and I do not try to hide my awe. His pride in the manuscripts and appreciation of someone else’s recognition of their value are clear. Pointing out his favourites from time to time, he shows me the talismanic texts with images of strange creatures and the prayer books with colourful hand drawn decorations. There is indeed something very special about these manuscripts, not only in their symbolism or content, but also in their physical makeup.


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1 Hassiem Salie passed away in June 2010. He was a generous and knowledgeable man, and I am glad to have been able to meet with him before his demise.
The overall aim of this thesis is to explore the movements of the manuscripts as social objects. It is therefore important to understand them as tangible physical objects and as sources of knowledge. Equally important is an understanding of the landscape of Cape ajami texts, namely what kinds of extant texts are available, where they are found and so on. The aim of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the Cape ajami manuscripts, beginning with a discussion of their place in contemporary Cape Town, including the situation regarding extant archives. I then approach the subject of codicology, briefly outlining common traits in the manuscripts with regards to their material and aesthetic qualities. Lastly, I describe the content of extant manuscripts. In addition to a general discussion, there is a focus on three specific extant manuscripts, in order to provide deeper insight into the contents of particular ones.

*Ajami manuscripts in the Contemporary Cape Town Landscape*

At present, the exact number of extant ajami manuscripts in Cape Town is unknown. However, on the basis of previous catalogues and my fieldwork, I estimate that the total would be somewhere in the hundreds. It is challenging to account accurately for the total number of extant manuscripts for several reasons, one of these being that extensive cataloguing is yet to be undertaken. While a number of catalogues have been published, they have only covered a select few collections, thus missing a significant number of documents. Such documents remain, to this day, unrecorded.

The most recent catalogue of Islamic manuscripts from Cape Town recorded 117 in total.² These manuscripts were from ten collections in total, one public and the remaining nine, private. While the number of documents recorded in this publication illustrates the number of manuscripts of those willing to share their collections with outsiders, or simply the number of people who were aware of the study, it cannot be seen as reflective of the total number of extant ajami manuscripts in Cape Town. Another significant reason for the uncertainty of extant ajami manuscript numbers is secrecy and, with this, suspicion. There is a great deal of guardedness surrounding the

manuscripts in Cape Town, which often means that individuals are unlikely to discuss their personal collections with outsiders, let alone authorise strangers to view them. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain both the number of people with manuscripts in their possession and the number of manuscripts these unknown collections hold. Nevertheless, there are several collections, both public and private, that are accessible by outsiders.

They are fragile books, many with loose covers. Some of them are kept in beautifully ornate boxes, others in protective bags in a secret cupboard, or in a high-up place. In one museum they lie spread out in glass cabinets. In another, they are each carefully wrapped in neutral, acid-free paper coverings, stored in individual boxes and kept at a monitored temperature. There is definitely a sense of grandeur about not just the way in which they are kept, but the way they are presented to the outsider. In some cases I am allowed to look through the kiętaabs, but I often hesitate. Some collections are in better condition than others, but often the slightest touch seems to create a tear here, or loosen a stitch of binding there. The more involved curators and owners tend to watch over me carefully, hoping I won’t break anything, wondering what I will say about the significance of the manuscript. Others leave me to be, busy with other things as I pore over their collections.

Scattered around Cape Town, extant manuscript collections vary in terms of access, content, physical condition and methods of preservation. Most manuscripts are kept in private collections held in family homes, rather than in official, curated collections overseen by heritage institutions. However, there are currently three institutions housing collections of kiętaabs. Of these, only one has at least part of their collection on public display, namely the Simons Town Heritage Museum. There are two collections housed in the South African National Library, one available immediately upon request and the other with permission-only access. These collections were donated by the late Dr Achmat

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3 As discussed in more detail in the ‘Methodology’ section of the previous chapter, being able to talk with people about their collections involved an amount of rapport and trust-building. I take the trust and privacy of my informants seriously and in this dissertation I have only included information that I have been permitted to use.
Davids, a Cape Muslim historian, and Mr Erefaan Rakiep, a descendant of the Muslim religious leader and eastern Indonesian political convict, ‘Tuan Guru’. The latter collection has restricted access and, in order to view it, written permission from the Rakiep family is required. In addition, the Iziko Museums of Cape Town have several unidentified kietaabs in their possession. These documents are currently held in storage and are thus not easily accessible.

To date, researchers have identified a significant number of personal collections among Muslim families all over Cape Town. However, as stated above, I believe that there are many more such family-held collections in Cape Town. During discussions with my informants, I have heard of other individuals with kietaab collections who are still anxious about showing them to other people. I have also come across at least six undocumented collections in the course of my fieldwork.

Nevertheless, the extant personal manuscript collections we know of tend to vary slightly in terms of size. Most individual collections featured in existing catalogues, as well as those I have encountered in the field, have numbered between approximately two and ten kietaabs. There are exceptions to this, such as Hassiem Salie’s collection described earlier. This particular collection, significantly larger than the average family kietaab collection in Cape Town, numbers no less than twenty-four manuscripts. These documents are of many different sizes, shapes and physical conditions. While the collection is unique in terms of its relative vastness, it also stands out with regards to content.

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4 Achmat Davids is seen as a pioneer in the study of the Muslim community of Cape Town.
5 Imaam Abdullah ibn Qadi Abdus Salaam or ‘Tuan Guru’ (Mister Teacher) was a prince from Tidore, in the Ternate islands of eastern Indonesia. He arrived at the Cape as a political convict in 1780 and was incarcerated on Robben Island until 1793. In line with his nickname, he was the principal Islamic teacher in the Cape at the time, and founded the first madrasah or Muslim school in Cape Town. See: Achmat Davids, The Mosques of Bo-Kaap: A social history of Islam at the Cape (Cape Town: The South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980).
6 The grounds upon which access is permitted are unclear. After requesting this access from the family two years ago, I am still yet to be granted permission from them.
7 I was fortunate enough to view these documents on 2 April 2009 at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, where the manuscripts were especially taken out of storage by the Iziko Museum staff.
8 Chapter Three offers an in-depth overview of research carried out on the kietaabs of Cape Town.
9 These include the collections of I. Petersen, A. da Costa, the Johardien family and Imaam Bassier.
The majority of Islamic manuscript collections in the Cape consist of works on religious themes. These range from supplications to popular theological or jurisprudence texts from the 18th and 19th centuries. The former are mostly in Arabic only, while the latter are generally bilingual, either both in Arabic and Malay or in Arabic and Afrikaans. Some of Hassiem Salie’s texts certainly fall into these categories, but he also has several manuscripts of a more mystical nature. These texts, containing crudely drawn images of winged creatures and giant men, and apparently comprising spells for such situations as when one is hated by another, definitely stand out. They are written in what appears to be jawi and, as he once explained, a code: the steps with which to carry out the spell are written out of order, so that such magic is not abused by those who have not been taught it properly. These manuscripts are rare both in that they contain images of animate creatures and because of the kinds of information they contain.

The value of these manuscripts is clearly acknowledged by their owner, as he keeps them in a safe held off-premises and has apparently had them insured. Most other owners of personal collections have not gone to such lengths. However, they do revere their kietaabs and are quite protective over them, storing them in special places in their homes. As described above, this ranges from a spot on top of a special cupboard, to a special wooden box in a designated prayer room.

Image 4: Talismanic drawing. H. Salie Collection

10 These texts include Ma’rifatul Islam wal Iman and Umm Al-Barabin, both brought to the Cape by Tuan Guru. These texts will be further expanded on later in the text.
This protectiveness over the safekeeping of manuscripts extends to their accessibility to outsiders. As previously mentioned, there is a great deal of guardedness surrounding the kietaabs and outsiders’ interaction with them. This is true not only of those who hide their manuscripts from the public eye, but also of those who have been more open about their kietaabs in the past and have had them catalogued by researchers or exhibited in museums. Most individuals are hesitant to show their manuscripts to outsiders and it often takes a process of rapport-building before one is invited to view the manuscripts firsthand. In some cases, rapport-building only allows one to discuss the manuscripts, but not to view them. In other cases, while an outsider may eventually be allowed to view the documents, they may not touch them. Gate-keeping is clearly practised by most kietaab owners, but individuals set their boundaries differently. These restrictions are often subjective and seem to change over time. In my fieldwork, I found that while certain boundaries were held up to me as an outsider, I knew that because I was often seen as part of a particular ‘in-group’, for various reasons, I was allowed in closer than other researchers may have been.11 Furthermore, as time went on and I became more familiar to the owners, these walls started to dissolve. For instance, with one particular family at first I was only allowed to look at the manuscript collection, but after the second and third visit, I was invited to look at and leaf through certain kietaabs.

For all of the gate keeping and secret storage places that have been established by most manuscript owners, physical preservation and restoration of the manuscripts are still lacking. While some kietaabs still look crisp and unweathered, most others are extremely fragile. Torn or loose sheets and pages dotted with holes made by insects are not uncommon and neither is broken binding or ripped covers. A few of the manuscript owners I have encountered are aware of the need for restoration and proper preservation of their manuscripts but do not know where to begin. From a research perspective, in order to preserve the manuscripts, knowledge of their materiality is needed. This requires exploring the manuscripts as physical objects.

11 My inclusion in different ‘in-groups’ has depended on various aspects of my personal identity, including being a Muslim and an Indonesian/Malay speaker, having studied Bahasa Indonesia as a high school and undergraduate univeristy student in Australia, and having ancestral roots in Cape Town.
Manuscripts as physical objects: notes on Codicology

An understanding of these documents as physical objects – what they are made of, what they look like, how they were made – is useful not only in terms of preservation and restoration. Such insight also helps in developing a deeper understanding of them as subjects with a particular history and make-up.
The study of texts as physical objects is a significant component of the research carried out on manuscripts worldwide. This area of manuscript study, encompassing codicology, palaeography and book history, is concerned with the methods of producing manuscripts as well as materials used to do so, including types of paper, binding, ink and other pigments. It also encompasses the kinds of writing and decoration found on manuscripts, such as calligraphic style and methods of decoration. Such information contributes not only to an understanding of the physical makeup, but also the greater contextual factors influencing the manuscripts’ material nature such as availability of materials, artistic and cultural influences and so on.

While certain aspects of their physical nature have been mentioned in a few publications, there has not been a comprehensive codicological or palaeographic study carried out on the ajami manuscripts of Cape Town. The descriptions that follow are based on my own observations and research, and those mentioned in other studies. They are intended to offer a brief survey, rather than an in-depth explanation of the kinds of physical traits common in Cape Town’s ajami manuscripts.

The ajami texts found today come in a variety of physical forms, differing in the kinds of paper used, calligraphic quality and level of decoration. Dissimilarity is often found between manuscripts produced in different periods and also between texts produced for varying purposes, for instance those used for recording theological texts compared to others produced to document medicinal cures and mantras. These contrasts are most clearly marked when comparing the kinds of materials the manuscripts are made of.

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Manuscript materiality

The vast majority of manuscripts are bound books, hence the term *kietaab*. Earlier texts, dated around the late 18th and early 19th centuries, typically consist of laid paper, with its easily distinguishable ribbed texture, hand-stitched into hard or semi-hard covers. Many of these *kietaabs'* paper contain watermarks, which contain not only interesting emblems and company names, but also dates. It is from these watermarks that we are able to place the manuscripts within an approximate period without involved dating processes, such as carbon dating. These watermarks also indicate the origin of the paper, which are, in most cases, European. Common amongst them are the ‘Pro Patria’, ‘Fleur de Lis’, ‘Arms of Amsterdam’ and ‘Beehive’ (Honig) watermarks, all used by Dutch papermakers.14 There is a local element however, as in one case a manuscript containing paper watermarked with the ‘Colony of Cape of Good Hope’ symbol has been recorded.15

Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a shift from this style of paper to the more contemporary notebooks and casebooks. Books from this period often consist of

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lined, much thinner, smoother paper. These newer *kietaabs* are much closer in appearance to contemporary books, both in terms of their physical condition and their aesthetic appeal. Although the binding of these manuscripts is often in a state of disrepair, the actual paper is generally more durable than that of older manuscripts. In these books, the pages are often still crisp and in a ‘healthy’ looking condition, free of tears and holes. This durability, smoothness and apparent newness is in marked contrast to the older *kietaabs*, which are more physically aged, and therefore appear, in a sense, more “historical”.

![Image 9: An example of newer, lined notebooks used. H. Salie Collection](image)

Besides manuscripts in book form some documents, such as letters and talismans, are found on loose leaves of paper. These are in fact rare, as most manuscript collections contain bound books. There are several possible reasons for this, for instance documents such as letters could easily have been discarded, given their more mundane focus. One reason why families have kept passing *kietaabs* down through the generations is because of their religious importance. It is thus quite plausible that documents that were not religious in orientation were considered less valuable. Furthermore, talismans written on loose leaves were often disposed of after use, or even during their use, as a part of the ritual, as will be explained later.

\[^{16}\text{Ibid.}\]
As the kinds of paper changes with the age of the texts, so does the type of ink and writing implements used by the manuscript authors. In 18th and early 19th century manuscripts, the script appears to be written with the traditional loose ink and some sort of writing implement, perhaps a traditional calligraphy pen made from bamboo or reed. Script sizing is not uniform, alternating between large and bold lettering and small, delicate forms depending on the 

\textit{kietaab}. In some cases, one manuscript may alternate a thicker, bolder script with a smaller style of writing, suggesting the use of two different kinds of writing implements. Meanwhile, later texts appear to use a variety of different modern pens and, at times, even pencils. This is reflected in a generally much smaller, finer print and also a wider range of pigments used.

The older texts use a narrower colour palate of mostly earthy tones, with most manuscripts featuring predominantly dark brown and red ink. The darker ink is used for the main text, therefore the majority of the writing, and red ink is used either for decorative purposes or to highlight specific words for emphasis. In addition, I noticed yellow-coloured ink was used especially on some of the talismanic texts, also for decorative purposes but apparently for medicinal reasons too. It has been said that the yellow pigment comes from saffron and is used particularly in talismanic texts because of curative or positive qualities it is perceived to have.\textsuperscript{17} However, is not known where the brown and red pigments would have been obtained from. Likewise, it is not certain whether these colours were thought to be the most appropriate for these purposes or if these were the only pigments available at the time. Research into this aspect of the manuscripts is yet to be undertaken.

\textsuperscript{17} This information was obtained from ‘Mr H Jamie’ (pseudonym), who was privy to azeemat-making practices in his youth. Correspondence with ‘Mrs S Jamie’ (wife of ‘Mr Jamie’). 09.03.2010.
In later manuscripts we see new types of inks and pigments being employed, both for decorative and practical purposes. On one end of the extreme, there have been texts found with a variety of colours, featuring elaborate designs and borders in less earthy tones such as bright blue and green. On the opposite end, we find less ceremonial-looking *kietaabs*, particularly those written on notepads, having been written in what looks like lead pencil. An owner of such a *kietaab* has suggested that the use of such a writing implement was out of necessity to jot notes down quickly, but this yet to be verified. Despite these examples of marked colour use, it is still mostly black and red ink that appears in later texts.
Manuscript aesthetics

With regard to the actual writing, the manuscripts have thus far been described as having been written in ‘Arabic script’. However, there are in fact many ‘Arabic scripts’. The field of Arabic calligraphy is extremely vast, with various styles of writing stretching from West Africa and the Maghreb, through the Middle East and to Asia. These calligraphies range from block-like scripts in the kufic style, to more cursive styles such as thuluth and naskh. While they are most often rendered on paper, these scripts are also seen carved into wood or stone on buildings and other objects.

In Islamic cultures, the importance of the Arabic script, and finding beautiful ways in which to render it, comes from the use of the script to record the Divine word, presented in the Qur’an. In pre-Islamic times the script was relatively rudimentary. However, from the early onset of Islam onwards it was actively developed to become a highly refined form of writing and, in fact, an art. Given the significance of not only the sacred words written, but also the way in which these words are recorded and preserved, the art of calligraphy holds an esteemed place in the world of Islamic art.

Despite the strong artistic tradition surrounding the Arabic script, it is nonetheless a script used on a daily basis and in everyday situations. The calligraphic differences abovementioned also extend themselves to everyday contexts and can be seen in many kinds of ‘practical’ texts, including extant Islamic manuscripts. These documents are written in all sorts of calligraphic styles and variants, generally according to the region of origin. Thus, we find West African manuscripts written in the western variations such as hausawi or sudani, while Ottoman Turkish texts use eastern styles like nasta’liq. Despite their geographical location, the manuscripts from Cape Town clearly use an eastern script, which most probably owes itself to the local texts’ origin in the jawi script, most often seen in Naskh and other cursive Arabic scripts.¹⁹

While the eastern style of script is more-or-less uniform across the manuscripts, there are differences in terms of size, boldness and so on. These differences lend themselves mostly to the writing implement and to the style of the particular scribe; as in the Latin script, each scribe has their unique handwriting style in the Arabic script.²⁰ This issue aside, there are instances where the style of handwriting systematically changes size and orientation.

A shift in calligraphic style often occurs in bilingual manuscripts, which are quite common in the Cape. The main language, generally Arabic, will often appear in a larger, bolder font written horizontally across the page. Underneath this text there is interlinear translation, usually in jawi, in a smaller font and often written diagonally. Interestingly, bilingual texts in Arabic/Arabic-Afrikaans, both handwritten and printed, do not appear to use these contrasting fonts. Rather, the translation is written in the same line as the main text and the two are not distinguished from each other visually.

²⁰ Many people claim that Tuan Guru himself had a very distinctive handwriting. During my fieldwork I came across at least 3 individuals who claimed they could distinguish kietabbs written by him from those written by others.
Generally, these documents are not calligraphically sophisticated. They are manuscripts intended for more practical rather than artistic purposes, for example as religious guidebooks or student notebooks. Yet, some manuscripts are written in what appears to be a more careful, elegant script than the rather rudimentary script used in others. This contrast is alluded to by researcher Ahmad Rahman in a short overview of the manuscripts he catalogued. In this article, he mentions an apparent decline in the accuracy of the manuscripts, particularly those that were copies of certain texts. He notes that scribes of newer manuscripts made quite a few mistakes, both in their Arabic and jawi transcriptions, in comparison to older versions of the same text.\(^\text{21}\)

As with calligraphic style, illumination of the manuscripts is usually not elaborate. Illumination, or decoration of manuscripts, is used to further add to the text’s aesthetic appeal, and to enhance the appearance of the calligraphy. It involves the addition of decorations in the form of motifs, borders and miniature images to the written text and features decorations in a variety of different pigments, from blues to pinks and even gold,

in which case crushed gold is used. Although often combined with calligraphy, illumination is an art on its own.\textsuperscript{22}

Among the extant \textit{ajami} texts found in Cape Town, the more common decorative features are often quite small and understated. An example of typical illumination are the images found in talismanic texts (see image 10). Often these drawings incorporate written text, for example magical formulas containing Arabic letters or numbers, and are partially illuminated. As mentioned above, they often feature decorations in yellow and red pigments. Another example is the separation of religious, often Qur’anic, verses with the use of an image, usually a small abstract decoration in red ink.

Although most instances of illumination in manuscripts from Cape Town are quite understated, compared to other manuscripts, there are several texts that do feature elaborate decoration. At least four extant documents, found in three different collections, contain decorative borders consisting of quite elaborate floral motifs. In three of the four cases, the dominant colours employed are black and red, as with the calligraphy. The motifs in these three manuscripts are somewhat similar, but it is unknown whether they are based on a style that was common at the time they were created, or if they were perhaps created by the same person. The remaining manuscript, composed later than the other three, contains elaborate borders, also involving floral motifs but also pillar-like images. It is extremely colourful, employing bright green, blue, red and yellow pigments, making it stand out amongst the other more monotone extant manuscripts. Why these particular manuscripts are more elaborately decorated than others is unknown, but a possible factor could be their contents. They are all religious texts, containing prayers, jurisprudence or theological discussions, rather than talismanic or social history-related issues.

\textsuperscript{22} For further information on illumination, see: John P. Harthan, \textit{An Introduction to Illuminated Manuscripts} (London: H.M.S.O, 1983).
While it is common to find manuscripts with illumination on their inside pages, decoration on book covers is quite rare. Yet, two extant *kietaabs* found in an individual collection in Cape Town are bound in covers featuring delicate hand-painted images. Although fragile and already quite damaged, these books are striking and painted in a design that is reminiscent of floral motifs found in Indonesian *batik*. Where these motifs were taken from or what they were inspired by is uncertain. One of these *kietaabs* is a bilingual Arabic-Malay book. Its cover is brown in colour and painted in quite a bold motif of red, pink, yellow and blue flowers with green vine-like stems, reaching across the cover. These images are outlined in several lines of tiny yellow dots, which work to both enhance the images and to fill in the spaces between them. It appears as though it is not the cover itself that has been painted, but rather a paper that has been used to cover the book.23 The other *kietaab* is completely in Arabic and contains the Qur’anic chapter ‘*Yaseen*’, which is one of the most revered and most frequently recited chapters in the Qur’an, often referred to as it’s ‘heart’.24 It has a cream-coloured cover and its designs are

23 This is evident from areas where the images in the design overlap, as a double layer of the paper covering has been adhered to the original book cover.
more subdued and monochrome than that of the other manuscript, with more earthy tones such as browns and even a metallic copper-coloured paint. Its designs are larger in size, and not as bold as the other kiestaab.

![Image 16: Manuscripts with hand-painted covers, Jubardien Family Collection.](image)

These manuscripts are dated 1806 and 1826 respectively, but whether the illumination was added to their covers around the same time or closer to the present is unknown. Although only two extant texts have displayed this kind of artistry thus far, it leads us to wonder whether such decoration was to be found on other manuscripts produced during the same period and, if so, why such a tradition ceased. However, it could simply be the work of one artist, or owner, who chose to decorate his own kiestaabs in such a manner. Either way, it appears to be quite a marked, yet striking, form of artistic expression as far as manuscript illumination at the Cape is concerned.

By exploring the physical features of the manuscripts, it is possible to find patterns (and exception to these patterns) in their production, their decoration and aesthetic features and also the very materials with which they were made. Identifying these physical features also helps to classify manuscripts into different groups, particularly into different periods. However, categorisation can also be achieved through exploring the content of the texts: the messages that they convey.
The Manuscripts According to Content

By looking at the content of the manuscripts, we are not only able to categorise the documents into different groups. It is also possible to analyse the kind of messages written and disseminated at the time, what sort of language was employed, what function these texts played in social life and so on. Thus, apart from identifying the main categories of extant ajami manuscripts in Cape Town and speaking of these generally, this section also offers an analysis of three separate texts, one from each genre.

From the variety of extant manuscripts available, I have identified three main genres according to their content and their intended use at the time of production. Broadly, these are ‘religious’ texts, ‘talismanic’ texts and ‘quotidian’ texts.

The majority of manuscripts can be classified as ‘religious’ works. Within this broad category we find liturgical and jurisprudence texts, and those based on teachings of faith and belief. These will often use Arabic as the main language, with inter-linear translations in jawi or Arabic-Afrikaans or sometimes both. They include popular works circulated in the early Muslim community by imams and madrasah teachers. Two such texts of this genre are *Ma’rifatul Islam wal Iman* (The Knowledge of Islam and Faith) and *Umm Al-Barabin* (The Mother of all Proofs), both written from memory by the exiled Indonesian prince, Imam Abdullah ibn Qadi Abdus Salaam (“Tuan Guru”).25 Such texts were also written for didactic purposes, to be widely read throughout the growing Muslim community. Consequently, many handwritten copies of the original would have been produced.

In addition, a significant number of these handwritten religious works are *koples boeke*, books made up of lessons taught to children in religious schools. These texts would be

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25 The former was part of a compendium written from memory by Tuan Guru while he was imprisoned on Robben Island, dated 6 January 1782. See: Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995) & Muttaqin Rakiep and Luqman Rakiep, “The Value of Manuscripts in establishing identity,” in *Seminar on manuscripts in conjunction with the spread of Islam in South Africa*, ed. Aris Garinto et al. (Cape Town: Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006), 19-31. The latter was originally written by Mohammad Yusuf ibn Al-Sanusi, an Algerian Ash’arite scholar, but was then written and translated into Malay by Tuan Guru. It is a philosophical text, explaining the 20 attributes a believer must recognise in respect of God, and 20 attributes impossible of Him.
written by hand, from memory, by students and would contain such subjects as the existence of angels and messengers, simple prayers and supplications for use in daily life and guidelines on how to pray. They were produced for didactic purposes, for the student to learn the particular teachings of what they were copying, and to practise writing using the Arabic script. Below is an example of one such *koples boek*.

*Allah, die baas van die wereld:* Islamic teachings at the Cape

It is rare to find an extant *ajami* student notebook, let alone any other *kietaab*, still in the hands of its original owner. Yet, a Mr Achmat Peters, past student of Sheikh Ismail Hanif Edwards still had his original *koples boek* in his home, on the Cape Flats. When I met him, he was in his eighties, and was one of the last generation to be educated in Arabic-Afrikaans. The book is dated back to the early 1950s, roughly the time of his madrasah career, which was also the very last stage of Arabic-Afrikaans literature production.

The book, with its torn pages and loose cover, is in fact a copy of a handwritten original, having been produced in a time when lithographic printing had already been introduced into Arabic-Afrikaans literature production. It is thus not a manuscript *per se*. However, in contrast to other printed copies using typefaces, the handwritten nature of the original is reproduced in the copy. This being said, it is the contents of this original that is of most importance here – it is an example of the kind of *koples boek* that would have previously been handwritten by madrasah pupils, before printing technology was introduced to the local madrasahs.

Taken as a whole, this *koples boek* is a rich example of the kinds of basic knowledge that informed the religious education of madrasah pupils in Cape Town. The particular lessons written in this book, intended for the student to memorise by heart, were considered appropriate knowledge to form the basis of the madrasah student’s Islamic

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26 ‘Allah, the boss of the world’.
27 Sheikh Ismail Hanif Edwards was an iconic Sheikh in Cape Town, and was educated at Al-Azhar university in Egypt. In the 1950s, he revived the use of Arabic-Afrikaans by producing texts in the script and also teaching his madrasah students using the script. He was one of the last people to compose and publish texts in Arabic-Afrikaans. See: Mogamat Hoosain Ebrahim, *Shaykh Ismail Hanif Edwards: His Life and Works* (Paarl: Paarl Print, 2004).
education. Based on the contents of this book, it appears as though the desired knowledge foundation was a solid understanding of the basic principles of belief, as outlined in the very first lessons, the *Arkaanul Islam* (‘The Pillars of Islam’) and the *Arkaanul Iman* (‘The Pillars of Faith’). There is also an emphasis on practical knowledge of required acts in the daily life of a Muslim, with a particular focus on *salaah* (‘prayer’) and *wuduh* (‘ablution’).

![Image 17: ‘Die Arkaans van die Iemaan’ Excerpt from a copy of 20th century koples boek, A. Peters Collection](image)

As a whole, the *koples boek* is rather unstructured, with no contents page outlining the lessons contained in it. It begins with a simple supplication, written in Arabic and then translated into Arabic-Afrikaans, honouring Allah as the Almighty (‘*die baas van die wereld*’\(^28\)) and requesting blessings upon Muhammad as his messenger and his companions (‘*syn vriende*’\(^29\)). From this, sub-texts follow on from one another in no clear order. There are approximately twenty-six different sub-texts of varying lengths, covering the 16 extant pages of the book. The texts range from statements of belief, such as the ‘*Arkaannul Islam*’ to statements of intention (*niyyahs*) for various acts, including prayer, fasting and ablution. There are also supplications for day-to-day acts, such as what to say when entering the bathroom, and instructions on how to perform obligatory acts such as ritual ablutions and so on.

\(^28\) ‘The boss of the world’.

\(^29\) ‘His friends’.
Because the main foci of the lessons are the acts of *salah* and *wudū*, there are various texts related to these two topics. This includes the statement of intention required before beginning either act, a step-by-step guide on how to perform the acts, what nullifies them and prayers to utter after the student has completed their prayers or ablutions. The only other act mentioned is fasting, referred to by its Malay term *‘puasa’*, rather than the Arabic term *‘sawm’*. The attention paid to fasting is minimal, with only one prayer-text dedicated to the topic. It is unclear why specific attention is paid to prayer and ablution only. However, this indicates the centrality of these two acts in the basic ‘skills’ taught to these pupils.

