

The Moral Economy of Islamic Philanthropy in Cape Town:
The Case of Mustadafin Foundation and Africa Muslims
Agency



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Abstract

This dissertation explores two Muslim philanthropy organisations in Cape Town, the Mustadafin Foundation and the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA). The aim of the thesis is twofold: one is to unpack the plurality of ethics that motivate their philanthropy, and the second is to explore the ways and extent to which they constitute a moral economy of donation and distribution. Established in 1986, the Mustadafin Foundation is a homegrown South African organisation with a legacy of community building and political activism driven by an Islamic social justice ethos. On the other hand, AMA was founded in 1981 as a transnational humanitarian organisation operating across Africa and Asia. Both organisations play a critical role in township development by providing food, water, education (secular and religious), disaster relief, and other essential services.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and theoretical analysis, this study illuminates the vast tapestry of engagement woven by faith, ethics of care, and community building in a post-apartheid dispensation. It argues that the motivations for giving are diverse, encompassing religious obligation, social solidarity, and community welfare. Anchored in Alhourani's (2024) conception of Islamic giving as constitutive of moral economy and Mona Atia's (2013) concept of pious neoliberalism, the dissertation examines the strategic objectives of Islamic philanthropy and its contributions to the social and economic growth of township communities in Cape Town. This dissertation contributes to the nascent field of Islamic philanthropy studies in Cape Town by providing a comparative account between local and transnational Muslim philanthropic organisations. The thesis argues that a plurality of ethics inspires both organisations and that they constitute a moral economy. It offers critical insights into its role in fostering social cohesion, social solidarity, conviviality, and Islamisation.

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Author's Note

Note on Racial Terminology and Anonymity

The use of racial terms in this dissertation does not imply an endorsement of the idea that human beings can be divided and categorised into fixed biological groups with inherent characteristics. I hold that 'race' has no scientific validity; however, it remains a legal and social reality that continues to be utilised in broader public discourse. Ultimately, I reject racial classifications imposed on people; however, in South Africa, racial classifications such as those used in Census data and official documents persist in everyday life, including employment, education, etc. For clarity, this dissertation follows commonly used racial descriptors as they appear in historical sources (chapter 2) and contemporary discussions. In most cases, these terms are not placed in quotation marks. However, I use them with full awareness of their problematic nature, not only to myself as the author but to my interlocutors and broader society.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 *Vignette*

It was a crisp afternoon in November 2023 when I first met the staff of the Mustadafin Foundation. We were greeted by a tall, bubbly lady named Shameemah De Jongh with an infectious smile. The building was new; one could tell by the freshness of the paint. Shameemah took us on a building tour and explained what happens every week. To hear the number of people the organisation feeds daily was unbelievable. From this very first meeting, it was evident that there is a deep-rooted culture of care and service. We were introduced to the staff, from the front desk to the volunteers, who give their time every weekend to a good cause. Muslims and Christians all cite a desire to do good work in their community. After the tour, Shameemah took us upstairs to meet the organisation's director, Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassiem. This meeting introduced me to Nazlie Behardien, the organisation's secretary. I shared my biographical details and my intentions with the organisation. I was quickly welcomed and shown the ropes. While the fieldwork did not start immediately, I was learning quickly what it would look like once I received ethical clearance from the faculty. Shameemah and Ghairunisa proudly shared that the building was an upgrade from their previous premises and was funded solely through donations. Upon hearing this, my curiosity was piqued, and many questions arose. Who in their right mind gives millions of Rands in this economy to an NGO? What informs such a decision? Were the donors looking to get a profit in return? My initial apprehension about meeting this organisation was removed, and from that moment, I listened intently in an attempt to unpack and understand what informs what I thought of at the time as mindless giving. Further engagement with Mustadafin revealed answers to the questions that I had for my research and my personal ones.

From the first day, it was clear that the Mustadafin Foundation is a Muslim organisation informed by Islamic principles drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. This has been exemplified through the aesthetic Islamic features of their office decorations. The Qur'anic reminders on posters also remind them of their Islamic identity.

However, the organisation does not view itself as operating alone and only serving Muslims. It is located in Bridgetown, which is a predominantly ‘Coloured’¹ community and has a vast Christian population. In such a community, there are families which have a multiplicity of religious backgrounds, with Muslims and Christians often living together in the same house. And in the spirit of conviviality, Mustadafin celebrates Christmas with the community annually on the 24th of December, I joined the foundation volunteers to cook meals, which will be distributed the next day to needy people to celebrate their Christmas. Over 1000 pieces of chicken were cooked in four 100-litre pots. This process included marinating meat, chopping onions, and preparing green salad and other vegetables. The preparation, while physically taxing, offered an insight into how preparing food for over 200 people goes. I found that the aesthetic experience of cooking copious amounts of food during Christmas in a Muslim organisation was a profound cultural and spiritual exchange where the culinary affair became a bridge of hospitality, connection, and care.

Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) was a different affair altogether. Meeting Rabiah was not at all planned. Rabiah sat next to me after an event in Rondebosch on interfaith dialogue. After our conversation, she told me she worked at the Africa Muslims Agency, and we got into contact to arrange for my participation in AMA events in Cape Town. My participant observation at the AMA events exposed me to a different Islamic giving approach involving religious propagation. My first event with AMA was in Manenberg in May of 2023, giving out *zakat* packages to Muslim families and feeding food to children in the area. While AMA recognises non-Muslims and their right to receive humanitarian aid, there seems to be a culture of preferring Muslims first. Especially when it comes to *zakat* donated, and the donors have specified that it is *zakat* that should go to Muslims. At that event, cooked food, booklets, and blankets were distributed, accompanied by religious talks, which the organisation makes an effort to include. Many volunteers I met have cited their spirituality and their hope to do something good in society as the central reasons for their volunteering and giving. In all the events I attended with AMA, there was an understanding that Muslims should not struggle financially or with hunger, while there are those who can make a difference and feed. There is a deep-rooted culture of care based on Islamic principles.

¹ This term is a problematic racial identifier used for people of mixed heritage under apartheid. The author uses this term in inverted commas as a social and political identifier. See Author’s Note.

The AMA culture of giving and sharing with community members who are known personally by the staff and some volunteers is akin to Mustadafin. What I found interesting about AMA and the Mustadafin Foundation's philanthropy is that a plurality of ethics drives both organisations. On the one hand, the AMA places more emphasis on Islamisation and *da'wa*². But yet, they also exhibit a great deal of social concern. On the other hand, Mustadafin Foundation stresses a social commitment and national belonging and commitment to the marginalised in society, which they also attach to their sense of piety and being a Muslim.

My experiences at both organisations have resulted in a deep interest in Islamic philanthropy and its social functions. Many scholars have explained the social and religious function of Islamic philanthropy, which fosters a sense of conviviality, solidarity, Ubuntu, care, and piety to God, all of which are entangled in Islamic giving (Alhourani 2024). This plurality of entangled ethics motivates the volunteers to avail themselves and for donors to generously give copious amounts of money towards a variety of projects. For Alhourani (2024), to assume that there is only one motivation of Islamic giving, and that it may be limited to following a religious obligation to God or just a social obligation, is a reductive way to perceive the complexities of Islamic giving. This plurality of ethics gives this thesis salience and is the impetus for such a study to be undertaken.

The second significant observation is that the social services provided by Mustadafin and AMA, including regular food distribution and long-term projects aiming for individual and collective empowerment, constitute a moral economy of donation and distribution rooted in Islamic ethics of giving and concern about the welfare of broader society (Alhourani 2024). Importantly, Mustadafin's and AMA's style of philanthropy is not a recent phenomenon but rather belongs to an old tradition of Islamic giving in South Africa.

² Da'wa is an Arabic term meaning 'issuing a summons' or 'making an invitation'. In Islamic theology, it refers to inviting people to embrace Islam. The English equivalent of the word is 'proselytisation'.

1.2 Islamic Giving in South Africa

Islamic philanthropy has been practised in minority and majority Muslim societies since the advent of Islam in the 7th century in Arabia. What is meant by ‘Islamic giving’ is broad, but for this dissertation, it will be limited to only *zakat* and *sadaqah*³. In many parts of the world, this form of philanthropy has been the last resort communities have looked at for poverty alleviation and community building. Multiple scholars have written about its social and individual impact in such societies (Alhourani 2024; Sadouni 2007; Clarke 2006, Atia 2012). Studies have shown that Islamic philanthropy has provided immediate intervention, and it also includes long-lasting social and individual development and progress (Alhourani 2024; Atia 2013). Islamic philanthropy has been a financial foundation of Muslim societies worldwide through the payments of *zakat* and *sadaqah* to the poorest of societies, increasing social solidarity among people (Singer 2008).

Islamic giving in South Africa has played an integral and foundational role for Muslim communities since they arrived at the Cape in 1658. Examples of Islamic giving arise from the very first Muslims who arrived in South Africa, namely, Shaykh Yusuf Makassar al Khalwati, who arrived at the Cape as a political prisoner exiled from his native Java in 1694, is generally regarded as the founder of Islam at the Cape. He established religious classes in secret for runaway slaves. Another influential scholar who had contributed to the construction of the Muslim community in Cape Town was Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam, also known as Tuan Guru (Mister Teacher), who established the first mosque and Madrasah in South Africa in 1794, which was built on land donated as *waqf* by a Muslim woman named Saartjie van de Kaap (Davids 1980, Jeppie 1996). Gradually, more mosques and madrasahs were built to serve the broader Muslim community of Cape Town, supported by Islamic philanthropy.

³ *Zakat* is one of the pillars of Islam and is a mandatory almsgiving in which every Muslim must participate. It involves paying 2.5% of one’s surplus annual wealth. *Sadaqah* is a voluntary charity that can be given in cash or kind. The Qur’an underpins Muslim ethics of giving, which the Qur’an prescribes as *zakat*. Linguistically, the word *zakat* means “to purify”; this purification is metaphysical and refers to wealth. *Zakat, one of Islam’s five pillars*, is an integral feature of Islamic societies and moral economies. This form of charity is incumbent on every Muslim who can afford it. In Nabih Faris’ (1966) translation of prominent Islamic scholar Al-Ghazali’s *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, he asserts that God has made almsgiving (*zakat*) a pillar of Islam, placing it next to prayer, which is the ultimate duty in Islam. Thus, believers take this command very seriously across the globe. It is the payment of 2.5% of one’s wealth, and it is to be paid to eight categories of people. The categorisation of potential *zakat* recipients can be found in the Qur’an in chapter 9, verse 60, namely: The poor (*fuqarâ*), the needy (*al masâkin*), *zakat* administrators, new Muslims, those in bondage, those struggling with debt, those in the cause of God, the wayfarer or traveller (Quran, 9:60).

Since the 1800s, Islam has been institutionalised in South Africa by establishing various structures such as mosques and madrasahs. In the early 1900s, under the inspiration of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, the Muslim communities in Cape Town opened Muslim Mission Schools. Dr Abdurahman sought to introduce modernisation and, by extension, institutionalisation for a much larger section of Cape Muslim society (Tayob 1995). An example of Muslim modernisation of Islamic institutions is the establishment of the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF) in 1974 as part of the Islamic Resurgence movement (Tayob 1995; Sadouni 2007). The establishment of SANZAF ensured the centralisation of Islamic giving and the modernisation of its institutional operation. It turned Islamic giving from an act of piety to a force for social solidarity (Tayob 1995). The role that SANZAF played was not only limited to function as the financial organisational wing of Muslims, but its establishment also had implications for Islamic visibility in public life. Muslims could give their money designated for charity to an organisation that positioned itself as concerned with helping poor Muslims. This represents the social function and religious obligation of Islamic giving at the time. SANZAF has grown to be the foremost important organisation in Muslim life in South Africa. Since its establishment, SANZAF has provided various social services, including scholarships for students who cannot afford tuition fees, feeding schemes and women empowerment programs, all supported by *zakat* funds.

During apartheid, Islamic philanthropic organisations in South Africa provided a range of social services solely for the Muslim community. Organisations such as the Mustadafin Foundation, founded in 1986, and Africa Muslims Agency, established in 1987 (Sadouni 2007), were involved in charitable events. Initially, during apartheid, Muslims were concerned with their own racial and ethnic communities and gave to one another, a tendency which has been understood within the framework of Islamisation; however, there was a shift in the manner of giving towards non-Muslims in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sadouni 2007). This shift comes as a result of a movement of regionalisation, which intended to create a new approach to Islam in South Africa, that called for South African Muslims to stop focusing solely on their ethnic communities or the Arab world (Sadouni 2007: 105). In the post-apartheid dispensation, Islamic giving has extended beyond the Muslim community and includes non-Muslims. Islamic giving became an avenue through which Muslims perform their citizenship and belonging to South Africa (Alhourani 2020). Muslim organisations such as the Mustadafin Foundation, Africa Muslims Agency, and the Gift of the Givers established a national

reputation for providing social welfare and long-term projects aiming for social development in poor areas, and these projects benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Within the context explained above, Black townships in South Africa became primary recipients of Islamic giving due to the unbearable poverty that comes with living in townships. As Vahed and Jeppie (2004) highlight, the Black communities are the ones in dire need of Islamic philanthropy and the reasons for this are rooted in apartheid and its history of extensive racial discrimination and disenfranchisement, exclusion of Black populations from jobs and other opportunities that could generate income for them. Various Muslim philanthropic organisations were established to provide for Muslim and non-Muslim living in townships disaster relief and economic assistance that foster development programs, including debt relief to Muslim families and scholarships and bursaries to Muslim students who cannot afford the fees. Notably, although the Black African Muslim community is the fastest-growing Muslim group in South Africa, constituting 12 per cent of the Muslim population in 2001, they remain on the periphery of “Muslim community life” socially and financially (Sitoto 2002:44; Vahed and Jeppie 2004:263). Sultan Khan (2011) corroborates this by showing the income levels of the distinct racial groups within the Muslim community, with the African Muslims being the lowest on the list.

This research finds salience in the fact that Islamic philanthropy has played a major social role in Black townships, providing a range of social services for poor people who are struck with calamity, severe hunger and homelessness. The economic situation, especially in Black townships, has gotten to a point where the government has failed to make provisions for its citizens regarding housing and food, and this is where Islamic giving becomes a crucial resource, providing daily needs and fostering social development and individual empowerment.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

This research study explores how Islamic philanthropy contributes to countering ever-emerging socioeconomic crises in the townships. The objective of this thesis is twofold; one is to explore the ways and extent to which Islamic philanthropy constitutes a moral economy in Black townships. Second, the study seeks to understand the plurality of ethics behind giving and how it is practised between two vastly different organisations operating in the same area. This

dissertation is a comparative study between a local Muslim philanthropic organisation, Mustadafin Foundation, and an international Muslim philanthropic organisation, the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA). This comparative account aims to shed light on what ethics drive their philanthropy in townships and the extent and ways in which it constitutes a moral economy. In my exploration of Islamic giving and philanthropy, I will be guided by a set of questions that the fieldwork and research will seek to answer:

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the social and physical infrastructures of Islamic philanthropy in the townships of Cape Town?
2. What are the strategic objectives of Islamic philanthropic organisations in townships generally?
3. How does Islamic philanthropy contribute to social development and individual empowerment in the township?
4. What are the ethics that motivate Islamic philanthropy in Cape Town?

1.5 Review of Key Literature of Islamic Philanthropy in Africa

Islamic philanthropy is a field that has received much scholarly attention. Holger Weiss (2020) writes about *zakat* in Ghana, highlighting its importance in poverty alleviation. Due to it being incumbent upon every Muslim, *zakat* is discussed in public at mosque sermons. Weiss' edited book features multiple contributions from authors writing across Africa on the importance of *zakat*. Unlike in South Africa, *zakat* in Ghana is not institutionalised, and therefore its collection is conducted locally at the mosques and other gatherings. In Ghana, people donate to widows, orphans, and mosques. Muslims pay their *zakat* in cash or kind, including shoes, textiles, clothes, and food items; and the mosques do not have a fund for *zakat* (Weiss 2020). Similar to Ghana, in Nigeria, *zakat* is not institutionalised as well. Dauda Abubakar (2013) considers the giving of *zakat* in Jos, Nigeria, as a gift exchange. He explains that it is a common practice in Jos to exchange and share gifts, which is underpinned by Islamic ethics and community practices. As in Ghana, Jos has no organised and institutionalised form of paying *zakat*. He explains that in twelve other states in northern Nigeria, the state has provided a state-organised administration of *zakat* in the year 2000. The group named Izala, which was created for the

collection of *zakat*, only collects during the month of Ramadan; they have a *sa'i* (*zakat* collector) who reminds wealthy people to pay their *zakat* to the organisation. This mode of collection and distribution is not as sophisticated as the South African *zakat* collection and distribution model. Weiss (2020; 285) corroborates Abubakar's points on distribution, stating that there are discourses that Muslims are poor and prefer to pay *zakat* traditionally, perhaps to the mosque or imams and scholars or directly to people who are meant to receive it. Furthermore, Weiss (2020: 285) speaks about how *zakat* is doled out, he contends that it is "seemingly haphazardly without a clear objective to change the life of the poor and needy." In an interview he had with an interlocutor, he critiques the lack of coordination and collection as well as the distribution of *zakat*, suggesting that *zakat* has had no impact on the empowerment of Muslims in Ghana.

While in the case of Nigeria and Ghana, giving *zakat* is not institutionalised, in the case of South Africa, the collection and distribution of *zakat* was institutionalised with the establishment of SANZAF. For Tayob, the establishment of SANZAF, "turned this pillar [*zakat*] from a personal duty of conscience into a social obligation" (Tayob 1995:121), which entails the promotion of Islamic values as a force for social solidarity and anti-apartheid political struggle (Tayob 1995). The establishment of the South African National Zakah Fund has allowed South Africans to collect and distribute *zakat* seamlessly. Following a codified and religiously mandatory form of charity, Muslims pay this religious tax to fulfil a pillar of Islam and ensure the social welfare development of Muslims afflicted with socio-economic difficulties (Khan 2011). Building on the understanding of Islamic philanthropy as an institutionalised economy of donation and distribution with a long-lasting objective, Alhourani (2024) argues that Islamic giving is constitutive of a moral economy.

Samadia Sadouni (2007) unpacks the history of the establishment of Islamic philanthropic organisations in South Africa, from the 1970s to the post-apartheid era. She asserts that the construction of an Islamic humanitarian field in South Africa was marked by the creation of a regional organisation named the Southern African Islamic Youth Conference (SAIYC). This organisation was financed by Arab countries like Saudi Arabia amongst others and controlled by Indian South Africans. As a product of Islamic resurgence from the 1970s, the SAIYC's regionalisation policy was intended to create a new approach to Islamic identity, which entails a re-Islamisation of Southern Africa (Sadouni 2007). At the heart of the re-Islamisation project was fostering social solidarity and a sense of Muslim community within and across Southern

Africa. Some of the activities that contributed to the re-Islamisation were the building and opening of libraries and Islamic centres, the distribution of Islamic literature and lastly the collection and distribution of *zakat* (Sadouni 2007). These activities are supported by and constitutive of Islamic giving. Samadia Sadouni (2007) highlights the crucial role humanitarianism played in securing Indian and Malay Muslims a spot in the 'new' South Africa. The focus on philanthropy has changed perceptions of Muslim identity in the newly constituted democratic disposition, leading to Muslim philanthropic organisations fostering relationships with the state which has been beneficial for their relationship with stakeholders in political spheres. Additionally, it is an interesting phenomenon to notice how the private sector has taken it upon itself to clothe, feed and to a certain degree, house citizens. Sadouni (2007) points out that in the post-apartheid era, there was a shift of Islamic giving toward Black township Muslims and non-Muslims.

Focusing on the resurgence of Islamic philanthropy in post-apartheid time, Khan (2011) provides a broad insight into the nature of giving amongst Muslims and the extent to which they give to different causes. In his assessments, he recognises the class discrepancies that occurred due to the racial past of South Africa, with a discussion and breakdown of financial status among Black, Indian and Malay Muslims (Khan 2011). Using Vahed and Jeppie (2004) as an auxiliary text, he highlights the economic standing of Indians as being the highest due to their history of being merchants in South Africa, closely followed by Malays – who have had more opportunities than the black population, who are at the bottom of the list with an average per capita income of R935 in 2001 (Khan 2011). Unemployment and lack of education are the biggest contributors to the poverty and socioeconomic troubles of Black and Malay communities.

Khan highlights that Muslims donated to a charitable cause they had a strong identification of the goals with and an organisation that has a credible record in meeting important social needs in the Ummah (Muslim community) and lastly organisations within the immediate locality of people. Furthermore, on giving, Khan (2011) highlights the extent of giving to causes outside the Muslim community, as Muslim philanthropy is well recognised in South Africa to support humanitarian causes. He lists 13 causes outside of the Muslim community that respondents donated or gave in kind to, with the most being cash to the needy and beggars at 97.3%— followed by child and social welfare societies at 43.3% and natural disasters and humanitarian crises at 24.0%. It is noted from the tabulated results he presents that Muslims donate cash

resources more than they do material goods or time. The causes that received the most time were children's homes at 26.0% and water provision at 10.7% (Khan, 2011).

Scholars have listed various motivations for Islamic giving (Khan 2011; Atia 2013). According to Amira Mittermaier (2019), people who participate in giving do not care for the poor. In her ethnography of Muslim charity in Egypt, Amira Mittermaier (2019) opens with a chilling sentence from one of her participants, "I don't care about the poor" (2019: 1). In explaining further, she argues that her participant does not give to be good or because she has compassion for the people who she is giving to, it is because she has no choice – she is commanded to by God in the Qur'an (Mittermaier 2019). The believer indeed has to give in charity, for God does command this in the Qur'an (Q 2:215). Thus, the believer 'gives to God'. In complicating this, Mittermaier brings in another quote from an interlocutor, who explained that compassion is insufficient as a framework to understand Islamic ethics of giving because Muslims in Egypt give to the poor to appease God. Essentially, they use the poor as a conduit to give to God. For Mittermaier, the centring of God and relegating to the background of the suffering Other in this work is imperative because it counters and disrupts the liberal conceit of compassion and the neoliberal imperative of self-help. This practice then protects recipients from the condescending dimensions of charity, from what Mary Douglas calls the wounding character of charity. Finally, Mittermaier asserts that this framework protects recipients of charity from having to be grateful and from having to reciprocate (Mittermaier 2019: 4).

An interesting publication by the same author, "Non-Compassionate Care: A View from an Islamic Charity Organisation" (2021), discusses how bureaucratized the Islamic ethics of care were in the Mustafa Mahmoud Association in Egypt. In both publications, she argues that this charity organisation has an uncompassionate approach to 'care'. She makes this observation due to the bureaucratic and formalised nature of giving, which involves extensive paperwork, assessing people's claims, etc. (Mittermaier 2021). People are seen as numbers, paperwork, and vessels to use to give money to and, by extension, 'give to God'. Mittermaier's research is critical in understanding how philanthropy is approached in some circles in Egypt.

Siddiqui (2022) problematises the narrow understanding of Muslim philanthropy as merely religious virtue by arguing that Muslim giving is also a humanitarian act informed by culture and tradition. To further reiterate this point, I raise the concept of horizontal philanthropy introduced by Wilkinson-Maposa et al. (2004); friends and neighbours practise the idea of

horizontal philanthropy in a particular community and may include some local associations or organisations. Much like Alhourani's (2024) central argument, this theory is not always informed by altruism or generosity but by a plurality of ethics, including social duty and moral obligation emanating from a shared identity – in our example, the *ummah* – or simply the concept of common humanity, tying it deeply with the African understanding of *ubuntu*.

Alhourani (2024), who introduces moral economy in the conversation, is important for this study. His paper “Aesthetics and Ethics of Islamic Giving: A Religious Moral Economy” is an ethnography on the Mustadafin Foundation's ethics of giving in Cape Town. He argues that the inclusion of piety, caring about others, and social commitment are all integral to the ethics of Islamic giving. What Alhourani (2024: 3) brings to this debate is the foregrounding of the complexity of ethics, which many scholars have overlooked. For instance, their work has focused on the social and political impact of Islamic philanthropy (Singer 2018), and others foreground piety towards God (Mittermaier 2019) and Mona Atia (2012) focus on worldly and heavenly achievement. Alhourani (2023) argues that focusing on the aesthetic experience of Islamic giving merges the plurality of ethics that motivate the act of giving.

Another scholar who has made contributions to the study of Islamic giving is Mona Atia (2012, 2013). She puts forth “pious neoliberalism” as a conceptual framework to view Islamic giving in Egypt. This concept can be understood through a discursive combination of religion and economic rationale (Atia 2012). In her paper, “A Way to Paradise: Pious Neoliberalism, Islam, and Faith-Based Development”, she examines the melding of religion and economy through the analytical lens of Islamic development; she realises that the Islamic philanthropy in Cairo uses *zakat* and *sadaqah* to fund development projects, rather than the common practice of using it as a form of charity (Atia 2012). This mode of giving presents challenges, such as organisations potentially dictating how donated money should be spent and on what projects, as is the norm with neoliberalism. Atia (2012) shows that for Amr Khaled and his followers, the best model of success is capitalism melded with Islamic social values. The main point made by Atia (2012) is that the development of the people who are receiving aid is the most important aspect of pious neoliberalism, a question this research seeks to grapple with. This theory comes from Atia's ethnography of philanthropy in Egypt, and she argues that the subjects are not victims of neoliberalism rather they are actively engaged in creating pious neoliberalism by drawing on a globalised religious discourse of volunteerism and faith; this combined with individualism and entrepreneurship (Atia 2012). For Atia, pious neoliberalism is fostered by

the culture of Islamic philanthropy in Egypt and the coming together of a supposedly secular political concept of neoliberalism which seeks to develop communities using Islamic solutions has interesting implications for giving and receiving altogether.

This review of the literature shows growing scholarly debate on Islamic giving in contemporary societies. Scholars foreground the ways and extent to which Islamic giving fosters a sense of community and solidarity among Muslims (Sadouni 2007; Singer 2008; Clarke 2006), how Islamic giving contributes to individual development and progress (Atia 2012), and how Islamic giving is constitutive of a religious moral economy (Alhourani 2024). My research draws on and intends to contribute to this debate by focusing on Islamic philanthropy in Western Cape townships with a growing Black Muslim population. Black Muslims living in the townships are at the bottom of the social ladder in South Africa. From census reports dated 2001 (Vahed and Jeppie 2004), they are the steadiest-growing group of Muslims in the country, however, their financial status does not reflect the same numbers.

1.6 *Theoretical Framework*

The theories I would like to expand upon can broadly relate to the study of religion. First, I shall deal with the moral economy. Many scholars have written on moral economy since British historian and political activist E.P Thompson revived the term when writing *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). While Thompson did not coin the term, he is responsible for its reintroduction and attraction to scholarly interest. Definitions of the term vary across disciplines. To grasp moral economy, one must understand the context in which Thompson used the term. In an article titled “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd” (1971), in which he was writing about the 18th-century food riots in England, he elucidates that the poor were rioting due to soaring prices, hunger and the authorities participating in illegitimate practices in farming, baking and milling and general malpractices amongst dealers (1971: 78). Furthermore, he explains that the moral economy is an agglomeration of “moral assumptions that rise out of a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations of the proper functions of several parties within the community” (1971: 79). Writing in 1976 and focusing on dearth, peasant farmers, and uprisings in various parts of the world, Professor James Scott’s understanding of the contentious term, simply put, is to safeguard peasants and subsistence farmers from exploitation and to ensure economic justice (Scott 1976). While Thompson is far

from religion, this theory can be used for our purposes as many scholars have borrowed it from its historical and sociological origin.

The moral economy has been presented as an alternative to the capitalist economy on the basis that the former addresses the question of ethics and morals toward others and society (Tripp 2006; Tayob 2022). Charles Tripp (2006:92) argues that it includes ‘mutual social responsibility’ and increases social harmony. He elucidates that the moral economy includes moving away from capitalism and entrenching itself in the values that have been traditionally accepted in Islam. Furthermore, ‘mutual social responsibility’ would eliminate and nullify the extremes of poverty and wealth, ensuring respect for the worker or member of the community and guaranteeing his rights to be protected. Additionally, this would enable the worker to be seen as a person rather than a factor of production (Tripp 2006: 93). With its main objectives being to ensure fairness, aiming to include all members of a group or society in attaining sustenance for themselves and not relegating people to the periphery, focusing our attention on a moral economy to the Islamic tradition seems fitting. Arguing against the Western political economy of modern society, Tayob (2022) sought a solution in Islamic tradition and economic ethics. Drawing on Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, Tayob (2022) put forward an Islamic moral economy that considers the question of ethics. Scholars’ understanding of moral economy as functioning in opposition to the market economy is key in understanding the social value of Islamic moral economy in our modern society (Tripp 2006; Keane 2021; Tayob 2022).

Didier Fassin (2009) argues that moral economy consists of two dimensions: the moral dimension and the economic dimension. Fassin’s notion of moral economy stands as a critique of the political economy of capitalism and as a critique of Thompson’s (1971) initial conceptualisation of the moral economy. Fassin’s work is essential for this study as he argues that moral economy should focus on the lived experiences of the poor/recipients of aid. Additionally, Fassin (2009) postulates that the moral economy has to be studied within the parameters of materiality and the phenomenological experience of the poor. Fassin’s conceptualisation of the moral economy extends beyond the market; he argues that it includes the ethical dimensions that usher economic behaviour in societies (2009). For Fassin, the attention should be on the two dimensions of morality, which include social obligations and norms deemed acceptable by society and the economy, as well as the production, distribution, and transfer of goods and services.

Drawing on Fassin's two dimensions, which are split into what constitutes 'moral' and what constitutes the 'economy', Alhourani (2024) theorised Islamic philanthropy is constitutive of a religious moral economy. In explaining Islamic philanthropy in Cape Town, Alhourani (2024) asserts that it is imbued with ethics and piety, and underpinning the question of ethics is central to his argument. Alhourani (2024) looks at the Mustadafin Foundation in Cape Town and its methods of Islamic giving, which are characterised by donations and food distribution inspired by Islamic ethics and values. Alhourani's article stands as a critique of what scholars have written about religious giving, where they have only focused on the social and political impacts of the phenomenon. In contrast, Alhourani argues for the foregrounding of ethics and piety in these religious practices, allowing us to view Islamic giving as a religious moral economy. Here, the concept of moral economy serves as the analysis and observation of the dissertation. Various scholars have drawn on the concept of the moral economy to highlight the ways and extent to which religious values are embedded in economic affairs (Tripp 2006; Fassin 2009; Tayob 2022; Alhourani 2024).

Another theorisation of Islamic giving at home with the concept of moral economy is the theory of '*pious neoliberalism*' coined by Mona Atia (2012). Atia (2012) view religion as a force for social development and individual empowerment. She (2012) argues that pious neoliberalism is the combination of piety and economic rationale, which seeks to make believers proactive in their relationship with God. For Atia, Islamic giving aims not only to feed the poor but also to create an environment in which poor people can work for themselves and position themselves toward personal financial empowerment and progress as well as development. Thus, one of the main driving forces of the subjects of pious neoliberalism is that they will gain material success in the physical life and spiritual reward in the hereafter (Atia 2012; 811). In her theorisation of the concept, Atia (2012) attempts to analyse Muslim philanthropy organisations as "key players" in the intersection between religion and neoliberalism, with organisations that look at self-help rhetoric with Islam to participate in the development process in Egypt. (Atia 2012:809). Using televangelism as a point of departure, her analysis uncovers the rise of the Faith-Based Development Organisations (FBDOs) in Egypt and their adaptation of Islamic principles of charity to promote neoliberal practices such as monetary investment, self-help strategies and entrepreneurship (Atia 2012). Being driven by faith, subjects of pious neoliberalism ensure that they pray, pay their *zakat/sadaqah*, avoid sin and observe modesty (Atia 2012). This study will aim to use "pious neoliberalism" as a concept to analyse the

landscape of religious giving in Cape Town, and this will inform my research and how interviews are held.

1.7 Methodology

This research is based on an anthropological approach to studying religion, which relies on qualitative data collection and generation methods, mainly participant observations and interviews. The participant observation includes volunteering with the Mustadafin Foundation and the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) for a cumulative eight months, during which I participated in their events. The reason for choosing these two organisations is to compare the plurality of ethics that motivate Islamic giving with local and international organisations. I have conducted my fieldwork in Cape Town, in the townships of Manenberg, and in St Helena Bay, where the AMA and the Mustadafin Foundation often operate.

This thesis used semi-structured interviews led by an interview guide. Additionally, I had open-ended conversations with stakeholders and volunteers involved in everyday giving. I conducted interviews with several of Mustadafin and AMA's staff to learn their motivation and objectives of giving objectives, as well as the nature of their work. I interviewed some of the organisations' volunteers and donors to explore their motivations for giving in cash or in kind. All of the mentioned interviews were semi-structured, and all were audio-recorded, with the informed consent of the participants. While the fieldwork and data collection periods yielded many conversations and interviews, often with volunteers and staff members of the respective organisations, this dissertation utilises four in-depth interviews with Rabiah, Buşra, Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassien and Nazlie Behardien.

The organisations that we are comparing are the Mustadafin Foundation and the Africa Muslims Agency. The Mustadafin was founded in 1986 by Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassiem. This organisation has its roots in political activism as the 1980s were a politically troubled time in South Africa. This local Muslim philanthropic organisation works in townships and poor semi-rural areas. AMA, on the other hand, is an international philanthropic organisation operating in over 35 countries across Africa and Asia. AMA, headquartered in Kuwait and is famous for its interventions in multiple countries and its concern not only with development but with *da'wa*, was founded in 1981 by Dr Al Sumait from Kuwait. This organisation boasts

a vast global network of donors and operations, funded by Gulf donors and donors from across the globe.

1.8 Ethics Section:

This research employed structured interviews and participant observation as primary tools of data collection. The utmost respect, ethics and care have to be used when conducting fieldwork during my research. Privacy will be ensured, and the participants had the right to remain anonymous or to withdraw from the research at any point they request. Research participants were required to sign a consent form which explained the research aims and how data will be managed. A consent form has been attached at the end of this document as an addendum, which was presented to the interviewees and an information sheet explaining the nature of the study. The participants were notified about their rights to withdraw, withhold certain responses and their right to anonymity at all times. Additionally, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of individuals who participated in this research study. In cases where additional contextual information might reveal a participant's identity, I have omitted certain details to maintain their privacy.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter focused on explaining Islamic giving in South Africa, its history and motivations. I open this chapter with a vignette detailing my meetings with my interlocutors at different points of the research period. The chapter sets out the literature consulted, which has informed much of this research. Further, the chapter explains the roles of Islamic humanitarian organisations, and introduces Mustadafin Foundation and Africa Muslims Agency as the main organisations of the study. Along with this, I introduce the concept of a moral economy and pious neoliberalism as the core theoretical framework that underpinned the observation and analysis of this research.

Chapter Two: African Muslims in South Africa

In this chapter, I will show the history of Muslims in Cape Town and move on to explore how Islam reached the townships. Here, Islam is introduced in its relation to Muslim social life and conversion, as well as the apartheid struggle and resistance movements. This chapter will set the groundwork for the townships as a site of giving. In this regard, important figures will be discussed, like the famous Imam Abdullah Haron, his students and pioneers of Islam in the townships such as Muhammad Ngxiki, and Dawood Lobi. Moreover, this chapter discusses the social-religious context of the townships. The chapter looks at Muslim philanthropy organisations and how pivotal they were in the build-up to the end of apartheid and in the transition into post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Three: Muslim Ethics of Giving in Black Townships: Mustadafin Foundation

This chapter will deal with the practices of giving of the Mustadafin Foundation. The chapter will rely on my participant observation in the Mustadafin offices and on feeding events I have attended with them. The main ethnographic event that is discussed is an outing with Mustadafin at the Laingville township in St. Helena Bay. This chapter argues the moral economy of the Mustadafin Foundation is heavily anchored in Islamic ethics of care and giving through their practices of sharing food, distributing blankets and other community development projects that the organisation undertakes in the townships of Cape Town.