There appears to be a standard structure for most of the lessons, presumably to ease their memorisation. There is a short introduction and then the information is communicated in point-form, with each ‘point’ often numbered. For instance, the lesson on factors that annul one’s prayer begins with the introduction (loosely translated) ‘That which annuls ablution is six in number’. The lesson then goes on to list each of the four factors, beginning with its numerical place. For example ‘the first is anything that escapes from the two places, in the front and back - wind or anything else unnatural. The second is...’ and so on. This structure applies mostly to the practical lessons, such as the steps on how to pray, how to take ablution, what the prayer times are and so on. Meanwhile, the lessons focused on supplications (*du’as*) and intentions, simply feature the required *du’a* or *niyyah* in full, so that the student may memorise and use it where necessary.

The book contains two languages: Afrikaans and Arabic. The general rule is that the instructive and non-ritual information is provided in Afrikaans, while the ‘ritual’ contents, such as specific supplications are kept in the original Arabic. This is because the student would have to utter these prayers in the original Arabic in their daily life. There is generally no translation of the Arabic text, except for the very first *du’a*, at the beginning of the book, referred to earlier.

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30 Spelt ‘poeasa’ in Afrikaans.
With regards to the Afrikaans sections, the language in this *koples boek* is generally quite simple, presumably because it was intended for student use and memorisation purposes. As indicated above, most texts are short and to-the-point, in order to be memorised by the student. The language is also very literal, bringing across abstract concepts such as the existence of God and angels in concrete language, and a register that would perhaps make these concepts easier to understand by madrasah students.\(^3\)

For instance, angels (*'malaikat'*) are described in a personifying nature: they have bodies and souls (made of light), they do not eat or drink, they are not men or women and they do not marry. Allah is also described in worldly terms, as 'boss of the world'(*'die baas van die wereld'*)

This is in contrast to, say, the ‘Almighty’ (*'Almagtige'*) and other, more abstract descriptions. In addition, the companions of the prophet Muhammad are referred to as his ‘friends’ (*'vriende'*), which does not seem to carry the same weight as the term ‘companion’, with all its historical-religious connotations. These are but a few of the examples of the distinct language features of this text.

There are also other marked linguistic features, such as the use of euphemisms scattered throughout the various lessons, which offer insight into the handling of issues seen as unsavoury. An example of this is the ambiguous phrase ‘anything that escapes from the two places, in the front and back’, mentioned above. This phrase, of course, refers to urinating, defecating or flatulence or, put simply, ‘going to the toilet’. Evidently, not only the religious content, but also the way in which the lessons are expressed, is telling about the didactic approach taken in the *madrasah*.

While religious texts had educational purposes, there were other texts with more mystical overtones, commonly referred to as *azeemats*, which are talismanic in nature. These texts are found in both Arabic-Afrikaans and *jawi*; however it appears as though the majority of extant *azeemats* are in the latter. Talismans in Cape Town are generally found in two forms: either on loose leaves of paper, or in bound books. The loose-leaf variety are usually talismans made for the purpose of being used, and have been found in places

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\(^3\) Ebrahim, Shaykh Ismail Hanif Edwards.
such as graveyards and family homes.\textsuperscript{32} In contrast, the latter act more as guides or reference books, listing different kinds of \textit{azeemats} and instructions on how to make and use them.

There are talismans for a variety of uses and purposes: certain texts contain solutions for problems ranging from medical issues, such as curing headaches and easing the birthing process, to non-human-oriented concerns like making a tree quickly bear fruit. There are also \textit{azeemats} used for more mental/spiritual ailments including when one has a bad dream. Some talismanic texts also contain systems for predicting ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days on which to undertake activities.\textsuperscript{33}

In contrast to religious manuscripts, containing mainly written script, these texts contain both writing and diagrams. As earlier mentioned, these diagrams are often based on numerological patterns but in some of the more rare cases there are images of non-human creatures. The numerological patterns often include some of the ninety-nine names of Allah, or Qur'anic verses for protection and other purposes.

\textit{Net Op 'n Donderdag Aand:}\textsuperscript{34} How talismans were made at the Cape

One \textit{azeemat} reference book, or at least a photocopy of it, has made its way into the research domain. The book, written in Arabic-Afrikaans, seems to have been preserved by an unknown individual and then given or shown to Dr I.D. du Plessis, poet, academic and ‘Cape Malay’ enthusiast.\textsuperscript{35} Dr Du Plessis then passed on a photocopy of a part of this

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{32} In fact, on a graveyard clean-up operation in March 2010, a colleague came across at least fifty, mostly identical, \textit{azeemats} in places around various Muslim graves. This is an example of contemporary \textit{azeemat} use.
\textsuperscript{33} This is presumably for events such as weddings, births and so on.
\textsuperscript{34} ‘Only on a Thursday Night’.
\textsuperscript{35} I.D. du Plessis (1900 – 1981) was an orientalist scholar and keen supporter of ‘Cape Malay’ culture. He took a particularly paternalistic approach towards the ‘Cape Malays’, advocating for a separate Group Area for ‘Malays’ under the Group Areas Act (1950) and calling for a ‘Cape Malay museum’ in order to preserve the culture and the people. He was also a driving force in the establishment of the Cape Malay Choir Board and wrote several books about the ‘Cape Malays’. See: I.D. Du Plessis, \textit{The Cape Malays} (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1944); I.D. Du Plessis, and C.A. Luckhoff, \textit{The Malay Quarter and Its People} (Cape Town: Balkema, 1953) and I.D. Du Plessis, \textit{Uit die Slamse buurt: kaapse sprokies, fabols en legendes} (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1939). He is undoubtedly a controversial figure. While some (including some of my informants) have praised him for his interest in and support of ‘Cape Malay’ culture, many others have criticised him for, among other things, causing social division amongst so-called ‘Coloureds’ during apartheid, through his push for a separate ‘Malay’ identity. The key critique comes from Shamil Jeppie. See: Shamil Jeppie, ‘Historical Process and the
*kietaab*, with an accompanying partial transliteration, to others including Robert Shell, his research assistant at the time, who kept it in his own research archive. It is from Professor Shell that I came to have my own copy of the document. Unfortunately, there is no contextual information available about the *kietaab* this excerpt comes from. Thus, the date it was written, its composer and to whom it belonged, is unknown. Likewise, there is no information regarding the exact length of the original *kietaab*, or the other information it contained. Nonetheless, the available content is extremely valuable, providing insight into the culture of Islamic talismans in Cape Town.

The copy is of two pages of the book and contains four separate *azeemats*, accompanied by short but detailed instructions explaining how to reproduce and use them. The fact that these instructions are present distinguishes this excerpt, and other similar ‘*azeemat* reference books’, from *azeemats* alone, which carry none of the social and practical knowledge contained in these descriptions.

The actual *azeemat* components of the text consist of sequences of Arabic numerals and letters, and symbols such as stars and hearts, as well as other unidentified markers. Each one has a different appearance, for instance the first and second ones consist of symbols written on several lines, while the third is a large square diagram, divided into nine smaller squares, each with three symbols inside. The fourth stands out among the rest, as it does not have an ordered pattern as the others appear to have. Rather, it is an asymmetric drawing consisting of cursive lines.

The accompanying descriptions offer crucial information about which maladies these *azeemats* were intended for and how they were to be made and used. The talismans featured in this excerpt are quite varied in terms of purpose. They consist of remedies for both spiritual/mental problems, such as post-dream uneasiness and being in a state of confusion (‘*ihtiara*’), and physical issues such as headaches (‘*kopseer*’) and premature

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36 According to Sheikh M. Mathee, this may also be interpreted as being ‘possessed’ (by an evil spirit). This particular *azeemat* is for Muslim children who experience this problem.
ejaculation (‘as jon water te gou kom’). This information, although brief, provides insight into the kinds of problems people using azeemats sought cures for: that they were both very specific and pertained to a wide variety of personal problems, from mental uneasiness to physical pain and sexual problems. It also shows that it was thought that talismans were a suitable way of curing these kinds of problems, and that these issues were common enough for a specific talisman to be made for them.

Aside from revealing what the talismans are for, as mentioned above, the descriptions explain exactly how to reproduce each one. The method for reproducing them is similar across the board, as all the azeemats need to be written on paper. The first is the only one that has explicit instructions regarding what it should be written with, namely saffron and rose water. The reason for these is not given, but it may possibly be for their supposed healing properties, as was briefly discussed earlier. While the fourth azeemat has no prescribed implements or inks, its accompanying explanation lists specific instructions as to when it should be written, as well as other prerequisites for the production of this azeemat. According to the description, it is only to be written on a Thursday night, after the Isha’a prayers (the last prayer of the day), or on the day of Juma’ah (Friday). In

37 ‘If your water comes too quickly’

38 However, not all azeemats are to be written down. For example, ‘H Jamie’, mentioned earlier, claims that certain azeemats are simply uttered verbally. (H Jamie, interview, 24 June, 2010)
addition, the writer is expected to have made ablutions and performed non-obligatory prayers before attempting to write out the talisman. The remaining two azeemats have no specific instructions as to how or when they should be produced.

However, all of the azeemats have specific instructions in terms of how they should be used. Numbers two, three and four are to be wrapped in cloth and worn, but it different ways. The talisman for ihtira, which is specifically for children, is to be hung around the child’s neck, while the headache talisman is to be tied to the place where the pain is (‘waar dit seer is’). The azeemat to prevent premature ejaculation is to be tied to the body and worn while having intercourse (‘as dy jou vrou gebruik’39) and then removed when the act is finished. The description also specifically mentions that this azeemat can be reused. The remaining azeemat, to cure post-dream uneasiness, is not to be worn but rather to be consumed. According to the directions of use, the azeemat should be placed in a bottle of water, preferably rainwater, and the afflicted individual should drink some of the mixture three times in a day.

These instructions shed light on the practice and knowledge of an art that is often shrouded in secrecy and, based on personal observations and interactions, is becoming increasingly rare in Cape Town. Only certain individuals who practice the art of azeemat-making are privy to the knowledge of their production and use, and these people choose whom they will pass their knowledge onto. The existence of written records of these practices, such as this excerpt as well as other such books resting in private family collections, combined with renewed interest in these books, presents a new dynamic in terms of access to this knowledge.

At the level of language, this text presents some interesting examples of cultural concepts and linguistic borrowings prevalent in the Afrikaans of the Muslim community of Cape Town. The instructions draw upon assumed knowledge of Islamic beliefs, for example the holiness of specific days. The fourth azeemat is only to be written on a Thursday night, or Friday in the day. Friday is the most important day of the week for Muslims, as it is of

39 ‘When you use your woman’
the ‘Juma’ah’ congregational prayers. Being the night preceding this day, Thursday night is therefore also seen as a time of spiritual and religious importance. It is sometimes referred to as ‘heilig aand’ (holy night), amongst Cape Muslims. Other Islamic terms referred to include ‘soembajang’, meaning to pray and ‘abdas’ referring to ritual ablution. Both of these terms are loanwords which have become part of the Afrikaans spoken by Cape Town Muslims, the former borrowed from Malay and the latter from Turkish.

While non-standard Afrikaans words are used, very few non-standard word-forms appear. The only non-standard Afrikaans pronunciation evident in this text is the use of ‘djy’ instead of the standard Afrikaans ‘jy’. This is in contrast to other Arabic-Afrikaans texts, which tend to have a far higher level of non-standard word forms.

While this short excerpt of the azeemat book is full of information about specific talismanic practices and attributes, it is only a small glimpse of the kinds of talismanic texts available. There exist more such books, particularly in jawi, that would be extremely useful to analyse. No doubt they would shed much more light on talismanic traditions at the Cape.

Of the three kinds of extant manuscripts, those quotidian in nature are the rarest. According to official catalogues and academic articles, there have been only four such texts found, including three letters and a shopping list. All of these texts are in Arabic-Afrikaans. The scarcity of these kinds of texts seems to point, for some, to the conclusion that ajami scripts were not used at the Cape for purposes of social communication. Yet, the fact that people were writing letters and other everyday texts in Arabic-Afrikaans indicates that there was an audience for these kinds of texts; that people were reading and possibly even responding to letters in ajami script. While these groups may very well be restricted, they nonetheless would have had the habit of correspondence in the ajami medium. Furthermore, their rarity today could be explained by the fact that because they were quotidian in nature, they were not as well preserved as religious or talismanic texts.
As limited as these extant texts are, they still offer insights into the Arabic-Afrikaans writing culture at the time. This includes questions around what kinds of topics people were writing on, who they were writing to, what kind of language registers were employed and so on. What follows is the exploration of one such text.

_What gebeer is in die Kaap_⁴⁰: Marital Troubles at the Cape

One of the extant ‘quotidian’ _ajami_ documents is a letter that was written in 1914. I found this letter only two years ago, not in a recognised manuscript collection but rather amongst old printed books in the library of the late Imaam Manie Bassier of the Bo-Kaap. A chance find, the manuscript happened to be folded up and placed between the pages of a thick, dusty religious volume and at first appeared to be written in Arabic. Upon reading the letter, I discovered that it was in fact written in Arabic-Afrikaans.⁴¹

This letter is noticeably different to most other _ajami_ manuscripts found at the Cape, both in terms of its form and content. Visually, it is very simple. Markedly different to the bound, delicate and almost romantically aged _kietaabs_ made of European paper, it is written on two loose sheets of plain, cream, lined notepaper. It begins in indigo ink, in what appears to be a somewhat unsteady, rushed hand and on the next page suddenly changes to black ink, in steadier, clearer script. There are no images or decorations on the document. In fact, there is nothing ornate or formal about the letter.

The document was written by Mr A Toffa, a resident of District Six. It is addressed to local Muslim leader Imaam Abdul Bassier⁴² and, presumably via him, to the community of ‘geleere mense’ (learned people). Although it is addressed to quite a large audience, its contents deal with very personal issues: ongoing problems in Mr Toffa’s marriage.

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⁴⁰ ‘What has happened in Cape Town’, taken directly from Mr Toffa’s Letter.
⁴¹ This letter was found in 2008 during a cataloguing exercise I carried out on Imaam Bassier’s library. See: Saarah Jappie, “Finding the reader within the literature: The Private Library of a Twentieth Century Cape Town Imam,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 63 (3 & 4) (2009): 81- 91.
⁴² Father of Imaam Maanie Bassier.
As narrated in the text, these problems began in 1911 and were still occurring at the time the letter was written, on 20 January 1914. The events are narrated chronologically, yet because it is written with little punctuation and is full of different actors, dates and occurrences, it is quite challenging to follow at times. It becomes, in some sections, rather like a whirlwind of facts than a coherent story. However, the gist of the story is that Mr Toffa was married to a woman, described as a mu‘minah (“believer”), who left him in 1911. Approximately two years later two men, including an imaam, came to Mr Toffa, asking him to divorce his wife. He refused this request and shortly afterward was assured by the imaam that his wife would return home. Two months later his wife, whom he had not yet been divorced from, was married to another man. Then, a month later this new marriage was annulled. Although it is not explicit in the letter, it appears as though Mr Toffa was still not reunited with his wife at the time the text was composed. By this point he was extremely frustrated and was calling out to Imaam Bassier to make this outrageous situation known to the wider community. His letter is thus both an exposé of these events and a cry for help.

43 The date this marriage took place is not specified in the text, nor is the name of the woman.
The letter is indeed quite an entertaining story of personal drama and marital mishaps. Yet, it contains themes and issues that shed light not only on the single experience of Mr Toffa, but also to the social world he was a part of at this time. Dominant themes occurring in this letter are that of the role and status of the imaam and religious judgement.

Imaams feature prominently in this letter, not only because it was addressed to one, but also because an imaam and at least one son of an imaam are actively involved in the marriage-divorce-remarriage-problem solving process. The imaam, in this case a certain Imaam Abubakr, is called upon by both Mr Toffa and his wife to sort out their marriage problems and to act as an intermediary by asking for a divorce, annulling a marriage and advocating reconciliation between the two parties. In addition, Imaam Bassier is brought into the situation by Mr Toffa in order to not only make this situation known in die hele land (‘the whole land’), but also to step in and order the other imaam to correct the situation. According to Mr Toffa, Imaam Abubakr would have to do so by ordering his wife’s second husband to leave her.

The centrality of the imaams’ role in this case is quite evident. Not only do the imaams need to perform religious marriages and divorces, but they are also involved at another level, sorting out quarrels (even if they started them initially), representing different parties and reprimanding each other. Their expected role in the personal troubles of these two individuals, and perhaps those of other community members, is a quite involved one.

The fact that Imam Bassier is called upon to intervene is telling of the social structure of the community of imaams at the time. It seems to indicate that he holds some kind of higher authority within the community, both because he is the one asked to make the issue known to the whole community and because he is believed to be able to order the other imaam to take a certain action. This is further strengthened by the terms with which Mr Toffa addresses the imaam in the letter, namely ‘mijn hoogste geliefste imaam’ (my highest,

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44 If he was referring to the entire Muslim community in the Cape at the time, this would have numbered over 22 575 people. (According to the 1906 State Census, there were 22 575 ‘Mohamedans’ in the Cape Colony. Cited in Ebrahim M. Mahida, History of Muslims in South Africa: A Chronology (Durban: Arabic Study Circle, 1993), 49.
beloved *imaam*). Indeed *imaams* in the Muslim community held, and still hold one may argue, an influential and esteemed position.\(^{45}\) Thus, the reverence for the *imaam* is not out of the ordinary. However, the higher authority attributed to Imaam Bassier is somewhat marked. Although it is not explicit, it seems he may have been regarded as one of the ‘principal *imaams*’ in the community.\(^{46}\)

Another theme that flows throughout this letter is that of religious judgement. In explaining his situation, the writer constantly draws upon religion as his frame of reference, particularly when trying to encourage a certain judgement, on the part of the reader, of the various actors involved. For instance, he describes his wife’s second marriage as one, which is ‘*sleg... by die geloof*’ (evil/bad in the religion). He also explains that he has read in the ‘*mukhtasar kietaab*’ (a religious guide) that it is one of the ‘*grootste garaams*’ (one of the biggest sins) to let an unmarried man and woman sit together, alone. This implies the sinful actions both of his wife and the man she was living with, and the *imaam* who let them stay together, even though the divorce was not yet approved. The religious overtones are further strengthened by various other religious terms scattered throughout the letter, including appeals to God, asking for protection for those who have sinned and for belief in the veracity of his claims.

Mr Toffa does not draw upon other frames of reference to strengthen his claim at all, such as secular law or general moral codes. He views this situation in terms of religion only. Clearly, one of the main reasons for this is that he is appealing to an *imaam* and those with a strong background in Islamic knowledge to support and believe his claims. Furthermore, perhaps the religious references and metalanguage are part of the prescribed discourse within this particular community at the time. Equally, religion may simply be key to the way he views the world, indicating the centrality of Islam to his identity and worldview.


\(^{46}\) The idea of ‘principal’ and ‘subordinate’ Imaams in the 19\(^{th}\) century Cape Town community is cited in Jeppie, “Leadership and Loyalties,” 143. This concept may have carried on into the early 20\(^{th}\) century.
Relevant insights can also be drawn from the letter’s linguistic attributes. The letter is particularly significant in terms of language, as it is a written record of the kind of Afrikaans used by a Cape Muslim in the early 20th Century. In fact, because the *ajami* script records language phonetically, it can be seen as a written record of how this individual, and possibly most people of his community, spoke and pronounced the language. A close inspection of the letter reveals that the Afrikaans used in this letter is non-standard in relation to contemporary ‘standard’ Afrikaans: it is both archaic and of the ‘Cape Afrikaans’ dialect. These differences are evident at the pronunciation and lexical levels. For instance, there are non-standard pronunciations of words such as *geleere* instead of *geleerde* (‘learned) and *anwoor* instead of *antwoord* (response) and so on, which are common in Cape Afrikaans.

At the lexical level, the dated nature of the language comes out most clearly in the use of archaic forms of words, such as *sêg* instead of *sê* (‘say’) and *mijn* instead of *my* (‘my’) used throughout the letter. In addition, loanwords from Malay, Arabic and even English, common in Cape Afrikaans, place Mr Toffa’s language-use within this specific variant of Afrikaans. This includes words such as such as the Malay terms *kanallah* (‘please’ lit. ‘for the sake of Allah’), *batja* (‘read’), the Arabic words *talaq* (‘divorce’), *garaam* (‘forbidden’), as well as the English borrowings ‘mistake’ and ‘order’.

Besides these standard loanwords, the letter also features non-standard Arabic borrowings. These words generally relate to religion, such as the terms *nasara* and *majusi* (‘Christians’ and ‘Zoroastrians’) and the *mukbitasar kietaab*, earlier mentioned. Leaving religious terms in their original Arabic is a common phenomenon not only in Afrikaans, but also in most non-Arabic languages, given the risk of inadequate translation.

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48 Sometimes referred to as ‘Kombuis Afrikaans’ or ‘Cape Coloured Afrikaans’, this so-called dialect of Afrikaans has been seen as an oppressed or hidden version of Afrikaans. The language is characterised by lexical borrowings from Eastern and local languages. For more information, see: Achmat Davids, “Words the Slaves Made: A Socio-Historical Linguistic Study,” *South African Journal of Linguistics* 8 (1) (1990): 1-24.
These brief observations of the contents of this particular manuscript, as well as the two other texts mentioned previously, must be seen in context. That is to say, they have been presented for the sole purpose of demonstrating the possibilities regarding the kind of knowledge available from this genre of *ajami* manuscripts. In order to make any substantive claims, a further analysis would need to go much deeper into the issues addressed here. It would also have to be based on as many other ‘quotidian’ *ajami* documents as possible. As these manuscripts are extremely rare, such work remains a challenge.

Now that an overview of the manuscripts has been provided, the story of their life can begin. The next chapter describes the manuscripts as practical objects, including their use at the time of production, and then explores their shift to the status of ‘heirloom’.
Chapter Two: The manuscripts from ‘practical objects’ to ‘heirlooms’

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, many people have told me their manuscript stories. Until recently, I had encountered mainly people who knew a little of the history, or were just rediscovering their family manuscripts. I had never met anyone with a lived experience of the ajami tradition—neither anyone who could read nor write in the script—until I met Mr Peters.¹ Boeta Achmat, as he was also known, was already in his mid-eighties and suffering from a serious illness, but could still read Arabic-Afrikaans. I was also told that sometimes he would even write in it. On a bright Sunday morning, sitting in his son-in-law’s living room, he schooled me in the old madrasah system, explaining what it was like to be taught in Arabic-Afrikaans. He explained how he began to learn the script, showing me his carefully-copied list of Arabic-Afrikaans-specific letters like ‘cha’, ‘pa’ and ‘nga’. He then led me through his old madrasah book, fluently reciting the various lessons covering the pages in Arabic-Afrikaans script. As he read along, my eyes and my ears became accustomed to the script and after a while I could begin to decipher the words with him, reading along to myself. For that hour at least, his old schoolbook, probably untouched for quite a while, became alive again.

¹ ‘Boeta’ Achmat Peters passed away in April 2010. I am grateful to have been able to interview him before his demise.
The *ajami* manuscripts at the Cape began their lives as practical objects, used in the educational, medicinal and communicative practices of the Cape Muslim community. In its early stages, made up of slaves and Free Blacks adhering to a (previously) banned religion and functioning in an alternate form of literacy, this community existed on the peripheries of Cape society. In this context, the manuscripts were crucial aspects of alternative strategies, educational and otherwise, devised and practised by the Cape Muslims. However, as time progressed and socio-linguistic changes, technological developments and the increasing integration of the Cape Muslims into dominant social practices took place, the *kietaabs* lost their currency. They were replaced by newer texts – either handwritten texts in another script, or printed books – and this replacement marked a change in how the manuscripts came to be viewed, as well as the function they assumed in the lives of their owners. While many texts were lost or disappeared, some entered a new phase in their lives as social objects. Many *kietaabs*, such as the ones sitting in today’s family collections, once read but no longer used, became heirlooms.
This shift in the life of the manuscripts occurred in the midst various social changes, including the end of slavery, the modernisation of education and the advent of print culture in Cape Town. For the manuscripts in particular, the entry into a new life stage is marked by multiple processes. This includes a major shift in function and, related to this, a new source of value; where the *kietaabs* were initially valued for their contents, as heirlooms they came to be revered because of their history of ownership and the memory attached to this. Furthermore, this next stage in manuscripts’ life is marked by their elevation from a practical to a sacred status and, consequently, their movement into a self-consciously protected domain in the lives of the individuals who own them.

In this chapter, I explore the shift from the manuscripts’ status as practical object to that of heirloom, looking not only at this change, but the contextual factors that influenced it, including the development of the Muslim community, linguistic shifts and the politics of education in Cape Town. I begin with a glimpse of how the manuscripts functioned as practical objects. I then discuss the decline of *ajami* text production and the fate of existing *ajami* documents as a result of this decline. Lastly, I focus on preserved manuscripts and explore how extant manuscripts became objects revered in the private domain, as heirlooms.

*The manuscripts as practical objects*

These days, most *kietaabs* lay sequestered in cupboards and other secure places in homes all over the Western Cape, and even beyond. They are rarely, if ever, read. Some of them are even on display in the glass cabinets of a museum, visible to the world, but never used. Yet, these manuscripts were once objects with practical functions, used in everyday situations for learning, healing and communication. They were created to fulfil specific functions in the lives of Muslims at the Cape.

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2 Although most *ajami* documents are found in the Cape, there are collections previously catalogued that are in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape.
and were thus influenced by larger social dynamics bringing them into being. In exploring the original functions of the manuscripts at the Cape, insights both into the documents themselves and into the contexts surrounding them can be gained.

Taken from the Arabic word for ‘book’, the local term for the manuscripts, *kietaab*, appears to come from their use as school books in the madrasah. While not all of the manuscripts pertain to religious teaching, based on extant examples, it is clear that the majority of *kietaabs* were produced as part of religious education practices, in the madrasah and beyond.

Madrasah education at the Cape began during the time of slavery, with the first official Muslim School founded in 1793 in Cape Town, by the iconic figure Imam Qadi Abdul Salaam, known as ‘Tuan Guru’. These madrasahs were essentially a subaltern system of education. They functioned either in mosques or in the homes of the elderly imams who took on the role of Muslim school master. Although religious leaders, the imams came from diverse backgrounds – from tailor to fishmonger – and some, if not in bondage, continued to pursue other occupations while still being madrasah teachers. Being a madrasah teacher was thus not an occupation on its own. In terms of pupils, the madrasahs taught slaves and Free Blacks alike, being one of the only educational options available to children from these communities. According to Robert Shell, these kinds of schools taught more people of colour than all other educational institutions in the Cape Colony put together. Furthermore, the madrasah was apparently very popular with slave children and played an important role in the conversion of slaves to Islam.

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3 The madrasah was established in Dorp Street, Cape Town.
5 Shell, “Madressahs and Moravians,” 103.
As a part of madrasah education at the Cape, handwritten books in Arabic script emerged. These manuscripts were produced predominantly for didactic purposes; to teach principles of Islamic faith and practice, and to familiarize pupils with important Islamic texts, including the Qur’an. An important written text in the educational experience of a student at these early madrasahs was the *koples boek*, discussed in detail in the previous chapter. In these notebooks, students would transcribe their lessons, either from a board or from dictation by their teacher, and they would have to memorise each lesson at home. The student’s knowledge would be tested by their madrasah teacher and once they had memorised one lesson, they would move on to the next one. The *koples boek* was an integral part of the rote-learning system, which characterised the madrasah educational system, and persisted even after the *ajami* scripts themselves stopped being used. Today, many extant *ajami* manuscripts are *koples boeke*, which have been handed down through the generations of a family.

Other religious books were used as readers, distributed via the madrasahs, for students to use as handbooks or guides. These texts formed the basis of the approach to Islam propagated through the madrasahs and, consequently, the dominant religious approach adopted in the Muslim community in Cape Town. One of the most popular texts copied and circulated, is the *Umm Al-Barahin* (‘The Mother of Proofs’), also known as the Sanusiyya, after its author Muhammad ibn Yusuf Al-Sanusi, and *Die Twintig Siefaat* (‘The Twenty Attributes’), its common name in Cape Town. This text was originally written from memory by Tuan Guru, while he was imprisoned on Robben Island (1780 – 1793). It is a philosophical text, proposing that every believer must know the 20 attributes of

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8 In fact, during the course of my fieldwork I came across a *koples boek* written in Afrikaans in Latin script, dating to the 1960s.

9 Muhammad ibn Yusuf Al-Sanusi (c. 1787-1859) was an influential Algerian Ash’arite scholar.
God and 20 attributes impossible of God,\textsuperscript{10} and formed part of Tuan Guru’s alleged 600-page compendium,\textsuperscript{11} entirely written on Robben Island. The compendium included not only the Sanusiyya, but also the Ma’rifatul Islam wal Iman (‘Manifestations of Islam and Faith’) and medicinal prescriptions involving azeemats and isharah (‘remedies’).\textsuperscript{12}

Tuan Guru wrote the work from memory in its original Arabic and also provided Malay translations. Extant copies of the Umm Al-Barabin with its jawi translations are available, as are later copies, with translations in Arabic-Afrikaans. The fact that the text continued to be used despite linguistic developments, and that an effort was made to translate it into Afrikaans, the new dominant language at the Cape, demonstrates its longevity as a source of information in the Muslim community at the Cape.