Chapter Four: Islamic propagation and development: Africa Muslims Agency

This chapter will analyse the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) in Cape Town, revealing an economy of care, distribution and donation. It shall be further elucidated that AMA has a large network of donors and receives funding from international stakeholders. The AMA has a massive presence in many countries on the continent and is concerned with Da'wa and Islamisation. The AMA's concern with Islamisation does not impede them from working with local humanitarian organisations to contribute to poverty and hunger alleviation. The chapter explores a plurality of ethics that motivate the AMA philanthropy and unpacks how it constitutes a moral economy.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Finally, the dissertation will conclude by comparing the plurality of ethics that motivate Mustadafin and AMA's Islamic giving practices. The chapter also highlights the research limitation. This will include a discussion of ethical considerations and why certain avenues could not be explored during the data collection phase. Furthermore, recommendations will be discussed moving forward to enhance Islamic philanthropy gleaned from the data and my observations. Ultimately, the dissertation will end with concluding remarks reflecting on the study's salience, its impact on Islamic philanthropy, and its contributions to the literature.

Chapter 2

African Muslims and Townships

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to map out the arrival of Islam at the Cape from the late 17th and centuries until the mid-20th century. In this brief historiography, the chapter discusses the role of some of the main characters who have played a part in the spread and growth of Islam at different temporal periods in the city. The chapter begins with the slave ships and the origins of the Islamic faith primarily practised amongst slaves at the Cape. It also discusses how Islamic public practice was outlawed and the resistance of Muslims who practised Islam privately and established underground learning centres. Following the discussion of Islam as liberatory praxis, the chapter then turns attention to its unifying nature towards the end of slavery in South Africa. This section deals with the building of mosques and the growth of the Islam in the city. During this time, leadership disputes plagued the Muslims, and this saw the breakaway of the initial community that had come from slavery and bondage. Amidst this discussion, attention will be paid to the diverse heritage seen at the Cape, focusing on language, historical background, and racial makeup.

As the chapter progresses, a brief discussion on the formations of the township shall steer the chapter into how Islam reaches the township through another main character. The chronology this chapter follows moves from the separation of Blacks by the apartheid government into desperate economic conditions which force Blacks into socioeconomic disarray. After this, the following argument will include the first Black pioneers of Islam in the townships, detailing their experiences as new Muslim converts. Furthermore, race relations between the Muslim communities at the Cape and broadly South Africa shall be explained and finally, a glimpse into the numbers of Muslims. This particular section aims to uncover an African Muslim identity through the works of pioneering scholars who studied Muslims and Islam in South Africa.

Towards the closing, the chapter will discuss African Muslim migration and how it has diversified the Islamic landscape of Cape Town. By briefly analysing Senegalese and Somali migration and settling, the chapter discusses how Islam ceases to be publicly perceived as an

ethnoreligious phenomenon and is seen as a religion for all races to join. While understanding that complexities and diversity of the Muslim community in Cape Town, has been influenced by various groups due to conversion, slavery and migration, this section seeks to analyse the specific migration of other Black Muslims into the country post-apartheid. The chapter ends with positioning Black Muslims as the neediest subgroup of Muslims in the country and, therefore, most ‘deserving’ of Islamic philanthropy and aid. Finally, the chapter closes by detailing the shift in giving attitudes in the Muslim community towards the end of apartheid, which opened up the township as a central location for philanthropy to be focused on. The overarching theme of this chapter sets the groundwork for the subsequent chapters to explain further the intricacies of Islamic philanthropy and how the moral economy is manifested in the township as the site of giving and receiving.

The concerns of this chapter are to investigate how Islam made its way into the townships reserved for Blacks on the outskirts of Cape Town. This chapter will mention various townships, focusing on Langa and its history as one of the first created townships in Cape Town. However, this chapter will look at more than this to locate Islam as a force for social and political change during apartheid. First, we need to look at the socio-political situation at the time in South Africa and, more specifically, Cape Town. We will focus on the townships and the conditions allowing Islam to be preached and accepted in these areas.

2.2 Islam from the Ships: A Brief Historiography of Islam at the Cape (1658-1850)

The history of Islam in South Africa is both rich and complex. The first Muslims in the Cape Colony, known as the Mardykckers from Amboyna, arrived on ships from Batavia and Java alongside Dutch colonists. The Mardykckers reached the Cape in 1658, and were employed to safeguard Dutch interests against attacks from the Indigenous Khoi and San tribes (Tayob 1995: 39). At the time, the Dutch had issued a *placaat* which outlawed the public observance of Islam in all Dutch colonies. Little information was available about Mardykckers as a result of this *placaat* (Tayob 1995: 39).

In the 1690s, Muslims from the Indonesian Archipelago and many other parts of the world, including Africa and parts of the Indian subcontinent, began to arrive. Most of the new arrivals were enslaved people and some were political exiles. To understand the racial makeup of the slaves and exiles, one must understand that the Dutch East India Company operated in various

parts of the world and brought slaves from each part they were in. While the origins of Cape Muslim slaves were diverse, historians Achmat Davids and Yusuf Da Costa (1994: 19) note that almost half of the African slaves at the Cape came from Madagascar. I make this distinction to underscore the racialisation of Islam and the discourse that emanates from this. The racial identity of Islam in South Africa began with a diverse group of slaves from various parts of the globe. The conditions of slavery under the Dutch were harsh and restricted religious freedoms.

Remarkably, the harsh and hostile conditions under which Islam was forced to grow, ruled by the colonial Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), are also to be credited for the way Islam has been preserved and practised at the Cape colony. As mentioned above, the Dutch had outlawed Islamic practice at the Cape through the issuing of *placaaten*, which rendered the public practice of Islam punishable by death. Despite these cruel conditions and ordinances, Muslims strove and kept their rituals and practices of five daily prayers and Dhikr⁴ meetings. The Muslim community grew to the point that it transcended race, ethnicity, and language, such that their creole, derived from Dutch and Malayu, was developed and spoken amongst the enslaved people and Vryezwarten (“Free Blacks” or manumitted slaves), which resulted in the creation of the Afrikaans language as we know it today (Davids 1980, Tayob 1995: 44).

Of the multiple political exiles, a few stand out. Shaykh Yusuf Al Khalwati Al Maqassari is regarded to be the founder of Islam at the Cape and is one of the most famous people to be brought to the colonial outpost (Bangstad 2007:63). Shaykh Yusuf, who came from Java, was a political exile who was banished to the Cape and welcomed by the governor at the time, Simon Van Der Stell, as a guest; he was given land in Zandvliet to live with his family and the large retinue of people who accompanied him on the voyage. Van der Stell knew that the Shaykh was of royal lineage in his home country and, much to the chagrin of the Dutch settlers, was taken care of through a stipend of twelve rix dollars (Davids 1980: 39). His continued stay in Java would have harmed the Dutch and their colonial ambitions and interests in the Indonesian archipelago (Dangor 1981). Shaykh Yusuf arrived in 1694 and was the first Muslim scholar to hold religious classes in his sanctuary in Zandvliet, creating one of the first Muslim communities (Tayob 1995; Alhourani 2017). His residence was far from Cape Town because of fears that he would stir trouble and start a rebellion against the Dutch colonists as he did in his native country. Tayob (1995) reports that Shaykh Yusuf granted protection and refuge to

⁴ Dhikr refers to ‘remembrance’ of God, chanted in unison at gatherings.

runaway slaves at his sanctuary. According to Dangor (1981), Shaykh Yusuf and the imams that came with him held secret “religious services” in slave lodges because Muslims were not allowed to gather publicly by Dutch authorities at the Cape. Dangor’s MA thesis, which has now been turned into a book, is a comprehensive biography of Shaykh Yusuf of Makassar; it is said that his influence was immense in the Cape and the country of his birth, where he is regarded as a ‘national saint’ (1981). In the short time he spent in the Cape, he nurtured the growth of a small Muslim community through his death on 23 May 1699 (Davids 1980, Jeppie 1996). The Shaykh has left a formidable legacy in his proselytisation of Islam to people and is fondly remembered centuries after his death.

After Shaykh Yusuf’s death, Islam’s growth at the Cape was slow until the release of Indonesian scholar and Sufi mystic Abdullah Kadi Abdus-Salaam, later known as Tuan Guru (‘Mister Teacher’). Tuan Guru was brought to the Cape in 1780 and kept on Robben Island until 1793 (Bradlow 1981; Tayob 1995; Jeppie 1996). According to oral tradition, Tuan Guru is said to have hand-written a copy of the Qur’an from memory. Shortly after his release from incarceration, he started to agitate for a mosque to be built at the Cape. Tuan Guru was a formidable teacher and is known for his theological writings. He founded the first madrassa in Cape Town in 1793 – the same site as the Auwal Masjid (Tayob 1995), and his classes attracted several students. At the time, the Dutch were the colonial power at the Cape; however, at the turn of the century, there was a shift of power due to the British occupation of the Cape. However, it did not mean prejudice against Islam disappeared (Bradlow 1981: 17).

2.3 Religious Freedoms

The Auwal Masjid (which means First Mosque in Arabic) was built in 1794 in Dorp Street of Bo-Kaap, on land donated as *waqf* by Saartjie von de Kaap (Tayob 1995: 44). The construction of the mosque was completed in 1806. Tuan Guru was the first imam of this historic mosque. The Auwal mosque occupies a special place in the hearts of contemporary Muslims in Cape Town due to its origins and what it represents as the first mosque to be erected on South African soil and in defiance of anti-Islamic Dutch rule, being the first “cultural, ecological base of the Cape Muslims” (Davids 1980: 94). Tuan Guru is regarded as a very important figure in Islamic history at the Cape due to his mysticism and general theology which have been used as fundamental material for teaching Islam at the Cape. He wrote *Mari’fat wal Iman wal Islam*, which is a theological textbook used to teach at the Cape in madrassas for many years

(Alhourani 2017: 255). In addition to this, he taught students Arabic at his madrassa. The Auwal masjid was popular amongst the Free Blacks and slave community and facilitated many conversions to the religion of Islam. Perhaps the most famous Islamic scholar, Sufi mystic and political exile at the Cape, Tuan Guru, died in 1807. Beyond his teachings, he is known for his leadership - being at the forefront of negotiations with the hostile colonial administration for religious tolerance and recognition for the Muslim community at the Cape.

After Tuan Guru's death, the Cape Muslim community went through a period of mosques being built throughout the 1800s. The first mosque that was established due to succession disputes at the Auwal Masjid was the Palm Tree Mosque on Long Street. As time went by, the Bo-Kaap area saw a series of mosques being erected because the number of Muslims in the area increased; furthermore, differences in the congregation also facilitated the increase of mosques. This shows the vast complexities within the Muslim community at the time, leadership and doctrinal disputes, and, most prevalently, succession issues. *Imamhood* was a powerful position, and the *imamate* offered those involved social capital in the Muslim community, including comfortable financial status (Jeppie 1996). As mentioned, Islam grew and spread in the 1800s as more mosques were erected, following the Palm Tree Mosque (est. 1820), the Nurul Islam mosque (est. 1844), and Jamia Mosque (est. 1850) to name a few (Davids 1980: 97). Well known Imams such as Achmat van Bengalen, Jan van Boughies, Frans van Bengalen all followed Tuan Guru. Islam was consolidated through the secession of the congregations, the opening of other mosques, and the opening of more madrassas. Education was a powerful tool in the early days of Islamic growth at the Cape, as people of colour were not allowed to receive a formal education. The first school, opened by Tuan Guru, operated from the premises of the Auwal masjid in Dorp Street and had an attendance of nearly 400 slave children who were taught the Qur'an and how to read and write Arabic (Davids 1980: 102).

The growth of Islam and its institutions underwent a dramatic increase. Bearing in mind that slavery was still in practice at the Cape until 1834, this also led to multiple conversions. And complexly, the granting of religious freedom to the slaves also saw an increase in conversions. Islam was almost a beacon of hope for those in bondage, as it offered them a sense of freedom. For example, Achmat van Bengalen and Tuan Guru laid strict rules concerning Muslims selling or buying Muslim slaves and treating slaves with dignity (Davids 1980: 96). While paradoxical, it is significant to note that many Muslims owned slaves. However, the rules laid down by religious leaders would not allow for exploitation and slaves were allowed to earn the means

to purchase their own freedom; additionally, they were entitled to sit down as equals in the family they were purchased (Davids, 96). Robert Shell (1993) has written extensively on the treatment of slaves at the Cape, which laid the groundwork for many of them to convert to Islam. A fascinating study on Christian-Muslim relations at the Cape of Good Hope by Jacobus Cilliers (2006) uncovers that Christianity may have been responsible for the growth of Islam in southern Africa. Cilliers (2006: 108) makes the argument that for slaves to be emancipated, they had to convert to Christianity and be baptised. This change would pave the way for them to inherit estates after the death of their parents if they had any property; however, as Cilliers (2006:108) notes, baptism gradually became less common, and this resulted in slaves being unable to be emancipated. Even after emancipation, due to racial prejudice, the converts were not accepted in the church on equal footing with the Dutch colonists. Cilliers (2006: 107-108) argues that because there were no prospects of freedom in Christianity, slaves remained Muslim. Thus, strangely, Christianity was responsible for the growth of Islam at the Cape.

As aforementioned, slaves were taken care of by the Muslim community and treated as human beings with dignity. Thus, Islam for the slaves was a means of upward social mobility, albeit limited. Conversion to Islam was in tandem with being accepted into the 'Malay' community. Language was not an obstacle due to the Creole (now known as Afrikaans) spoken by most slaves at the Cape (Shell 1993:4). Literary scholar Gabeba Baderoon (2014:13) recognises that Islam was a refuge for the enslaved, including the indigenous Khoi and San population. This community of vastly different origins has left a legacy of racial ambiguity and indeterminability about the meaning of 'Muslim' in South Africa; what Baderoon means by this is that it was impossible to say Muslims had a particular phenotypical 'look'. This was first espoused by Shell (1993: 4), who recognised that Muslim migration was low from 1808 to 1902. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that there was an influx of conversions to the religion.

Furthermore, Shell (1993) provides evidence of these conversions after 1891 when he quotes a census enumerator who observed that the Muslims – who were known as "Mohammedans" and seen as part of the 'Malays'- included Blacks and people of mixed-race heritage. Blacks and mixed-race people were counted as 'Malays' because, at the time, this identity was synonymous with being Muslim (Shell 1993). The inclusion of Khoi, San, and Black backgrounds in the Islamic religion has shifted discourses of race surrounding Muslim identity in South Africa. However, what is undeniable is the role Islam played in resistance to slavery and other forms of domination at the Cape in the 18th and 19th centuries (Baderoon 2014)

The Auwal Masjid was the centre of the Muslim communal life. Since most of the congregation were Free Blacks, it provided a sense of community and home for those who were still in slavery. Achmat Davids asserts that the slaves could identify with the mosque, which might have appeared as a symbol of ultimate liberty for them (1980: 96). For years, as the religion grew and more institutions were founded, the racial makeup of the adherents of Islam became very heterogeneous and diverse. Black people, Indians, people of Malaysian and Indonesian descent and those who came to be classified as ‘Coloured’ or Cape Malay were all represented in the racial identity of this religion.

It was not only Javanese political exiles who were brought to the Cape and expanded Islam; there is an almost forgotten history of East and West African slaves who were brought to the Cape. Davids and Da Costa (1994: 14) tell the story of these slaves who were taken from East African coastal countries like Mozambique and Zanzibar. The West African slaves came from countries like Senegambia, Ghana, and Guinea. As these were already Islamic states at the time, the slaves from this area were already Muslim. Although West Africa is the origin of many slaves that were sold to the Americas, a small number of them were destined for the Cape (Davids and Da Costa 1994). The slaves at the Cape who were Muslim or eventually embraced Islam were made up of various nationalities and backgrounds, languages, and hues; however, due to anti-Black rhetoric, the African origins of this group have been silenced. Robert Shell (1993:28) highlights that Free Blacks, former slaves who were absorbed into the community, thus increasing the racial heterogeneity of the Muslims but also specifically the black population. Undeniably, there has been a massive African influence and heritage in the history of these people. Eventually, this permeated into the cultural identity that makes up modern-day Cape Muslims and their descendants.

2.4 1900s Modernisation of Islamic Institutions in Cape Town

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Muslim institutions only included the mosques and madrasas that were built throughout the 1800s. These mosques unified Muslim communities, and it became necessary that the Muslim community be part of the growing political economy in South Africa (Tayob 1995). Dr Abdullah Abdurahman (d. 1940) recognised the need to modernise the Cape Muslim community. Dr Abdurahman was a medical doctor trained in

Scotland and a successful politician who won a seat in the Cape Town City Council in 1904 and the Cape Provincial Council in 1915 (Tayob 1995:80). It was through these positions that the doctor-cum-politician was able to introduce modernisation for his community. The doctor was also passionate about schools and education, and after realising that the madrassa system was not sufficient education for Muslim children to excel in the changing political economy of the newly established Union of South Africa, coupling this with them being unable to attend Christian schools which discriminated against them (Tayob 1995: 80, Haron 2015: 248). As a result, Dr Abdurahman encouraged the community to support the initiative to start the Muslim Mission Schools, which began with the Rahmaniyya Institute/School in Bo-Kaap named after him circa 1912⁵ (Tayob 1995: 80, Haron 2015: 249). Following this school was the Talfalah Institute in Claremont. The establishment of these schools was not to negate the importance of religious education but to combine it with a modern education required to thrive in the new South Africa. Tayob (1995: 81) reports that Dr. Abdurahman did not reject the ‘*ulama* of Cape Town, but he worked with them, and they provided the vital religious component in the Muslim Mission Schools’ curriculum to ensure students still received an adequate Islamic education along with a secular education. The founding of the Muslim Mission Schools by Dr Abdurahman represented a transformative shift for the Cape Muslim community. This initiative expanded the community’s educational infrastructure, demonstrated a strategic investment in its empowerment, and promoted communal cohesion by establishing a centralised religiously and culturally affirming educational system.