Besides koples boeke and religious Readers, religious manuscripts also included handwritten copies of the Quran. These manuscripts would have been used by students in the madrasahs, or families in their homes, for recitation purposes. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, handwritten copies of the Qur’an would have been rare. However, it is assumed that by the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, under the influence of Tuan Guru, who himself wrote the entire Qur’an by memory,\textsuperscript{13} handwritten copies of the holy book became more common at the Cape.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to copies of the complete Qur’an, copies of certain of its chapters or ‘surahs’ were also circulated, for instance copies

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Davids, “The Early Afrikaans Publications,” 73.
\item \textsuperscript{11} The compendium was actually 613 pages long, according to Tuan Guru’s descendants. See: Muttaqin Rakiep and Luqman Rakiep, “The Value of Manuscripts in Establishing Identity,” in Seminar on Manuscripts in conjunction with the spread of Islam in South Africa, ed. Aris Garinto et al. (Cape Town: Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006), 19-31.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Achmat Davids, “The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims 1815-1915: A Socio-Linguistic Study” (MA diss., University of Natal (Durban), 1992), 66.
\item \textsuperscript{13} It is said that Tuan Guru wrote several copies of the Qur’an from memory while at the Cape. One of these is held at the Dorp Street Mosque, Cape Town. See: Achmat Davids, The Mosques of Bo-Kaap (Cape Town: South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980), 18.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ajam, “The Raison D’etre,” 47.
\end{itemize}
of the surah ‘Yaseen’, referred to in the previous chapter. Both copies of the Qur’an and its individual chapters are entirely in Arabic, with no translations in either Arabic-Afrikaans or jawi. No doubt, these manuscripts would have been of extremely high importance, given the centrality of the Qur’an in the life of a Muslim.

Also with origins in the practices of the early Muslims at the Cape are the talismanic manuscripts. More for mystical purposes than educational functions, these texts derive from Islamic mystical traditions, brought over by political exiles and slaves from South East Asia and other parts of the Indian Ocean. Early Islam at the Cape, of the 18th century in particular, is generally described as having a strong Sufi influence. This is attributed both to the kinds of people sent to the Cape in the 17th century and 18th centuries, and the social relevance of mystical Islam.

Political exiles sent to the Cape, such as religious leaders Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, Tuan Said Aloewie and Tuan Guru, were particularly involved in Sufism. Sheikh Yusuf, seen as the father of Islam, particularly Sufi Islam in South Africa, had a varied and deep knowledge of Islamic Sufism. He had studied under masters of four different tariqas, or religious orders, having travelled to Aceh, Yemen, Medinah and Damascus to further his studies. In addition to his studies, he had written

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15 See Chapter One, note 23.
16 Tuan Said Aloewie was a ‘Malay Priest’, apparently originating from Mocha, Yemen. He was sent from Batavia to the Cape in 1744, with Haji Mataram, another ‘Malay Priest’. They were the first ‘Malay Priests’ to be imprisoned on Robben Island. While Haji Mataram died in prison, Tuan Said Aloewie survived and after 11 years on the island, was sent to the Cape. After his release, it is said that he became a ‘Caffer’, or a fiscal assistant at the Cape. See: Harriet Deacon, The Island: A History of Robben Island, 1488 – 1990 (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers & Bellville: Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1996), 30.
17 These are only three examples of the religious exiles sent to the Cape. For more information, see: Robert C.-H. Shell, “The establishment and spread of Islam at the Cape from the beginning of company rule to 1838” (Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1974).
18 The term tariqa literally means ‘way’, ‘path’ or ‘method’ in Arabic. The four tariqas followed by Sheikh Yusuf were the naqshbandi, qadariyyah, shattariyyah and khulwatiyyah.
various manuscripts on Sufism-related subjects.\textsuperscript{20} Meanwhile, Tuan Guru and Tuan Said Aloewie were also involved in Sufism and both were said to have mystical powers, performing Sufi miracles at the Cape. Legends about these mystical powers are still told in the community today.\textsuperscript{21}

Sufi Islam, with its esoteric teachings, psychological and physical cures, was particularly beneficial to the Muslims at the Cape, as it offered power and a haven for them to deal with the hostile social environment they faced. As noted by Tayob, ‘[Sufi] Islam was powerful because it was a mystery couched in secret knowledge and secret meetings’.\textsuperscript{22} One practical aspect of the Islamic mysticism practised at the Cape was the tradition of azeemats. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there were amulets for a variety of problems, physical and otherwise. There were also talismans for ‘good’ or ‘bad’ magic, and people would call upon those skilled in azeemat making for both purposes.\textsuperscript{23}

Muslims at the Cape were infamous for their magic and charm-making or “Malay tricks”; both for healing and dangerous or destructive purposes.\textsuperscript{24} The services of

\textsuperscript{20} These works were not produced at the Cape.

\textsuperscript{21} Examples include the story of Tuan Guru magically turning a cynical trader’s potatoes into stones at a marketplace in Cape Town and the story about Tuan Said Aloewie secretly entering the locked Slave Lodge at night, with a Quran under his arm. See: Davids, \textit{The Mosques of Bo-Kaap}, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{22} Abdulkader Tayob, \textit{Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement} (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995), 42.

\textsuperscript{23} Mayson notes two 19\textsuperscript{th} century cases where azeemats were used for less noble purposes. The one was to protect a thief from being caught during a robbery and the other was to bring ruin to a man who wished to build a mission school on a building site where some ‘Malays’ had lived and were evicted from. This was in the form of an egg covered in ‘maledictory writings’ placed under the stairs of the building. See: John, S. Mayson, \textit{The Malays of Cape Town} (Cape Town: Africana Connoisseurs Press, 1963; Manchester: J. Galt, 1861), 28.

\textsuperscript{24} Academic, poet and Malay enthusiast I.D. du Plessis had a particular interest in Malay magic. He believed the association between the ‘Cape Malays’ and magic integral to broader South Africans’ perception of them, so much so that he included a chapter on ‘Malay tricks’ in his ethnographic study of the community. See: I.D. du Plessis, \textit{The Cape Malays} (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1947), 68-74. He also wrote a novel set in Cape Town and Indonesia, based on the adventure of three young Afrikaaner boys searching for a doekoen in Java. See: I.D. du Plessis, \textit{Hart van Java} (Cape Town, Bloemfontein & Port Elizabeth: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1942).
certain charm makers were sought after by fellow slaves, as well as settlers at the Cape, which demonstrates that belief in the effectiveness of the charms reached beyond the boundaries of the slave population. One particularly well-known azeemat maker was Tuan Nuruman, known as ‘Paay Schaapie’, an exile banished to the Cape from Batavia in 1770. In 1786 he assisted a group of runaway slaves by providing them with an azeemat and special prayers for protection, specifically to ‘render them invincible against recapture’. However, the slaves were caught and Paay Schaapie was sent to Robben Island, seen as a potential threat by Cape authorities.

When speaking of ‘talismanic manuscripts’ I refer to both what I term ‘azeemat reference books’ and the amulets themselves. Both of these required a great deal of practical involvement. Azeemat makers would refer to the ‘guidelines’, in the ‘azeemat reference books’, which would explain what kind of amulet to produce for specific problems and how to make each amulet. While not an ‘azeemat reference book’ on its own, an example of charm-making guidelines is in Tuan Guru’s compendium, referred to earlier. Within the compendium’s chapter on spiritual medicine, Tuan Guru included instructions on how to make azeemats for specific maladies. In terms of practical use, the azeemats themselves would be created for

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25 These charm-makers are referred to as ‘doekoem’, based on the Malay word ‘dukun’, meaning ‘spiritual healer’. Often seen as witch doctors or ‘magic men’, people would consult them to perform supernatural tasks for them. There was a general fear of doekoems, and people who had experienced misfortune or illness would claim they had been ‘gedoekoem’ (‘doekoemed’). There are still doekoems in contemporary Cape Town, and the doekoem figure still captures the local imagination. See for example: Rayda Jacobs, “The Doekoem” in Post-cards from South Africa, Rayda Jacobs (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2004), 33-45.


27 In fact, as related to me by Mr H. Jamie, who has knowledge of azeemat-making, even until recently, the services of charm-makers were sought after by white South Africans, predominantly those from Afrikaans-speaking community. H Jamie, interview, 24 June, 2010.


29 Tayob, Islamic Resurgence, 42.

30 Mahida, History of Muslims in South Africa, 7-8.

31 Davids, The Mosques of Bo-Kaap, 18.
each specific case, which would involve rewriting, using specific materials, and then either sewing the amulet in cloth, or wrapping it in special paper. From the user’s side, the *azeemat* would then either be worn, placed in a specific physical location such as the entry to a house, or even consumed.  

Of the ‘historical’ talismanic manuscripts that do exist in private collections I have come across, the ‘magic’ therein is no longer used. With the end of these mystical practises in specific families, and also because these manuscripts are often written in *jawi* and other scripts and languages no longer understood at the Cape, these documents have lost their use. Furthermore, these ‘historical’ talismanic manuscripts are often feared, or revered, for the ‘magic’, which they hold. This has led to a specific power and at times, a stigma, attached to these them.

This is not to say that *azeemat*-making no longer exists in Cape Town. As explained to me by Hassan Jamie, who has learned aspects of *azeemat*-making from certain experts, the art has gradually declined, and is not as popular a solution as it was perceived to be in earlier times. He links this to a decline in spirituality and Sufi practises in the community, as well as the growth of Salafism at the Cape. Yet, the tradition of *azeemats* still exists, albeit to a lesser degree, and is practised and sought after by sections of the community. In fact, those used for personal protection are, in fact, used by some Muslims today. These kinds of written charms usually contain Qur’anic verses and are kept on the person, pinned to their clothing, or stored in possessions such as bags and wallets. There are also similar *azeemats* for the safeguarding of the home, which are attached to specific areas on the structure of the house. These *azeemats* are distinct from what I refer to as ‘historical’ talismanic manuscripts, such as those contained in private manuscript collections.

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32 For instance, they would be written on paper, using saffron powder as ink, and placed in water. The person requiring the ‘magic’ would then drink the mixture, thus consuming the *azeemat*. For an example of such an *azeemat*, see Chapter 1.

33 This will be elaborated on later in the chapter.
The last, and in fact least common, function of *ajami* manuscripts was in everyday social communication. I refer to these kinds of manuscripts, such as letters and personal notes, as ‘quotidian’. In a community where many people learned to read and write in the madrasah only, where written communication took place in the Arabic script, it is only natural that people also used the script to express themselves in everyday situations. The exact extent of the use of *ajami* scripts, both *jawi* and Arabic-Afrikaans, in written communication is unclear and there are very few extant ‘socio-historical’ *ajami* manuscripts. In fact, only four have been found, to my knowledge. All of these texts are in Arabic-Afrikaans, and thus social communication in *jawi*, is unaccounted for. It is therefore difficult to make generalisations about the everyday communicative function of *ajami* manuscripts.

However, the four examples that do exist can provide some insight into how Arabic-Afrikaans was used in everyday situations generally and, in these cases, specifically. For instance, the texts involve a variety of different actors, from a fezmaker to a housewife, thus indicating that the script was being used by a range of different people, presumably all madrasah-educated. Of the extant manuscripts, there are two examples of letters, one written by a politician and presumably publicly addressed, and the other between an ordinary community member and a learned scholar. They would most probably have been part of a chain of letters, going back and forth between different readers, explaining problems, expressing ideas and feelings and exchanging news. There are also instances of personal record-keeping in the home, such as an account books and a shopping list. These manuscripts acted as notes to oneself, reminding individuals of provisions needed in the home, sales made and payments owed. They would have been read, reread and amended as time went on.

34 Achmat Davids claimed to have such a text in his possession. See: Davids, *The Early Afrikaans Publications*, 67. However, the current whereabouts of this document are unknown.
In contrast to the majority of extant *ajami* documents, the content of these texts is mostly mundane in nature. This is most probably the main reason why such documents are the most difficult to find nowadays; given their non-religious nature, as well as their ‘everydayness’, people would have been more likely to discard of them. They would not have been seen as having religious or historical value. Unlike the *koples boeke*, religious readers and, to an extent, the talismanic works, these manuscripts’ status was not elevated to that of an object worth preserving.

Because these letters and personal records were discarded, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the use of Arabic-Afrikaans, and if *jawi* was used at all, for everyday purposes, and when exactly the use of the script for these purposes ended. Mr Peters, mentioned above, perhaps the only person in Cape Town who, until his death last year, still wrote in Arabic-Afrikaans, provided some insight into the latter. When our discussions came to the topic of his writings in Arabic-Afrikaans, he explained that in his experience, people did not write letters or other texts using the script. Rather, having learnt the script at madrasah, he had taken his own initiative to use it as a ‘secret code’ for himself, and also with his wife. He told stories of how, when he went on pilgrimage to Mecca with his wife and his sisters, it was difficult to communicate with his wife in private. He thus decided to start writing notes to her in Arabic-Afrikaans, because no one else would be able to understand them. In his working days, Mr Peters also used the script in his workshop, when trying to calculate employees’ wages without having them find out how much others earned.  

Thus for Mr Peters, writing in an *ajami* script was more of a strategic choice. This tells us, among other things, that by the middle of the 20th century onwards, although some people were still literate in the script, writing in Arabic-Afrikaans was practically unheard of. Writing in the script was thus a covert practice.

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The end of the *ajami* era

The ending of the *ajami* manuscript tradition was a gradual process, which saw several beginnings and ends. Among the reasons for its demise were broader linguistic change and technological innovation and, entangled in these developments, the modernisation and formalisation of the status of Cape Muslims in broader Cape society.

With regards to linguistics, the majority of early Islamic manuscripts written at the Cape used Arabic and *jawi*. As most individuals did not understand Arabic, but could read it, translations of Arabic passages in Malay were often provided. Although several languages were spoken amongst the slaves and Free Blacks at the Cape, Malay was a major lingua franca, particularly among the Muslim population. It was the chosen language of instruction at the first madrasah, and *jawi*, its corresponding written form, was also taught there. That many early *kietaabs* were written in Arabic-Malay is therefore unsurprising.

Around the late 18th century, the linguistic landscape began to develop and (proto)-Afrikaans, or ‘Cape Dutch’, was also being used in the community, particularly amongst those who were Cape-born. Initially, the new language was used side-by-side with Malay. However, by the 1840s and 1850s, it was the dominant tongue and had taken over Malay as the medium of instruction in madrasahs. The Arabic-Afrikaans script, developed as its written form, eventually came to replace the use of *jawi* script, as evident from extant manuscripts written from the 1840s.

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36 When Tuan Guru started the Cape’s first madrasah in 1793, he chose to use Melayu as the medium of instruction. See Davids, “The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims,” 50.

onwards.\textsuperscript{38} While Arabic-Afrikaans had replaced \textit{jawi}, the \textit{jawi kietaabs} were not immediately abandoned; Malay was still spoken up until the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{39} so it is possible that \textit{jawi} manuscripts continued to be read and understood until this time.

In the mid 1900s, more than a century after the development of the Arabic-Afrikaans script, \textit{printed} Arabic-Afrikaans literature was introduced. Although these early printed books were among the first Afrikaans works to be printed, they were not the first printed works at the Cape. In fact, the printing press was introduced to South Africa in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, over half a century before it was used for text circulation in the Muslim community. Given the constituency of the Muslim community, made up predominantly of slaves and Free Blacks, and the ending of slavery in practise only occurring in 1838, the late adoption of printing for text circulation in the Muslim public is understandable.

The first printed Arabic-Afrikaans book was, reportedly, the \textit{Kitab al-Qawl al-Matin fi Bayan Umur al-Din}\textsuperscript{40} (The book on the firm declaration with regard to explaining the affairs of faith), originally by Ahmad al-Ishmuni and printed in Cape Town 1856. However, no extant examples of this book exist.\textsuperscript{41} The oldest \textit{extant} printed Arabic-Afrikaans book is the \textit{Bayanudin} (‘Explanation of the Religion’),\textsuperscript{42} printed in 1877 not at the Cape, but in Constantinople. The \textit{Bayanudin} was composed by Abu Bakr Effendi (d.1880), an Ottoman Kurdish scholar sent to the Cape on the request

\textsuperscript{38} Achmat Davids notes the earliest extant Arabic-Afrikaans manuscript found was written in the 1840s. See: Davids, “The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims,” 56.


\textsuperscript{40} Sometimes referred to simply as the ‘\textit{Kitab al-Qawl al-Matin}’

\textsuperscript{41} The existence of an original copy of this book has been proven and then disproved. This issue concerns both Adriaanus van Selms and Achmat Davids and is further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Bayanudin} has been translated by Mia Brandel-Syrier. See: Mia Brandel-Syrier, ed., \textit{The religious duties of Islam as taught and explained by Abu Bakr Effendi: A translation from the original Arabic and Afrikaans} (London: E.J. Brill, 1960).
of the British government in 1862, in order to settle a religious dispute amongst the Muslims at the Cape.43

In his 18 years at the Cape, Effendi made several contributions to the community, not only literary, but also with regards to education, culture and religious polemics. Given his assignment as a religious advisor, Effendi prioritised the provision of religious education for the Muslims at the Cape and, just over two weeks after arriving, he established the ‘Ottoman Theological School’ for boys, funded by the Ottoman Sultan. 44 Then in 1870, a school for girls, run by his wife, was established.45 According to Ajam, not all people were attracted to Effendi’s schooling system because it propagated a new system of Islamic law – that of the Hanafi school – and was thus seen to be undermining the traditional system of Islam practised and taught at the Cape, based on the Shafi’i school.46 In fact, his emphasis on Hanafi law contributed significantly to Hanifi-Shafi’i disputes at the Cape, leading to complaints from the Muslim community, disapproval from the local religious leaders, and a petition to have Effendi recalled to Constantinople.47 Yet, he never left the Cape, and was buried at the famous Tana Baru48 cemetery in 1880.

43 Adrianus Van Selms, “The manuscript and its author,” in *The religious duties of Islam as taught and explained by Abu Bakr Effendi*, ed. Mia Brandel-Syrier (London: E.J. Brill, 1960), VIII. Van Selms mentions that the main issue causing the dispute was the ritual of ‘Khalifah’, also known as Ratiep, which is a Sufi ritual aimed at demonstrating the power of faith. During the ritual, participants enter a mystical state and strike themselves with swords and daggers without being harmed. Their immunity to the blows is attributed to their strong faith.
48 Located in the Bo-Kaap area of Cape Town, the Tana Baru cemetery is the resting place of iconic Muslim figures such as Tuan Guru, Saartjie van der Kaap and Achmat van Bengalen. See: Achmat Davids, *The History of the Tana Baru: The case for the preservation of the Muslim cemetery [sic] at the top of Long Market Street* (Cape Town: Committee for the Preservation of the Tana Baru, 1985).
Despite the controversy surrounding Effendi, his literary contribution, in the form of the *Bayanudin*, is seen as his greatest contribution to the Muslims at the Cape.\textsuperscript{49} The book was originally written in 1869 and then printed in 1877, by the Ottoman Ministry of Education. It was intended to serve as a religious handbook for the Muslims at the Cape, and its contents set out the principles of the religion.\textsuperscript{50} In order to reach out to the local population, it was written in their mother tongue, (proto)-Afrikaans, in a script they could read. Given the achievement of being the oldest extant Arabic-Afrikaans printed book, the *Bayanudin*, and Abu Bakr Effendi, have gained much popular and scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1890, thirteen years after the *Bayanudin* was published, the production of printed Arabic-Afrikaans literature began to accelerate. This ‘golden era’ of Arabic-Afrikaans publication was spearheaded by influential Islamic scholars at the Cape, including Imam Kassiem Gamieldien, Sheikh Achmad Behardien and Imams Abdullah and Abubakr Abdurauf, who led the production of such literary works. According to Achmat Davids,\textsuperscript{52} there were two main reasons influencing the demand for printed Arabic-Afrikaans works. Firstly, Arabic-Afrikaans was the medium of instruction in most of the Muslim religious schools, and handbooks in the script were useful to guide students’ learning.\textsuperscript{53}

Secondly, publications were introduced in response to religious issues arising in the Muslim community, of which most members were literate in Arabic-Afrikaans, it

\textsuperscript{49} This book also has Hanafi leanings in terms of its approach to jurisprudence.


\textsuperscript{52} Davids, *The Early Afrikaans Publications*.

\textsuperscript{53} The madrasah reader of Mr Achmat Peters, referred to earlier, is a later example of such texts (dated to c.1950). I have also come across earlier examples in my fieldwork, for instance in the library of Imam Bassier.
seems. There was thus a growing public, made up of Muslim Capetonians, literate in Arabic-Afrikaans and sharing similar concerns, for Arabic-Afrikaans to address. Some of the topics of such texts include principles of religion and Islamic law (both general and pertaining to specific issues), *tajwid* (the science of Qur’anic recitation), Arabic grammar, principles of belief (*taubid* and *aqida*) and translations of various chapters of the Qur’an. These books were generally not original works written at the Cape, but rather translations of Arabic works into Arabic-Afrikaans. Often, they were not *direct* translations of a text, but rather interpretations of them, in order to convey the meaning of the text in a register appropriate for the target audience.

While produced specifically for readers at the Cape, in a language and script specific to the area, many of these books were in fact published abroad. As mentioned above, the *Bayanudin* was printed in Istanbul. Other books were printed in Cairo and Bombay,\(^\text{54}\) where Arabic script-accommodating printing presses were better established. Despite the foreignness of the language, reproducing Arabic-Afrikaans works in these cities would have been easier than at the Cape. This is illustrated by a case cited by Rochlin,\(^\text{55}\) wherein ‘The Cape of Good Hope Literary Gazette’ reported in 1830, that a Christian missionary of the Bengal Civil Establishment had attempted to have an Arabic-Afrikaans translation of the *Hidayat al-Islam* printed at the Cape. However, given the lack of facilities available to accommodate the Arabic script, the attempt failed and he decided instead to have the text printed in Calcutta. Nonetheless, it appears as though, later on, certain religious books were reproduced locally, often by method of lithography.

The height of Arabic-Afrikaans publishing was short-lived, lasting until 1918. However, Sheikh Ismail Hanif Edwards, an Al Azhar-trained Cape Town scholar, revived the tradition again briefly in the 1930s. According to his biography, the


\(^{55}\) Rochlin, “Early Arabic Printing,” 49.
Sheikh produced thirty works on Islam. Of these, most were Arabic-Afrikaans translations of other works, but the Sheikh also produced original works of his own.\textsuperscript{56} While the majority of texts produced in the ‘golden era’ of Arabic-Afrikaans publication may have been for community reading purposes, Sheikh Edwards’ publications were more for the benefit of a smaller discursive community – that of his madrasah students only. Although the last Arabic-Afrikaans publication was not produced by the Sheikh, it was certainly produced during his time, in fact a year before his death in 1958.\textsuperscript{57} Sheikh Edwards was one of the last proponents of Arabic-Afrikaans literature and was most certainly the last scholar to be teaching literacy in the script. As Mr Peters, a former student of Sheikh Edwards, expressed during an interview, ‘all this stuff [referring to his Arabic-Afrikaans kietaabs] died with him’.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, by the 1950s, the Arabic-Afrikaans writing tradition was beginning to die out.\textsuperscript{59} Just as Arabic-Afrikaans replaced jawi, and printed Arabic-Afrikaans took over from the handwritten books, the Arabic script, in both printed and written forms, was replaced by the Latin script. This was initially Afrikaans in the Latin alphabet, and eventually English in the Latin alphabet.

Knowledge of the Latin script had already begun to spread in the Muslim community at the Cape from the latter part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which was, coincidentally, during the height of Arabic-Afrikaans literature production.\textsuperscript{60} In fact, the growth of literacy in the Latin script was undoubtedly one of the main

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{56} Mogamat Hoosain Ebrahim, Shaykh Ismail Hanif Edwards: His Life and Works (Paarl: Paarl Print, 2004), 132-133.
\item\textsuperscript{57} This publication was Bayani salati thuri ba’adal Jum’ati (‘Explanation of the mid-day prayer after the Friday congregational prayer’) by Sheikh Achmad Behardien, cited in Davids, The Early Afrikaans Publications, 79.
\item\textsuperscript{58} Achmat Peters, interview, 24 January, 2010.
\item\textsuperscript{59} Apparently the practice of writing in Arabic-Afrikaans did not die out altogether and some individuals still used the script in their daily lives, even into the 1970s. Mr Peters was a key example of this until his demise in 2010 and, as I have been told, there are still a handful of elders in the Muslim community who are able to read the script.
\item\textsuperscript{60} Gerard Stell, “From Kitaab-Hollandsch to Kitaab-Afrikaans: The evolution of a non-white literary variety at the Cape (1856-1940),” Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics 37 (2007): 90.
\end{itemize}
reasons this period of Arabic-Afrikaans production ended early in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. With an ever-decreasing population literate in the script, these kinds of texts lost a public to address.

The growth in Latin script literacy also mirrors the increasing integration and modernisation of the Muslim community in broader Cape Town society. The initial prevalence of Latin script illiteracy in the Muslim community was due largely to the inaccessibility of formal education to Muslims.\textsuperscript{61} In the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, while the state attempted to modernise education for white children, due to broader social and economic changes, they made no provisions for children of ‘coloured’ races.\textsuperscript{62} The only schools available to the majority of ‘coloured’ children, who were almost all from low socioeconomic backgrounds, were those run by missionaries. However, being part of the church, Christianity heavily informed the curriculum at such schools.\textsuperscript{63} Consequently, Muslim parents were wary of sending their children to mission schools, ‘as they rightly saw a correlation between modern education and Christianity’.\textsuperscript{64}

As a result of their parent’s resistance to the mission school system, many Muslim children had to settle for traditional madrasah education. However, with its educational basis focused on religious responsibilities and social behaviour, this schooling system did not meet the requirements for suitability in the labour force, including Latin script literacy and numeracy. Madrasah-educated children were consequently seen as less ‘modern’ than those who received mission education.\textsuperscript{65} Eventually, as it became apparent that the traditional madrasah educational system

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Stell, “From Kitaab-Hollandsch to Kitaab-Afrikaans,” 95.
\item Mogamed Ajam, “The Group Areas Act and the Modernization of Schooling in South Africa,’ \textit{The Journal of Negro Education} 56 (3) (Summer,1987): 318. This situation arose as a result of the passing of the 1905 Cape School Board Act.
\item Ajam, “The Raison D’etre,” 120.
\item Tayob, \textit{Islamic Resurgence}, 79.
\item Ajam, “The Raison D’etre’, 429
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
was not suitable to the ‘modern’ world, many Muslim children were obliged to attend mission schools, in order to acquire the necessary skills.\(^\text{66}\)

However, this situation did not suffice. It was clear that, in order to progress beyond tradition-bound education, and to avoid the evangelising missionary education, Muslims would have to establish their own ‘denominational’ schools. The first such school, named the ‘Rahmaniyyeh Institute’ was established by City Councillor Dr Abdullah Abdurahman,\(^\text{67}\) in 1913. The intention of the Rahmaniyyeh Institute, and other Muslim schools Dr Abdurahman envisioned to follow it, was to offer secular education with an Islamic orientation, thereby providing a curriculum based on modern pedagogy and Islamic values. It is unclear what the entire teaching repertoire was, however both English and Arabic were a part of the curriculum.\(^\text{68}\)

The introduction of Muslim students into both mission schools and Muslim ‘denominational schools’, where they would be taught to read and write in the Latin script, was the catalyst for the growth of Latin-script literacy in the Muslim community.\(^\text{69}\) In response to this shift in literacy, Islamic publications in Afrikaans and also English in Latin script were developed. There is thus a direct correlation between the absorption of Cape Muslims into mainstream literacy practices and the death of \textit{ajami} text production at the Cape. The very first Afrikaans-Latin-script Islamic publication was Imam Abdurakib ibn Abdul Kahaar’s \textit{Kitâb Tarjamah al-riyaad al-Badiati},\(^\text{70}\) (‘Book of the Translation of the Marvellous Garden’) published

\(^{66}\) Tayob, \textit{Islamic Resurgence}, 79.

\(^{67}\) Dr Abdurahman (1872 – 1940) is an important figure in South African political history. He was the first black person to be elected to the Cape Town City Council (1904) and President of the African Political Organisation (est.1902) for 35 years. He was also the father of Zairunisa ‘Cissie’ Gool, who also became a key political leader in Cape Town. See: J.H. Raynard, \textit{Dr A. Abdurahman: A biographical memoir}, ed. Mohamed Adhikari (Cape Town: Friends of the National Library of South Africa in association with the District Six Museum, 2002).

\(^{68}\) Ajam, “The Raison D’etre,” 431.

\(^{69}\) Cassiem D’arcy, interview, 4 February, 2010.

\(^{70}\) Stell, “From Kitaab-Hollandsch to Kitaab-Afrikaans,” 95 (NB. Stell’s transliteration of the title is ‘\textit{Kitâb Tarajomatariyaadil Badiati}’, which I have been told is inaccurate). This book is a translation of the work \textit{ar-Riyadh al Badi’ah fi Usbul ad-Din wa Ba’ith Furu’ as-Shari’ah} (‘The Marvellous Garden in
in 1898. This publication marked the beginning of a new era in Islamic literature production at the Cape, and a tradition of literature in the Latin script which still continues today.

It is not just religious literature that was affected by this shift in literacy. Other forms of written culture were also influenced by the growth in Latin script literacy in the community. Because people were no longer learning Arabic-Afrikaans in the madrasah, they were unable to use the script for other purposes, including in their daily lives. Thus the production of handwritten ‘everyday’ texts in Arabic-Afrikaans, such as letters and personal records, and presumably talismanic texts also ceased.

Not only did the production of *ajami* texts cease, but this literature was replaced by newer, Latin script texts serving similar functions. With regards to religious literature, perhaps the main genre affected, these newer texts took over as key religious guides and readers in the madrasahs and homes of Muslims. By this stage, the Muslim community had changed over time, gradually moving away from conditions of extreme subalternity to an improved social standing in Cape society, through formal education, professions and social structures. This had a direct effect on extant *ajami* texts, which lost their currency and purpose for the developing Muslim community. There was not necessarily an immediate replacement of newer books over older ones, but as the last generation literate in *ajami* (either jawi or Arabic-Afrikaans) began to pass on, the existing *ajami* materials were becoming rarely, if at all, used. Without a public to engage with them, the manuscripts moved from the phase of being ‘objects used’ to being simply ‘possessed’. With this shift in their status came also a shift in their value.

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the Principles of Religion and some of the Branches of the Shariah’) by Sheikh Muhammad Hasbullah, a 19th century Meccan scholar.

71 According to the experiences of my informants, manuscripts were still being read during the 20th century. For instance see the story of ‘Mrs H’, which follows.
Mrs H\textsuperscript{72} generally sits by quietly, physically distanced from the main discussion, and listens to her husband talk about his experiences, his knowledge, his cultural ‘proof’. Sometimes she passes comment, filling in gaps where her husband’s memory fails, but mostly she observes and listens. I had never thought to address her directly, not because I didn’t think she would have anything to say, but rather because she always seemed reluctant to say very much; less out of wariness than shyness. I recall that once, her husband had mentioned that her family were of the descendents of the revered Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, and she politely smiled but said little.

Yet, this evening was somewhat different. Perhaps she had gotten used to the interaction, perhaps she just felt like talking. Or maybe she was just interested in our talk of manuscripts and felt inspired to contribute to the discussion. I was preparing to leave—finishing my tea, packing my things away, when she began to tell the story of her family’s kietaabs.

Mrs H grew up knowing about the manuscripts in her family. She remembers those older members of her family, including her father, reading the handwritten kietaabs, reciting the Arabic verses. But there were not only Arabic words in the texts. Rather, there was another strange script that looked like Arabic, but was in a language no one could understand anymore. She now acknowledges that it must have been jawi script. She recalls that those who read the text could not understand that script and so the lines with the foreign script would not be recited. Despite the skipping of lines, the kietaabs were still used.

\textsuperscript{72} As requested by my informant, a pseudonym has been used instead of her real name.
When her father passed away, his belongings were distributed amongst the children. Among the possessions to be given away were several kietaabs, of different sizes. She remembers a particular oval-shaped manuscript, commenting with a hint of excitement that it was quite rare. In the end, she chose not to take that manuscript, or any of them for that matter. Instead, she let her siblings and other families divide the kietaabs up amongst themselves. They would be the ones to guard the family’s literature. She could not read the kietaabs, and therefore she did not personally feel the need to have one in her possession. I wondered if she still feels that way.

As Mrs H’s story indicates above, handwritten religious readers and chapters of the Qur’an were important reading materials in the home. Even when the ajami script was no longer understood, the Arabic text could be read and understood by some. In this way, they continued to be used as texts to be read and studied. Her story demonstrates a personal story of the very last stages of the ‘ajami era’, where handwritten manuscripts were still being read as practical objects. As a part of the next generation, she could not read the books and, as she later explained, she did not lay claim to them after her father passed on. Even if she did choose to take them as part of her inheritance, it is highly unlikely that they would have been used.

Preserve or perish: The fate of extant kietaabs

When I first thought about interviewing ‘Bapak’ Ismail Petersen, I did not imagine he would have any manuscripts. His life story on its own interested me enough. Yet, on our

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Amongst his ‘Malay-literate’ friends, Ismail Petersen is usually referred to as ‘Bapak’. This term literally means ‘Father’ in Indonesian and Malaysian. However, it is also used as a term of respect for adult males.
first meeting, he suddenly left the room and returned with an ornamental box, filled with 7 or so jawi kietaabs. As we sifted through the documents he told me about the large collection, ‘a chest full’, that his family once had. Every Thursday night, assisting his father, he would open the chest, burn incense around the books and then recite a du’ah. They would never read the kietaabs, because they couldn’t, but every Thursday night this ritual would take place. To this day, he does not know why this was done- he was just helping his father, who offered no explanation to him. Before I could wonder why only a small box from the ‘chest full’ remained, Bapak Ismail’s eyes began to tear up. With sadness drowning his words, he explained how, after his father died and he had gone to work out of town, his brother had burnt many of the kietaabs. These few books are all he has left of his family collection.

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Both Mrs H and Bapak Ismail have memories of the kietaabs as objects of religious importance during their childhood. And yet, they both relate the experience of ‘knowing of but not using’ (or ‘reading’) the manuscripts. Many older people of the community have memories of the kietaabs from their childhoods; seeing them, hearing about them, watching others use them. However, few people alive today are able to read and understand them. While many people can read Arabic script for the purpose of reading the Qur’an, they are not familiar with jawi script and have rarely, if ever, had to use Arabic-Afrikaans script. These situations of ‘possessing but not using’ represent a threshold moment in the life of the kietaabs, and a crucial point at which the survival of the manuscripts is most at stake. In these situations, two main actions were (and are still) taken, both represented in the above stories. That is to say, the texts were either kept and preserved, both intentionally and unintentionally, or, as happened in most cases, they would be burnt or buried.74

74 It is relatively common, particularly in Cape Town, for texts with Arabic script to be burnt, instead of thrown away. This is to prevent the misuse or violation of sacred text. This is explained further on in the chapter.
It is a common tradition at the Cape even today to dispose unused or damaged religious materials. As explained to me by a local Sheikh, this practise is particularly encouraged by the elderly members of the community, who stress that religious material be discarded ‘properly’, in order to prevent maltreatment of the sacred content. There are various reasons why manuscripts would have been destroyed, often dependant on the type of manuscript in question.

Religious texts, such as *koples boeke* and handwritten ‘readers’, were often destroyed due to a lack of currency seen in the documents. Underlying this idea of the *kietaabs* being old-fashioned was perhaps also a stigma attached to them, as objects linked to a pre-modern, subaltern past of slavery, subordination and a lesser form of education. As the handwritten *kietaabs* were replaced with newer, more modern books, as part of the more formal and advanced educational systems, they were no longer used. Consequently, some people would have seen no other option but to discard them.

An additional factor contributing to the disposal of religious *kietaabs* was forced removal. During Apartheid many Muslim families in Cape Town were forcibly removed from their original homes in areas such as District Six, Claremont and Black River. In many cases families who were forcibly removed faced the added pressure of moving into much smaller dwellings. This made it even more crucial to get rid of unused or unimportant, and sometimes even extremely important, objects that they would no longer have the means to keep. As community heritage ‘activist’ Cassiem D’arcy describes:

‘And once people move, say for instance you are in this house. You are going to be forced to move out. The first thing, you will find that you

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75 E Moos, telephone interview, 7 June, 2010.
can’t afford a new house because you have no money. So you will go into a smaller house, maybe even a council subsidised house... You will also get rid of all your papers – whatever documents you had, diaries, whatever it is – where can you store these things? So in this community, they would regard this as waste paper, ‘cause they did not know the heritage value of those things.’

Given the small number of extant manuscripts available today, it has been assumed that quite a large number of them were destroyed or lost, usually due to circumstances such as those above. This kind of disposal of Islamic manuscripts, due to movement or migration is not restricted to the South African context. In fact, *jawi* manuscripts in Sri Lanka are said to have met a similar fate which, as with the *kietaabs* of Cape Town, is reflected in the small number of extant *jawi* manuscripts in the Sri Lankan Malay community.

While burning or burying books may seem to indicate maltreatment of the documents, or disrespect thereof, it must be stressed that this is not the case. The way in which *kietaabs* were disposed of is not akin to stereotypical cases of book-burning, performed out of malice or contempt for the literature. Rather, according to mainstream Islamic tradition, religious literature should be disposed of in this manner out of care for the sacred contents of the literature, which may include passages from the Qur’an, references to Allah and so on. Instead of simply throwing books into the rubbish, where they could be picked up by anyone and

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76 Cassiem D’arcy, interview, 4 February, 2010. Whether or not people regarded their documents as ‘waste paper’ is debatable. I certainly am not convinced of this myself.

77 Cassiem D’arcy, “Timbuktu is right here,” *Muslim Views*, June 2008, 41.


79 It is generally preferred that old copies of the Qur’an are buried (at land or sea), instead of being burned, however burning seems permissible for other non-Qur’anic literature. For more on this issue, see: Jonas Svensson, “Relating, Revering and Removing: Muslim views on the use, power and disposal of divine words,” in *The Death of Sacred Texts: Ritual disposal and renovation of texts in world religions*, ed. Kristina Myrvold (Surrey, UK & Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), 31-54.
misused, it is preferable to ensure that the contents are disposed of permanently. Therefore, the way manuscripts at the Cape were disposed of indicates nuances in the intentions behind the destruction. Although they were not seen as relevant or culturally significant enough to preserve, and may have had a stigma of an unfavourable past attached to them, they were also revered on a spiritual level because of their religious content. The way in which they were discarded was thus not simply an act of careless destruction, but a considered duty of care.

The intentions behind discarding talismanic materials are slightly different. As mentioned above, azeemats would be made by specific people, referred to locally as the *slim man* (‘Smart man’), in the case of ‘white magic’ or the *doekoem*, in the case of ‘black magic’. These ‘psychic guides’ would generally have been chosen by an elder, to learn the art of azeemat-making and other practices. The practices they learned and the knowledge they acquired were considered not suitable for, nor understood by, everyone; only those who had the correct training and intentions should have access to this information. Given the highly classified nature of the information, all literature regarding this art would have to be well-guarded. The main reason for this was to prevent the information from being accessed by ‘the wrong people’, in which case the knowledge in these books would be used for harmful purposes. It thus became common that upon nearing death, or becoming seriously ill, these ‘spiritual guides’, would order their talismanic books burned.\(^{80}\)

Why some of these manuscripts were not destroyed, but rather passed on as unused literature through generations of families is unclear.

An informant of mine related a story of a friend, whose own father was involved in these spiritual practices.\(^{81}\) Prior to his death, the man had taught his son about the characteristics of such literature, so that he may be able to recognise these books in his father’s collection, and thus know to destroy them. In addition, the man

\(^{80}\) This was related to me by both E Moos and H Jamie.

\(^{81}\) E Moos, telephone interview, 7 June, 2010.
shared these insights with his son so that he may be able to recognise this kind of literature elsewhere, for example in other people’s collections, and therefore be able to ‘deal with them properly’ – in other words, discard them.\textsuperscript{82}

Another plausible reason why manuscripts were destroyed is the growth of reformist views, based on Salafi understandings of Islam, in the Muslim community of Cape Town. The growth of such understandings increased particularly in the 1970s. During this time, due to the oil boom in the Middle East, an increasing number of students from the Muslim community were sent on scholarships to places such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. These scholarships were offered with the aim of propagating Salafi/ Wahhabi versions of Islam, supported especially by the Saudi regime.\textsuperscript{83} As explained by Bangstad, ‘Wahhabi/Salafi versions of Islam were sharply critical of some of the existing Sufi practices of South African and Capetonian Muslims’.\textsuperscript{84} Such practices, including visiting the \textit{kramats}, or shines of holy Muslims, were viewed as \textit{bid’\textasciiacute{a}}, or religious innovation. As one informant mentioned to me, at one point, even \textit{gadats}, the local gatherings for the recital of certain Sufi litanies, were declared \textit{bid’\textasciiacute{a}}.\textsuperscript{85}

There is no clear evidence of the destruction of talismanic manuscripts, as objects of \textit{bid’\textasciiacute{a}}, in the Cape Town context. However, a historical precedent for the destruction of literature and objects, including tombs, relating to mysticism exists in Wahhabism. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab himself

\textsuperscript{82} Possibly related to this issue, in my own experience of cataloguing the private library of Imaam Bassier of the Bo-Kaap, it came to my attention that many of the books in the library had been burned by the Imaam himself, after he had had a stroke. Following his recovery, he had decided to go through his collection and discard of certain literature. This story was related by his daughter, several years after the Imaam’s death. She did not know what exactly her father had burnt. However, of the remaining literature I was able to catalogue, I did not come across anything overtly related to talismans or mysticism.

\textsuperscript{83} Sindre Bangstad, \textit{Global Flows, Local Appropriations} (Amsterdam: ISIM/ Amsterdam, University Press, 2007), 204.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{85} H Jamie, interview, 24 June, 2010.
‘launched a campaign of purification and renewal’,\textsuperscript{86} involving the destruction of all things seen as innovation in relation to ‘pure’ Islam. This included the burning of books on mysticism. Thus, while it is uncertain whether the burning of talismanic manuscripts was undertaken by religious purists, it remains a possibility.\textsuperscript{87}

Although many manuscripts were disposed of, others escaped this fate. It is uncertain whether all undisposed kietaabs were preserved consciously, or with grand intentions. They may simply have been put away somewhere in the family home and left untouched for many years, being preserved more by accident than intention. However, in some families the manuscripts were still revered and held a place of prominence in the home. The act of keeping and preserving the manuscripts in these cases was a conscious one, in which some kind of value was seen in the kietaabs.

This value may have been for a number of reasons. For some people, it would have been the religious status of the documents, while for others it may have been scholarly links that inspired them to keep their manuscripts, particularly where kietaabs were passed down from a scholar to their student. Or, as is the case with many private manuscript collections, family links may have been the main motivation. In many examples that I have encountered in my fieldwork, kietaabs are understood to be part of the family heritage; they are pieces linking individuals and families back to their forefathers. Moreover, they are objects linking families – and students – to a certain kind of history and lineage; usually one of piousness, religious education and, in some cases, ethnic purity.


\textsuperscript{87} Yet, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab also spoke out \textit{against} the burning of religious books, particularly those in line with the Wahhabi doctrine, as the destruction of knowledge. See: Bosmajian, \textit{Burning Books}, 133.
These connections may be explicitly manifested through documentation, for instance via a family tree inscribed on the inside cover of a *kietaab*, as is common in the collection of a family of imams that I came across. In this case, one particular manuscript, containing carefully handwritten, decorated liturgies, contained not only the name of the author and two generations before him, but also his place of origin. In other cases, family connections may be less tangibly attached to the *kietaabs*, through the act of handing down *kietaabs* through the generations of the family or scholarly network, as in Mrs H’s story and also in the experience of Hassiem Salie, whose manuscripts had been passed down in the Salie family since the time of his first ancestor to arrive at the Cape.88

As illustrated in Mrs H’s story, upon the death of the owners of the manuscripts, the texts would generally be passed on to family members who were interested in protecting the legacy. Manuscripts were not necessarily passed on to immediate relatives, but rather to those who showed enough interest. In some cases, if none of the immediate relatives were interested enough, even distant relatives would acquire manuscripts. Although the common path of manuscript inheritance traversed along bloodlines, there were also cases where individuals linked through friendship or student-teacher relationships were given *kietaabs* following the passing of the owner. 89 In this way, the *kietaabs* live on through inheritance, being moved into different networks and collections.

This process of guarding and passing on the *kietaabs* through to following generations, as objects of family or other legacies, involved the elevation of the *kietaabs* to a different, more sacred status than those they previously held. As observed by Shell, through the passing on of the *kietaabs* in the Muslim

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88 This first ancestor was ‘Ahmad bin Salie’, sent from Batavia.
89 In fact, in Cape Town it is quite common to find the private literary collections of deceased religious scholars distributed amongst their colleagues and students, or absorbed into a larger literary collection or repository of a mosque or a religious organization. An example of this is the Johardien Family collection, which contains *kietaabs* passed down from an imam to his student.
community, they ‘became sanctified by tradition’.\textsuperscript{90} They started off as books used in the madrasah or the home for practical purposes of knowledge creation and sharing, but due to the demise of the \textit{ajami} writing tradition they became unused, outdated literature. Then, some time following this change the \textit{kietaabs} were then reappraised as objects that should be passed on, preserved and kept alive. They had gained new meaning and new significance, as ‘heirlooms’.

\textit{Manuscript as heirloom}

With the elevation to the status of ‘heirloom’, the manuscripts became valued not so much for their content, as they were in the past, but rather for their form and history. As objects passed down from one generation to the next, the \textit{kietaabs} became perceived as markers and bearers of memory.\textsuperscript{91} They were also seen as objects linking individuals to an identity and a history. Stemming from this status as markers of memory and history is an added, perceived sacredness surrounding their presence. This intangible ‘thing’ contributing to the manuscripts’ enhanced significance can be explained by the concept of ‘aura’.\textsuperscript{92}

The ‘aura’ exists in relation to a thing – an object, a place or even a person – and has been described as akin to a halo, or light surrounding it. It is not an inherent property of the subject in question, but emerges in a ‘perceptual transaction between the properties of the thing/person and someone viewing it or taking it in’.\textsuperscript{93} That is, it arises in the way we as viewers, imagine the object and how we

\textsuperscript{90} Shell, \textit{Madressahs and Moravians}, 105.
\textsuperscript{92} Walter Benjamin has been one of the main contributors to writings on the ‘aura’. His text “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” is seen as one of the classic texts on the subject. See: Walter Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,” in \textit{Walter Benjamin Illuminations}, trans. Henry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schoken Books, 2007), 217-252. My explanation is based on Daniel Herwitz’s own interpretation and extension of this work in: Daniel A. Herwitz, \textit{The Star as Icon} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{93} Herwitz, \textit{The Star as Icon}, 59.
respond to it. Experiencing an object’s aura is thus more about what the viewer brings to the interaction, rather than an ever-present mystical power emanating from the object.

In order to experience the ‘aura’ of something, one needs to be in its direct presence. One must also know its history, as knowledge of its narrative is a significant part of what creates our experience of the ‘aura’. Most holy sites, objects and people are revered because of the greater myths and stories around them. For instance, if Muslims did not know the narratives surrounding Sheikh Yusuf’s *kramat* in Faure, or the myths surrounding him as a figure, the site may just be seen as any other gravesite, rather than the place of pilgrimage, reflection and history that it has become for many South African Muslims.

The specific kind of *aura* we invest heirlooms and other historical sites or objects with, is that of ‘pastness’. While an object may have been seen to hold a specific kind of power when it was still in use, for example in religious rituals, once the particular tradition it was embedded in dies out, people no longer invest it with this power. The object itself, now a ruin of a culture long gone, is then perceived to have a different kind of aura; one that ‘carr[ies] the unspoken intimation of the past’. This aura has been described as ‘the presence of pastness’.

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*I remember the first time I came into physical contact with a manuscript. It was already a few months into my research and, by then, I had read and heard a lot about the manuscripts. It happened at Ebrahiem Manuel’s house. For weeks, he had been telling me the story of his ancestors and their ‘ancient kietaab’. The story was about a prince,*

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*Herwitz, *The Star as Icon*, 59-60.*

*This is the shrine of Sheikh Yusuf Taj Al-Khalwaty, exiled Sufi Saint from Makassar, Indonesia.*

*Herwitz, *The Star as Icon*, 60.*

*Ibid., 63.*
captured in Eastern Indonesia and sent to the Cape, as a punishment for his anti-colonial efforts. As the story went, he ended up in Simons Town and had written a manuscript while still held captive there. Mr Manuel had gone into great detail about the treatment his ancestor had endured and his attempts to escape. The story was extremely intriguing and I was curious to see this mysterious manuscript. Mr Manuel did not present the original kietaab to me, but offered a page that must have come from it. It was an extremely fragile page, heavily yellowed with age. On it, the outline of a human hand, with various prayers in Arabic inside it, was drawn in red and brown ink. I recall looking down at the page with amazement. As soon as it was handed to me, it was as though I was almost in the presence of this historical figure and that, through this manuscript, the entire atmosphere of the room had shifted. I even acted differently, speaking in softer tones, making extremely delicate, careful movements as I surveyed this single page. This document not only had a presence about it, but it somehow affected my own presence.

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Whether or not I would have had a similar experience with this old document without Mr Manuel’s influence is questionable. He clearly played a crucial role in ‘setting up’ the aura experience for me. Because of the stories I had been told about the document’s history I felt somehow in the presence of something historically significant, linked to this manuscript. The knowledge of the historical context enabled me to envisage the ‘presence’ of the manuscript’s ‘pastness’ and thus to imagine its ‘aura’. This aura experience was further strengthened by my knowledge of the manuscript’s mystical and religious underpinnings, adding a mystical dimension to the ‘presence’ I perceived as surrounding the manuscript.
The ‘presence of pastness’ in the kietaabs, however vague this ‘pastness’ is, is undoubtedly crucial to their significance as heirlooms. The literary tradition that the kietaabs were produced in has faded out at the Cape, and the people who wrote these manuscripts have long since passed away. The kietaabs are remnants not only of this writing culture, but also the practices in which the manuscripts were used. They are also, for many families, the only physical remains they have of their forefathers. These books, with their old, yellowing pages and their unknown script, present those who safeguard them, and others who come into contact with them, with a unique glimpse of the past. This past is, for many Muslims, as descendents of slaves and exiles, largely unwritten. This no doubt adds to the value of the kietaabs.

While the manuscripts themselves do not explicitly deal with historical events, they in themselves are historical objects, with oral histories surrounding them. This may be a specific story about the manuscript and its writer, as in the case of Mr Manuel, or, as is more common, a general narrative about a family’s kietaab collection, or

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98 In my experience, most kietaabs do not have specific or elaborate narratives surrounding them.
even the *kietaab*-writing tradition in general. These oral histories undoubtedly play a part in why certain manuscripts came to be preserved and passed on as heirlooms – they invoke the aura of the manuscript. In turn, the aura works to assuage the stigma of *kietaabs* as reminders of an unfortunate past of subordination, and of ignorance of local Islamic practices, shifting their function from that of negative reminder to positive token of the past. Consequently, it is likely that those *kietaabs* with known narratives were more actively preserved. For those who knew the narratives of the object, its aura would have been clear. Most probably, it was a lack of narrative that led to the destruction of many other *kietaabs*.

As heirlooms, with auras, the manuscripts entered a different social sphere. Their heightened value, elevating them to the level of the ‘precious’ in the eyes of their owners, meant that they assumed a much more protected life, physically and otherwise. This life is characterised by protocols and boundaries regarding their storage, handling and their public visibility. In their previous roles, they would not necessarily have had a very ‘public’ life, but there were instances wherein they were part of a bigger, less private sphere. They were used in religious schools or circulated amongst community members and not restricted to the family home or an alternative space with limited access.

As described in the previous chapter, the manuscripts take a prime place in the family home. They are sequestered in a secure place in the home, with restricted access, such as a special section of a locked cupboard in someone’s bedroom, or a wooden chest at the back of the house, where guests rarely go. They seldom leave these locations and require a significant enough reason to be taken from their resting places. In their lives as practical objects, they would have been interacted with on a very physical level: they were held, open and closed, had their pages turned and were even written on. However, as authentic objects of family history,
they are, in many cases, not to be actively handled. Even within the family they are rarely touched and certainly not read, as they would have been in the past.

Yet, in some cases, once owners feel they trust someone enough, they do offer to show them their collection. In some cases, the *kietaabs* may even be carefully handled, often for not too long a period of time. However, they rarely let viewer see where the *kietaabs* are stored. In my own experience, having been a guest in the homes of various *kietaab* owners, I became used to a certain ‘*kietaab* fetching’ ritual. As it would go, the owner would discuss their manuscripts, and then invite me to see them. After I happily accepted the offer, the owner would disappear to some other part of the house. I would then sit waiting patiently in the lounge room or the kitchen and, after several minutes, the owner would appear again, carefully holding their *kietaabs*, ready to place them in front of me.

With restricted physical access come restrictions with regards to the manuscripts’ presence in public discourse. In a number of cases, owners of *kietaabs* are reluctant to even speak about their possessions openly, or to have people know that they own a manuscript collection. Perhaps the logic behind this is that, the less people who know about the manuscripts, the safer they are and the more likely they are to stay in the in the possession of the family who own them. Of course, the manuscript owners I encountered during my fieldwork were those who were not particularly worried about their collections reaching a broader public, having had them analysed by intellectuals and published in catalogues.

However, from these people, I heard several stories of individuals with large manuscript collections who were unwilling to disclose them to outsiders. In fact, some of the informants themselves had not seen the collections, but were relating these stories based on hearsay. There was talk of one man in Worcester, who had a
huge trunk full of *kietaabs* and another man in Athlone, who had ‘hundreds’ of them but would not show them to anybody because of their mystical content.

I also learned, late in my research, that someone who was helping me to contact manuscript owners in fact had a collection of his own, but not once did he mention it. I came across his collection in a printed catalogue of manuscripts,\(^99\) in which the man’s collection had been listed a decade prior to my interactions with him. Why he did not disclose the information is unknown. However, this situation highlights how people may be selective about who they give access to their manuscripts to. It also indicates that while owners may maintain their own boundaries of personal privacy closely, they are more open to traversing those of others.

Thus, the life of the manuscript as heirloom is characterised by protocols and protectiveness. As heirlooms, they are at once valuable remnants of roots, ancestry and identity and also carriers of the stigmas of slavery, subordination and a past of Islamic ignorance. On one hand, they are guarded because their owners are fearful of having their material links to a greater family history and memory enter into a public realm, or be taken from them. On the other hand, particularly in the case of talismanic *kietaabs*, they are sequestered because their contents are not fully understood. The appraisal of the *kietaabs* as ‘heirlooms’ to be guarded and passed on, still exists today. In fact many extant manuscripts remain sequestered in secure places in the family home, fulfilling the role of ‘heirloom’.

Yet, the *kietaabs* have also begun to address new, broader publics, due to the developing social significance and awareness of them. While manuscripts are still physically in private domains, maintaining the status of ‘heirloom’, at times they have physically entered into public spaces and assumed other roles, even if only

temporarily. The main force behind the increased visibility of the *kietaabs* has been the emergence of secondary texts about the manuscripts, driven by research. This next phase in the life of the manuscripts, as ‘research objects’, will be discussed in the next chapter.
In the previous chapter I outlined the manuscripts’ transition from objects used in everyday practices, such as Muslim schooling and alternative healing, to heirlooms cloistered in cupboards and wooden trunks in the family home. They began their life as texts circulated amongst an *ajami*-literate, Muslim, subaltern public at the Cape. Then, as the social, educational and religious conditions of the Muslims changed and they lost the original public they addressed, their significance shifted. They became relegated to the private space of the family home and, if not forgotten or destroyed, were preserved and safe-guarded to become objects of personal and family history.

In this new role, the *kietaabs* were accessed mainly by family members, and sometimes friends or colleagues considered as part of the inner circle. While being quietly preserved in the home, they were forgotten by, or perhaps never even known to, the world outside the family and, more generally, the Muslim community. Yet, their confinement to such a restricted discursive space would later start to ease, and their diminished social role be revived, by influences coming from the academic world. Driven by concerns, queries and investigations by intellectuals, the manuscripts became research objects.