Besides building schools and securing education for their children, Muslims expanded their institutional presence by establishing the Cape Malay Association in 1923 (CMA). Jeppie describes the CMA as a socio-religious organisation (1987: 37). The CMA, under the leadership of Mogamat Arshad Gamiet, was supported by the ‘*ulama* because it represented the aspirations of Cape Muslims in the political sphere. According to Tayob (1995: 81-82), the CMA also represented a division between Indian and Cape Muslims and attempted to create for its members a political identity that was contingent on “recognition and concessions from the ruling class” (Jeppie 1987: 37). Indeed, the CMA has received its fair share of criticism from multiple scholars for its lack of original politics and mobilisation beyond seeking

⁵ Haron (2015) notes that this school was established in 1912, while Tayob (1995) posits it was established in 1913.

legitimisation from the Afrikaners. Nonetheless, its emergence signifies the changes happening in the Muslim community and its slow modernisation process.

Perhaps the most influential body in Islamic religious discourse in Cape Town is the Muslim Judicial Council, established in 1945. This body emerged as a religious forum and an organised authority of the imams (leaders) and shaykhs (scholars) (Tayob 1995:82). Jeppie argues that the MJC gathered Muslim support through imams and shaykhs who were popular amongst Muslims in their immediate locality (1987: 74). The founding of this organisation proved to be an essential move by the Muslims as it cemented their institutional presence and announced their seriousness on a national scale. However, the MJC's existence is not without its controversial moments. The MJC is a Muslim judiciary whose primary concerns are, but are not limited to, religious education, guidance, halaal certification and *da'wa* and has a significant position in the life of Muslims in Cape Town. During the apartheid struggle, the MJC has been accused of being complacent to the regime and its policies, professing a desire to focus on religious issues and not political ones.

While the institutionalisation of Islam has yielded multiple bodies and organisations, I wish to close this section with the advent of the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF), established in 1974. SANZAF was the first body established for the centralised collection and distribution of *zakat* funds from the Muslim community. According to Tayob (1995) SANZAF was founded as a result of the national Islamic movement spearheaded by the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM). The MYM, which is a key indicator for the Islamisation of South Africa and the neighbouring countries, was created in 1970 by three individuals: Ebrahim Jadwat, Mahmud Moosa and Abu Bakr Mohammed (Tayob 1995: 106). Tayob contends that the activities of the MYM led to the formation of SANZAF, which successfully gained recognition and traction in Cape Town under the leadership of Faik Gamiieldien (1995: 113). The primary function of SANZAF is to collect *zakat* funds from the community reserved solely for impoverished Muslims (Begg 2012: 226). However, the organisation also collects *sadaqah* from the broader Muslim community, which is used for Muslims and non-Muslims alike (ibid.). Begg (2012) demonstrates that while SANZAF is not a solely religious organisation, because they collect *zakat*, they cannot operate without *ulama*. Therefore, SANZAF and the MJC have close working relationships. As the primary and centralised collector of *zakat* in the country, the organisation has a significant amount of *ulama* serving on its boards. Furthermore, SANZAF collaborates well with Muslim philanthropy organisations such as the Mustadafin Foundation.

Islam has been publicly visible in Cape Town since the 19th century. Intermarriage, conversions and other factors have influenced this. From Shaykh Yusuf's sanctuary in Zandvliet to Bo-Kaap, the religion has taken shape and influenced various aspects of social and political life at the Cape. The following section will detail how Islam moved from these areas into the township. First, dealing with the creation of townships from the 1920s and their proliferation in the latter years of the 20th century, the section uncovers how the townships and their creation cultivated a fertile ground for Islam to grow. The section introduces townships and moves to map the story of influential figures who shaped the history of Islam in the townships through proselytisation efforts.

2.5 Topography of the Township: Making the Case for Islamic Philanthropy in the Townships

The townships were created as a living space for Africans as a result of white racism against Blacks in the 19th and 20th centuries. Even before legislated apartheid, prejudice for Africans by the white ruling class was rife. It manifested itself through the spatial segregation that has left its mark on the city, which can be seen today. Locations for African residents were hastily created on the peripheries of Cape Town. Langa was created in 1927 (Musemwa 1993), the first township to be developed for the residence of Black people in Cape Town. Any examination of the inner workings of apartheid will tell us that this area was not meant to be a prosperous ground for Blacks to thrive and flourish but rather a space of marginalisation for Black communities to perpetuate conditions of a continuous social death where individuals are systematically deprived of social, economic and political participation. The forced removals of 1950, sanctioned by the government as the Group Areas Act, meant that Black residents were pushed to live in townships, which were and still are overcrowded, with poor living conditions and poor service delivery. Langa still exists in the post-apartheid dispensation and still battles poverty and high levels of crime.

Before forced removals and racialisation of living areas, Black Africans lived in multiracial regions in the country, such as District Six in Cape Town and Sophiatown in Johannesburg. According to historian Vivian Bickford-Smith, Cape Town was presumed by many of its residents to be a "haven of ethnic harmony and integration before 1948" (1995; 63). However, he shows that this was not the case because the residential segregation of Africans took place in 1901 with the outbreak of the bubonic plague in Cape Town (Bickford-Smith 1995;

Musemwa 1993). Racist fears about Africans bringing diseases to the city are what led to the forced removal of Africans living in District Six to Ndabeni Location, an overcrowded township that was hastily created for African residents (Field 2015; see Christopher Saunders 1979). This happened before the 1950 removals, showing us a tendency of the ruling class to remove people at will. Ndabeni, according to Musemwa (1993: 18), had been “the byproduct of white racism that was manifest against Africans at the turn of the twentieth century.” After the destruction of Ndabeni, Africans who resided there were forced to move to Langa to make way for industrial expansion (Musemwa 1993:18).⁶

For Africans to be forcefully removed twice, from District Six to Ndabeni and then once more to Langa, no doubt exacerbated living conditions and further perpetuated economic hardship for them. This transpires in the period leading up to and after the Great Depression of 1929 when economic advancement was difficult for many countries. The townships were a place where conditions were not conducive for economic development and employment opportunities were not readily available, coupled with the socio-political oppression that Africans faced, which was undoubtedly onerous. According to oral historian Sean Field, Langa served as the sole township for Africans from 1927 to 1959 (Field 2015).

Consequently, this section centres on Langa as the “birthplace” of “Black Islam”⁷ in South Africa, given its status as the only official residence for Africans at the time. Sindre Bangstad provides extensive research tracing the origins of “Black Islam,” beginning with Muhammad Ngxiki, one of the first Black converts to Islam in Cape Town after the introduction of apartheid and Imam Abdullah Haron (Bangstad 2007: 78). Very little is known about a Muslim community in the townships in the 1940s. However, it is not inaccurate to say that Black Muslims did exist and lived in parts of Cape Town. Many of whom were descendants from Cape Malay Muslims and slaves. It is argued that Imam Abdullah Haron was the first person to go into the townships and propagate Islam to the communities living in these areas. A stalwart of the struggle against apartheid, he is fondly remembered for his role during the struggle. Imam Haron’s tactics of resistance were unusual at the time; as a person classified as ‘Coloured’ under the apartheid racial system, he was barred from entering any place of residence that was not designated for ‘Coloured’ people. Imam Haron would go to the township

⁶ Musemwa’s 1993 dissertation deals with the history of Langa at length. For more, see Saunders 1979.

⁷ This is not to be confused with the concept ‘Islam Noir’, which means Black Islam in French.

of Langa to proselytise the message of Islam to the residents. He recognised the people's difficulties and saw that the ground was fertile for this kind of work, where he was a specialist as a proselytiser. He would visit areas such as Langa, Nyanga, and Gugulethu for missionary work, spend time with the people, and build friendships (Gunther 2004). The Imam is a central figure in the development of Islam in the townships because he was regarded as one of the first “Coloured” people to head into the townships to give *da'wa* to the locals along with Abdul Aleem Siddique (Bangstad 2007: 78). Due to his occupation as a salesman for a British-owned sweets company, he had a permit to enter the township. As a result, he always had sweets in his car, which he would distribute among the children in the townships; this meant that he built good relations with the residents of the township (Koroglu 2019). He was affectionately known as *Umfundisi*, a Xhosa term synonymous with ‘teacher’ or ‘pastor/preacher’, thus showing how the township residents recognised his position as an Imam. Amidst the racial and spatial segregation, Imam Haron remained ever-defiant of the laws that held him back from freely moving to spread and preach Islam.

He was well-respected because of how vocal he was against the injustices the Apartheid government was enacting on all peoples of colour, but more so on the Black population. The Imam took charge of Al Jamia Mosque in Claremont in 1955, a suburb with a long history of Muslims, non-Muslims, and people of all hues living together. His *Jumu'ah* (Friday) sermons focused on justice, and he criticised and condemned the government. Shortly after he assumed the role of Imam at this mosque, he was appointed editor of two newspaper outlets, the Islamic Mirror and Muslim News, currently known as Muslim Views (Haron 2021). Through these outlets, the Imam let his opinions be known. Many people in the Muslim community were conscientised through his written works (Gunther 2004). His ideas of collaborating with other communities and inviting Black people to the mosque were rather unorthodox and made some congregants uncomfortable. His work in the communities focused on reaching Muslims regardless of the existing racial barriers and opening minds to those in the established Muslim community.⁸

As a member of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), he was also vocal in those circles and urged members of the *'ulama* that scholars and clergymen are required to stand up against

⁸ I use the term ‘Established Muslims’ to differentiate between ‘new’ Muslim communities, such as the Black Muslims who converted and those who were born Muslims, mostly ‘Malays’ and ‘Indians’.

injustices. Unfortunately, he was largely unsuccessful in gathering support due to the MJC's complacency. They took an apolitical stance against apartheid and were primarily focused on religious concerns. Since the MJC wielded significant power in the Muslim community at the time, they were adamant about staying away from political matters; thus, so did many Muslims. However, some Muslims were sympathetic and understood the need for the Imam's activities outside the mosque. Eventually, Imam Haron was arrested and detained by the Security Police under the Terrorism Act of 1967.⁹ Once again, the MJC, showing their complacency with the unjust system of apartheid, chose not to protest or condemn the arrest of the Imam because they believed that it was a political matter, and that the Imam was arrested for political reasons rather than religious. Nevertheless, inquiries were made about the Imam's detention; however, Minister of Justice Lourens Muller said it was not in the public's interest to know why Imam Haron was detained (Günther 2004). After 123 days in detention, being deprived of legal counsel and any visitors, Imam Abdullah Haron was murdered by the Security Branch on September 27th, 1969. Günther (2004) and Haron (198: 114) state that the Security Branch declared his death accidental as he 'fell down a flight of stone stairs'. The Muslim community and others largely disagree with this explanation and believe that he was tortured and ultimately killed in custody (Haron 1986). As previously discussed, the majority of the Muslim community, due to the hegemonic nature of the MJC, was largely apolitical; however, as Jeppie (1991: 3) notes – the death of the Imam “left an indelible mark on the consciousness and political conscience of the Cape Town Muslim community”, which sprung them into action.

As a result of his openness and calling people to Islam, Imam Haron was enormously successful in this regard. As mentioned earlier, Muhammad Ngxiki from Nyanga was one of the first known Black Muslim converts in Cape Town (Bangstad 2007). Ngxiki is said to have converted at 22 in 1960 and cited Imam Haron and Muhammed Sayed as people who proselytised to him (Bangstad 2007). Bangstad (2007) asserts that Abdullah Haron and Abdul Aleem Siddique were directly involved in translating some Quranic passages into isiXhosa, the language of the African residents in Langa and Nyanga. For people who struggle with English and do not understand the Arabic language, this was a strategic move to make converts comfortable with the religion. Imam Haron and Siddique were inspired by Haron's teacher, Shaykh Ismail Ganief Edwards, to undertake *da'wa* in the townships (Bangstad 2007). Ngxiki, Imam Dawood Lobi and Mtutuzeni Hassan Ghila are regarded as the pioneers of Islam in the township (Muslim

⁹ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1967-terrorism-act-no-83-1967>

Views 2019; Bangstad 2007). These young men were students of Imam Abdullah Haron and were of the few Xhosa-speaking Muslims who converted in the 1960s. It could be said that these men laid the groundwork for more conversions and the normalisation of Islam in their localities.

The Xhosa converts came from Christian and traditional African backgrounds. Their wearing of *kurtas*¹⁰ and *kufiyahs*¹¹ was peculiar for their fellow neighbours and other Black people at the time because, to many Black people, the general feeling was that Islam was a “cult for Indians and Malays”.¹² Most probably because of enforced segregation, not many Black people interacted with Indian and Cape Malay Muslims outside of their working hours. The idea of seeing Black people wearing what is colloquially accepted to be the clothing of Indians and Coloureds was undoubtedly strange to witness. Bangstad (2007: 79) articulates how difficult it was for Ngxiki and his fellow coreligionists to practice Islam in apartheid due to social barriers, racism and also surveillance from the Security Branch, which followed him around because of his ties with the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Moreover, the converts were ostracised from their daily social life; according to Bangstad (2007: 80), Ngxiki recounted how his peers would say that he was no longer one of them since he decided to take on the customs of Malays. For Ngxiki and many others, their acceptance and adherence to Islam meant that they could no longer drink beer, which was a pastime for young Xhosa males in the township because it is *haram*¹³ to drink alcohol. Beyond not being able to drink alcohol, Ngxiki faced ostracisation from family members, and in addition to that, their employers, who were fellow Muslims, treated them poorly due to racial prejudice.

Bangstad (2007: 80) asserts that the relationship between Indian Muslims and Black Muslims was marked by asymmetrical power relationships based on economic disparities between the two groups. Furthermore, the idea that Islamic knowledge was the property of ‘Indians’ and ‘Coloureds’ (ibid). Finally, Bangstad (2007; 82) states that many converts had their children effectively adopted by their employers, funding their education and offering employment opportunities; this is a benevolent act that not many participate in. However, the unfortunate part of it is that some of the converts who were no longer practising Muslims felt the need to

¹⁰ A kurta is the traditional long Arab shirt, co-opted by Muslims across the world to signify their Muslim status and perform Muslim-ness.

¹¹ A kufiyah is a head covering worn by Muslim men, like a skullcap. It is also co-opted around the Muslim world to signify piety and display Muslim-ness.

¹² Muslim News newspaper article 2019.

¹³ This is the Arabic word for ‘forbidden/ prohibited’.

pretend to be still doing so for fear of losing their jobs or opportunities afforded to them by the Indian Muslims (Bangstad 2007:81).

2.6 African Muslim Identity

Black Muslims in South Africa are a minority when compared to other Muslim identities. Ebrahim Fakude makes a distinction when describing the different ethnicities in the community. Black Muslims, who are primarily converts, are defined as a “developing Muslim community” and other Muslims— “Coloured” and Indians—as “established Muslims” (Fakude 2002). As previously mentioned, Muslims in the townships were very few. There were no mosques or madrassas for people to attend and learn about Islam (Bangstad 2007). In Langa, Muslims have been using the shack erected outside the home of the late Imam Dawood Lobi for many years, and as of 2007, no masjid had been built for this religious community (ibid., 82). Fakude mentioned more barriers to Islam spreading, such as communism (2002). He argued that the political atmosphere of apartheid, which led many people in the townships to follow the communist ideology, meant that they viewed religion as a mechanism which “the slave master used to control the minds of slaves, the Black people” (Fakude 2002: 47). This was a serious impediment for new Muslims who were trying to spread their message. This, along with the spatial segregation, meant people were not allowed to freely move into communities created for other races, meaning that no relationship could be constructed between the developing and developed Muslim communities. Tahir Sitoto has written on the issue of inclusion, using the late Imam Essa Al-Seppe; he argued that the “emerging and unorganised African Muslim sector” ought to be integrated into everyday Muslim life in South Africa (Sitoto 2002: 44). The inclusion would come from what is termed the “established Muslim community” (Sitoto 2002). These terms are similar to what Fakude uses; the latter community refers to the Indian and Malay communities – members of the Asian diaspora. Whereas the “emerging and unorganised African Muslim refers to the Black Muslims in the township. Sitoto (2002) recognises that even though traces of a Black Muslim presence can be tracked to the early 19th century with the migration of the “Zanzibari community”, – the majority of the Black Muslim community found its way to Islam through conversion. Further, on the point of integration, Sitoto (2002: 45) asserts that Imam Al-Seppe was as equally passionate about forging a common Muslim identity, thus collapsing the binaries between “established” and “emerging” Muslim communities.

While the demographics of Muslims in South Africa are very culturally and linguistically different, Auwais Rafudeen (2002) called for the forging of an African Muslim identity. He feels firmly that Muslims ought to follow the call of former president Thabo Mbeki in aligning themselves as Africans and participating in the “African Renaissance” and, thus, ‘Africanising’ themselves (Rafudeen 2002). He further elucidates that the process of Africanising oneself is a two-step process which involves firstly being thoroughly aware of our African history and traditional culture and, secondly, Muslims embracing and involving themselves in traditional African culture provided it does not go against the core beliefs and teachings in Islam (Rafudeen 2002). He recognises the issue of conflating adherence to this religion with a specific race; for instance, in Cape Town, to be ‘Malay’ is also to be Muslim. In Durban, oftentimes, ‘Indians’ are seen as Muslims (Rafudeen 2002). His call to forge a new African Muslim identity is profound because it forces the communities to be creative in finding unity in their diversity. Rafudeen has correctly diagnosed the problem of separationism and, like Al-Seppe and Sitoto (2002), calls for a move towards an integrationist imagination of Islam in South Africa. Citing the cultural and religious amalgamation of the East African Swahili and West African Hausa communities, Rafudeen argues that this could be possible in South Africa. He proposes three measures to ensure that we move towards this identity: having South African Islamic schools and tertiary institutions dedicate a portion of their curriculum to studying and teaching indigenous culture in South Africa and the history of Islam in the country. Secondly, he asserts that in addition to Arabic, an indigenous South African language should be taught in madrassahs instead of Malayu or Urdu (Rafudeen 2002). Lastly, he proposes facilitating and encouraging intermarriage between cultures and races in the different Muslim communities (Rafudeen 2002: 5). There may be some nuances that Rafudeen missed in his evaluation of creating an African Muslim identity, such as uniformity when it comes to language and indigenisation of Islam. That is to say, for an African Muslim identity to be constructed, it must be at home with the local language and words such as *masjid*, *madrassa* and should be integrated into local languages. However, his overall argument is profound and is an important step to achieving such an ideal. Auwais Rafudeen’s (2022) most recent article is on the perceptions of race by Black Sunni Muslims in Laudium, Pretoria. This article follows interviews held with Sunni Muslims, all of whom have religious and theological training, who share their experiences of racism by the local ‘Indian’ Muslim population; some interviewees have accepted the racial differences of people on a theological basis (Rafudeen 2022). These Muslims see their shared religion as a unifying force, while acknowledging the ills of racism and the exclusionary behaviour of some, they maintain that their religion ought to unite them.

While it is true that Black African Muslims receive the short end of the proverbial stick when it comes to social relations, they have made significant strides in creating their own spaces. Relegation to the townships does not mean that black Muslims cannot come together and organise themselves. Well-respected Islamic scholar Shaykh Ismail Gqamane studied Islamic sciences in Saudi Arabia and returned to Cape Town to serve his community of Gugulethu. He is currently the imam of Masjid Murtazaa in Gugulethu. Shaykh Gqamane joined the Masakhane Muslim Community (MMC) shortly after his return to South Africa, an Islamic organisation focused on *da'wa* and Islamic development in the townships. The MMC strove to act as a representative body for “Township Muslims and provide coherent leadership and qualified education to (Black) African Muslims” (Masakhane Muslim Community 2002: 51). Currently, the representative body for Black African Muslims is the Western Cape Shura Council, which was formed from the MMC according to Shaykh Gqamane (Gqamane interview 1, 2024).

Social historians Goolam Vahed and Shamil Jeppie (2004) have written about the diverse Muslim communities in South Africa in the post-apartheid dispensation. It is important to note that Vahed & Jeppie (2004) do not aim to further divide the community but rather show that South African Muslims are not a monolith (Vahed & Jeppie 2004). They show that Muslims come from very diverse backgrounds, starting with class differences across races. Their analysis uncovers that Black Muslims are the poorest due to the constraints apartheid placed on them in terms of education and employment opportunities being held from them. While Black African Muslims constitute the steadiest growing population in the Muslim community, they are indeed the poorest, with a per capita income of R935 in 2004 (Vahed & Jeppie 2004). This contrasts with the ‘Indian’ and ‘Malay’ communities at R2396 and R1262, respectively (Vahed & Jeppie 2004: 253). Before further discussion, I want to emphasise that this highlights the desperate financial need of the Black Muslim community. Furthermore, ever-present socioeconomic issues such as poor quality of education in the township, lack of infrastructure, unemployment and crime continue to plague the Black communities, and this affects their progress.

Black African Muslims, though they are at the margins of Muslim community life, are the steadiest-growing group in the country (Vahed & Jeppie 2004: 262). The census and scholars, in agreement, provide that in 1980, they were numbered at a humble 9048 and reached a

staggering 74701 by 2001 (Stats SA 2001; Vahed & Jeppie 2004).¹⁴ This growth is due to multiple conversions and presumably more children born into the religion. Moreover, in the 1980s, there was an influx of conversions to Islam among township youth, which were politically motivated (Vahed & Jeppie 2004: 263; Molins-Lliteras 2009). Youth in the township were rapidly converting to Islam as a method of resistance to apartheid.

Additionally, in Soweto during the 1970s, there was an increase in the economic migration of Muslims from Malawi and Mozambique (ibid.). It is currently unclear what the number of Muslims is in recent times. Regrettably, the 2011 South African census was the first which did not question religious adherence to citizens. Without the numbers of Muslims, it will be impossible to map out the different demographics and where they are placed in the city and, more broadly, the country. However, the 2001 national census results collectively put the number at 654,046. At the time of the census, this constitutes at least 1.5% of the population. In Tasnim Motala's (2013) discussion about the Muslim population in Cape Town, she revealed that in 2001, about 7,612 Black Muslims were living in Cape Town (Stats SA 2001), which constituted about 2,7 per cent of the Muslim population in the city. While Motala's work is helpful for us to imagine the number of Muslims in residential areas, she admittedly does not pay extensive attention and analysis to the Black Muslim communities, economic migrants from other nations, or the local population (Motala 2013: 13). In closing the discussion on the numbers of the Muslim population, it is astounding to see the growth of the Black Muslim community from its rudimentary formation from the 17th century at the Cape. Davids & Da Costa (1994: 130) estimate that the Free Black population was at ten, whereas the Muslim slave population was at 270. The population grew from this, including the migration of the Mozambicans and other East Africans to the colony. Proselytisation efforts cannot be understated as integral to this growth. As mentioned, more people being born into the religion is a key factor that should not be ignored, including the increase in population through the migration of other Muslims to South Africa on the continent.

2.7 Black African Muslim Migration to Post-apartheid South Africa

Black African Muslims, as already discussed in this chapter, have an extensive history in Cape Town. However, they are not only limited to the local Africans. In the 1990s, towards the last

¹⁴ It is not clear what the numbers represent before 1970.

years of apartheid, there was an influx of migration to the country. West Africans migrated to South Africa, and Molins-Lliteras (2005; 2009) and Zubillaga (2009) touched on this migration. Many of these immigrants came to South Africa looking for work, education and other opportunities that were scarce in their country of origin (Molins-Lliteras 2005). Some immigrants fled political upheaval and conflict and identified South Africa as a place of relative peace and prosperity (Zubillaga 2009). It is further elucidated that many Senegalese and West African migrants legally came to the country and are relatively well-educated and enterprising. Most West African Muslim migrants were men; two-thirds have secondary education, and about 22 per cent have tertiary education (Molins-Lliteras 2009: 220). Contrasting this to Somali immigrants' arrival in South Africa in the 1990s. Political upheaval and conflicts were the reasons behind this mass influx of Somali immigrants (Alhourani 2017). Interestingly, some Somalis initially settled in townships as opposed to the Senegalese, who opted for middle-class areas.

Most Senegalese immigrants who moved to South Africa were Muslim and followed the Tijaniyya-Niassene tariqa¹⁵. The first Tijanis arrived in Cape Town in 1994 at the end of apartheid; the majority of them were Black Muslims from Senegal (Molins-Lliteras 2005). The significance of this migration as Bangstad (2007: 84) states is that they bridged the ethnic divisions in the Cape Town Muslim community by accepting a Black African leadership. Furthermore, Muslims from Burundi, Mozambique, Malawi and Zanzibar, and political exiles from DRC and Rwanda have all augmented the Black African Muslim population of the country (Vahed & Jeppie 2004: 263; Molins-Lliteras 2009: 218).

The Tijaniyya tariqa in Cape Town played a cardinal role in the spread of Islam in the townships. Firstly, the tariqa settled themselves in Gugulethu. They opened a *zawiya*¹⁶ in the township, which was a key factor in the number of Black South Africans joining the tariqa. Secondly, the Niassene branch of the Tariqa was founded in Black Africa, and its leaders are also Black Africans. This plays a critical role in converting many Black South Africans (Molins-Lliteras 2009: 225). For the new converts who were disillusioned with Christianity and other beliefs they may have come from, the Tijaniyya tariqa, through its teachings, shows

¹⁵ This Sufi order has its roots in Senegal. It is regarded as one of the biggest and strongest Sufi orders in West Africa (Molins-Lliteras 2005). The Sufi order has grown beyond the borders of Senegal, and many people have since joined it. The word *tariqa* means 'order'.

¹⁶ This is a centre of religious practice and learning, often associated with Sufi Muslims.

that Islam is not solely associated with a specific cultural or ethnic group. Furthermore, the Tijaniyya also provided a support structure and new network for new converts, both religious and financial. New converts could learn Arabic, were given financial support, and were encouraged to increase their educational qualifications. Provisions would also be made for this (Molins-Lliteras 2009: 225-226). The Tijaniyya tariqa can be described as a more liberal order, which takes a relaxed approach to navigating Islamic gender politics. Molins-Lliteras shows evidence of this by naming two women, ‘Indian’ and ‘Cape Malay,’ who have been initiated into the brotherhood and made *muqaddams*¹⁷ (2009: 225). These two women shared that meeting Shaykh Hassan Cissé, the spiritual leader of the Tijanis, has changed their lives and provided a different understanding of being Muslim. Finally, the migration of West African Muslims, mostly Senegalese, has changed the landscape of Islam in Cape Town and increased diversity.

The relationship between the Senegalese Tijanis and the local initiates into the brotherhood is complex. Ultimately, these two communities have different needs that cannot all be addressed adequately; therefore, tensions have arisen when there are differences. Molins-Lliteras points out to the separation of the two communities, arguing that they have different goals; the Senegalese Tijanis need to collect money to send to their struggling countrymen, whereas the South Africans need money to develop infrastructure in the townships and ensure new converts are taken care of (2009: 227). Moreover, the question of religious authority has been raised, with the Senegalese Tijanis convinced that their *muqaddams* are more senior than the South African ones. They also feel that they are not recognised and respected as ‘senior’ by the South African Tijanis. However, an overarching understanding of Shaykh Hassan Cissé’s supreme authority over all the Tijanis in Cape Town is maintained (Molins-Lliteras 2009:227-228). It must be reiterated that even though the relationship has had its issues, it has produced more good than malice. The multiracial and multicultural nature of the Tijanis in Cape Town has interested some local ‘Cape Malays’ and ‘Indian’ Muslims who have since joined the *tariqa* – the brotherhood allows them to get out of the small enclaves of their own ethnic communities and mix with other Muslims. Molins-Lliteras (2009: 229) cheerfully explains how racist attitudes towards Africans have changed due to spending time with the local Tijanis, Cape Malays and Indian Muslims, even learned Wolof and IsiXhosa. Some blamed apartheid for their short-sighted and bigoted views about fellow Black African Muslims. Furthermore, this

¹⁷ This is the Islamic term for a leader or one who holds authority in a community or group.

opens the lines of communication and a transnational network which allows for travel to Senegal, Morocco, and Indonesia (ibid.). For the Senegalese, the Tijaniyya Tariqa has been an integral conduit for their integration into South Africa, and it is thanks to this brotherhood that many of them have made their way into South Africa for economic betterment. Once they arrive, they are supported to a great extent by the brotherhood in terms of accommodation, employment, and a stipend (Molins-Llitas 2005; 2009: 230). My focus on this Sufi group is precisely because of their Islamic giving. A core theme of the struggles between the communities has been surrounding the issue of finances, which alludes to the concept of Islamic giving¹⁸ and tensions around who ‘deserves’ it more. Their involvement in Gugulethu is a point of interest as they have been settled in this area for more than 20 years – since the establishment of the *zawiya*.

Somali migration to Cape Town was prevalent in the 1990s, along with the West Africans, although for vastly different reasons. Alhourani (2017) included an ethnographic account of the Somali community in Cape Town, which had established itself in the suburb of Bellville. In an earlier paper, Alhourani (2015) notes the influx of Somali immigrants fleeing political instability, a dictatorial government collapse and the subsequent civil war from 1991. Somalia has seldom enjoyed periods of relative peace; in December of 2006, following the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, which ousted the Islamic Courts Union, and the rise of Al-Shabab, a militant Islamist group, there was another wave of Somali migration to the Western Cape (Gastrow 2013: 15). The first Somalis to arrive in Cape Town in the 1990s opened trading stalls and shops in central business districts in and around Bellville, Mitchell’s Plain and the city centre. The new immigrants capitalised on the centrality of these places as they were around bus stations and taxi ranks. Following this, some Somali traders tapped into the township economy by opening “spaza shops” or tuckshops in Black townships (Gastrow 2013: 15). Spaza shops are informal businesses that focus on selling essential goods to the community, such as paraffin, bread, tinned food amongst others.

The majority of Somalis who have come to Cape Town are Muslim, which is unsurprising given that Somalia has a Muslim population of over 97%. Alhourani (2015) reveals that although many Somalis cannot read or speak Arabic, they self-identify as Arab rather than African. Recognising that self-identification politics are personal and should be taken seriously,

¹⁸ The concept of ‘Islamic Giving’ will be discussed in the third and fourth chapters of the dissertation.

many South Africans do not view Somalis as Arabs. Alhourani further articulates that they believed this affiliation with Arab identity would afford them greater credibility and improved social mobility within the South African Muslim community (2015: 107). The self-identification of Somalis as Arabs complicates how they are perceived and interacted with. In rural areas and townships, they are primarily seen as Black Africans, placing them in this subsection of my discussion. Somalis have also enhanced and contributed to the diverse nature of the Islamic landscape in South Africa; however, unlike West Africans, who have largely integrated into local communities, Somalis have chosen to remain more closely connected with one another. This phenomenon may have been influenced by the 2008 xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals by South Africans (Alhourani 2015: 104). These events prompted Somalis to relocate from townships to the Bellville CBD and create their close-knit semi-homogenous communities where “they sought and found community protection” (Alhourani 2015: 104-105, 2017: 149). Despite enduring horrific xenophobic attacks, Somalis remain socially connected to the Muslim community, attending Friday prayers at local mosques with a diverse Muslim population. Mosques and Islamic organisations have attempted to integrate Somalis into broader communities. In their ethnographic study based in Johannesburg, Mahomed and Jhazbhay (2020: 20) acknowledge that little interaction exists outside of prayer times, Muslim holidays, and Friday sermons. Thus, these efforts are largely ineffective. Nonetheless, they make a compelling argument about the Somalis’ desire to be accepted as equals by the local ‘Indians’ and ‘Malays’, yet they regard the local Africans as inferior (ibid). Studies focusing on the interactions between immigrant Somalis and local Black African Muslims have yet to be conducted; however, the ground realities of general conviviality, basic ethical behaviour, and overall notions of an imagined community toward the local Muslim *ummah* are respected.

The discussion up until this point has primarily centred on Black Muslims as poor and needy. The results of apartheid are still felt today in the townships. Muslims in these areas lack basic infrastructure like madrassas and Islamic schools. While there are mosques in townships, the distance between an individual Muslim and a mosque is still quite far. Islamic organisations such as the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF) have recognised the need for development in African townships. Black Muslim ‘ulama have long petitioned for serious intervention in the township. Despite efforts in the Black townships to uplift themselves, it is increasingly necessary that collaborative efforts between established Muslims and emerging/developing Muslims are necessary. Certainly, the aims of this chapter and, overall, the dissertation are not to place Black Muslims as beggars or people who are unable to take

care of themselves. Rather, it aims to highlight that through proper collaboration and attention, Islamic philanthropy can accelerate the development process, and equal opportunities can be made available in both communities, which aim to forge a common identity while holding on to their cultural and traditional backgrounds.

2.8 Conclusion

The history of South African Islam is riddled with intricate details covering a broad spectrum of politics, identity, racial bigotry and exclusion. The rise of all the institutions that were established played an essential role in unifying certain pockets of the Muslim community in South Africa. SANZAF, however, is a central organisation in more than one way. Due to shifting mindsets in the Muslim community, as Sadouni (2007) highlights, SANZAF and other organisations such as Mustadafin and the transnational AMA, start focusing their efforts into the townships and the Black communities that are in need of aid. This shift, profound in its occurrence, led to multiple Muslim organisations moving into the townships. Organisations focused on aid and development like the Mustadafin Foundation, which employs a convivial and friendly approach to giving, led by its political and activist origins, were able to show a different side of Islam (Alhourani, 2020). While the Mustadafin Foundation is a Muslim organisation, the organisation does not have a policy of Islamisation. Their activities are informed by their social responsibility, sense of citizenship, and piety (Ahourani, 2020). The post-apartheid shift allowed Muslim organisations and individuals to perform their citizenship and belonging in the new South Africa. Food and blanket distribution has been the method through which multiple organisations have done this. The work done by SANZAF, AMA and Mustadafin in the townships has gone a long way in addressing the many problems that are faced in those areas. The post-apartheid methods of giving have opened up conversations about a moral economy, and the following chapter examines the role of the Mustadafin Foundation in forging a moral economy in the township.

Chapter 3

A Moral Economy of Care: The Humanitarian Reach of the Mustadafin Foundation

3.1 *Introduction*

This chapter plots the broad contours of the moral economy as a tool for examining the Mustadafin Foundation's charitable activities in Cape Town and surrounding areas. In the previous chapter, we concluded with flagging the post-apartheid and the shift of giving attitudes to the Black townships. The Mustadafin Foundation is one of the organisations that turned their focus to the townships. This shift was followed by Muslims performing their citizenship and their belonging through acts of conviviality such as food distribution amongst others (Alhourani 2020). Using ethnographic research, I aim to answer key questions about the motivations behind Mustadafin Foundation's giving in Cape Town and the surrounding townships. Through participant observation with the Mustadafin Foundation in various parts of the Western Cape and interviews with two executive members, the chapter uncovers the social and spiritual impetus for the specific type of charity that Mustadafin undertakes.

The chapter draws and contributes to Alhourani's (2024) conception of Mustadafin as constitutive of a moral economy. The chapter opens with an ethnographic account of Mustadafin giving at Laingville, a semi-rural township in St. Helena Bay, Western Cape. Following that, I provide a historical background of the Mustadafin Foundation. The following sections all deal with an aspect of moral economy and call into question the idea of Muslim ethics and care. The main contention of this chapter is to show, through interviews and ethnography, that Mustadafin not only is a moral economy on its own, but also provides compassionate care to the communities it operates in. Antithetical to Mittermaier's understanding of non-compassionate care, the Mustadafin Foundation foregrounds social solidarity and then lists piety as one of the multiple reasons they participate in feeding and distribution events in the townships.