Starting from the 1950s, around the time of the end in production of printed *kietaabs*, academic research into the ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’ tradition began. This research, which was later followed by studies on the *jawi* tradition and Islamic manuscripts, marked the beginning of a modest body of literature based on the *ajami* tradition of the Cape that is still being added to today. As the subject of these studies, the manuscripts entered another stage in their lives, gaining newfound significance, addressing additional publics and assuming a new social function.

In his biography of the Bakunin Family Archive, Randolph highlights the point at which the archive leaves the family home and becomes the subject of research as a significant
moment in its biography. So too, the stage of ‘research object’ is a crucial phase in the
life of the ajami manuscripts at the Cape. It is the point at which the manuscripts are
opened up to multiple audiences, when other texts about them begin to emerge, and
when they become formally recognised – consecrated, even – by outside agents with
authority.

Up until this point, the manuscripts addressed the localised, very particular counterpublic of
the Muslim community of Cape Town. However, as subjects of research, their reach
gradually extended, encompassing multiple discursive communities, located both within
South Africa and beyond. This increased engagement with the kietaabs is due mostly to
researchers as agents who, through producing texts about the kietaabs, entered them into
new spaces of engagement. That is to say, together, these secondary texts about the
manuscripts produced a ‘concatenation’ of texts, around which new publics interested in
the kietaabs formed.

As objects of research and scholarly analysis, the kietaabs assumed new roles, in fields
ranging from Semitics and Malay philology to reformist linguistics. Within this scope,
they became part of larger academic movements and concerns, including linguistic
activism, diasporic studies and Orientalist agendas – simultaneously being affected by and
affecting these greater contextual issues.

This chapter examines the stage of ‘research object’ in the life of the kietaabs, focusing on
the most significant studies carried out on the topic so far. Within the broader framework
of this life-stage, I have outlined sub-phases, based on the specific ideological projects
underlying the research initiatives. In this examination, I pay particular attention to the
representation of the kietaabs in each study, their own influence on the research carried

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1 John Randolph, “On the Biography of the Bakunin Family Archive” in Archive Stories: Facts, fictions and the
2 I use this term based on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘consecration’, whereby art forms are given legitimacy
and set apart from other forms by ‘agents of legitimation’, such as institutions like the academy and museums,
and also other non-institutionalised bodies, for instance literary circles. See: Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of
Cultural Production: Essays on art and literature, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993). In the case of
the kietaabs, academics and researchers, as ‘agents of legitimacy’, consecrate the manuscripts as legitimate
sources of scholarly enquiry.
out, the developing ‘publicness’ of the manuscripts, and the impact of the research on the manuscripts and their owners. While the two previous chapters have dealt predominantly with the manuscripts themselves, this one focuses more on the secondary texts about the manuscripts. Thus, in addition to discussing general trends in the research, I also discuss several of the most influential books and articles produced so far.

The sub-stages of ajami manuscript research

There was not simply one research initiative, or one genre of research, concerned with the ajami manuscript tradition of Cape Town. Over time, there have been a variety of studies carried out, coming from a range of perspectives and disciplines. This diversity is visible not only in the scope of approaches taken in the research, but also in the range of languages that publications on the manuscripts appear in: Afrikaans, English, German, Dutch, Malaysian and Indonesian. For the most part, research into the manuscripts has been part of once-off or ‘on-the-side’ studies conducted by researchers, rarely forming the basis of a scholar’s core research. The ‘canon’ of the Cape ajami tradition secondary literature is thus somewhat scattered and fragmented.

Despite the disjointedness of the ‘canon’, it is still useful to examine the main studies on the subject as a single body of literature. In so doing, a clear narrative of development of the manuscripts as research objects emerges, with various themes and patterns surfacing. One of the main shifts, and in fact the change that frames the structure of this chapter is that of ideological underpinnings of the various studies, from classicist Orientalism to organic intellectual reforms and nationalist projects. In addition, as the literature develops, there is a gradual shift from a focus on the macro, beginning with studies on the ‘literary tradition as a whole’, to the micro, where individual collections and manuscripts gain attention. Linked to this, as more studies emerge, particularly from non-Orientalist perspectives, there is growing input and visibility of manuscript owners and other community members in the literature. Another key theme is the introduction of the manuscripts into additional publics and, closely linked to this, the articulation of the various ‘worlds’ to which the manuscripts belong, from that of an alternative Afrikaans literature to a South East Asian cultural legacy.
Orientalist Interests

The very first research on the *ajami* writing tradition came from the pens of European Orientalist scholars, and was based on their interest in the Afrikaans literature of the Muslim community at the Cape. While much of these studies dealt with printed Arabic-Afrikaans literature, this research is not entirely disconnected from the manuscript tradition. Firstly, although they were not the main focus of these particular studies, the manuscripts do fall into the broader category of ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’ literature that was being discussed, and are thus directly connected to the subject matter. Secondly, at times handwritten Arabic-Afrikaans was also featured in these studies, even if only briefly, for instance as part of inventories of Arabic-Afrikaans works.

One of the main reasons why manuscripts in particular were largely overlooked as independent objects of research was the classical Orientalist approach taken in these kinds of studies. In line with Orientalist Classicism’s preoccupation with the classical texts of a culture, the ‘higher’ literature of printed Arabic-Afrikaans publications was privileged over the everyday, handwritten student notebooks or personal letters extant in the community. The focus on these high texts also overshadowed any human presence in these studies. As is demonstrated later on, the ‘modern Orientals’ using, circulating, perhaps even guiding these scholars to these works are largely invisible in their writings.

Despite the shortcomings of such approaches, this body of research did make a significant contribution to the overall study of the *ajami* tradition of Cape Town. They did so by pioneering research into Arabic-Afrikaans as a written tradition and, in turn, establishing the idea of a kind of literature called ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’. Such studies brought together diverse texts, held in homes and mosques all over the Cape and other places in the country, into a conceptual category of literature, based on the script it was written in. While the work did not necessarily create a physical repository of the documents, it did provide an intellectual space in which they could be viewed uniformly.

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5 Ibid., 207
Furthermore, in creating an idea of a body ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’ literature, and performing their respective analyses of specific texts, this research presented the Arabic-Afrikaans publications, and by implication the manuscripts, as being research-worthy material. This pioneering research also provided a platform for later scholarly discussion and contribution to the Arabic-Afrikaans and jawi manuscripts, that emerged from the 1980s, as will be discussed further on.

The first scholarly work on the Arabic-Afrikaans writing tradition, came from Adriannus van Selms of the University of Pretoria, and was entitled ‘Arabies-Afrikaanse Studies I: 'n Tweetalige (Arabiese en Afrikaanse) kategismus’ (‘Arabic-Afrikaans Studies I: A bilingual (Arabic and Afrikaans) catechism’). According to general scholarly consensus, this was not only the first scholarly work produced on the topic, but in fact the first time that the term ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’ was used.

Van Selms (1906 – 1984) was a Dutch Semiticist, Christian Minister and World War II hero, who moved to South Africa in 1938 to lecture in Semitic Studies at the University of Pretoria. He published twenty-two books, including two on Arabic-Afrikaans, and was considered by many to be the ‘father of the study of Semitic languages in South Africa’. He is most well-known for his work on the Old Testament, but has been described as having had ‘an encyclopaedic knowledge of a wide variety of subjects’, including Semitic languages, archaeology, Judaism, Islam, New Testament study and dogmatics.

Despite being the ‘founding father’ of Arabic-Afrikaans academic research, most commemorative work and biographical documents on Van Selms seem to overlook this aspect of his research. Not once is Arabic-Afrikaans mentioned. In fact, even in a

7 That Van Selms coined this term himself has been popularly disputed. As expressed by Dr Cassiem D’arcy: “Now they call it ‘Arab-Afrikaans’ and they say Van Selms said this. I said ‘my God, nonsense’ we used to know it by ‘Arab-Afrikaans’, he didn’t coin this word at all.” (Cassiem D’arcy, interview, 4 February, 2010).
collection of essays ‘inspired’ by him, none of the work deals with this topic. It appears as though his study of Arabic-Afrikaans was not thought of as sufficiently significant to be continued by his students. Alternatively, given the political context of Van Selms’ work – during the height of Apartheid – and the centrality of Afrikaans to Afrikaner Nationalism, it is possible that this aspect of his research, offering a different view of Afrikaans, was simply ignored. Nevertheless, his work on the Arabic-Afrikaans tradition is held in high esteem in the domain of *ajami* writing cultures at the Cape.

It is uncertain where Van Selms’ interest in Arabic-Afrikaans comes from, although he mentions that he came across the literature ‘by a series of accidents too long to describe’. He also appears to have read briefly about this kind of literature in several scholarly publications, amongst these being the work of I.D. du Plessis, the Afrikaner folklorist and Orientalist scholar. As a Cape Malay enthusiast, Du Plessis no doubt had at least a basic acquaintance with the Arabic-Afrikaans tradition and definitely had access to specific texts. In fact, he even supplied Van Selms with some Arabic-Afrikaans materials. Whether Van Selms’ work was in anyway linked to either Du Plessis’ cultural or political ambitions is unclear as, for the most part, there are few traces of the ‘Cape Malay’ people in his studies of their literature.

Van Selms published a handful of key texts on the subject, including two books and a lengthy article. All of these texts are yet to be translated, remaining in their original Afrikaans. The most famous of these works was the aforementioned ‘Arabies-Afrikaanse Studies I’. Being ‘die eerste studie oor die Arabies-Afrikaanse literatuur’, (‘the first study about Arabic-Afrikaans literature’) as Van Selms himself proclaims, the work is very much concerned with setting out the groundwork vis à vis the historical and social background to the Arabic-Afrikaans writing tradition and the inner workings of the

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11 However, one of Van Selms’ students, Mia Brandel-Syrier, did pursue research into Arabic-Afrikaans. See: Mia Brandel-Syrier, ed., *The religious duties of Islam as taught and explained by Abu Bakr Eiffendi: A translation from the original Arabic and Afrikaans* (London: E.J. Brill, 1960).
14 This included some Arabic-Afrikaans printed greeting cards. See note 20.
script. However, it also includes the close textual work that Van Selms was known for. What follows is a brief overview of this work.

Although Van Selms establishes Arabic-Afrikaans printed literature as worthy of scholarly enquiry, from the outset he maintains a low valuation of it. In the introduction to his first book, in particular the section on the importance of Arabic-Afrikaans literature (‘die belang van die Arabies-Afrikaanse literatuur’), it is clear that he views these printed *kietaabs* as ‘low’ literature, referring to them in the diminutive form, as ‘little books’ and ‘little works’ (‘boekies’ and ‘werkies’). In fact, he states that for these ‘little works’, which can hardly be seen as a ‘contribution to the intellectual property of humankind’, the term ‘literature’ is far too broad.16 This is presumably in contrast to the kinds of literature he is accustomed to dealing with as a Semiticist. Nonetheless, he views the Arabic-Afrikaans works as ‘documents from the intellectual life’ of the ‘Slamaiers’,17 and thus helpful to understanding their specific version of Islam.

In setting the scene for Arabic-Afrikaans, Van Selms begins with an explanation of the notion of ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’, as opposed to ‘Islamic-Afrikaans’ (‘Islaams-Afrikaans’) or alternative terminologies. He then discusses the appearance of the writing tradition in other ‘scientific literature’. Once the socio-historical foundations are laid out, he provides a lengthy and detailed explanation of the script itself, including theories of its development, the different characters and punctuation marks, with examples. He then goes on to do a close textual study of his chosen ‘catechism’, ‘Die Ketaab van Tawhid’ (‘The book of Unity’), a bilingual Arabic/Afrikaans text by Sheikh Achmat Behardien.18 This involves both a transliteration of the text and a translation of the Arabic text into Afrikaans.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this book, and definitely one that is often mentioned in other literature on Arabic-Afrikaans,19 is Van Selms’ inclusion of an Arabic-

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16 Ibid., 8.
17 Ibid.
18 This appears to be the *Risalat fi Aqa’id al-Tawhid*, written by Imam Abu Bakr ibn al-Imaam ‘Abd Allah.
Afrikaans literature inventory. This list, although quite modest, is the first of its kind, marking the first known attempt at grouping Arabic-Afrikaans together as a coherent body of literature. The list contains ten Islamic literary texts and formed the basis of the handlists that were to follow it. The entries on each text include information such as the title, author, date and place of publication, as well as the method of printing and length of the document, in pages. The list consists of mainly Islamic religious writings, including texts like the famous Bayanuddin, and other publications about Islamic belief and practice. Aside from these texts, however, Van Selms includes two printed Islamic greeting cards, in Arabic-Afrikaans, intended for the two main Islamic feasts, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Whether Van Selms was unaware of other genres of Arabic-Afrikaans texts, such as talismanic texts, is unknown, but he did not include any such texts in his inventory. His list also lacks manuscripts, including only one manuscript example, which is also a religious work. Based on this inventory, it seems clear that what Van Selms considered Arabic-Afrikaans literature, was the narrow genre of printed religious materials.

Van Selms’ other two works, ‘Die Oudste Boek in Afrikaans: “Isjmoeni se Betroubare Woord”’ and ‘Abu Bakr se Uiteensetting van die Godsdiens’ are very much textual works, focusing on the content, method of inscription and translation of the texts. The former is based on the text ‘Al-Qawl al-Matin’ sometimes referred to as ‘Gobalmalien’, which is reported to have been the first Arabic-Afrikaans text printed at the Cape in 1856. However, no extant copy of the original has been found – only copies of its second printing, dated 1910 were extant. Then, apparently a copy of the original was found in the Lembaga Kudajaan Indonesia, Jakarta, and Van Selms managed to receive a microfilm copy of this, hence his claim ‘Die Oudste Boek in Afrikaans’. Many years later, Achmat Davids managed to see a complete copy of the original publication, and reported

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20 Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, while Eid al-Adha commemorates the willingness of the prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. Van Selms notes that he was given these greeting cards by I.D. du Plessis. See: Van Selms, Arabies-Afrikaanse Studies I, 15.
that it was also dated 1910, and in fact translated by a man who was not even born in 1856. This meant that Abu Bakr Effendi’s Bayanuddin was this still the oldest extant Arabic-Afrikaans publication.

Van Selms’ other work on Arabic-Afrikaans, ‘Abu Bakr se Uiteensetting van die Godsdien’, was in fact about the Bayanudin. While his previous two works were published in the 1950s, this work came out much later, in the 1970s. By this time, other researchers had started to study the Arabic-Afrikaans literature. Nevertheless, being the pioneer of Arabic-Afrikaans study, Vans Selms paved the way for studies that were to follow, which would go on to reshape the role of ajami manuscripts as research objects.

The next influential study into Arabic-Afrikaans came in the 1960s, and was undertaken by Hans Kähler of the University of Hamburg. While Van Selms was a Semiticist, Kähler was a Indonesianist, focusing primarily on Indonesian linguistics, and within this field, specialising in Austronesian linguistics. Thus, as with his predecessor, Arabic-Afrikaans was not a part of his core research repertoire, but rather a peripheral study. Kähler’s interest in Arabic-Afrikaans seems to have come from his interest in the ‘Malays’ of Cape Town.

While Kähler produced a small number of articles on Arabic-Afrikaans, his main contribution to the study of Cape ajami literature was the book Studien über die Kultur, die Sprache und die Arabisch-Afrikaanse Literatur der Kap-Malaïen, (‘Studies of the culture, language and Arabic-Afrikaans literature of the Cape Malays’). Published in 1971, this was the most influential work on Arabic-Afrikaans since that of Van Selms. The

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25 As indicated by his previous publications, such as Grammatik der Bahasa Indonesia (‘An Indonesian Grammar’) and Worterverzeichnis des Omong Djakarta (‘Word directory for spoken ‘Jakartan’). See: Hans Kähler, Grammatik der Bahasa Indonesia mit Christomathie und Worterverzeichnis (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1956) and Hans Kähler, Worterverzeichnis des Omong Djakarta (Berlin: D. Riemer, 1966).

26 A collection of essays on this topic was published in Kähler’s honour, see: Rainer Carle, Martina Henschke, Peter W. Pink, Christel Rost and Karen Stadtlander, eds., GAVA: Studies in Austronesian languages and cultures dedicated to Hans Kähler (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982).

27 Mohamed Haron cites three articles published by Kähler on the subject, in German. See: Haron, “South African Ajami Mss and Texts,” 4-5.

28 Kähler, Studien über die Kultur.
original was written entirely in German, however an English translation of the chapter ‘Die arabisch-afrikaanse Literatur’ has since been published by Suleman Dangor.29 Achmat Davids described this study as ‘the most outstanding’ contribution to the study of the Cape Muslim contribution to Afrikaans30.

The book is based on fieldwork Kähler carried out between July - October 1964 in Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth, with ‘Cape Malay’ people. Ironically, despite his focus on this particular group, which is overwhelmingly based in Cape Town, his fieldwork did not take him there. Perhaps, given his focus on language and written documents, he did not feel the need to actually go to the place where these documents were predominantly produced and circulated. Although less marked than in the work of Van Selms, the distancing of the textual research from the contemporary setting and the living descendants as practitioners is striking.

Kähler’s inspiration for the study is not clear, but he does specifically mention that it was supported by the Department of Education, Arts and Science (National Council for Social Research) in Pretoria. As with Van Selms, Kähler’s work was also related to ‘Cape Malay’ enthusiast, I.D. du Plessis. In Kähler’s case, it was Du Plessis who helped put him in contact with ‘Cape Malay’ people (but not in Cape Town).31 From these brief details it appears as though there was a developing network of Orientalist scholars interested in the ‘Malays’ of Cape Town, helping each other and exchanging ideas. Even if only in certain cases, the ajami texts became a part of this network’s interests and exchanges.

As indicated by its title, Kähler’s book’s contents cover various aspects of the ‘Cape Malays’, not just Arabic-Afrikaans literature. While a brief ‘general overview’ of the ‘Cape Malays’ is offered, there is a specific focus on Islamic practices and ‘Malay’ Afrikaans. With regards to the latter, Kähler discusses outside influences on the language and, in particular, Indonesian characteristics of this strain of Afrikaans.32 However, a significant

31 See ‘Vorwort’ in Kähler, Studien über die Kultur 2.
32 No doubt this subject was influenced by Kähler’s research background.
portion of the publication is dedicated to the Arabic-Afrikaans literary tradition. This includes a section on Arabic-Afrikaans authors, a handlist of the Arabic-Afrikaans literary works so-far discovered, and a list of common Arabic and Persian expressions found in Arabic-Afrikaans texts. It offers a sound overall guide to the literary tradition and, in doing so, further strengthens the notion of ‘the Arabic-Afrikaans literary tradition’, initiated by Van Selms.

This work is most renowned for its extensive handlist of Arabic-Afrikaans works, which is in fact still the largest single inventory of Arabic-Afrikaans literature.\textsuperscript{33} This inventory is significantly larger than that of Van Selms, containing 64 works, and is also more detailed in its treatment of the individual works. The list is organised alphabetically, according to the title of the texts, and the entry of each text includes its date of publication or composition (if a manuscript) and the name of its author. The list also includes the number of pages of the text, or the number of pages Kähler was able to locate, in the case of an incomplete document. In some cases, Kähler also provides a transliteration of parts of the Arabic-Afrikaans text as well as translations of the Afrikaans into his native German. By creating this detailed list, Kähler, and to a lesser state Van Selms before him, not only record an extended archive of \textit{ajami} texts, but give scholarly approval to specific texts, in turn consecrating them.

Kähler’s inventory, like that of Van Selms, consists mainly of religious works, such as ‘Du’a li Shahr Ramadan al-Mukarram’ (‘Invocation for the sacred month of Ramadan’) and ‘Kitab al-In’am fi Bayan Arkan al-Islam’ (‘The book of the blessings bestowed in expounding the pillars of Islam’). In fact, the first 51 listings are all religious in nature. Only these 51 texts are included in the English translation of the handlist. The 13 remaining documents apparently still had to be confirmed.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} With regards to inventories of all Cape \textit{ajami} documents, as opposed to just Arabic-Afrikaans texts, the catalogue prepared by Indonesian researchers Syahrial and Ahmad Rahman, consisting of 117 works, is the largest.

\textsuperscript{34} As explained by Dangor in: Dangor, “Arabic-Afrikaans Literature at the Cape”.

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Among the unconfirmed titles, for example in entry number 64, are Arabic-Afrikaans *azeemats*. Apart from just including them in his inventory, Kähler briefly discusses Arabic-Afrikaans talismans in the introduction to his chapter ‘Die arabisch-afrikaanse Literatur’:

‘Arabic-Afrikaans manuscripts apparently circulated among the learned circles of the Cape Malays – which deal with amulets and with the practice of black magic both of which play an important role in the lives of these people. An inspection of such manuals is, understandably, possible only in exceptional cases’.35

Evidently Kähler managed to inspect at least a few such manuals, as he was able to include some of the *azeemat* instructions in his book. Amongst the *azeemats* included are those for making a girl fall madly in love with one (‘laat en meisie moet mal word van liefde ver jau’) and to ‘finish someone off’ (‘om iemand klaar te maak’).36

The inclusion of such texts was a bold step away from the very rigid definition of Arabic-Afrikaans literature established by Van Selms.37 In including handwritten *azeemats* in his inventory, Kähler broadened the scope of Arabic-Afrikaans ‘literature’, acknowledging that it is not restricted to mainly published texts produced for traditional religious purposes, or composed by learned religious leaders. He also introduced the added genre of talismanic texts into the body of literature – even if only indirectly so.

Although Kähler only mentions them relatively briefly, including *azeemats* in this study also works to expose them and their related culture of magic and mysticism to another public – that of the intellectual, German-literate community. This is undoubtedly a public that would ordinarily be culturally and geographically isolated from these practices. As discussed in the previous chapter, *azeemats* belonged to an ‘underground’ world of mysticism and magic, often rarely spoken of in the ‘Cape Malay’ community itself, let alone to outsiders. In fact, as explained by a colleague of mine who happened to visit a ‘spiritual healer’ for assistance with an unknown illness, even today there is a code of

37 Whether this was because Van Selms had no access to such texts or if he did not consider them worth including is unknown.
silence to be observed when visiting such a person, or engaging in magic-related activities. Kähler is clearly aware of the sensitivity of these documents and their related practices, hinting at the difficulty in accessing these kinds of texts, as seen in the excerpt above.

The Arabic-Afrikaans studies of Orientalists like Adrianus van Selms and Hans Kähler were the first of their kind, both with regards to this kind of Afrikaans and the *ajami* script in Cape Town in general. They helped to establish the idea of an ‘Arabic-Afrikaans’ literature, establishing what this literature entailed - for the most part religious works, but also talismanic writings. These scholars also developed the first inventories of this literature, in turn creating a ‘canon’ of Arabic-Afrikaans works. Their research was, for the most part, detached from overt political or religious motivations. However, these studies laid the groundwork for future studies, from both local and foreign researchers, to carry out research of a more openly political nature. The first of these was to come from local scholar, Achmat Davids.

*The ‘Father of Cape Muslim History’*

In the late 1970s, a new force in Cape history emerged from within the local Muslim community: Achmat Davids (1939 -1998). Through his research and publications, written over a period of about twenty years, Davids contributed among the most significant works to the body of literature concerning Muslims at the Cape. The insights that his work offered came from a variety of disciplines, including socio-linguistic, historical and cultural perspectives. Among these various studies was his work on the *ajami* manuscripts and publications at the Cape, which became his main focus in the years before his death.

Davids, who was born and spent his entire life in the Bo-Kaap, was a highly respected and admired character in Cape Town’s Muslim community. Initially his historical work
was not widely read or engaged with in this community, and his early popularity stemmed from his social welfare endeavours and community conscience rather than his research. He began his career in the mid-1960s as a social worker focusing on adult skills training and the reformation of early childhood education. Through his work in the social welfare-sector, he became deeply involved in his local community, joining goodwill committees and welfare societies, and founding educational trusts and working bodies. These efforts not only made Davids a popular figure, but also impacted on his research, which consciously incorporated a community-based, grassroots approach.

Davids was a populariser of history and scholarship. As described of him in a commemorative publication following his death, ‘Achmat Davids believed that history belongs in the kitchens of families rather than packaged on the august shelves of libraries’. In line with this, Davids’ studies focused on local histories ‘from the bottom up’, giving a voice to Cape slaves and their descendants in Cape history. He was intent on not only telling the history of these people, but also sharing it with them. Thus, in addition to producing academic publications and presentations, Davids contributed to a regular community newsletter, the Boorhanol Islam Magazine, and had his own slot on community radio. He would use community media to address his scholarly work to an everyday, predominantly working class so-called ‘Coloured’ (although predominantly Muslim) public.

His first major academic publication, and the work he is most famous for, was ‘The Mosques of Bo-Kaap’, a book that focused on the place mosques in Cape Town and the local histories surrounding these buildings. Through using the Bo-Kaap mosques as a focal point, Davids was able to tell the history of Cape Islam, looking at the buildings significant sites. In 1952 it was declared a ‘Malay’ group area, under the apartheid ‘Group Areas Act’ (1950) and it is still popularly identified with ‘Cape Malay’ / ‘Cape Muslim’ culture and people. See for example: Michael Hutchison, Bo-Kaap: Colourful Heart of Cape Town (Claremont: David Phillip, 2006).

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themselves, the *imaams*, their congregations and so on. His subsequent publications on Cape Islamic history looked at, among other topics, the ‘Tana Baru’, a sacred and historically significant Muslim burial ground, the political involvement of Muslims at the Cape, and Muslim-Christian Relations and the survival of Islam at the Cape. He thus dealt with various aspects of Cape Muslim history.

Although he produced original academic works on under-researched areas, Davids was largely viewed as on the periphery of the scholarly community during his time, and his work not always taken seriously by mainstream academia. For a long time he produced books and articles without formal academic qualifications in the field, and he was unable to have his major works published by mainstream publishers. Rather, had to seek help and funds from the local community in order to publish his books. His research and the works he produced, as well as how these works were received, were thus marked by subalternity. This includes his writings on the *ajami* tradition of Cape Town.

In the late 1980s, Davids’ attention turned to the history of Afrikaans. In particular, his researched addressed the role of slaves and their descendents in the development of the language, specifically the Cape dialect. Within this scope, the *ajami* literary tradition became a focal point for Davids. His first academic work on the subject was published in 1987, and set the tone for Davids’ subsequent publications based around Arabic-Afrikaans. This article draws from previous literature, thereby grounding Davids in the existing literature on the subject, such as the work of Van Selms and Kähler. It presents an historical overview of the tradition of Arabic-Afrikaans publications and explains the genesis of this script. This information is presented in constant reference and comparison to the development of mainstream Afrikaans, with the clear intention of uncovering the as yet untold history of what he referred to as ‘Cape Muslim Afrikaans’.

Through this first article, Davids was shedding light on an under-researched aspect of Cape linguistic and social history that had been largely overlooked by the Afrikaans academic world. As with other non-standard, non-white dialects of the language, such as

43 The only qualification he held until 1992 was a diploma in Social Work.
Orange River Afrikaans, Cape Muslim Afrikaans – developed by the slave community at the Cape – had barely been addressed by researchers. This lack of attention was in part linked to the myth of the language being a tongue exclusive to white Afrikaans speaking South Africans – a fact which the existence of other dialects of Afrikaans threatened. Davids’ dedication to uncovering the creole nature of Afrikaans, and documenting a non-standard version of the language can thus be seen as an act of historical and linguistic activism.

While his 1987 article was the first to be published on the subject, his most significant contribution to the study of ajami writing traditions at the Cape was his Masters Thesis, ‘The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815-1915: a socio-linguistic study’, completed in 1992.46 The thesis is a broad study of the Afrikaans of this particular community and covers subjects from the emergence of the Muslim community and slavery in Cape Town, to Islamic Afrikaans in Roman script. Within this broad scope, the Arabic-Afrikaans literary tradition becomes a focal point. In fact, Davids mentions that one of his two main aims for the study is ‘to draw attention to the literary tradition of Arabic-Afrikaans’.47 The study is by far one of the most influential and comprehensive studies on the tradition to date.

This study, as well as Davids’ work on Arabic-Afrikaans in general, made several major contributions to the study of ajami writing cultures at the Cape. It also had several consequences for the manuscripts as objects of academic research. It was the first study to include manuscripts consciously as part of the literary tradition and to discuss the jawi writing tradition at the Cape. Davids’ research also bridged the gap between the academic world and real people who spoke the language or what remained of it, consulting members of the Muslim community in his research and making them more visible in his works.

45 Completed at the University of Natal (Durban), in the Department of Afrikaans.
47 The other aim is to ‘evoke an awareness of the existence of Cape Muslim Afrikaans’. See: Achmat Davids, “The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims from 1815 to 1915” (MA diss., University of Natal (Durban), 1992), xi.
In contrast to previous research, Davids’ work, and his MA study in particular, broadens the view of Arabic-Afrikaans literature both in terms of the place of manuscripts in this literary tradition and the tradition’s origins. With regards to the former, rather than writing about the Arabic-Afrikaans tradition in isolation, as previous scholars tended to, Davids contextualises its development. In accounting for the development of the writing system, he comprehensively describes the linguistic landscape of the early Cape, the development of Islam amongst the slave and Free Black population and the evolution of religious instruction amongst the Muslim population.

Through in-depth explanation, Davids places the manuscripts in a socio-historical context, and a greater linguistic and social-religious historical narrative. In this narrative, the manuscripts themselves have a significant role. They are not simply insignificant notebooks or jottings, but rather part of a greater written tradition, and evidence of a writing system brought to the Cape by slaves and exiles in the form of *jawi*, and then further developed by them to create Arabic-Afrikaans. By including examples of manuscripts in his study, thus Davids establishes them as objects with authority, worth debate and inclusion in academic research, thereby elevating their value.

As indicated earlier, studies prior to that of Davids are limited, for the most part, to printed religious publications. They make little room for handwritten documents both in their discussions and their inventories. This absence of the manuscripts’ presence marks their perceived insignificance in these studies. While Davids too examines printed Arabic-Afrikaans literature, he does not examine the printed literature in isolation, explicitly highlighting the manuscripts and their role in the development of printed Arabic-Afrikaans literature.

In supporting his claims about the existence of manuscripts of a certain period, Davids refers to several extant manuscripts. He thus not only brings the general ‘idea’ of handwritten Arabic-Afrikaans documents into academic discussion, but also makes visible individual manuscripts. He achieves this both through his writing and through the inclusion of images of the manuscripts in question. These individual manuscripts he mentions become, in their status as research objects, sources of evidence for arguments
about the larger writing culture from which they originate. This is a significant shift away from their secluded, stagnant existence in the family cupboard.

Another of the main contributions Davids makes in this study is to introduce the *jawi* manuscripts into the discussion of *ajami* writing cultures at the Cape and, more specifically, the genesis of Arabic-Afrikaans. This is one of, if not the first instances where the *jawi* manuscripts composed in Cape Town by slaves, exiles and their descendants, as well as the link between *jawi* and Arabic-Afrikaans, are discussed in academic literature. Before this, as the examples of previous studies show above, the focus was only on Arabic-Afrikaans. While Davids only mentions *jawi* in the context of the generation of Arabic-Afrikaans, his work laid the foundation for research specifically into *jawi* manuscripts at the Cape.

As with his work on the mosques of Cape Town and other social histories involving slaves and other subalterns, Davids’ work on Muslim Afrikaans incorporated a grassroots, ‘native-ethnographic’ approach. Rather than simply basing his work on archival records and secondary research, he interviewed locals, who were still familiar with the Arabic-Afrikaans writing tradition. In this way, those who had inherited or even been part of the production and use of these texts were incorporated into his work, thereby grounding the tradition in a real, living community. This aspect was almost invisible in previous studies.

As part of his grassroots approach, Davids also accessed the private manuscript collections of Cape Town families, uncovering undocumented manuscripts and incorporating them into his scholarly activities. On this issue, Davids himself states:

‘Many people opened their cupboards of family heirlooms and allowed me to search through their private family papers for examples of early Arabic-Afrikaans writings. In this way some of the rare items in this study were discovered. It is impossible to mention them all, but to them is extended by deep felt appreciation.’

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According to his former wife, Davids sourced over 70 manuscripts from various family collections, for use in his thesis.\textsuperscript{49} No doubt Davids’ standing in the Muslim community, particularly in the Bo-Kaap, as a local historian and contributor to social-welfare issues, helped enabled him to engage with people and their family stories, and to access their heirlooms.\textsuperscript{50}

Davids’ research is a clear example of how the manuscripts as ‘private family papers’, gain additional publics through their role as research objects in the work of researchers and the secondary texts they produce. In the case of Davids, the manuscripts have reached not only a specialised academic public through his articles and dissertation, but also a less specialised, local community reading and listening public, through community publications, radio broadcasts and public addresses.

His work also marks a change in physical circulation of these particular heirlooms. For the sake of Davids’ research, the manuscripts physically left their secure storage places in the family home, to be held temporarily, in another location, by him. This place was presumably not in a publicly accessible space. However, it was still a place other than the family’s home, where the safe-guarding of the manuscripts would usually take place. Following the task of the researcher, the manuscripts returned to the original private, family domain. However, they were not the same objects upon their return; they acquired additional value as objects used for scholarly research. They also became part of a different kind of circulation – that of research activities.

Aside from drawing the manuscripts into a new kind of circulation, or perhaps as a part of it, Davids began the process of creating an archive of manuscripts. He established his own collection of manuscripts at the South African library, consisting mainly of photocopies of these documents. This collection still exists today and consists of 11 separate items. In creating this archive, Davids permanently left the manuscripts, or at least copies of them, in a publicly accessible space. These specific manuscripts were then

\textsuperscript{49} Kariema Jacobs, interview, 19 May, 2008.
\textsuperscript{50} In my own fieldwork, several individuals mentioned that Achmat Davids had viewed or borrowed their family’s private \textit{kiitaab} collection, or that they had had friends whose manuscripts Davids borrowed for his research.
occupying the private space of the home and the public of the state institution simultaneously.

Davids’ choice to leave these documents at a state library, rather than a university one, is significant. By leaving copies of manuscripts in a public institution, he was broadening the possibilities of the kinds of people who could access them. Rather than simply university professors and students, interested members of other publics, for instance amateur researchers, school students or history-conscious laymen, would also be able to easily access the materials. This is another instance of the kind of ‘bridging’ between formal academic and everyday non-educated publics that Davids tried to achieve in his role as a historian and researcher.

Achmat Davids’ research into the *ajami* tradition of Cape Town was groundbreaking. His research and publications were the first to foreground the manuscripts, bringing them into scholarly debate. Through his scholarly arguments, aimed at broadening social conceptions of the genesis of Afrikaans, the manuscripts became not only evidence in one study, but part of a larger attempt at academic and social reform. They became political statements, in fact. Davids’ work also affected the manuscripts on a physical level, altering their physical circulation by bringing them out of family repositories into his own private space, and into the publicly accessible space of the library. Furthermore, through images of manuscripts in his writings and publications, he also made individual manuscripts visible to a wider audience than they would usually be.

Just as Davids’ work built upon previous research, his studies would impact on future studies of *ajami* manuscripts at the Cape. One of the most significant contributions to this was his inclusion of Cape *jawi* manuscripts into his research. This laid a foundation for further investigations of the *jawi* tradition to take place. These investigations would not come from local researchers, but rather from scholars from across the Indian Ocean.
In the mid-1990s, with the end of Apartheid, the world turned its gaze back towards South Africa and, driven by diplomatic, economic and cultural interests, new ties between South Africa and other nations were built. Among these states were Malaysia and Indonesia who, besides diplomatic and economic interests, also had a historical bond with South Africa, embodied in the ‘cultural legacies’ of the ‘remnant Malay’ cultural attributes of the Muslim community of Cape Town. In line with these interests, studies on the ‘Malays’ of Cape Town were carried out, including particular investigations into the *ajami* manuscript tradition, focusing on *jawi* manuscripts. The main concern of the research was to uncover and document extant *jawi* manuscripts at the Cape, as traces of Malay/Indonesian contributions to Islam and culture in South Africa.

These studies entered the *kietaabs* into a new domain on several levels. Firstly, the manuscripts joined a transnational, and a trans-oceanic archive, as part of the global *jawi* manuscript tradition. Secondly, they became entangled in, among other things, ideas around the Indonesian/Malay diaspora, both in the Indonesian/Malay world and in South Africa. Furthermore, through the publications resulting from each study, the public sphere of the *ajami* manuscripts of Cape Town further developed, with academic and heritage-conscious, Malay and Indonesian-literate publics joining the increasing number of audiences engaging with the *kietaabs*.

One major study was carried out by each of the two countries, occurring roughly ten years apart. The studies took a similar, direct approach, with researchers going directly ‘into the field’, visiting family homes and documenting personal manuscript collections. The first investigation was undertaken in 1996, by The National Library of Malaysia’s Centre for Malay Manuscripts (*Pusat Manuskrip Melayu*). This effort was part of the Centre’s work to document Malay manuscripts worldwide and was carried out by researcher Munazzah Zakaria, an employee of the Centre. As noted by Zakaria, it was the

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51 This point will be further discussed in the next chapter. However, for further discussion of these relations, see: Shamil Jeppie, “Reclassifications: Coloured, Malay, Muslim,” in *Coloured by History Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, ed. Zimitri Erasmus (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 80-96.
first time that an organised study to identify and document Malay manuscripts in South Africa had been undertaken.\textsuperscript{52}

The study was in response to a paper delivered at the 'International Malay Manuscripts Seminar', held at the National Library of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, in October 1995. This paper, ‘Towards a Catalogue of Islamic Manuscripts in South Africa with Reference to the Cape’ was presented by Muhammad Haron, a South African scholar of Arabic. According to Zakaria, although the paper was about Islamic manuscripts at the Cape in general, it also incorporated Malay documents.\textsuperscript{53} The National Library of Malaysia took the information presented very seriously and decided to locate and document the Malay manuscripts at the Cape ‘before it [was] too late’.\textsuperscript{54}

For the purpose of this study, fieldwork was carried out over a period of two weeks (from 3 – 17 November 1996). During this time, Zakaria visited both Cape Town and Johannesburg, viewing collections and meeting with community members. She managed to locate and document nine different collections, including two public ones - that of the South African Cultural and History Museum\textsuperscript{55} and the South African Library. The further seven collections were personal ones, belonging to various community members including Achmat Davids.

Following the completion of the study, in 1998, Zakaria published both a catalogue\textsuperscript{56} of the collections studied and a journal article\textsuperscript{57} based on the research. While the journal article is generally about the Islamic manuscripts of South Africa, the catalogue contains information about specific manuscripts and the collections they fall into. In total, it lists the 55 manuscripts that Zakaria encountered during her fieldwork from the nine different collections she was able to visit. Most of these manuscripts were in \textit{jawi}, however several

\textsuperscript{52} While Davids’ work did look at Malay manuscripts, its aim was not to compile a catalogue thereof.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} This museum has since been renamed the ‘Iziko South African Museum’.
\textsuperscript{56} Zakaria, \textit{Katalog Manuskrip Melayu}.
documents were in regional languages of modern-day Indonesia, such as Buginese and Javanese.

As with Davids’ work, this study adopted a community-based approach, both in terms of Zakaria’s local informants and the logistics of the operation. Zakaria went into the Muslim community in Cape Town, viewed family collections, transcribed sections of manuscripts and took photographs of them. Some of my own informants recall meeting Zakaria and having her view and document their collections. Furthermore, ‘Pang’, one of these informants, recalls having to drive the researcher around to the various places she needed to visit while in Cape Town, and Hassiem Salie of the South African Melayu Cultural Society (SAMCS) was involved in directing her to other private collections. She thus interacted with the local community quite closely during her fieldwork.

This close community interaction, particularly the entering of the researcher into the familial space of the private home through ‘the visit’, is a key aspect of this study. It also marked a turning point in the status and value of the manuscripts as everyday possessions. Prior to the coming of the researcher, in this case Zakaria, the kietaabs held the status of heirloom only. Their value rested solely in their significance to the individual or family narrative. However, when the qualified academic researcher came into the world of the manuscript(s), and observed, analysed and documented it, it gained a new level of significance. It became consecrated as an object of scholarly importance, by an outsider with authority.

For many manuscript owners, this particular significance would probably not have been evident prior to the ‘visit’ of academics, and its realisation would have lead to new levels of awareness of the manuscripts’ importance in the community. Furthermore, in the specific case of Zakaria’s research and the Indonesian study that followed hers, an additional awareness of value was triggered, namely that of the manuscripts as objects of South East Asian cultural and historical value. This would lead to other follow-on effects of heritage consciousness, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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58 As requested by my informant, I have used a pseudonym (specified by the informant) in place of his real name.
Zakaria’s research, and subsequent publications, took these family-owned manuscripts in particular to a new level of visibility and accessibility. While other studies, such as that of Kahler, briefly mentioned manuscripts, in-depth details about them including their owners and conditions were not mentioned. Furthermore, while the work of Achmat Davids incorporated privately owned manuscripts, this was always as part of a larger argument about the origins of Afrikaans. The focus was not solely on the manuscripts. In contrast, Zakaria’s catalogue was exclusively about the manuscripts. It listed individual collections, gave summaries of these collections, including information on their owners, and individually numbered and detailed the separate manuscripts. She also transcribed and transliterated sections of the manuscripts’ contents, and included coloured photographs of some of the more decorative manuscripts, thus physically representing their likeness in her book.

By including such detailed information, her work has made a handful of private manuscript collections accessible to a new public, in particular those interested in Malay heritage and philology, and literate in Bahasa Malaysia. While these private collections may still be difficult to physically access, due to gate-keeping, one can easily discover the contents of a collection by paging through this catalogue. In fact, even I have been able to read about and view, through photographs, the contents of collections that I have as of yet not been able to access, due to reluctance from an owner to show me his *kietaaabs*.

In 2006, ten years following the National Library of Malaysia’s project, a similar study on a larger scale was organised by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Cape Town, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism, Indonesia. This venture was part of a larger effort to build mutual understanding between the ‘Malay’ community of South Africa and the Republic of Indonesia. As a part of the project, two manuscript experts from Jakarta were flown to Cape Town, to spend two weeks analysing and cataloguing the manuscripts of the ‘Malay’ community.60 These

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60 Although the majority of manuscripts featured in this study were from Cape Town, one particular collection was from a member of the Port Elizabeth Muslim Community. See Ahmad Rahman, “Hubungan Masyarakat Cape Malay, Afrika Selatan dengan Indonesia Berdasarkan Manuskrip,” in *Seminar on Manuscripts in Conjunction with the National Library of Malaysia*.
individuals were Syahrial, from the University of Indonesia, and Ahmad Rahman, of the National Department of Religion. Some of the collections covered by Syahrial and Rahman were previously documented by the Malaysian study, however their work introduced other individual collections, and also a public collection, held at the Simons Town Heritage Museum. While the focus was on jawi manuscripts, the researchers also documented Arabic-Afrikaans and Arabic documents, which were not included in the Malaysian study.

As with Zakaria, Syahrial and Rahman produced a catalogue of the manuscripts they encountered.61 This particular catalogue is considerably larger than Zakaria’s, consisting of 117 separate manuscripts. There are two main reasons why these researchers were able to access many more manuscripts than the previous research effort. Firstly, they had access to the Simons Town Heritage Museums’ collection, which is made up of the privately owned kietaabs of several families originally from the Simons Town area and is thus extensive. Secondly, they had released a call for interest before arriving in South Africa, in order to attract the attention of manuscript owners willing to have their collections documented.

Their highly decorated catalogue includes, in addition to the actual inventory of manuscripts, a substantial forward consisting of messages from various government officials, a concise history of the keturunan Indonesia (‘Indonesian descendants’) in South Africa and a short biography of the exiled Sufi Saint and Indonesian National Hero, Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, buried in Macassar, an outlying area of Cape Town. By including this information, the book establishes the greater historical narrative of a lost Indonesian diaspora in which the manuscripts were created. This is in line with the book’s aim to provide their presumably all-Indonesian, culturally aware audience with a glimpse at the manuscripts, as the legacy of their own people in Africa. The manuscripts thus become, as historical evidence, part of a larger narrative of forced migration and cultural dispersal.

As with the Malaysian-produced catalogue, this one also consists of images of the manuscripts. However, it is much more visually-inclined, including a manuscript image for each catalogue entry. Thus, along with information about content, dates and script, visual information is also provided. This makes each individual manuscript, which are, as we know, generally family heirlooms, accessible to the book’s reading public(s) not only in their content, but also their visual form.

The fieldwork for this study followed the same pattern of the Malaysian study, with the researchers going into ‘the field’ to view different collections, documenting the manuscripts and engaging with their owners and curators. The impact of the ‘visit’ was, as with Zakaria’s, still felt amongst the people I interviewed for my own research, who spoke proudly of having their *kietaabs* viewed and analysed by the researchers. Furthermore, Syahrial and Rahman left physical traces of their visits on each of the documents they viewed in the form of inventory numbers written on each manuscript. In these cases, the manuscripts were forever marked as research objects and researchers to come after the Indonesians will be aware of this study that came before their own.

Where the Indonesians’ research in South Africa differed to that of Zakaria was that in addition to visiting individual homes and museums and undertaking their research in a manner removed from wider society, they also held a public event regarding their work. This was the ‘Seminar on Manuscripts in Conjunction with the Spread of Islam in South Africa’, held on 4 September 2006 at the Islamic Peace University (IPSA). The event was jointly coordinated by the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, Cape Town, SAMCS and IPSA, and featured 7 presentations from both academics and community members. According to the official publication resulting from the seminar, more than 60 people registered to attend the event.

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62 Whether or not the images correspond to the different entries of individual manuscript details is unknown, but it would appear that way.
63 Writing directly onto the manuscripts is contrary to current conservation practice, which endeavours to keep the document as close to its original state as possible, and to leave as little trace as possible of the conservator’s work on it.
During this seminar, the main focus was, of course, the manuscripts. During the event, an overview of the manuscripts documented during Syahrial and Rahman’s fieldwork was given, including information on the manuscripts’ content and form. Other presentations discussed the *kietaabs* as cultural links between Indonesia and South Africa, their role as identity markers for manuscript owners, and the development of the Arabic-Afrikaans literary tradition.

The event put the manuscripts on a community platform and brought about discussion of them from a diverse range of perspectives, in front of a broader heritage-conscious local public. The seminar not only broadly addressed the issue of the *kietaabs* of Cape Town, but also raised issues surrounding specific private collections. Thus, while the researchers spoke of the collections thus far viewed and documented, brothers Muttaqin and Luqman Rakiep, descendants of *Tuan Guru*, gave a presentation of their particular family collection. This presentation is particularly significant because the Rakiep family collection is especially difficult to access. Thus, while this family is generally not open to showing their *kietaabs* to outsiders, the seminar provided a platform with which to discuss...
their manuscripts, including their contents, with a substantially large audience. The seminar thus provided a platform not only for researchers, but also for manuscript owners, to voice their issues regarding their collections. This is a perspective that is rarely addressed.

Both the Malaysian and Indonesian studies perceived the manuscripts as legacies of an Asian past. They were motivated by the idea of documenting relics with a Malay-Indonesian ancestry and belonging to a Malay-Indonesian ‘diaspora’ in Southern Africa. Their publications and, in the case of the Indonesian researchers, seminar, also communicated the idea of the manuscripts belonging to a greater, ‘Malay-Indonesian’ manuscript archive to the Cape Muslim public. Through this, the manuscripts took on a new, or perhaps an added role, as relics of a South East Asian past.65

Furthermore, through their community engagement, both the Malaysian and Indonesian researchers’ visits worked to draw attention to the manuscripts. This was particularly from the local Muslim community, with whom they worked. By engaging manuscript owners in their research and taking interest in the heirlooms of these individuals, they enabled these people to see an added value in their manuscripts, as objects of academic importance. This accretion of value did not only extend to the manuscripts they worked with, but also to the collections of others, who became aware of the importance of their own kietaabs, through witnessing the value that those of others were given. This evoked a new kind of ‘textual consciousness’ on the part of many manuscript owners in Cape Town.

One example of this renewed ‘textual consciousness’ is of a lady I came across at a heritage group meeting. She had brought a colour photocopy of several pages of one of her family kietaabs to the meeting, in order to show them to the group members. While going through a ‘show and tell’ of her family possessions, which also included photos and a family tree, she mentioned that she had heard of the Indonesian researchers who had studied the manuscripts at the Cape. Furthermore, she was currently in contact with the Indonesian Consulate, trying to get her kietaabs sent to Indonesia in order to be studied.

65 This will be elaborated on in the next chapter.
Evidently, she had heard that other manuscripts had been given scholarly attention and thought that hers should be too.

Besides individual textual consciousness, another kind of awareness that these research efforts influenced was that of ‘heritage’ and the importance of *kietaabs* as links to the past, and also to new transnational links based on this past. This emerging awareness led to a further accretion of value of the manuscripts, and the next phase in the life of the manuscripts, as cultural objects.

Thus far, the phase of ‘research object’ in the life of the manuscripts has seen major shifts with regards to the manuscripts’ visibility, value and even circulation. As research objects, they have become increasingly ‘public’ over time. That is to say, through the studies carried out on them and their resulting ‘epitexts’, the manuscripts have begun to address an increasing number of publics, from Afrikaans linguists to Indonesian philologists and local heritage activists. They have also gained additional value as objects of academic enquiry, and therefore historical, linguistic and social importance, albeit from various ideological viewpoints. Although my analysis of this life-phase ends here, the life of the manuscripts as ‘research objects’, as with that as ‘heirloom’, still continues, this study alone being a testament to this fact. However, in the next chapter, I will go on to explain how, largely due to their inclusion in research projects, the manuscripts went on to acquire new significance as ‘cultural objects’.
Chapter Four: Manuscripts as ‘heritage objects’

One of the first stops my research takes me to is a family-run museum in Simon’s Town, outside of Cape Town. It is a sunny Tuesday morning in May. I stand waiting outside the front door with Ebrahim Manuel, eager to enter the Simons Town Heritage Museum. The door opens, and there stands aunty Patty, welcoming us into the museum and, actually, her home. She invites us upstairs, to the part of the house she lives in. With aunty Patty’s permission, I decide to stay downstairs for the moment and explore the museum.

All is quiet, and I walk as slowly and softly as possible. Every step I take makes the old floor creak, making me feel like an intruder in the stillness. Glancing into the first room on my left, I almost politely say ‘salaam’ but stop myself in fright, realising the Muslim lady I was about to greet is actually a mannequin dressed in a fancy nikab. The male figure at the tea table is also a ‘dummy’, and together they play the role of guests sitting around a traditional ‘Celebration Table’. The table is decked out with cups and saucers, sweets and traditional snacks, all of which appear to be real.

Moving away, my attention moves to other objects in the room. This front room is crammed with information, as are the other four large rooms of the museum. Panels cover the walls from top to bottom, filled with information in both image and text-form. There are photographs, newspaper clippings and objects hanging from the wall. On one side of the room there is a display on the ‘Indian Community’, and diagonally opposite this, part of the room is dedicated to the Capetonian Muslim experience of the Hajj. There is also information on forced removals from the Simon’s Town area and the history of the museum building itself. This room is almost a museum in itself.

I make my way back into the hallway, unsure of where to go next. I peep around the corner, to find a ‘bruids kamer’, complete with multiple wedding dresses and an elaborately decorated bed – a mix of satin, lace and sequins. Exploring the rest of the house, I come across all sorts of ‘Cape Muslim’ artefacts and information.

1 Usually prepared for cultural and religious celebrations such as Eid (referred to as ‘labarang’ in Cape Muslim Afrikaans, based on the Indonesia word ‘lebaran’).
2 ‘Bridal room’
However, it is not until I get to one of the back rooms that I come across the original reason for my visit: the glass cabinets displaying the kietaabs.
The increased visibility of the *kietaabs* in their role as research objects, combined with developments in the greater political context, ushered in the next phase in their social life. With changes in national discourses of history and heritage, the manuscripts took on new significance culturally, entering the space of the museum, being featured in popular media and, most importantly, becoming crucial sources of culture and identity. With their added significance as sources of culture, the manuscripts came to be used as ‘heritage objects’ by certain people in the Muslim community. That is to say, as material remnants of the past, they were used in historical remembrance, cultural construction and self-definition in the present.\(^3\)

This chapter explores the ways in which the *kietaabs*, as formerly stigmatised subaltern communicative strategies and later family heirlooms, have been elevated to the level of cultural heritage in contemporary Cape Town and beyond. On one hand, it examines the manuscripts’ absorption into collective heritage practices, particularly that of the Cape Muslim community. On the other hand, it discusses the *kietaabs*’ use in personal heritage projects, as archival evidence in personal searches for identity and ancestry. Through focusing on the development of the *kietaabs* in this phase, the chapter deals closely with the broader issues of culture and identity politics in post-apartheid South African society, to which contemporary heritage practices are inextricably linked.

The chapter begins with a discussion of identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa, with a specific focus on the politics of ‘Malayness’ in the Cape Muslim community. It then goes on to examine how, in this context, the *kietaabs* have been incorporated into contemporary reimaginings of Cape Muslim heritage and history, both in a local sense and a trans-national context. The chapter then focuses on the use of the manuscripts as evidence in individual searches for heritage and identity.

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\(^3\) Nick Shepherd, “Heritage” in *New South African Keywords*, ed. Nick Shepherd and Steven I. Robins (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008), 116-128.
With the early 1990s lead-up to the end of apartheid, and eventually the coming of democracy, there was an ‘opening up’ in South Africa on many levels. The most apparent changes were legal and political, including the unbanning of the African National Congress, the release of Nelson Mandela and the end of segregationalist laws. However, these changes also had significant effects on a cultural level. With race-laws being undone and the population no longer bound by their government-imposed racial identities, there was a search for new ways to articulate both the identity of the ‘rainbow nation’ \(^4\) and that of the various ethnic and cultural groups therein.

While this crisis of identity affected everyone in the New South Africa, it was the groups classified as minorities under the former regime, such as the so-called ‘Coloureds’, that were most threatened by it.\(^5\) Historically, ‘coloured’ identities have existed uncomfortably and arbitrarily between the identities ‘black’ and ‘white’. They have been constructed and reconstructed from ‘fragmented cultural material available in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession’\(^6\), and are often simplified by the use of the term ‘mixed race’. As a consequence of the ‘mixed’ perception of coloured identities, ‘colouredness’ has always been characterised by dislocation, marginality and ‘in-betweenness’.

As Zimitri Erasmus explains, there were several dominant ways that the ‘coloured’ population dealt (and are still dealing) with the instability arising from their socially-marginalised position. This included the denial of coloured identities; isolating themselves, through fear, from the New South Africa; and the refashioning or rearticulation of identity, based on ethno-nationalism.\(^7\) As a part of the broader ‘coloured’

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\(^5\) For more on this issue, see: Alexander, *An Ordinary Country*.


\(^7\) Erasmus, “Re-imagining coloured identities,” 20.
community, the Muslim community of Cape Town has not been excluded from the need to rearticulate their collective identity in the New South Africa.8

The largest expression of Cape Muslim identity to date was the Tercentenary of Islam in South Africa celebrations, held in Cape Town in 1994, just weeks before the country’s first democratic elections. Organised by the Sheikh Yusuf Commemoration Committee, headed by Achmat Davids, the event celebrated the 300th anniversary of the arrival of Sheikh Yusuf Taj al-Khalwati of Makassar, Indonesia,9 commonly seen as the founder of Islam in South Africa.10 Besides honouring Sheikh Yusuf, the celebrations were aimed more broadly at the recognition of the historical roots of the Muslim community in South Africa. Yet, the event focused almost exclusively on Islam in the Western Cape. More specifically, it was centered on the history of the urban Muslims with links to Sheikh Yusuf, almost excluding other Muslim communities in Cape Town, such as those identifying as ‘Indian’.11

The celebrations consisted of several events, including a 3-week exhibition on ‘Cape Muslim Culture’, held at the historic Castle of Good Hope,12 a march by 100 000 people through the centre of Cape Town and a rally at the Good Hope Centre, complete with pageants, speeches and international guests. Through their particular display of ‘Cape Muslim’ culture, these celebrations put forth, to the whole of South Africa, an image of the Cape Muslims. This particular image was not one of a Creole African community with diverse origins, but rather that of a Malay diaspora.13

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10 For a discussion of this issue and an explanation of the spread of Islam at the Cape, see Robert C.-H. Shell, “The establishment and spread of Islam at the Cape from the beginning of company rule to 1838” (Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1974).
13 Jeppie, “Commemorations and Identities”. 
Local guests attended the celebrations in traditional Malaysian *sangkok* headgear and *sarongs*, objects such as Bantenese coins and *toering* hats were included in glass cases symbolising ‘Cape Muslim Culture’, and South East Asian diplomats spoke of bringing the Cape Malays back to the ‘Malay’ fold. Even Achmat Davids, who had long rejected the term ‘Cape Malay’, in favour of the term ‘Cape Muslim’, and thus a more hybrid view of the historical roots of the Muslim community at the Cape, had embraced ‘Malayism’ during these events.