3.2 Bridging Communities: Ethnographic Insights into Mustadafin's Community Work

On Saturday, March 9, 2024, my supervisor, Dr. Alhourani, and I participated in a distribution event organised by the Mustadafin Foundation in Laingville, near St. Helena Bay. The event aimed to distribute food and blankets to those in need within this small town. At 4:50 am, Dr. Alhourani texted me to let me know he would be on his way soon. After waking up and getting ready to go to the Bridgetown headquarters of Mustadafin, I performed the fajr prayer and met Dr. Alhourani at 5:30 am. He played soothing Egyptian-style Quranic recitations to create a calming atmosphere during our peaceful drive.

Amidst Abdul Basit 'Abdus-Samad's relaxing recitation, enunciating every word with perfect *tajweed*, we sat in the tranquil darkness. Dr. Alhourani detailed the plan for the day, explain that we were on an ethnographic excursion using the method of participant observation, so I would have to get my hands dirty, but I was warned not to get overwhelmed with participating; I had to step back and watch how the dynamics unfolded between the recipients and the volunteers. We agreed that I would talk to people, ask questions, and build relationships with the other Mustadafin Foundation volunteers.

We gathered at Mustadafin's office at 05:50 am. We were greeted by a group of women, most of whom we had yet to meet. As we stepped out, the cold air blew on our faces, shocking us into activity. Soon, we were greeting people and introducing ourselves. "This is Dr. Alhourani; he used to teach drums to the children in the area", said Shameemah, the head of operations. After exchanging niceties and having to pronounce my name a couple of times, we helped load some goods onto the truck. More people arrived shortly, and within 10 minutes, all of the volunteers had arrived. The majority of them were women who have been with the Mustadafin Foundation for years, and some of them staff in different branches across the city. Tasneem, the media and HR manager, arrived, and we had a good conversation as it had been almost two months since we last saw one another. Not long after that, Ghairunisa Johnstone, a founding member and the director, arrived in her vehicle accompanied by two other people. We warmly embraced and greeted one another with the greeting of *Assalaamu 'Alaykum*; peace be unto you. Indeed, the morning carried a peaceful breeze, kind smiles and hearty laughter amongst friends, co-workers, fellow Muslims, and Christians alike.

Shameemah briefed everyone before we got into our respective vehicles. Two trucks carried blankets, pots, and food ingredients, two bakkies carried cooking equipment such as gas stoves and other paraphernalia, and one Toyota Quantum to transport the volunteers. Dr Alhourani and I got into the Quantum. Before we left, we mingled with the other volunteers, and in conversation, the HR manager, Tasneem, informed me that we would be going to St Helena Bay, which was just over two hours away. Our driver, affectionately known as 'Q', a softspoken Xhosa man, put on the radio, and we were on our way. I sat beside Sumaya, a middle-aged woman who runs the Delft office, and we had a spirited conversation about working with the organisation. To my left was a young Xhosa-speaking man named Bongani, who was surprised that I spoke Xhosa and was older than him. At the end of the ride, Bongani and I were acquainted, and he had explained his work with Mustadafin as a volunteer and part-time staff member.

The ride, although smooth and safe, was very long. At precisely 09:37 am, we arrived in Laingville. Our destination was a bustling construction site, where an Islamic centre and masjid were in the process of being built to attend to the religious needs of this community. The area was cocooned in dust, as characteristic of an active construction zone; a solitary main road stretched down to the residential area and the shops. Some of the side roads were gravel. As we exited the vehicle, volunteers dispersed with a clear sense of purpose. The kitchen, which was the focal point of attention for the day, was filled with large cooking pots and other equipment. The gas stoves and canisters were unloaded and placed in the kitchen so that cooking could start swiftly. The Mustadafin Foundation gazebo was set up alongside an unbranded gazebo to provide a much-needed respite from the unrelenting sunshine and heat.

Before the set-up was fully complete, Ghairunisa called everyone in a circle. With much fervour and exuberance, she announced that volunteers would be placed in teams, some cooking, some helping with dishing the food and distributing blankets, and some setting up the chairs for guests and the sound system for the event that would take place later in the day. She introduced us to a group of Italian volunteers who would be joining us. In this debrief, she also introduced the organisers. A group of Scouts led by a lady named Gouwa would be doing the clean-up. As part of their program to make Laingville clean and pleasant to live in. After Ghairunisa delegated the duties, I was placed with her in the kitchen, cooking mince curry.

Helping with the pots was 28-year-old Yusuf from Italy. While Yusuf and I became acquainted over the pot, Ghairunisa gave us very clear instructions: "Ensure that the onions are golden-brown!". Although we struggled to achieve the desired colour for the onions, the Brownian motion was in full swing; the kitchen was filled with the scents of cardamom, bay leaves, cinnamon, and other exotic spices, creating a memorable olfactory experience. It had been my first time taking charge of a 100-litre pot that had the potential to feed more than 250 people. Yusuf and I did our jobs well; the onions started to brown and turn golden. We added frozen tomatoes, spices, and 15kg of mince to each pot. The food was ready after hours in the kitchen, toiling, mixing, and stirring. While the food was being cooked, people started lining up and waiting patiently. There was a high turnout of people that I was unable to count.

While the community was gathering and waiting for the food to be cooked and finished, they lined up outside the site's fence. Three speakers addressed the community before the food was served. First was a local up-and-coming rugby player named Delrin, who serves as a role model for the youth in the community. His speech, while motivational, was delivered in Afrikaans. However, he assured the children that they could achieve their dreams and that if they seized the opportunities that came their way, they would be successful. He concluded by informing the young people of the area that they possess abundant talent and potential; with the community's support, the youth could become a source of pride for Laingville. Shortly after Delrin spoke, Dr Alhourani addressed the crowd with a compelling message of hope, drawing from his life experiences as a young man in South Africa who could not afford to pay for his university fees at UWC—a story that resonates with too many students. He shared how the Mustadafin Foundation covered his master's tuition fees. He concluded with a Quranic maxim that teaches that God does not change the condition of a people until they strive to change it themselves (Quran 13:11). This message embodies hope and encourages people to work hard and give their best, regardless of circumstances. Finally, an Islamic scholar addressed the crowd in Afrikaans. He explained what the organisations present were doing regarding proselytisation and its spiritual benefits. He shared that they were building a community centre which would also double as an Islamic centre and prayer area to serve the Muslim residents of Laingville. He asked the community for their patience and understanding and to open their hearts to the practitioners of Islam. Moreover, to drive this point home, he listed the similarities between the two religions of Christianity and Islam. In an endeavour to highlight the similarities, he explained how Muslims hold Jesus in high esteem much like the Christians. Soon afterwards, he asked the Christian people in attendance to recite what is known as "The Lord's Prayer" in

Afrikaans and they obliged. After this, he read the opening chapter of the Qur'an, *Al Fatiha*, in both Arabic and Afrikaans. He concluded by saying that even the prayers share some similarities. Thereafter, he thanked the community for listening to him, and he asked for some patience as the food was going to be cooked and served in a few minutes.

Following the speeches, there was a *dhikr* held in the Islamic centre. This included melodious chanting of the Qur'an and other invocations, known as *Salawat*.¹⁹ During a break, the *dhikr* was momentarily paused for midday prayers known as *Dhuhr*. The *adhan* was called, and midday prayers took place. Shortly thereafter, the *dhikr* was continued.

After some time in the kitchen, the mince had been cooked to Ghairunisa's satisfaction. The two 100-litre pots that Yusuf and I presided over brimmed with freshly cooked rice and mince curry, and the food was complete. Mince curry and rice were served to the community. Under the shade of the Mustadafin gazebos, the elders sat and ate the food that we had worked hard to cook. The laughter of children could be heard all around the area. After people ate and drank their juice and water, the trucks were opened, and blankets were unloaded and prepared for distribution. All the families that gathered there received packets of food and blankets. It was not clear how among them is a Muslim or non-Muslim. They were all treated equally. After we accomplished our task of giving packets of food and blankets to everyone I sat down and ate with some of the volunteers, a rare moment of stillness and a chance to connect more with people. Among them was Hassan, whom I had briefly met earlier in the whirlwind of activity but hadn't had a chance to speak to properly. I was introduced to him by Ghairunisa, and I was informed that he is a frequent donor to the Mustadafin Foundation.

As Hassan approached me, he shook my hand and shared some insights from the donor's point of view. He explained in detail how the donors are drawn to organisations that are efficient in how they distribute *zakat* and *sadaqah*. Hassan was clear that if an organisation follows the instruction of the donor and ensures that the least amount of money is spent by reaching more people, that is where the money will go. His explanation went deeper and shared that there has been a shift in donor priorities. One that sought to empower recipients rather than perpetuate the current culture of dependency. He firmly told me that "donors are looking for recipients who want to be self-sufficient". He elucidated that donors, himself included, were interested in

¹⁹ This is the Arabic term for sending blessings and prayers upon the Prophet Muhammad. Often done in religious gatherings known as *dhikr*.

recipients who wanted better conditions for themselves. Therefore, he would be drawn to donate towards skills-building programs and subsistence farming projects. He gave the example of growing one's crops and having the donors purchase from them, and those crops/produce can be donated to poorer people. Hassan's insights provided much food for thought. I thanked him for his time, and we parted ways.

Finally, the day's activities came to an end. Everyone packed up; the pots were washed and loaded onto the bakkies, and the gas stoves, canisters and other paraphernalia were loaded onto the trucks. The leftover blankets as well. The Scouts, led by Gouwa, excitedly cleaned the area and threw all the rubbish in lack refuse bags neatly packed by the garbage containers in their effort to keep Laingville clean. Salaams were exchanged, hugs and kisses, and farewells were made. It was 15:30 when we left for Cape Town.

Mustadafin's regular distribution of food and blankets, the building of the mosque (that also operates as a Madrasa), and collaboration with The Scouts groups demonstrate how the Mustadafin Foundation's giving practices constitute a moral economy, as posited by Alhourani (2024). In addition to the feeding event, a religious centre for Muslims was opened. This responds directly to my research question regarding the physical infrastructure built by Islamic philanthropy. Furthermore, this is a centre for people to trade ideas, learn about their neighbours and ultimately increase their spirituality as they see fit. The centre included a praying area, which would also operate as a learning centre, and there was a kitchen beside it to feed the community when resources were available. The event at Laingville was important because it exposed me to the broad local network to which Mustadafin is connected. Mustadafin's moral economy provide for Muslims and Christians who were in attendance, which points to Mustadafin's commitment to attending to all kinds of people. Moreover, while the feeding and blanket distribution event was for all in attendance, the *dhikr* provided an aesthetic experience that encapsulates Mustadafin Islamic values.

The area that we went to, Laingville, is a township on the West Coast outside of Cape Town. This small township was created in 1972 and has a single entrance and exit point, much like many townships created during the apartheid era. It is a poor community with a diverse religious and racial background. To be specific, the demographic of the township is made of predominantly Black and 'coloured' people, both Muslim and Christian population. There are not many opportunities for employment due to its size and distance from towns and the city;

therefore, youth of school-leaving age are unable to find work quickly, and public transportation is expensive and challenging to attain (Shultz 2010: 43). It is not all grim. The community is keenly interested in sports to get children out of trouble and keep them busy. As outlined above, a young resident named Delrin is an emerging rugby star from the local team. Beyond sports, for school-age children, there is a Scouts programme that they could enrol in. This is run by fellow resident Gouwa in conjunction with the Mustadafin Foundation, who support some of the activities. The Scouts are taught discipline, critical thinking, and other survival skills in their programme. More than this, the students were expected to serve their community in an effort to teach them social responsibility.

The ethnographic account given above took place in March 2024. This was before the holy month of Ramadan and was the preparation in the couple of days leading to it. Exposure to the demanding physical workload undertaken by the volunteers and staff members certainly gives one an appreciation of the work they do selflessly on a near-weekly basis. Conversations with volunteers and employees made it clear to me that interacting with the community members through serving them allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation for humanity. For instance, I spoke to Bongani, who told me that he, as a Christian man, volunteers with a Muslim organisation like Mustadafin because they do good work to uplift communities and ensure that they help people. For Bongani and many volunteers who give their time to these causes and projects, this is a worthwhile sacrifice. Additionally, it is not only doing good for the community but also on a more personal level. Sumaya shared that she appreciates that another human being can see her as someone who cares for them in a world that seems to have abandoned them. The volunteer's expression indicates a plurality of ethics that motivate their participation in Mustadafin's event, a mix between social solidarity and piety to God.

All of the volunteers who participated are affiliated with the Mustadafin Foundation, except for the Italian volunteers. An interesting observation to report is the demographics of the volunteers. Most of the volunteers were 'Coloured' women who reside in the Bridgetown area, where the Mustadafin Foundation is headquartered. Yet there are, Black Xhosa-speaking volunteers such as Bongani, 'Q' and Sumaya. Furthermore, the volunteers, although diverse, were mostly Muslim. Inspired by their faith, these women join in what is commonly referred to by the Mustadafin staff as 'feedings', where they head out to townships and other areas to distribute food, clothes, and blankets. The volunteers and staff often do this work independently with little help from community members. However, this time was different. Mustadafin

partnered with a local organisation and the Scouts mentioned earlier to make the distribution of food and goods less onerous. Interestingly, this event differed from the conventional feeding events that Mustadafin holds in that a religious element was attached. Admittedly, the Shaykh in attendance was not affiliated with Mustadafin – the organisation does not explicitly proselytise to communities they enter. Nevertheless, the Shaykh tried to highlight the similarities between Christianity and Islam, even translating the first chapter of the Qur’an (Al Fatiha) to Afrikaans, contrasting it to the Lord’s Prayer. The shaykh asked for tolerance in the community and an open-mindedness that would facilitate social cohesion between the Muslims and Christians in the area.

Furthermore, participating in this event allowed me to meet with donors. The primary donor to whom I spoke was named Hassan. It is not common for donors to be present when their donations are being distributed to people, but Hassan wanted to be hands-on during this event. During our conversation, Hassan mentioned a shift in how donors give money. Donors are inclined to prioritise communities, Muslim and non-Muslim, who are self-sustaining. He made an example using farming. For Hassan, it is better to give money to a community that will purchase fertiliser and seedlings and grow food to sell to sustain themselves rather than buy blankets and distribute food. This comment is reminiscent of the theory of pious neoliberalism. This theory dictates that one should be proactive with their relationship with God, meaning that one should encompass an entrepreneurial spirit to please God. In simple terms, Mona Atia (2012: 809) explains that pious neoliberalism is “the discursive combination of religion and economic rationale”. While Hassan did not mention religion in his comments, his insights could still be linked to pious neoliberalism – a theory that prefers a proactive attitude when it comes to aid.

3.4 Mustadafin Foundation

Founded in the turbulent political conditions of the 1980s, Mustadafin Foundation comes with a strong tradition rooted in political activism. Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassiem founded the Mustadafin Foundation with the support of the late Imam Achmad Cassiem (d. 2022), a former anti-Apartheid activist and founder of Qibla, a militant Islamist group created in the late 1970s. The organisation has its roots in the apartheid struggle operating in Cape Town, specifically in the townships of Nyanga, Langa and Crossroads (Begg 2012). While Mustadafin started out in these areas, it has expanded gradually to service the rest of Cape Town and areas outside of the

city as well. As the analysis above explains, Mustadafin has connections and networks in other Western Cape townships. Ghairunisa is well-known in the humanitarian field by the government and civil society alike. Mustadafin and Ghairunisa have won many awards from the City of Cape Town and other stakeholders. In explaining her journey with the Mustadafin Foundation, Ghairunisa detailed that this organisation relies solely on donations. This ranges from the building wherein they are situated to the furniture people use to sit on. Everything was donated either in cash or in kind. According to her, Mustadafin rarely makes enough money to make big purchases.

Ghairunisa grew up in District Six in Cape Town before her family was displaced. She recalls that they did not grow up well off financially, but their family did not starve. Her upbringing prioritised sharing, she has fond memories of her youth, she recalls:

“How I grew up - and this is what I brought back into Mustadafin - is that if you have something in kind to share, or if you have food for one, there is enough for two and if there is enough for two, invite a third.”²⁰

This lesson has taught her how to lead Mustadafin with an ethos of sharing and care. In her understanding of these ethics of care, she refers to the early Muslims who arrived in Cape Town as slaves and imagined them in a strange land but still found it in themselves to build a community centred on sharing the little resources available to them.

To Ghairunisa, diversity is essential to note, and this extends to language. To this end, cultural exchange has become increasingly important, and as a director of such an organisation, she can recognise this. Therefore, she makes concerted efforts to feed the needy food they’re most comfortable with. This does not always happen as there is little money to buy ingredients, and they often use what they have. Thus, the ethics of care embodied by Ghairunisa and, by extension, Mustadafin extend beyond materiality. Although there is an understanding of spirituality, the ground realities of poverty and violence still operate. To address this, Ghairunisa asserts that Mustadafin’s charity is not only centred on money but also on bringing people together and viewing people as human beings. She clarifies that this extends to how we

²⁰ Personal interview with Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassiem. Bridgetown Mustadafin Foundation office, 14 May 2024.

smile at people, interact with them and ultimately, treat them. Additionally, it is providing a nutritional meal for them:

“People say if you don’t have money, how do you provide food for them? We used to get a lot of things in kind. We get surplus goods, so the meals we made today we got from places like Woolworths and Busy Corner (a local meat store and butchery), and the Muslim community in general who provides us with those things. And that itself is a charitable act, and we fulfil that by ensuring that what is given to us is given to the person who needs it the most.”²¹

Above is the response Ghairunisa gave when questioned about how the organisation runs when there are claims that they make little money. In her response, she alluded to people who do not have the means and how they can also participate in acts of charity. Using the example of students and unemployed people, she elucidates that those who are able to give up their time are counted as givers. Referring to the Mother’s Day event that I participated in two days before (12 May 2024), she says my assisting poor mothers with preparing food and serving them was an act of charity. She further legitimises her position by explaining that many of the women there may not have food at home, and my presence and assistance in the kitchen may bring some ease to them and a smile on their faces. Finally, she asserts that:

“Money should not be considered the only form of charity. It is your time, your interaction with another human being. Making that person feel good about themselves and uplifting that person to be a better human being. But also, whatever you have to share, whether it be a beanie, a shirt, a pair of shoes or a pair of socks, a vest, plate of food or glass of water...”²²

With an activist history, the organisation has not ceased on this approach as they are still in the business of lobbying for social justice and not only continuing but expanding their operations in poor areas to alleviate and address financial and distributional injustices. Currently, the Mustadafin Foundation is run wholly by women, namely Ghairunisa Johnstone-Cassiem, the organisation’s director; Nazlie Behardien, the secretary; and Shameemah De Jongh, head of operations. They are currently based in the local Bridgetown area, serving the poor hot meals. Through interviews and conversations with Ghairunisa, I learned that the Mustadafin

²¹ Interview with Johnstone-Cassiem, 14 May 2024.

²² Johnstone-Cassiem, 14 May 2024.

Foundation relies on donations from local philanthropists and Muslims who pay their *zakat* and give *sadaqah* through them and a small section of the private sector. She has expressed how the word ‘Mustadafin’ in Arabic can be translated to ‘downtrodden’ or ‘oppressed’, and the central ethos of the organisation is to stand up for the people in this position in society. Thus, Mustadafin focuses on the poor and runs poverty alleviation programs, feeding schemes and blanket drives. Besides the foundational distribution of food and blankets, it also offers various workshops that aim to empower women (Alhourani 2017, 2024). Alhourani (2024:33) has shown that the Mustadafin Foundation also receive grants from the Department of Social Development. This relationship with the government was earned through years of service to the surrounding communities of Cape Town. Scholars have shown that although the Mustadafin Foundation positions itself as a Muslim organisation operating within Islamic ethics and practices, it also reaches out to non-Muslims (Begg 2012, Alhourani 2024). We see similarities in the conceptualisation of a moral economy given to us by British historian E.P. Thompson (1963, 1971) and applying this to how Mustadafin conducts its charity events. Mustadafin’s method of giving is inspired by their slogan: “If every man helps his neighbour, who will need help?” Through their slogan and actions, Mustadafin has shown their commitment to helping all people in need, regardless of creed, race and religion. Mustadafin operates a moral economy underpinned by Islamic ethics and social commitment.

In an interview, it was posed to Ghairunisa what she expects in return for all her efforts in giving. In response to the question, she quoted the Qur’an verse: “...we feed you only for the sake of Allah, seeking neither reward nor thanks from you.”²³ (Q 76:9), she stated that the basis behind their giving is to attain God’s pleasure (Johnstone-Cassiem, 2024). Interestingly, Ghairunisa mentioned compassion as one of the reasons for Mustadafin’s giving and humanitarian activism. The idea of wanting something in return is taboo and she mentioned that it should not be in the mind of someone who works for or with Mustadafin. In Islamic theology, the poor have a right to the wealth of the rich. This is called *haqq al-faqīr*.²⁴ Ghairunisa, when questioned about her thoughts towards this axiom, reiterated that as much as the poor are ‘entitled’ to this, the wealthy have an obligation to give it to them without any obstacle. While there is an intermingling of obligation and compassion, the central tenet ought to be the attainment of distributional justice – regardless of compassion and care. While

²³ Johnstone-Cassiem, 14 May 2024.

²⁴ See Qur’an verses 17:26 and 51:19.

keeping in line with Qur'anic injunctions and commands is vital to the director, she has clarified more than once that Mustadafin is not an exclusively Muslim space. During my time with them, I noticed that their voluntary and salaried staff members are from diverse backgrounds. While a significant number of them are Muslims, there is a high number of Christians and people who are not religiously affiliated but give their time and effort to a good cause. This indicates that a social commitment to the broader society of South Africa drives Mustadafin.

Samadia Sadouni (2007) and Ala Alhourani (2017) have argued that in the post-apartheid dispensation, Muslims have positioned themselves in the field of humanitarianism as a way to perform their citizenship in South Africa. Due to apartheid segregating people along the lines of race, Muslims belonging to the 'Malay', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' communities were legally unable to show solidarity with their Black coreligionists. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there were Muslims, such as Imam Haron, who defied these laws. But the fact remains that apartheid held many of them back and kept them in their townships and places of residence. The dawn of democracy came with the expansion of Islamic charity into the townships. Alhourani (2017) explains that Muslims have shown conviviality and public performances of Muslim-ness through cooking and distributing food, and the primary recipients are poor people residing in townships. The food is almost always *akhni*, a local Cape Malay rice dish, often made with chicken and potatoes. Sadouni (2007:112) suggests that the humanitarian turn results from Muslims wanting to perform their citizenship in South Africa and to build and cultivate a sense of belonging. Through these acts of conviviality, cooking food, aid distribution and disaster relief, the Mustadafin Foundation and Muslims participating in humanitarian work perform their citizenship and belonging to the new democratic dispensation.

Further, this friendship and collaboration is shown through grants given by the government to Mustadafin and their engagement with civil society. Unlike some organisations, Mustadafin's mandate is not one of Islamisation. What is meant by this is that Mustadafin does not directly propagate Islam to communities that they go into. Their focus is on building relationships with communities and ensuring that development takes place. While they are outwardly Muslim, there is no direct effort to convert people to Islam. There is a profound respect for communities' traditions and religions, and the general consensus is that if people are interested in converting to Islam, Mustadafin will make that process easy for them. Ghairunisa affirms this idea through her speeches at events, all of which she greets the attendees in IsiXhosa (*molweni*), Afrikaans (*goeie môre*), and Arabic (*salaam*). This shows the commitment to multiculturalism and

recognising the plurality of languages in one space. This approach makes people feel comfortable in the presence of Muslims, as Mustadafin is an outwardly Muslim organisation and, as Sadouni suggests, links their Islamic identity to their identity as citizens (2007: 112).

As previously explained, Mustadafin accepts *zakat* payments and therefore distributes the funds according to the donors' wishes or if there is no particular intention on the part of the donor, the money is allocated to portfolios accordingly. Mustadafin Foundation works in many areas and has dynamic portfolios, each functioning independently. Eight portfolios carry out Mustadafin's work: poverty alleviation, education, madrassa, health programmes, youth development, disaster relief, *isibindi*, and community development. These are spread out across the city in different townships. There are branches in Khayelitsha, Delft and Manenberg. Furthermore, 21 daycare centres for school-going children are concentrated in Khayelitsha, Crossroads, Delft and Phillipi. These townships are the poorest areas in Cape Town. The organisation's dedication since 1986 to the poorest areas in the city legitimises them as a force of social change through embodied religious practice. Additionally, Mustadafin's long history in the community has allowed them to be frequenters on the radio waves. Therefore, if there is an event they are planning, it is easy to attain funds or volunteers. Their presence in the local Muslim community is a formidable force.

Mustadafin's main focus is feeding people. The organisation reaches incredible numbers of people—feeding a reported 29000 hungry people daily, an increase from Alhourani's reported 27,910 in 2021 (2024: 33). Shameemah De Jongh, who runs the poverty alleviation programmes, has shared on multiple occasions that these particular projects take the bulk of their time and resources. The moral economy Mustadafin operates under is multifaceted and not limited to food items and blanket distribution; it includes education programmes, religious education, poverty alleviation, and community development. Moreover, the organisation supports an adult literacy program which is geared towards vocational skills. Mustadafin also assists in disaster relief programs in partnership with the City of Cape Town and other organisations in the surrounding areas (Begg 2012:225). In his article, Alhourani (2024) argues that Mustadafin's donation and distribution economy and transnational and national networks affirm the economic dimension of Mustadafin's moral economy (2024: 34). The moral dimension is informed by their commitment to religious ethics, social solidarity and a sense of citizenship through their diverse programmes including, but not limited to, education, vocational skills development, and community upliftment (Alhourani 2024). Finally, this

religious, moral economy practised by Mustadafin is embodied piety. This means that they show their piety to God through cooking, distribution and activism.

Through participant research with the Mustadafin Foundation, it became evident that they prioritise religion in their everyday actions. The organisation does not outrightly position itself as a Muslim organisation. However, interestingly, the front desk worker, when answering the phone, greets the caller on the other end, “Mustadafin Foundation, As-Salaamu ‘Alaikum”. When visiting the offices of the respective staff members, one is bound to encounter Qur’anic verses on posters or desk decorations. The language used is Islamic in nature. For example, “thank you” is substituted for the Arabic “*shukran*,” and responses to queries about one’s health are almost always “Alhamdulillah.”²⁵ Before anyone begins to cook, they are encouraged to start with “Bismillah,” invoking the name of God before they embark on any task.²⁶ Moreover, this language is utilised not only by Muslim staff members but has been co-opted by Christian staff members and volunteers alike. The non-Muslim staff have picked up the so-called Muslim language, words such as *Insha’Allah*²⁷ and *shukran* and use them often, thus acknowledging their presence in a Muslim space. Finally, while volunteer women prepare meals for the poor at any stage in the kitchen, it is not uncommon to hear melodious recordings of Qur’anic recitation. While religious plurality is evident in their staff and volunteers, and though their position is not outrightly Muslim, they still perform a sense of Muslimness (Alhourani, 2017). What I mean by this is that an Islamic ethos is employed at the Mustadafin Foundation. All of this is to say that religion is central in the day-to-day operations at Mustadafin, and this manifests itself through their distribution, feeding, and other community activities. Furthermore, it informs the moral dimension of Mustadafin’s moral economy. Due to their activist past and their immediate locality of Bridgetown being a low-income area, the Mustadafin Foundation has had little trouble engaging with the poor and is well acquainted with their experiences, and in turn, applying Fassin’s (2009) notion of centring the phenomenological experiences of the poor.

²⁵ This means ‘All praise be to God’ in Arabic.

²⁶ For more see Alhourani (2017).

²⁷ This means ‘God willing’ in Arabic.

3.5 Muslim Ethics of Care & Motivations of Giving: Interview with Nazlie Behardien

People from all walks of life are familiar with the old adage: “Charity begins at home”. Further enhanced by the *hadith*: “The upper hand is better than the lower hand. One should start giving first to his dependents.”²⁸ This simple but powerful sentence alludes to the idea that people are taught how to be generous at home. And that is where one should begin their charity before giving it to others. This is what Nazlie Behardien, secretary of Mustadafin, was taught in her young days. A member of the Mustadafin Foundation for over 20 years, Nazlie has been involved in her community and has learnt valuable lessons from her father's selflessness. She is a professional I.T. specialist and doubles as the organisation's elected Secretary. In an audio-recorded interview, Nazlie shared that she gives simply because it is the right thing to do. Admittedly, she did not grow up wealthy or poor, but her ethics of giving stems from it being the right thing to do as opposed to earning a reward. For Nazlie, giving and charity have been a way of life – she shared that she experiences joy in giving and difficulty in taking. When asked about *zakat* and Islamic giving more broadly, Nazlie shared:

*“I feel that it is a way of life. It is in the giving that you receive. You don't give because you want to receive; you give for the sake of giving. When you look at Mustadafin's logo, the top hand gives, and the lower hand receives. And in turn, you, then, the one who is receiving, should eventually turn out to be the one that gives. I feel that Allah has designed it like that [poverty], and we will not eradicate it. Allah gives, and whatever we have is from Allah. And how we use that – we could either hoard it and keep it for ourselves, or we could give for the sake of giving.”*²⁹

The above quote highlights Nazlie's commitment to Islamic giving. The motivations are to earn God's pleasure and ensure that one helps one's fellow neighbour and human in need. She references the logo of Mustadafin, which resembles a hand giving to a receiving hand. In addressing the question of motivation behind giving and its strategic objectives, Nazlie lays out her personal convictions for giving.

²⁸ See Sahih al-Bukhari 1427.

²⁹ Recorded interview with Nazlie Behardien, Mustadafin Foundation office, Bridgetown, 4 July 2024.

Furthermore, she grew up during apartheid and was therefore exposed to state-sanctioned violence and exclusion, which resulted in extreme poverty. In the apartheid regime, she was classified as a “Coloured”³⁰ person and thus grew up in a segregated community that had to rely on a form of moral economy to function. Simply put, neighbours relied on one another, and communities were involved in the daily lives of fellow community members. Although she was born Muslim, the spiritual side of giving did not manifest itself in Nazlie until her adult years, when she began attending Islamic studies lessons under the tutelage of the late Imam Achmad Cassiem. In these lessons, she learned the spiritual side of Islam, which informs her participation in Mustadafin today. This resulted in a shift in her giving; this benevolent giving is firmly rooted in her love for God and her social obligation to give charity. Nazlie Behardien’s ethics of giving is motivated by Islamic values and her social and political commitment toward the oppressed and marginalised.

There is what Amy Singer (2018) calls a “politics of philanthropy” that is revealed when looking at Nazlie Behardien’s situation. Singer asserts that “benevolent giving is an action that is embedded in the lives of Muslims” (2018: 4). This is evident in Nazlie’s life. Although religiously motivated, her giving also has a political and activist dimension. Her involvement with Mustadafin dates back to the 1980s. The political unrest of the apartheid regime necessitated an activist approach with the organisation. Thus, we see that Nazlie demonstrates a plurality of ethics in her approach to Islamic philanthropy. The politics of where and how Nazlie grew up shaped how she broadly views Islamic giving and philanthropy. The amalgamation of her social obligation to oppose economic injustices and to give for the sake of God, or *lillāh* in Arabic, creates a striking politics of philanthropy.

Due to the cultivation of the idea of giving in her youth, Nazlie finds herself experiencing joy when she is giving and helping people. Her upbringing centred the community in her giving, and she views Islamic charity this way. For Nazlie, giving is an act of care and a way to show one’s piety towards God. The director and Nazlie share the same sentiments that the recipients don’t have to be Muslim or not as long as they are able to reach people in need. Gesturing to the logo and slogan of the Mustadafin Foundation, Nazlie justifies that by saying God made all people, not just Muslims and, therefore, everyone deserves help.

³⁰ Nazlie Behardien categorically rejects the term ‘Coloured’ as an identifier; however, she granted the author permission to use it when referring to her.

As someone who has been in the ‘giving’ industry for 20 years, Nazlie is well aware of the critiques that are levelled against the methods of giving in Cape Town. For instance, critiques range from various groups arguing that the “Cape Town” way of giving aid is giving *akhni* to communities, feeding the community and leaving them to fend for themselves in other aspects. Some have raised questions about the lack of developmental infrastructure and so forth. Responding to these critiques, she mentioned that the community is the central focus of their work; therefore, should the community request for something different, Mustadafin has a duty to provide that. For instance, she mentioned current skills development programmes run by the Mustadafin Foundation on web development are open to the entire community at no cost; the onus is then on people to join such workshops and programmes. With the assistance of volunteers, donors and the government, the Mustadafin Foundation has made considerable efforts to reach out to poor people, provide skills training opportunities to those in need and run successful hunger and poverty alleviation programmes. However, she accepts criticism, saying:

“We may not be able to offer upskilling, but we may be able to source other organisations that are hosting programs or courses that the people we are servicing are aware of. That may be more far-reaching than what we are doing right now. We should also support the community we serve, not just the feeding... there will always be room for growth and room for creativity. We can never stagnate; the needs of the people evolve all the time, so we can never meet the needs of the people by one hundred per cent. So, there will always be room for growth, and that, in turn, will grow us as an organisation. Being open and keeping up with the needs of the people.”³¹

Nazlie fully accepts that Mustadafin is imperfect. While they cannot attend to every community and community member’s needs due to lack of funding and logistical issues, they stand to learn a lot from engaging more with the community. Here, Nazlie shows that Mustadafin does not remain complacent in their giving and believes there are ways of improving their service to the people most reliant on them. In responding to questions about creating a dependency, it was alluded that the reason for community development programs is to mitigate dependency. It is up to community members to be proactive here and take responsibility for gleaning wisdom

³¹ Interview with Nazlie Behardien, 4 July 2024.

and lessons from these free programs, as Nazlie mentions above. She is hopeful that skills development programs can offer a different approach to charity/giving. This may incentivise community members to provide financially for themselves and their families.

While criticism may come from both outside and internally, there is a general recognition of the good that the organisation has done. Nazlie shared that Mustadafin was the number one organisation at the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring communities were cared for and fed. In a time when it felt as though the world stopped, Mustadafin came to the aid of the hungry and poor. The City of Cape Town acknowledged the projects run by the organisation during the pandemic. When I inquired what inspired them to do this during such a difficult time, Nazlie mentioned that the staff are *“adrenaline junkies when it comes to charity. And they are nurturing.”* It was almost as though it was up to them to nourish and nurture their communities and those who relied on them before the pandemic. She attributes the organisation's ‘nurturing by nature’ attitude to the fact that most of the staff and volunteers are women. She argues that almost all feeding events and fundraisers include an overwhelming majority of women volunteers. Therefore, this demographic has implications on the nature of giving, which, according to Nazlie, manifests itself in a nurturing manner; while not negating male presence in the organisation, she finds this significant. As Mittermaier (2019) suggests, this notion of care may centre itself and relegate the vital notions of justice and equality to those forced to the social and geographical peripheries. Mustadafin do so to earn good deeds and for the pleasure of God, however, this is not where it ends. There is a deep commitment to society and to developing poor communities through programs and workshops. Ultimately, the commitment to social solidarity is imbued with an obligational religious duty to help feed and clothe the poor and hungry.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter has uncovered the plurality of ethics that motivate Mustadafin’s philanthropy and the way and extent to which it constitutes a moral economy. Ethnographic accounts and interviews have illustrated that Mustadafin’s moral economy is underpinned by Islamic ethics, social obligation, and their sense of citizenship. The Mustadafin Foundation makes a considerable effort in the areas in which it is active. However, there are times when financial calamity befalls the organisation. To this effect, the chapter has revealed that regardless of the financial dearth, with communal and, to a certain extent, government support, the organisation

has been able to enact positive change in low-income communities in and around the Western Cape. While many communities and townships have benefitted from the Mustadafin Foundation, this chapter focused on Laingville in St. Helena Bay. The semi-rural township is a formidable example of a place in dire need of Islamic giving. Laingville is one of the few areas in the surrounding Cape Town that enjoy physical and social infrastructure built and maintained by Islamic philanthropy. Furthermore, my interviews with the director of Mustadafin and the executive secretary provided much-needed clarity on the motivations and effects of giving. It has been uncovered that not only piety, but also social solidarity, conviviality and belonging have been carefully and meticulously cultivated in the organisation over the years since its inception, and this permeates from the executive members to the staff, volunteers, and recipients. Mustadafin's philanthropy entails collaboration with other organisations, among which is the Africa Muslims Agency, which will be the focus of the next chapter.