As reflected in the event, the search for a separate identity for Cape Muslims in the new South Africa had led, for a certain number of people, to an affiliation with the Malay world. This push for an identity of ‘Malayness’, distinct from ‘Colouredness’, led to the emergence of various identity-based cultural groups, tourist ventures, and businesses. These initiatives were either based solely or partially on preserving and promoting the ‘Malay’ people, or building links across the Indian Ocean, with the Malay-Indonesian world.

This distinct choice of identity expression is linked to the greater political, social and other changes in the South African context, signalled above. In the changing times of South Africa, rather than expressing a hybrid, dynamic, evolving Islam and Muslim community, a fixed Malay identity has been opted for instead. This static identity is seen as a mechanism for stability in changing times, as well as a way to link the community to a larger global grouping – that of the Malay world. This kind of identity rearticulation is not exclusive to the Muslim community of the Western Cape. As former Premier of the Western Cape, Ebrahim Rasool once stated, ‘…the Malays revel in their reawakened connection with Malaysia; the Griqua chiefs demand recognition and compensation; the

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14 Sindre Bangstad, “Diasporic Consciousness as a Strategic Resource - a case study from a Cape Muslim community,” in *Diasporas within without Africa: Dynamism, Heterogeneity, Variation*, ed. Leif Manger and Assal Munzoul (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006), 44.
15 *Toerings* are traditional straw hats used for working outdoors, often worn by people working on crops in South East Asia.
16 Ward, “The 300 Years”.
17 Bangstad, “Diasporic Consciousness,” 44.
18 Jeppie, “Commemorations and Identities,” 81.
19 For example, the ‘Cape Malay Consultants’ consulting company, the ‘South African Melayu Cultural Society’, the ‘Malaysian Welcoming Committee’ and so on.
Khoi and the San trace their history and lineages; and others identify their traditional lands.\(^\text{20}\)

As Rasool points out, the ‘Malay’ reawakening took place at a time when other ‘coloured’ identities were also being refashioned. However, its development occurred in isolation to these other positionings. The reformed ‘Malays’ were, even if only indirectly, creating an identity for themselves separate from the general ‘coloured’ apartheid grouping, but also distinct from that of others whom they were previously categorised with. While these other, predominantly Christian, groups were stressing indigeneity and Christianity in their rearticulations,\(^\text{21}\) the ‘Malays’ were emphasising their Muslim South East Asian roots. Through such claims to a pure ‘Malay’ ancestry, individuals were subtly positioning themselves against a local identity and, consequently, Africanness and indigeneity. Based on racial stereotypes of the local and the indigenous, this meant aligning oneself with a superior, more refined race. Thus, the currency of ‘Malayness’ was two-fold: it linked the Muslims of Cape Town to a greater global community and distanced them from an undesirable indigenous, local identity.

In addition to, or perhaps embedded in, this push for Malayness is a more general enthusiasm for heritage. In a newly democratic South Africa, where archives and other sources of history are accessible to all,\(^\text{22}\) and new and alternative histories are being encouraged, interest in rewriting or rediscovering the heritage of the community and the individual has flourished. This heritage interest - in some cases a heritage fetish - is evident in cultural groups, amateur genealogical societies and individual efforts to trace personal heritage emerging in the past 16 years. This particular desire is linked to a need to be recognised, as individuals and a community, as possessing a culture and history worthy of world recognition. Or, in the words of Daniel Herwitz, ‘Having (suddenly) a heritage


\(^{21}\) The “Khoisan Revivalist Movement” is the key example of this. See: Michael Besten, “We are the Original Inhabitants of this Land: Khoi-San Identity in Post-apartheid South Africa,” in Burdened by Race: Coloured identities in southern Africa, ed. Mohamed Adhikari (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2009), 134-155.

\(^{22}\) As Shepherd explains, universal availability and accessibility is in fact one of the fundamentals of heritage in post-apartheid in South Africa. See: Shepherd, “Heritage,” 118.
makes you (potentially) an international player...? Perhaps this is a status the ‘Cape Muslims’ were in search of.

In this context of Malayism and heritage consciousness, it has become crucial for some to prove the (Malay) heritage of both the individual and the Muslim community of Cape Town as a whole. In this endeavour, a predominantly ‘museological’ view of culture has been adopted, and objects such as toering hats and kaparangs, places like the kramats, and even linguistic features of Cape Afrikaans have become significant ‘proof’ of a pure ‘Cape Muslim’ identity. In heritage and cultural activist circles, in line with dominant cultural property laws and practices, ‘being depends upon having’ and possession of unique cultural property brings Malayness, and therefore credible, traceable ancestral origins, into reality for many.

The kietaabs have become entangled in this process. As material remnants of historical practices particular to the Muslim community of Cape Town, with routes in South East Asian writing traditions, they have acquired an important place in contemporary rearticulation(s) of ‘Cape Muslimness’. Having been classified in multiple ways as ‘heritage’, the manuscripts have adopted a range of responsibilities and meanings, as physical objects and as cultural symbols. Furthermore, through their inclusion in heritage-based efforts, the number of publics surrounding them has further multiplied, further adding to their increasing ‘publicness’.

25 Kaparangs are traditional wooden-soled, open toed sandal, often worn to the bathroom. Examples of these are on display in the Bo-Kaap Museum, Cape Town.
26 Kramats are the graves of revered Muslims, particularly those who were seen as the founders of Islam, such as Sheikh Yusuf, Tuan Guru and so on. Sometimes referred to as ‘shrines’, these sites are often visited by Muslims before going on pilgrimage to Mecca and at other times during the year. See: Mansoor Jaffer, Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape (Cape Town: Mazaar Society, 1996).
28 Many of my research participants note that in order to prove one’s Malayness, one must have manuscripts in their possession, or in their family.
The primary heritage functions of the *kietaabs* can be divided into serving collective and individual projects. Below I discuss these two functions, beginning with an explanation of the greater context in which the *kietaabs* acquired these roles, followed by an examination of specific case studies of the manuscripts in these roles.

**Manuscripts as Collective Heritage**

As explained above, political changes in South Africa led to renewed cultural freedoms, particularly in the way of access to history and the expression of identity. For particular sections of the Cape Muslim community, this led not only to rearticulations of identity in a local context, but also to the construction of a shared transnational identity and heritage, based on historical and ‘ethnic’ links with the Malay-Indonesian world. In this context, there was a history and heritage to be shared with other Muslims based in Cape Town, and also one to be shared between Cape Muslims and their long lost siblings in South East Asia. Cultural projects arose on both of these levels, and the *kietaabs* gained significance in each of these matters.

In terms of collective Cape Muslim heritage at the local level, numerous cultural initiatives have emerged in the community since the lead-up to democracy. As discussed above, the largest such initiative was the Tercentenary of Islam in South Africa celebrations in 1993. This event appears to have influenced subsequent expressions of the community’s identity, specifically the kinds of art forms, relics and historical figures included in articulations of ‘Cape Muslimness’. Since then, there have been various efforts around the articulation of identity in the Muslim community of Cape Town; both those challenging popular notions of Cape Muslim identity and those aiming to preserve mainstream articulations. These activities have ranged from cultural fêtes to media initiatives and have included both long and short-term projects.

The most visible and far-reaching heritage initiatives are undoubtedly those undertaken by community media, in predominantly radio and print forms. The main example of this

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29 This includes displays of the ‘bruids kamer’, specific crafts seen as ‘traditional’, such as dress-making and embroidery.
is the Voice of the Cape radio station, one of two local Muslim community radio stations, followed by Muslim households throughout the greater Cape Town area. This particular radio station has been actively involved in community cultural and identity issues, reporting on cultural events it sees relevant to the community, organising heritage events and engaging discussion on cultural and historical issues.

The main channels of discussion on history are the station’s various heritage-focused radio programs that have arisen over the years. This line of heritage programs began in early 2007, with the ‘Malaysian connection’, a program aimed at tracing links between Malaysia and the Muslim community in Cape Town. The program covered areas such as language and culture, local Islamic history, diaspora, as well as contemporary similarities between the two societies. It was followed by ‘The Indonesian Connection’, in 2008. Then, in 2009, in the hopes of broadening the wider perception of ‘Cape Muslim’ historical origins, ‘The Indian Connection’ and ‘The African Connection’, were established. In addition to these ethnically-based heritage programs, the station introduced shows like ‘Toeka se dae’ and ‘History Speaks’, established in 2008 and 2009 respectively. These shows take a more general historical approach to all things historically ‘Cape Muslim’, including slavery, cultural practices and significant historical events. All of these heritage programs are aimed at raising the awareness of the cultural history of the Muslim community of Cape Town. By doing this, they not only engage the station’s public in discussion on this subject, but promote the value of a unique ‘Cape Muslim’ culture and history.

Apart from media heritage projects, efforts to preserve and promote ‘Cape Muslim’ culture have come from local community groups, such as cultural organisations and genealogical societies, and even businesses, such as restaurants and tourist ventures. The

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30 For example the ‘Kamptyd by die kalie’ annual Easter camp by the river, by the kramat of Sheikh Yusuf at Faure.
31 An example of this is the ‘District Six homecoming Festival’
33 This term is an Afrikaans idiom, meaning ‘long ago’.
34 I was interviewed on 11.04.2009 on ‘Toeka se dae’, at the annual camping event near the kramat of Sheikh Yusuf, in relation to myths around Sheikh Yusuf and more generally the kistaabs.
Cape Family Research Forum, an amateur genealogical society, has been actively involved in this respect, becoming a hub of Cape Muslim history, heritage and nostalgia. Aside from genealogical research, the group regularly participates at community fairs, displaying informative panels on the history and heritage of the Muslims at the Cape and engaging visitors in discussion on all things historically Cape Muslim. Their participation in these events has been positively received by visitors to their stalls at festivals, where they are often overloaded with attention. Because of this positive reception, the group notes that there has been an increase in heritage interest since the group was founded.  

More on the ‘promotional’ side is the Bo-Kaap Cultural and Heritage Gateway, a monthly traditional food and craft market, promoting the local traditions and culture of the Bo-Kaap. Featured in the market are traditional ‘Cape Malay’ foods, crafts and displays on the history and culture of the Muslims of the Cape, particularly that of the Muslims of the Bo-Kaap area. While the market is aimed at providing a regular space to express and experience the local Muslim culture in, it is also clear that a major aim is to promote the culture, and the ‘traditional’ products for sale, to tourists and also South Africans of other backgrounds. Through this articulation of the community’s culture, its commodification also occurs.

In this context of defining and promoting a unique cultural identity and history, tangible heritage is invaluable – it provides a material link from the past into the present, and carries the memory of practices and traditions long gone. For the promotion of collective Cape Muslim heritage then, the kietaabs, as tangible remnants of unique cultural practices, have become focal points, both physically and symbolically.

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36 The centrality of food in Malay culture has been analysed by several scholars. For example, see: Gabeba Baderoon “Everybody’s mother was a good cook: Meanings of food in Muslim cooking,” *Agenda* 51 (2002): 4-15 and Sindre Bangstad, “Food for thought,” *Annual Review of Islam in Southern Africa* 7 (2004): 22-27.
Back at the museum, I stop to examine the kietaabs. Moving between the various glass cabinets, I try to get as close a look as possible. I am not allowed to touch them – not even aunty Patty touches them – so I try my best to scrutinise them through the thick glass. Some of the books are placed open, spine-down, ready to be read. Others stand ajar on special stands, facing the world in an upright position. Yet, they are not alone. Placed between various madrasah souvenirs, commemorative plaques and ceremonial objects from Indonesia, they have become one element in a larger representation of a particular group of people, their history and their way of life.

As material testaments to the shared Cape Muslim past, some kietaabs have been physically transported into the world of heritage, leaving their spaces of sequestration in the family home, to enter the institutional space of the museum. The largest public collection of manuscripts, and in fact the only collection on public display in Cape Town, is that of the Simon’s Town Heritage Museum. The museum was founded in 1998, by Zainab ‘Patty’ Davidson (née Amlay) and the Nurul Islam Historical Society, a group of former Simon’s Town residents who were forced to leave the area under apartheid laws in the 1970s, and is housed in the home Mrs Davidson left in 1975. It was established with the intention of honouring the history of those who were forcibly removed from Simon’s Town under the Group Areas Act (1950), including those classified as ‘Indian’,
‘Coloured’ and ‘Malay’, but its scope reaches beyond the Simon’s Town community alone. While expanding physically, its focus has narrowed demographically; over the years, the museum has assumed the reputation of a ‘Cape Muslim’ museum. In fact, because of its specific content, it has even been described as a ‘genuine repository of the culture and history of the Muslims of the Cape’. It is thus the strongest, ongoing contemporary expression of ‘Cape Muslim’ identity.

There are dozens of kietaabs held at the museum, displayed in glass cabinets of ‘Cape Muslim’ curiosity under the category ‘literature’, and there are also others held in storage. That they were chosen to be a part of the permanent display at the museum is indicative of their perceived status as remnants of ‘Cape Muslim’ culture. More specifically, they are remnants of education, literary production and ritual in this culture. In-between displays on ratiep spiritual practices and celebratory cuisine, the koples boeke and written liturgies displayed, fill the role of ‘intellectual output’ and ‘educational activities’, in the narrative of Cape Muslim history and legacies. These manuscripts, all borrowed from private family collections, with their own narratives of an individual’s madrasah educational experience or a family’s medicinal remedies, are presented as part of a larger, community experience and story.

The manuscripts at the museum were donated by ex-Simon’s Town residents and their families, and were collated into this single repository by Ebrahim Manuel. Although the family members authorised the display of their kietaabs in the museum, it was on the condition that only Mr Manuel handle them. Thus, despite being the main curator of the museum, Mrs Davidson is hesitant to handle kietaabs. This situation indicates a tension between private property and collective heritage. That is to say, although, the manuscripts have acquired a greater level of physical accessibility and publicness by being on display, and have in fact become collective heritage, they remain the heirlooms of specific individuals. As their personal property, the manuscripts are still subject to gate keeping processes, even while not in their owners’ possession.

39 Indonesian researchers Syahrial and Ahmad Rahman catalogued 40 manuscripts from the museum, however Ebrahiem Manuel insists that there are hundreds.
As their current caretakers, the museum staff’s treatment of the kietaabs as pieces of Cape Muslim heritage is not only about display, but also about preservation. Rather than leaving the manuscripts in questionable conditions in family homes, where they could easily be lost or destroyed by the next generation, who may not see any value in the kietaabs, the museum, under the direction of Ebrahiem Manuel, is working to conserve them. While this preservation has not yet involved active restoration of damaged kietaabs, by keeping them in secure holdings, with limited access to outsiders, they are helping to conserve these kietaabs.

This particular museum is not the only institution with kietaabs in its collection; both the National Library and the Iziko Museums of Cape Town have a selection of kietaabs. While they are not permanently on display in these institutions, the kietaabs are still considered appropriate to be in the respective collections. Thus, in the Cape Town context, this view of the Cape Islamic manuscripts as heritage is not always restricted to Muslim circles.

The physical preservation and guarding of the manuscripts by cultural institutions like the Simon’s Town Heritage Museum has been commended by cultural activists, who try to promote the conservation of ‘Cape Muslim’ culture and heritage in all its shapes and forms. One channel for these activists’ messages is, again, the local media. Islamic media in particular has been a key platform where ‘cultural activists’ have reached out to the community to take a stand in preserving their kietaabs as objects of shared Cape Muslim culture. In this context, they are promoted not only as physical cultural remnants, but also as symbols of larger collective legacy.

One of the main actors in this regard is Dr Cassiem D’arcy, a medical doctor who writes the ‘Arts for All’ column in the Muslim Views, a monthly newspaper distributed at mosques in the Cape Town area. Dr D’arcy became involved in ‘cultural activism’ in the Cape Muslim community in the 1960s, making a concerted effort in District Six before its destruction, and later working on Cape Muslim heritage preservation with Achmat.

While the National Library of South Africa’s collection can be viewed immediately on request, the Iziko collection is held in storage and may take longer to gain access to.
Davids. Today Dr D’arcy’s interest and experience with the arts, culture and heritage are clearly well-respected, both in the local community and beyond it.\(^1\) He not only has his own column, but addresses community groups as a kind of cultural pundit and has been part of a panel on intangible cultural heritage policy for the Department of Arts and Culture in South Africa.

Dr D’arcy’s monthly column, currently his main avenue of heritage activism, has covered a variety of issues and topics, from local artisans to the value of Islamic calligraphy. Amongst the more recent of the column’s topics is the issue of the *kietaabs*. In his writing on the *kietaabs*, Dr D’arcy has been particularly passionate, not only about what these manuscripts have meant to the community, but also about their preservation:

“[T]hose [Malay] manuscripts were the cement that held this Muslim community together at the southern tip of Africa. They were the foundation stones of Islam as we know it here in Cape Town. Their essence was the birth-blood of a new language, Afrikaans… It is vital that we preserve every available scrap of writing, every piece of paper from the past”\(^2\)

In discussing the *kietaabs*, Dr D’arcy and community cultural activists like him evoke a sense of collective achievement and advocate a shared responsibility for the manuscripts. The *kietaabs* are promoted as material evidence of the beginnings of the Muslim community at the Cape, and as symbols of the unity of the community. Consequently, it is the duty of the descendants of the early Muslim community to preserve them. In addition, as expressed elsewhere,\(^3\) the *kietaabs* are also evidence of the worthiness of the Cape Muslim’s common ancestors and a testament to the struggles of the Muslim community at the Cape. Through such popular representations, the *kietaabs* have become invested with significance not only for those possessing extant manuscripts, but for the broader Cape Muslim community.

\(^1\) Many of my informants respect Dr D’arcy’s opinion and contribution to Cape Muslim heritage preservation, personally mentioning him in conversations I have had with them.


\(^3\) D’arcy, “Simonstown’s treasure”. 
In addition to educating others about the value of the *kietaabs*, Dr D’arcy speaks out against their destruction. For instance, he has written of those who burned their *kietaabs* as ‘destroy[ing] our past, our foundation stones’.\(^{44}\) He also speaks of the destruction of heritage, in the context of *kietaabs*, as a reason why Cape Muslims are not credited in ‘the history books’ for their contribution to ‘the nation’. For him, and for many other cultural activists of similar opinion, the *kietaabs* and other tangible sources of Cape Muslim history represent the industriousness and prestige of the community. They therefore need to be preserved and brought to the attention of scholars and heritage specialists.

Such calls for preservation are relatively recent and have been inspired by contemporary research and preservation efforts regarding similar literary traditions of other places, particularly that of Timbuktu, Mali. In some cases parallels between the two situations have been drawn in a bid to draw attention to the extant manuscripts in Cape Town. In my own fieldwork I have come across ‘Cape Malay’ enthusiasts echoing such sentiments, usually in the form of complaints about attention given to Timbuktu and not to Cape Town. Dr D’arcy himself has even written about this issue.\(^ {45}\) In such instances, the significance of the manuscripts is attached not only to the local context, but also to a greater African Islamic legacy, if only indirectly.

As explained earlier, the idea of a collective ‘Malay’ heritage extends beyond the local Cape Town and African context, entering the territory of shared transregional, in fact transoceanic, cultural and historical legacies with the Malay-Indonesian world. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the 1990s both Malaysia and Indonesia recommenced dialogue with South Africa. The Malaysian government resumed formal contact with South Africa from 1991, after 30 years of boycotting the country under apartheid. Then, in November 1993, the two countries established full diplomatic relations. The bilateral agreements that followed this reestablishment of official links involved multiple diplomatic visits between Malaysia and South Africa, and resulted in partnerships in social infrastructure and skills development in South Africa, defence

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Cassiem D’arcy, “Timbuktu is right here,” *Muslim Views*, June 2008, 41.
cooperation, the flourishing of bilateral trade, as well as a ‘special friend[ship]’. As with Malaysia, the Indonesian state opposed apartheid and only established relations with the South African government in August 1994. From that time, healthy bilateral political, economic and socio-cultural relations between the two states developed. Indonesia also became one of South Africa’s strongest trading partners in South East Asia.

Although these were all officially ‘new’ initiatives between relatively young states, they were put forth rather as the rebuilding of ancient links between South Africa and Malaysia and Indonesia, respectively. New trans-Indian Ocean links between the countries were being built in the shadow of a mutually-acknowledged past of sameness. Thus, in the midst of building political and diplomatic relations, the process of rebuilding cultural and sentimental ties actively took place. It became commonplace, in speaking of new or envisioned diplomatic links between the countries, for aspects of a shared history to be drawn upon, from the shared legacy of anti-colonial fighters like Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar, to slaves sent from Indonesia to the Cape of Good Hope.

As a crucial element of this process, both Malaysia and Indonesia took part in the reclaiming of the Muslims of Cape Town as long lost “blood brothers”, Malaysia being the first to do so. One of the main reasons for Malaysia’s early show of interest in the ‘Cape Malay’ community of South Africa was its own ‘Malay Diaspora’ project in the 1990s. This effort to locate and establish links with ‘Malay peoples’ globally was in response to internal identity-politics issues, related to Malay nationalism in a multiracial Malaysia, and also part of a new post-nation-state strategy proposed by certain influential

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46 Mohamed Haron, *Going Forward: South Africa and Malaysia Cementing Relations* (Selangor: Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, 2008).
47 Examples of this include speeches by former South African Presidents Mandela and Mbeki in Indonesia. See: Nelson Mandela, *Speech by President Nelson Mandela at State a Banquet in his Honour* (Jakarta, 14 July, 1997) [http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1997/sp970714.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1997/sp970714.html), accessed 28 May, 2010, and Thabo Mbeki, *Reply by the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to the Toast Remarks by his Excellency, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Dr Sutih Bambang Yudhoyono, at the State Banquet, Istana Negara* (Jakarta, 19 April, 2005) [http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2005/mbek0420.htm](http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2005/mbek0420.htm), accessed 28 May, 2010. Of course, the Indonesians’ basis of engagement with the ‘Keturunan Indonesia’ in South Africa is much more concrete than that of Malaysia’s. This is because the South East Asian exiles and slaves (as opposed to those from South Asia) sent to the Cape were overwhelmingly from areas in present-day Indonesia, not Malaysia.
49 For information regarding the formal relationship between Malaysia and South Africa over the past decade, see: Haron, *Going Forward: South Africa and Malaysia*. 

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Malaysian figures. The scope of the Malay ‘diaspora’ project was not restricted to the ‘Malays’ of South Africa, including among others, diasporas in Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and even the United Kingdom.\(^{50}\) In reaching out to these global ‘Malays’, particular effort was made to build cultural and business networks,\(^{51}\) including the International Malay Secretariat, the Malay World Symposium and, in South Africa, the Cape Malay Chamber of Commerce.\(^{52}\)

With a different demographic landscape and thus different identity politics, Indonesia did not have the same political urgency to stress a greater, global self based on diaspora. Nonetheless, Indonesia did commence its own effort to re-establish links with the keturunan Indonesia (‘Indonesian descendants’) in South Africa. This effort became visible much later than the Malaysian campaign, but endured longer that the Malaysian effort, most probably because of the presence of the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Cape Town, which actively engages with Malay cultural enthusiasts, most of whom are based in Cape Town.\(^{53}\) Despite this, both the Malaysian and the Indonesian efforts have followed similar strategies, including research initiatives, official visits and the establishment of cultural links and organisations.

An initiative that clearly demonstrates this kind of cultural involvement is the South African Melayu Cultural Society, a group I have had dealings with since the beginning of my fieldwork.\(^{54}\) SAMCS was established in 1993 by the late Mr Hassiem Salie, as a group to ‘strengthen the conservation of existing Melayu culture in South Africa, thereby ensuring the ultimate preservation of culture’.\(^{55}\) Although locally established, the society

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\(^{51}\) The renewed ties with Malaysia held the promise of lucrative business opportunities for locally-owned, ‘Cape Malay’ businesses. However, those who benefitted from Malaysian investment were most often large-scale companies such as Engen, a petrol giant, and Telkom.

\(^{52}\) Mohamed Haron cited in Milner, *The Malays*, 184.


\(^{54}\) In fact, during my fieldwork, I was asked to join the society and obliged.

was encouraged by a Malaysian diplomat, whom Mr Salie had met while on pilgrimage in Mecca. This man, the Malaysian High Commissioner in London at the time, had suggested a society to preserve ‘remnant Malay culture’ in South Africa, which could then be displayed elsewhere in the Dunia Melayu.56

While SAMCS is one of the largest and most successful examples of cultural initiatives aimed at reconnecting the ‘Cape Malays’ with the Malay-Indonesian world, there have been other attempts also. This includes other organisations, such Cape Malay Consultants,57 GAPENA58 and the Malaysia Welcoming Committee, and also the individual efforts of people like ‘Bapak’ Ismail Petersen.59

Nevertheless, SAMCS flourished in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and gained financial and other support from the South African government, as well as various institutions in Malaysia and Indonesia. During the height of SAMC’s activity, they were invited to perform and exhibit South African ‘Melayu’ culture not only at cultural events in South Africa, but also in Malaysia and in Indonesia.60 Although the society’s work seems predominantly motivated by cultural concerns, there are also underlying economic and political factors influencing their activities. At least one of these is the attraction of visitors and investment from South East Asia to South Africa. This aspect has not been explicitly

56 ‘Malay World’. This concept is also referred to as the ‘Alam Melayu’. The latter in particular was a political term, used by Dr Mahathir Mohamed, former Prime Minister of Malaysia. See: Kessler, “A Malay Diaspora?,”.
57 This is an organisation facilitating business, cultural and tourism links predominantly with Malaysia. An example of this is the recent Malaysian calligraphy exhibition the organisation held in Cape Town. See: Veronica C. Wilkinson, “Islamic calligraphy links cultures,” Cape Times, 18 May, 2010.
58 GAPENA is a Malaysian-based cultural NGO. For information on their links with the ‘Cape Malays’, see: Mohamed Haron, “Gapena and the Cape Malays: Initiating Connections, Constructing Images,” Sari 23 (2005): 47-66.
59 Ismail Petersen became an ‘unofficial ambassador’ to Malaysia and Indonesia through his connections with Malay and Indonesian sailors who came to dock at the Cape. His interactions with these people began in 1938. As a local Muslim who was welcoming to these foreign workers, he became a well known and well-promoted contact, through word of mouth. Through these interactions he not only learned a lot about Malaysian and Indonesian cultures, but also became fluent in Bahasa Malaysia. In 1945, he established the ‘Indonesian and Malaysian Seamen’s Club’ and subsequently became so famous that he was invited to officially visit Malaysia in 1957, but due to political and other setbacks, he only made his way there (and to Indonesia) in the 1990s. He is still seen as the unofficial ambassador to the Malay world and accommodates visitors to Cape Town.
60 One of the largest, more recent trips was for an exhibition, entitled ‘Indonesians in South Africa – historical links spanning three centuries’, held over three weeks at the Gedung Arsip Nasional in Jakarta. This event was reported in both local and Indonesian media. See for example: Mehru Jaffer, “South Africans of Indonesian descent back home with arts,” Jakarta Post, 19 June, 2000 & [No Author] “Celebrating Indonesian Links,” Southern Mail, 09 August, 2000, 2.
expressed during my dealings with the society yet, evidence of this has emerged elsewhere, for example in promotional material of the society.61

In preserving and reviving remnant ‘Melayu’ culture in South Africa, the society has three main areas of focus: cooking and cuisine, music and dancing and ratiep or debus, all seen as cultural features originating from the ‘Melayu’ homeland.62 Although not one of the central foci of the society, the Islamic manuscripts at the Cape, particularly those containing jawi and other Indonesian languages are also part of SAMCS’s ‘remnant Melayu’ cultural preservation efforts.63 The society incorporates the manuscripts into their work by putting them on exhibition, along with other aspects of ‘South African Melayu’ culture, such as historical photos, wedding dresses and food. Mr Sale’s own extensive kietaab collection has been on display in Indonesia and Malaysia, under strict security, alongside ratiep implements and other objects.

While this use of the kietaabs appears similar to that of the Simons Town Heritage Museum, there are differences with regards to their movement, representation and purpose. The kietaabs are not only physically removed from their usual ‘homes’, in private collections, to be put on display in a publicly accessible space in Cape Town or any other part of South Africa. Rather, they cross national borders, and are transported across the ocean in a kind of ‘return’ to the source of their literary origins. During these returns, they are not simply displayed as evidence of the Cape Muslim’s cultural capital, but rather as a shared South African-South East Asian heritage, and as cultural proof of the Cape Muslims’ links to a Malay-Indonesian past. They are no longer simply an individual’s family heirlooms, but also a part of a transnational archive of ‘Malayness’.

In addition to such inclusion of the manuscripts at a museological level, both Malaysia and Indonesia have taken a scholarly interest in the kietaabs, carrying out their respective

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61 For instance, the SAMCS’s promotional pamphlet advertises travel to South Africa, to ‘experience Cape Melayu Culture’.

62 The ‘preservation’ involves theshowcasing of these cultural features, while the ‘revival’ appears to be re-education and re-acquaintance with the ‘homeland’, by sending people to learn various cultural practices in Indonesia. Since its establishment, the society has sent several students to learn traditional dancing, and singing and also language and culture in Indonesia.

63 Such as Bantenese, Buginese etc.
research and cataloguing projects, as discussed in the previous chapter. While these endeavours are considered part of the ‘research’ phase in the life of the manuscripts, they were also influential in the promotion of the kietaabs as objects of cultural and historical relevance. In these projects, the kietaabs were thus at once research and heritage objects.

Similar to the existence of SAMCS, the purpose of investment in the kietaabs through both studies was not simply the fulfilment of cultural, socio-historical or even philological interests. The study of the manuscripts as evidence of historical links and emotional ties between the countries, “long before they became free nations”64, were also aimed at aiding the promotion of new political, diplomatic and economic links between the countries. As expressed in the Indonesian manuscript catalogue, supported by the Indonesian Department of Culture and Tourism:

“Through this catalogue, we can all see the richness of the cultural heritage of the Indonesian-descendant community in South Africa. This cultural heritage is a link that unites both nations and needs to be forever strengthened in various sectors. Via this relationship we can develop cooperative efforts between the two nations. These efforts should be in the fields of social welfare, political economy, culture and, especially, in the field of tourism”.65

This statement speaks volumes not only about the perceived shared heritage of South Africa and Indonesia, but also the ways in which this heritage is drawn upon for political and economic purposes. In this context, and others like it, the manuscripts are recognised as tangible remnants of a shared past and culture which, in the present, not only do cultural work, but are also drawn upon in diplomatic strategy. Their existence, confirming age-old links between South Africa and the Malay-Indonesian world, has become justification for modern political-economic, trans-Indian Ocean relations.

The significance of the *kietaabs* as objects carrying a historical and cultural legacy is not limited to collective projects. The manuscripts have also become proof of individual ancestry and cultural roots in increasingly popular searches for personal heritage.

**Manuscripts as personal heritage**

In June 2009, community radio presenter Munadia Karaan set out on a publicly broadcast journey ‘back to [her] roots’. Accompanied by her father, mother and three of their grandchildren, she made her way to India, her maternal ancestral homeland and then onto Indonesia, where her father’s family originates from. As Karaan herself acknowledged, ‘In as much as this [trip] is about self discovery of our family heritage, the experience could be shared with others at home and that helps us as Cape Muslims to find a common a [sic] part of our past that had been denied to us for cons.’

In discussing the trip further, Karaan explained that an interest in heritage within the Muslim community had flourished over the past 15 years, and that by making her journey public, she would be able to give listeners ‘a real time example of finding ones roots’.

This need for knowledge of and access to one’s ancestral origins is a common phenomena in contemporary South Africa, particularly so for people in the Muslim community of Cape Town, whose origins were historically simplified or denied, or clouded in romantic myths about Javanese princes. Thus, in addition to projects articulating collective Cape Muslim culture, there have been efforts to explore and confirm the ancestry of specific individuals and families, through research.

A classic example of this is the CFRF, abovementioned, who have been investigating Cape Muslim ‘ancestral roots from across the four corners of the trade winds’ since their

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establishment in 1992. Their core membership includes family historians and community heritage activists who have carried out significant research into their own ancestry and are keen on helping others. Since their establishment, the group has traced the origins of dozens of common Muslim family names, the tangible results of which are deposited into their steadily growing archive, stored at the Simons Town Heritage Museum. Although the Forum works predominately with oral history and traditional archival sources, family kietaabs have also played a role in their explorations of certain family histories. The key, but problematic, example of someone locating their ancestry through a manuscript is that of Ebrahiem Manuel, a core member of the group. However, there are others who have approached the group with queries about their ancestry as linked to a kietaab. In fact, since my involvement with the group, there have been at least two individuals possessing manuscripts who have approached the group for help.

The use of a manuscript as possible ancestral evidence is not limited to the activities of the CFRF. In fact, it has become increasingly popular for manuscripts to be used as proof in personal heritage claims. Individuals are realising not only the historical and cultural value of their kietaabs, but also their archival potential. The kietaabs are now seen as collected traces of the past that have the ability to perform the role of ‘evidence’. Consequently, in these situations the cultural role of the manuscripts has become not only that of ‘heritage object’, but also ‘archival object’. How the manuscripts act as proof

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70 An influential member of the CFRF is Mr Ebrahiem Rhoda, a local expert on the history of the Muslim community of the Strand area in the Western Cape. See: Ebrahiem Rhoda “The founding and development of the Strand Muslim Community (1822 –1928)” (MA diss., University of the Western Cape, 2006) and Ebrahiem Rhoda, Die Strand Muslimgemeenskap: ‘n Historiese Oorsig (Cape Town: Boorhanol Publishing, 2005). He is also the main figure in the History Speaks programme on the Voice of the Cape radio.

71 While the group is not explicitly bound to researching a particular community, the majority of their research has been into Muslim families in the Western Cape, and all of the members are Cape Muslim.

72 One of these people was a man who needed help determining whether his manuscript, a handwritten Qur’an, belonged to the Raja of Tambora. The Raja, named Abdul Basir, was an exile from the eastern Indonesian island of Sumbawa, exiled to the Cape and held at Vergelegen, Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel’s country estate. It is believed that the Raja gifted a handwritten copy of the Qur’an to the Governor. See: Kerry Ward, Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 210. To my knowledge, this matter is yet to be settled.

varies. In some cases, the evidence may lie in the contents of the manuscript’s primary text or through marginal writings containing genealogies or place names, thus linking the document to a specific person or geographical location. In cases where such specific information is discovered, this often leads to a pilgrimage to the ‘homeland’, where the individual is able to physically visit their place of ancestral origin, as evidenced in their particular kietaab.

The endeavour to link oneself through kietaabs to a specific ancestor and place of origin, and therefore a ‘pure’ past, has been successful in several cases. The earliest known case is that of Erfaan Rakiep, descendant of the iconic Cape Town imam and Eastern Indonesian political convict, Tuan Guru. Rakiep, a fourth-generation descendant of Tuan Guru, inherited manuscripts and other heirlooms belonging to the Tuan, including a sword and shield brought from his birthplace of Tidore, in present-day Indonesia. Of these heirlooms, the manuscripts in particular held a place of importance in Rakiep’s family, being carefully kept and handed on through the generations. They were even used as teaching materials up until Rakiep’s time.

In the late 1970s, after inheriting the kietaabs, Rakiep discovered a piece of paper containing writings in jawi amongst them. This piece of paper sparked an interest in him, and he, along with a friend and some Indonesian sailors docked at the Cape, spent a considerable amount of time trying to decipher it. As it turned out, the jottings on the paper contained a family tree, written by the grandson of Tuan Guru. This find inspired a new-found interest in heritage for Rakiep. In 1979, he decided to take his search a step further, contacting Tempo magazine in Indonesia, who agreed to carry a story about the family. This led to contact with ‘long lost family’ in Indonesia and, eventually in 1993, a trip to the island of Tidore. Upon the verification of his research, Rakiep was welcomed into the royal family of the region and legally recognised by the sultan of Ternate as a prince of Tidore.

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74 Mr Rakiep passed away before I started my research. However, I was able to speak to his son, Muttaqin Rakiep, about the family kietaabs and his father’s journey (Muttaqin Rakiep, interview, 3 June, 2008). My information on Erfaan Rakiep and the family’s kietaabs comes from this discussion, discussions with my other informants, as well as the article: Debe Campbell, “The Forgotten Children,” Flying Springbok, July 1997, 83-87.
Erfaan Rakiep has since passed away. However, the centrality of his family’s kiestaabs to their sense of identity, and thus their value as heritage and archive, is recognised by his children. As two of his sons stated, ‘[W]e become acutely aware of how important it is for families to safeguard their manuscripts and artefacts. Not only does it ensure identity, but it also translates into a heritage we can be proud of.’

Erfaan Rakiep’s story and research attracted the interest of many individuals. One of his sons described to me how frequently different academics and researchers, including community historian Achmat Davids, would visit his father. These people would come to speak to him and to look at the sources he had in his home, for help with their own research. Here, the manuscripts were simultaneously potential research objects, on the part of the visitors, and heritage objects for Rakiep. Rakiep’s story also inspired, and still inspires, other individuals to look to their own family kiestaabs as sources of history and ancestry. His experience was perhaps the catalyst that brought about the shift in the perception of the kiestaabs as valuable heritage and objects with archival potential.

A more recent, unpublicised story of ‘reconnection with the homeland’ through kiestaabs is that of the late Hassiem Salie, former President of SAMCS. Like Rakiep, Salie’s personal collection of manuscripts was passed down through the generations of his family, eventually reaching him. Salie started to take his manuscripts seriously in the early 1990s, around the time he started the cultural society. His vast personal collection has since taken on many roles, including one of personal discovery.

Although Mr Salie, or ‘uncle Hassiem’, as he became to me, offered to show his manuscripts to me from early on, he did not discuss the specifics of their origins or his research into them. He spoke of the basics – that these manuscripts linked the Salies to Banten and to Makassar in some way – but the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ were never apparent. Given the high level of security he guarded his manuscripts with physically, I assumed that the family stories around them would be equally protected. I thus conceded that I

may never know the tales around the Salies’ kietaabs. Yet, much later in our interactions, these stories surfaced.

One day I paid Mr Salie a quick visit to see how he was, as his wife had informed me that he had fallen sick. Sitting close to the foot of his bed, I listened as he spoke about his manuscripts. He was clearly straining and frequently out of breath, but he insisted that he was fine. He clearly took joy out of talking about ‘the culture’.

In contrast to Rakiep’s research, Hassiem Salie’s investigation into his kietaabs began in Indonesia. In 2006 Mr Salie’s daughter, Rayhana, went to Indonesia to spend a year working and learning Bahasa Indonesia. At the request of her father, she took a copy of some of the pages of a particular manuscript with her. The Salie’s originally thought this manuscript was from Banten, West Java, as that is where, according to oral history, their ancestor Ahmad bin Salie originated from. However, after sharing the copies with some manuscript experts, Rayhana was told that the kietaab was actually from Makassar, on the island of Sulawesi. She then journeyed to South Sulawesi, and was led to a small village, where the locals recognised the contents of the kietaab. The text outlined a ritual, piri-piri di Makah dan Madinah, that existed only in this village, and was practised by the wife of Ahmad bin Salie. After some questioning and spiritual ‘tests’, it was confirmed that the Salies were linked to this village. They too, then, discovered their own ‘pure’ link to an Indonesian past, through their family kietaabs.

Despite these success stories, not all kietaab owners are able to link themselves to a particular ancestry or place of origin using their documents. However, some manuscripts, especially jawi kietaabs, have been used to affirm people’s ‘Malay’ heritage in more general ways. In cases where Malay enthusiasts have not been able to make direct links through their kietaabs, they have promoted their possession of jawi kietaabs as general proof of being ‘Malay’. That is to say, because they possess manuscripts that contain writings in the Malay language, their ancestors ‘must have been Malay’. In fact, the possession of kietaabs has gained quite a deal of esteem in Malay heritage circles. As put by one ‘cultural

76 This included having to dream about a specific ancestor.
activist’, after I sought his opinion on what makes a Cape Malay, Malay: “you’ve gotta have manuscripts.” This statement alone indicates the centrality of kietaabs to identity for people in these circles.

Although kietaabs are used to confirm one’s own ‘Malayness’, they have also been used to indirectly discredit that of others. That is, the ability to prove one’s own Malayness through manuscripts has led to suspicion and judgement of the veracity of other people’s claims to Malayness. On more than one occasion, during conversations with different cultural activists, a certain person’s level of knowledge about or experience of Malay heritage was made questionable by a statement such as “but he doesn’t have manuscripts.” These types of situations indicate a kind of competitiveness in terms of cultural influence or knowledge between different heritage and cultural enthusiasts, where possession of manuscripts, and most probably other cultural objects, elevate one’s status on the playing field. Therefore, in addition to being archival objects for heritage claims, the kietaabs have also become cultural capital.

For those who do not possess manuscripts, especially in cases where they have been destroyed, this can be a very sensitive matter. There is a deep sense of loss of heritage felt by people in such situations. This matter emerged most clearly during my fieldwork in my interactions with ‘Bapak’ Ismail Petersen, whose kietaabs were almost all destroyed, except for five or so copies which he keeps with much care. Bapak Ismail often becomes quite moved when speaking of his kietaabs. However, on one occasion when explaining that he was still trying to search for any family manuscripts that were not destroyed, he got to the heart of the matter. He expressed that, for him, the kietaabs provide a heritage and, without his kietaabs, there is no sense of his heritage. Thus, while for some the possession of these manuscripts provides ancestral evidence and a stable identity, for those who do not possess or perhaps lost them, the impact on identity can be detrimental.

The role of manuscripts as heritage and as objects with archival potential is not restricted to the domain of Malay identity and certainly does not end here. While not part of the

scope of this particular work, it is important to mention emergent ways in which the *kietaabs’* role as ‘heritage object’ is being manifested. Currently, with debates around the origins of the Afrikaans language entering the cultural sphere in the form of creative stage productions, public seminars, documentaries and even museum exhibitions, Arabic-Afrikaans *kietaabs* in particular are being sought after for their heritage value. Where this nascent use of the Arabic-Afrikaans *kietaabs* will take the manuscripts in their continuing life will no doubt be worth observation.

This chapter has explored the ways in which the *kietaabs* have become objects of heritage in contemporary Cape Town and, in some cases, beyond it. This phase in the life of the *kietaabs* was influenced predominantly by the changing discourses of history and heritage, and shifting identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa. As heritage objects, the *kietaabs* not only represent the Cape Muslim community, their history and achievements, but are also archival sources for claims to individual ancestries and ethnic purity. While becoming symbols of history and culture, the *kietaabs* have also been affected physically, leaving their places of sequestration and entering the space of the cultural institution, to be viewed by outsiders from a variety of different publics. Their public reach has further widened through their inclusion in cultural heritage campaigns in community media. While the life of the manuscripts continues, my observations of their roles, movements and changing value ends here. The next chapter concludes this study with a summary, evaluation and recommendations for further research.

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Conclusion

“Indeed, what is left of the past...? What has come down to us of all the things that were said, whispered, and devised for countless generations? Scarcely anything... (Amin Maalouf)\(^1\)

The Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town have largely been approached as written texts, to be studied for their content only. Through a significant shift in approach, this study has put forth the manuscripts’ relevance as objects with specific lives to be traced. In so doing it has gone beyond traditional considerations of archives, drawing attention to the life history of the documents themselves, and not simply the information they may contain. Furthermore, this approach has offered a unique lens through which to view the broader social, political and cultural changes contributing to the dynamics of the biography of archival objects.

Tracing the \textit{kietaabs}’ biography has revealed distinct shifts in their life stages, shedding light on how they have become objects of contemporary heritage and identity. In accounting for these shifts, the study has periodised and separately analysed the different stages in the life of the \textit{kietaabs}. However, it has also shown the interconnectedness of the various stages, and the accrual of history that occurs as the manuscripts move between the phases of their life. Furthermore, through the use of a biographical framework, rather than that of a straightforward history, this study has addressed both how the \textit{kietaabs} are affected by broader contextual issues, and how they in turn influence their greater context.

As has been shown, the manuscripts were produced as subaltern literacy strategies of the Muslim community in Cape Town in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. They were created out of the needs for education materials in madrasahs, for recording medicinal

and other remedies, and for written social communication. However, from the late 19th century, as the Muslim community became integrated into modern, more mainstream forms of education, *ajami kietaabs* became obsolete. Having lost their usefulness and gained the stigma of a substandard form of religion and education, and a past of subordination, many manuscripts were discarded by their owners and inheritors. Yet, others were preserved – either by accident, without knowledge of their significance, or purposefully, due to recognition of their importance. Of those that survived, certain manuscripts became heirlooms passed on in family or scholarly networks and sequestered in the private domain of the family home, as objects affirming a righteous history and lineage.

Through academic projects in the mid-20th century, the manuscripts entered a new life stage, as sources of research. In this role they were studied in numerous disciplines, from sociolinguistics to Malay philology, consequently acquiring a variety of sub-roles. Different academics used the *kietaabs* as examples of ‘quaint Muslim literature’ at the Cape, evidence of the Creole nature of the Afrikaans language, and as material remnants of the global spread of *jawi*. Through the presence and attention of academic researchers, the manuscripts became consecrated as objects worthy of official outsider consideration, and consequently there was an elevation of their value and status as social objects. This stage in the life of the *kietaabs* also marked the beginning of the proliferation of secondary texts about them and, consequently, a growing number of different publics engaging with them.

In the late 20th century, the growing awareness of the manuscripts’ value, combined with political transformation and shifting identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa, led to the next phase in their life story. In the search for new articulations of Cape Muslim history and identity, in particular the revived ‘Malayist’ discourse of certain individuals and groups, the *kietaabs* were further elevated to the status of ‘heritage objects’. Recognising the manuscripts as material remnants of past practices and traditions of the Muslim community at the Cape, heritage practitioners and cultural activists included them in contemporary projections of the past, both through physical display and as symbols drawn upon in popular discourse. Furthermore, for certain individuals in the
Muslim community, the *kietaabs* became archival objects from which to claim a personal South East Asian heritage ancestry. They were (and still are) valued as proof of the community and an individual’s ‘Malayness’.

The use of the *kietaabs* as objects to strengthen claims to Malayness by certain individuals and groups raises broader issues surrounding Cape Muslim identity, and more generally minority identities, in contemporary South Africa. It points to a need to construct a separate identity distinct from apartheid-enforced Colouredness and also distanced from other South African communities, including other Muslim and coloured groups. There is a conscious effort to promote an exclusive South East Asian identity, with allegiances as strong – if not stronger – to the Malay world as to (South) Africa.

This articulation of foreign origins highlights both the desire to be distinct from the local context and a need to be included in a global community. In terms of the former, constructing a diasporic identity implies rejection of any indigenous links to South Africa. Articulating pure ‘Malayness’ is thus another way of subtly distancing oneself from indigeneity and Africanness. Furthermore, based on common racial stereotypes, it is also a means of claiming ties to a more ‘refined’, culturally ‘superior’ people. With regards to the latter, identifying as ‘Malay’ provides this minority group with the security, stability and esteem of belonging to a global community. Although there may be ambivalence regarding where ‘Cape Malays’ fit in the South African context, they can be assured of a place in the ‘Malay World’.

That the *kietaabs* have been taken up as evidence of ‘Malay’ cultural identity speaks volumes about views on archive and authenticity in this particular community. For many in the community, the construction and maintenance of identity must be grounded in some form of archival proof, preferably tangible documents or objects. However, for many Cape Muslims, as the descendants of subaltern peoples, it is difficult to locate detailed information of ancestors in traditional archival documents, such as those in State-run repositories. To fill this gap in the knowledge, certain individuals have turned to alternative forms of archive for keys to their ancestral origins. While this includes oral history and family tradition, there is an increased emphasis on tangible relics, such as the
manuscripts. Significantly, in the case of the *kietaabs*, their mere existence as inherited objects in the *ajami* script is proof enough of ‘Malayness’ – the actual content of the documents is not particularly important.

This study has approached the Islamic manuscripts of Cape Town through the specific perspective of them as *objects* with traceable and complex life histories. However, through the research process, it has become clear that many other aspects of the *kietaabs* require further investigation. While the majority of previous research on the *kietaabs* has been at a textual level, more such work needs to be undertaken, particularly in translation and interpretation of manuscripts – both Arabic-Afrikaans and *jawi*. As mentioned above, there is currently insufficient information about the content of manuscripts and, consequently, they are dealt with at a superficial level, particularly in their role as evidence of identity and ancestry. In most cases, the *kietaabs* are used as proof of identity based on the language they are in, and not their actual contents. No doubt deeper insight into their contents will have a significant impact on their role as heritage and archive, and may possibly trigger yet another phase in their life.

In order to aid such work, the ongoing identification and documentation of manuscript collections in the Cape Muslim community is necessary. This will involve fieldwork and community consultation, as well as digitisation and preservation projects, in order to document and help preserve extant manuscripts.

Furthermore, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the context in which the *kietaabs* were created, studies into the book culture around them are recommended. This includes research into book production in Cape Town in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the place of Islamic book production in this context. Related to this, the study of the transition from handwritten to printed *ajami* books, including the logistics, economics and social aspects of this shift is suggested. Such research is necessary to deepening our understanding of the place of Islamic manuscripts in broader book history and the history of writing cultures in South Africa and beyond. This study

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2 An example of this would be my translation and analysis of the three Afrikaans texts in Chapter One.
has made a significant contribution to such knowledge, providing insight into Islamic books beyond their use as carriers of information – as objects with social roles and social lives.

As this study has traced the biography of the *kietaabs* and how they came to be objects of heritage and identity, it has also told the story of their survival. The *kietaabs* that today sit in the cabinets of the Simons Town Heritage Museum and in sequestered spaces in homes scattered across the greater Cape Town area comprise but a sliver of the total number of Islamic manuscripts that once existed. While the vast majority of manuscripts were burned, buried or lost and never recovered, these books managed to survive. As demonstrated, certain individuals and families preserved them either by accident, without the knowledge of their value, or purposefully because of a religious, scholarly or ancestral significance seen in them. Then, due to outside forces raising awareness of these manuscripts as objects of academic and cultural relevance, they became increasingly valued and thus protected. Therefore, their survival has always been linked to perceptions of their status.

The phenomenon of the safeguarding of Islamic documents echoes similar cases in other regions, where Islamic manuscripts are kept in families, often without knowledge of their contents but rather out of a reverence for the documents as written Islamic texts, and as documents in the Arabic script. A key example of this is in the town of Timbuktu, Mali, where for decades families have held onto their manuscripts in their storerooms and even underground, only discovering their contents with the arrival of researchers and heritage practitioners. As a case study of this phenomenon, this thesis lays a foundation for further study into this contemporary aspect of Islamic manuscript culture.

In as much as this study of the extant *kietaabs* has shed light on how and why these specific books – of all those written and circulated for countless generations – managed to survive, it has also drawn attention to the gaps and silences in the archive representing those that did not. That is to say, by focusing on what is left of the past, attention has also been drawn, if only discretely, to that which is not. Furthermore, by accounting for those *kietaabs* that still exist, this exploration has brought into focus the *ajami* writing
culture and subaltern literary history of Cape Town – aspects of the past that remain largely silenced in academic and popular histories of South Africa.
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Appendix: Transliterations of Arabic-Afrikaans Texts Analysed

Text One: Text Headings and Excerpt from Koples Boek of Achmat Peters

Headings:
(Opening du’ah)
Arkaanoel Islam
Arkaanoel Iemaan
Die vard van die abdas
Doe’ah wat abdas breek
Arkaan van salaah
Die waktuus van salaah
Die nieyats van mandi
Die nieyas van die salaah
Takbier al-Iehram
Al iefta-ta
Die Fatiehah
Die Koenoet
Die Tahieyyah
Iestiegfar
Doe’ah agter salaah
Die bedryfs van salaah
Die volkomde manierte van abdas
Baca as klaar abdas geneem het
Baca voor gaan in die jamang
Die manierte om te mandie
Die athaan
Athaan syn doe’ah
Ieqama
Niyat van poeasa

Arkaanul Imaan

Die arkaans van die iemaan is ses. Die eerste is om te geloof in Allah en dat Allah een is by syn selw en by syn maniere en by syn werksloon. Die tweede is om te geloof in Allah syn malaikat en hulle het lyf en siel van noer en hulle is nie man of vrou nie hulle eet nie en drink nie en trou ook nie hulle maak dag en nag iebraadat vir Allah. Die dieer (derde) is om te geloof Allah syn kieraape en dit is altesaame een honerd en veer. Maar al die ander kieraaps is af geskaf moet (met) die Qur’an. Die vierde is om te geloof an Allah syn rasoels. Die vyfte is om te geloof die laaste dag wat sal kom wat die weereel sal vergaan.
Die seste is om te geloof waarlik Allah het uit gesit goed in *kwaad* Maar Allah belet die *kwaad* en o(r)der om goed te doen en al die uitsetting is van Allah.

*Text Two: Azeemat ‘Reference Book’*

1. Die azeemat moet met safram en rose water geskrywe word op papier dan sit die azeemat in ‘in wit botol water reent water is die beste dan gee om tedrink ‘n half koppie drie keer op ‘n dag die azeemat is vir een wat geslaap het toe droom hy toe agter dit voel hy siek en so an

2. Die azeemat is vir ‘n Moesliem kind dat is in *ikhtiar* sit in die *tie kas loot??* en ’n wit lap dan hang om die nek.

3. Die azeemat moet op papier geskryf word die azeemat is ir kopseer. Sit dit in die *tie kas loot??* Dan dra dit in ’n lap dan maak vas waar dit seer is.

4. Die azeemat moet geskrywe word op papier neem eers abdas dit moet net op ’n donderdag aand agter *isha’* of juma’a dag geskrywe word soembajang eers twee raka’ats sunnatillahi ta’ala die azeemat is laat jou water nie so gou moet kom nie as dji jou vrou gaan gebruik dan maak die azeemat om jou lyf vas as dji klaar is dan haal dit af dit kan weer gebruik wort.

*Text Three: Letter to Imam Bassier*

Aslah Allahu ta’ala āmīn

Na mijn hooige geliefste imām en geleere [sic] mense wat ek naa skrywe en ek hoop laat u karena Allah vir myn moet verstaan. Nou maak ek bekent in u wat gebeer is in die Kaap van een trou wat *sleg* is by die geloof van ons en ek vraag in die hooige Allah laat Allah moet *bewaar* vir myn en mijn broeters van so een *sleg* die werks loon āmīn. Nou sêg ek mijn vrou moe’minat het weg geloop van haar man die een en twintigste *noember* (November) 1911. En die negentien october (Oktober) 1913 toe kom imām Abubakr en Muhammad Sa’id ibn imām

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1 This transliteration includes diacritical marks, hence the change in font.
Muhammad Sa’dân vir mijn talâq vraag van mijn vrou. Toe sêg ek laat sy moet huistoe kom en die een en twintigste optober (oktober) toe skrywe imâm Abubakr vir myn laat sy tevrede is om huistoe toe kom en die agtiende desember toe laat Abdulraouf ibn imâm Abdullah myn vrou trou wat nie getalâq is nie en die geteke daarvan is imâm Abubakr en Muhammad Toefie en nog een man wat saam gewees het an die diertienste desember toe maak Muhammad Toefie die trou batal voor imâm Abubakr en voor ander geteekene ak an die agste januarie 1914 toe laat imâm Abubakr weer talâq vraag moet Muhammad Rasdien en Moetalib en nou sêg ek laat ek sien in die mukhtașar kitâb laat dit een van die groeste [sic] haraam is om twee mense by mekaar wat te sit wat nie getrou is nie en die imâm geleere mense gemaak het wat haraam is en hulle is die mense wat verstaan die naçu en šarf en die yahûd en die naṣâr en die majûsF hulle maak nie so nie die laat trou wat ’n vrou wat nie getalâq is nie. Nou vraag ek an die imâm en die geleere mense wie is nou sleg daar van hulle en die sonder is tussen die man wat laat trou het die vrou en tussen getuike so lank as die twee mense by mekaar is en die trou man is Ja’afar Sâdiq ibn imâm Muhammad Sa’dân en dit sal moet bekent gemaak word deur die hele land en bevaar die brief vir een dag en ek vraag an die hoege Allah om vir hulle die bevaar van die sonde wat hulle gedoen het en Allah weet beter van die werks loon.

Wasalaam
Ek blyf u vriend
Khatîb Muhammad ibn Toufa
Januarie die twintigste 1914

Nou imâm en geleere mense ek het vir imâm Abdullah gekrywe twee briewe om te sêg vir imâm Abubakr en vir Abdulraouf laat hulle moet order die man van mijn vrou af en ek het vir imâm Abubakr ook gekrywe en ek het nie anwoor [sic] gekry daar op nie nou imâm en geleere mense gee karensa Allah vir mijn een anwoor op mijn praate wat reg is of wat verkeerd is en Allah is tevrede moet die genige wat die geregteheid sêg en batja die brief karensa Allah voor die jama’at laat hulle ek kan weet wat gebeer is in die Kaap ek ek vraag an die hoege Allah vergewens as ek mistake gemaak het in mijn skrywe in.

Wasalaam

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