Fig 3.2: A Shaykh addressing the community that came out in their droves for the distribution 9 March 2024 (photo by Alhourani).



Fig 3.3: Mustadafin Foundation staff members unloading food packs, accompanied by a resident of Laingville 9 March 2024 (Photo by the author).

Chapter 4

From Faith to Action: The Interplay of Development, *Da'wa* and Moral Economy in AMA's Practices

While the previous chapter addressed the extent to which a local Muslim philanthropic organisation, Mustadafin, constitutes a moral economy and unfolded the plurality of ethics that motivate their Islamic philanthropy, this chapter focuses on an international Muslim philanthropic organisation, the African Muslims Agency (AMA). The chapter's function is two-fold: first, it examines the giving practices of AMA and argues for a moral economy of distribution, donation, and developmental aid of the Africa Muslims Agency through descriptive accounts in the Manenberg township. Secondly, interviews and the subsequent analysis seek to understand AMA's ethics of care and the continuum of motivations behind their giving in Cape Town and other parts of South Africa. Using Alhourani's (2024) main argument of a plurality of ethics in Islamic giving, the chapter contends that although AMA takes an Islamist and overtly religious approach to humanitarianism, it does not distinguish between its social, political, and religious obligations when giving. Further, the chapter explores how AMA views "*da'wa* as development" (Leichtman, 2022) and uncovers the *da'wa* element of the organisation's giving methods. These methods include the distribution of Islamic literature at feeding events, the general practices of the organisation at its Cape Town office and messaging from its online platforms as well as other media such as radio, newspapers and television. The chapter closes with an analysis of AMA's moral economy in Cape Town and with examples to further research in the areas in which AMA operates. The nascent field of Islamic philanthropy studies in Cape Town benefits from the assertions made in this chapter, from the data gathered and the results that emanate from the analysis.

The African Muslims Agency (AMA) is an internationally recognised charity organisation. Donors come from all over the world, and the organisation operates on a larger scale than Mustadafin geographically. AMA has a far-reaching operation and is fully donor-funded, unlike the partially state-funded Mustadafin Foundation. While both organisations are concerned with humanitarian aid and giving, AMA specifically focuses on religious proselytisation,

particularly Islamisation, as argued by Sadouni (2007). The shortage of Islamic organisations in the field of humanitarian aid underscored this policy of Islamisation. ‘Aid’ in this context includes long-term development as well as disaster relief of any kind.

4.1 Collective Responsibility: The Practice of Moral Economy in Manenberg with AMA

In May of 2023, I volunteered with the AMA for the first time. There was a food distribution programme in the “Coloured” township of Manenberg. I went to Belgravia Estate in Athlone, to the AMA offices to meet the volunteer team. I strolled into the offices and greeted the other volunteers quietly. The office is situated across Wembley Roadhouse, so the smell of freshly baked koeksisters and samoosas filled the office. The Belgravia office is narrow and small, so all the volunteers were standing close to one another. In the debriefing before we left, we were told we would distribute *zakat* packages and serve warm food to the Manenberg community. The organiser explained how the day was going to work. I was paired with another volunteer, Khalil. Following our arrival, we would make our way to the park, where we would be stationed to hand out *zakat* packs, and another team would be dishing and serving food to the community’s children. Once we set up, the recipients would form a line and they would have to present a slip with their name and address, expressing their eligibility for a pack. It was made clear that the food we were distributing was for the community members, for the pleasure of God. The distribution of *sadaqah* and *zakat* was an important task; undertaking it was admirable on our part. Our task was seen as a form of worship and piety. In the *zakat* packs, there would be tinned fish, maize meal, rice, sugar, corned beef, cooking oil, a bag of salt and an assortment of spices. After the debriefing, we were told to drive to Manenberg and meet at the rendezvous point in the park. I drove with Khalil, we followed all the other volunteers closely as this was our first time in Manenberg.

The streets of Manenberg whisper painful stories of dispossession and despair. Stray dogs scurry through the alleys in search of scraps; young men roam around the streets, some addicted to drugs and some striving to make a living for their families. Wrought by the weight of lost opportunities, systematic neglect, and economic hardship, Manenberg finds its lifeline in the resilience of faith-based organisations whose solidarity offers hope and sustenance for its residents. Amidst the economic and social desolation, an enthusiastic group assembled under the banner of faith and service to humanity, armed with food packages intended to be distributed to struggling families. Children lined the streets, eagerly awaiting what could be

their first meal for some of them. Parents, grandparents, and other family members formed lines stretching behind homes due to their length. In effect, we witnessed the results of a system of apartheid and how it continues to devastate communities. When we arrived, we saw a neglected area with dusty roads, litter lining the streets, and poverty. Even though the material situation looked dire, the community was together, and some of the residents of this neighbourhood felt a sense of pride.

Khalil and I remained together, and we made our way to our station. When recipients produced their tickets, I was handing out the packs in the trunk of a Toyota Corolla that belonged to one of the volunteers. Many people in the line were women fetching food for their families, and very few men were present. Every person who approached me thanked me and smiled at me warmly as if I were the one who was generous enough to pay for this event. On the opposite side of the street, while food was being distributed, some volunteers played ball games with the children, while others captured the moments through photos and videos. The laughter and excitement of the children provided some reprieve from the harsh conditions around us.

Unfortunately, not all community members were served food. We were informed that the donors had intended for the cooked food to go to the area's children. Similarly, the *zakat* packages could only be distributed amongst Muslim families. When I inquired about this, I was informed that the donor was clear in their *niyyah* (intention) form that the food should go to the children and *zakat* packages should go specifically to Muslim families. This created a tension in the community as the residents were not aware of this. Explaining to some residents proved an arduous task because this meant that they would not receive food – nonperishable or prepared. Some volunteers, myself included, found this uncomfortable. It was further explained that if a recipient was not in possession of a ticket with their address, they were ineligible to receive a *zakat* pack. While struggling to understand the reasoning behind not receiving food, people reluctantly accepted that they would not get anything that day. At the end of it all, we debriefed, packed the rubbish in black refuse bags and prepared to leave. As we drove away into the sunset to make it home before *Maghrib*, I wondered about the people who were turned away and told that there was not enough food or that they were ineligible. A glimmer of hope is that because AMA frequently runs feeding schemes in Manenberg, they would be able to receive a package or a plate of food the next time.

In Ramadan, on the 16th of March 2024, I once again went to Manenberg with AMA to participate in a feeding programme in the local mosque. This trip was different as we were only

feeding Muslims in the mosque. I arrived at the AMA office in Belgravia Estate with an optimistic spring in my step as it was Ramadan, and we were excited to be in Manenberg once again. The debrief was quick as we would meet many more people at the location and have an easier way to move forward with plans in Manenberg. Khalil and I drove to Manenberg, closely following a gentleman affectionately known as Uncle Harun. On our arrival, we were met by a group of ushers wearing reflective vests, who handed us our own reflective AMA branded vests and told us to head to the kitchen. In the kitchen, the duties were delegated. Khalil and I would serve soup and food parcels to the children and the elderly who were in attendance. Unlike the first event above, all attendees were Muslim and were given food in this event. We were stationed at the mosque's entrance and welcomed people inside with warm smiles. Some elderly men were greeting us with salaam and making conversation in Afrikaans. Shortly before the *Maghrib* prayer's adhan (call to prayer) went off, Rabiah, the AMA Cape Town office coordinator, walked in, we exchanged pleasantries, and she told me I should prioritise the elderly women first.

To break their fast, people had dates, samoosas, soup and bread. I noticed that AMA events almost always have a religious element attached to them; however, because it was in Ramadan, it was not strange to have a religious talk accompanying the event. Following the food, some imams were invited to speak about trusting God, a concept called *tawakkul* in Islam. As this was a religious event, there was Islamic literature present and ready for distribution. This ranged from prayer books with invocations and copies of the Qur'an. The community received these with ease. After people broke their fasts with dates, water and small baked goods like samoosas – the men lined up at the front to pray.

After we had performed our obligatory and supererogatory prayers, Khalil and I were instructed to start dishing the food to the congregants at the mosque. As we were doing our assigned duties, serving hot *akhni* to the community, we were met with smiles of gratitude and kind gazes from the elderly, and timid but curious looks from the children. Hilaal TV, a local Islamic television channel that airs on DSTV, was in attendance, documenting the feeding event. Many volunteers and media staff including myself, were taking pictures of the event. Throughout the evening, there was a Qur'anic recitation and dhikr, which is the melodious recitation of the Qur'an and the remembrance of God done in Arabic. Being in a mosque, listening to Quranic recitation, praying with the community and handing out food during the month of Ramadan was an enriching spiritual experience. As the programme ended and the people left, we handed

out chicken soup and bread at the exit point. There were many people who took more than once, and we gladly gave them in between grins and laughter. The event was a success, every individual had more than enough food to eat. The leftover food was left with the mosque management to distribute for *suhoor*³². The event ended, and all the volunteers left shortly with a sense of triumph after completing a good deed in the holy month.

The above accounts describe two fieldwork excursions with the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) in Manenberg. Manenberg was established as a township in 1966 for “Coloured” people as part of the apartheid government’s forced removals (Jacobs 2010). In these events, I was exposed to the fact that AMA has two distribution strategies: two lines must be formed, one where only Muslims stand to receive *zakat* donations and the second one with people lining up to receive warm cooked food. The *zakat* donation is only given to Muslims, while the *sadaqah* donations are given to both Muslims and non-Muslims.³³ Therefore, only Muslims received a pack of essential food items, which was a *zakat* donation. The *zakat* packages provide temporary relief and ensure that families are cared for slightly. People of all faiths can stand and wait in the food distribution line given as *sadaqah*, where the volunteers dish and serve warm food. This is because *sadaqah* can be given to anyone, regardless of their faith. Before the events, the donor attaches a “niyyah form,” or intention form, to their donation, outlining exactly how they intend to distribute their donation.³⁴ Importantly, AMA is an organisation concerned with *da’wa* and Islamisation, which is exemplified by the distribution of Islamic literature and the involvement of Islamic scholars who read prayers in Arabic in all their events. What is significant to highlight here, is that AMA’s philanthropy is not merely an act of piety limited to *da’wa* and Islamisation, but rather, as seen in their distribution of *sadaqah*, the AMA also gives to non-Muslims based on their social commitment and concern for marginalised people.

The second point I wish to emphasise is that the AMA philanthropy is best understood as moral economy, aligning with Alhourani’s (2024) argument regarding the Mustadafin Foundation. The event described above may not present enough evidence to prove a moral economy of the

³² This is the meal before commencing one’s fast for the day.

³³ See chapter one for the categories of people eligible to receive *zakat*.

³⁴ As evident in the most comprehensive and trusted hadith collection, Sahih al-Bukhari, the first narration of the Prophet Muhammad, emphasises the importance of intention. One of the prophet’s companions narrated: “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended...” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 1).

AMA, but as the following ethnography demonstrates, the AMA run various long-term projects that make those who did not receive food, as in this particular event, hopeful that the AMA will provide for them in the coming event. The AMA moral economy is not limited to feeding but also includes large-scale collaboration that aims to empower individuals. AMA's moral economy provides social services that date back to the 1980s and reaches beyond Cape Town. On this basis, I argue that AMA's philanthropy is a moral economy of donation and distribution underpinned by a plurality of ethics, which includes both religious and social obligations not only to feed the poor but also to empower them. The following section will explain how AMA philanthropic practices constitute a moral economy.

4.3 *A Brief Background of Africa Muslims Agency*

The Africa Muslims Agency, initially the African Muslims Committee, is an Islamic NGO founded by Kuwaiti doctor Abdul Rahman Al-Sumait in 1981. AMA has multiple branches across Asia and Africa and is headquartered in Kuwait. AMA has a strong presence in Africa; the NGO is active in 34 African countries. Scholarly literature recognises the organisation as Direct Aid (Leichtman 2022) and is funded through charitable contributions in the form of *zakat* and *sadaqah*. According to Rabiah, the organisation in Southern Africa operates as Africa Muslims Agency, while in the northern and western parts of the continent it is known as Direct Aid.³⁵ While known for its robust intervention in disaster relief and food distribution in many parts of the continent, it also doubles as a *da'wa* organisation serving through humanitarian aid and emergency assistance. AMA have a strong desire to change people's spiritual convictions by building mosques and Islamic centres, and they also have the urge to change people's material conditions through economic development. One such example is opening a school in Johannesburg to educate the local community. In a way, the school serves a dual purpose, balancing both secular and religious curricula within an Islamic educational framework. Simply put, the school is a Muslim school that serves the community. Due to AMA being a Gulf-funded organisation, some may be sceptical about their political agenda. Many Gulf organisations and their staff "have been suspected of serving as conduits for financial and material support to militant Islamist groups and as humanitarian cover for missionary activity" (De Cordier, 2009: 608). It is essential to note that AMA does not make a distinction between their social activism and religious obligations to spread Islam. For AMA, *da'wa* and

³⁵ Interview with Rabiah.

development are equal and are done in tandem (Leichtman 2022: 117). The vast presence of AMA and Direct Aid in Africa is due to the philanthropy of the Kuwaiti doctor Abdul Rahman Al-Sumait. Interestingly, AMA was primarily focused on *da'wa* in Malawi and other African countries before they included humanitarian activities as a *modus operandi* (Sadouni 2007: 110).

According to Leichtman (2022), Gulf Salafis and Islamists have identified Africa as a continent in need of economic development and *da'wa*. Despite Muslims making up 34% of the continent's population (Afrobarometer 2020; Kate Hairsine 2024) the Gulf Salafis have negative perceptions of "African Islam", as though African cultures influence it; this concept is called 'Islam noir', which is Black Islam, which was constructed in the context of French colonial rule of sub-Saharan Muslims. This theory, as Triaud (2014) puts it, suggests that there is something distinctive about Islam practised in African countries. Triaud argues that it is tainted by African traditional practices and, therefore, different from the 'pure' Islam practised by the Arabs. Thus, AMA (and Direct Aid in other parts of the continent), through their efforts in the continent, is invested in the formation of a particular type of African Muslim, one which is Islamist at its core (Leichtman, 2022: 106). This is achieved through establishing Islamic centres in rural areas, and providing religious education and training in areas that otherwise would not have access to such. We can see that this approach to *da'wa* as development brings a set of issues, with racial prejudice being a central point. Scholars have criticised the racial prejudice that has come with the Arab NGOs strongly felt by their African coreligionists (Kaag and Sahla, 2020: 71). While the Gulf organisations have their set of problems, their commitment to economic development in the continent has been astounding and has received praise from Bill Gates additionally, Al-Sumait, the founder, has insisted that AMA is an NGO and affirmed that the Kuwait government has no political influence in the organisation's operations and that AMA works independently of any state apparatus (Kaag and Sahla 2020; Leichtman 2022).

AMA's work in West and East Africa has a formidable track record, opening multiple mosques, schools and water wells, amongst other crucial projects. Similarly, in Southern Africa, AMA has a strong presence. The organisation is mainly active in the Southern African region in Malawi and Mozambique. In these regions, they have a policy of Islamisation and *da'wa*. Sadouni (2007: 103) suggests that these organisations in the 1990s entered the humanitarian sphere intending to foster Islamisation or re-Islamisation in the case of Mozambique and

Malawi, the idea of re-Islamisation means to reinvigorate Islamic practices in places that have a population of Muslims but have no resources to fully practice their religion, i.e., a mosque and madrassa. While political agendas and global Islamist ideas dominated the thought of these organisations, the practices of AMA do not seem to stress the Islamisation of the nations they operate in nor call for the adoption of sharia law (Sadouni 2007). Scholars have argued that even though these frameworks of Islamist thinking influence these organisations, they do not wield enough power, nor is it their mandate to become Islamist actors and confront governments, alluding to how the majority of these organisations maintain peaceful and fruitful working relationships with the state (Kaag 2011; Sadouni 2007). However, the operation of AMA in the southern African region does not come without its issues. Malawi and Mozambique are poor countries; therefore, the AMA branches in these countries rely on funding from the Kuwait mother organisation; the opposite applies to the South African AMA, where most of the funding comes from local donors.

Moreover, Sadouni remarks that AMA's charity marketing strategy consists of distributing emotive and religious pamphlets. These pamphlets contain messages urging Muslims to pay their *zakat* and *sadaqah* through AMA and support humanitarian efforts to help their brethren in Islam (ibid.). In their communications, they use well-known Islamic maxims and quotations from the Holy Qur'an—specifically during Ramadan, followed by *Eid Al Fitr* and *Eid Al Adha*. During Ramadan, the organisation urges community members and potential donors to contribute towards purchasing *iftar*³⁶ boxes. These boxes contain date fruits, a small meal, a water bottle and a sweet or savoury treat. AMA asserts that the divine reward for feeding a fasting person is immense, and the opportunity to attain this should not be neglected. As a result, recipients across the country or other parts of the continent have something to break their fast with at the end of the fasting day during Ramadan. The emphasis on helping a fellow Muslim brother or sister suffering in a faraway land evokes certain feelings on the patron. Muslims view themselves as part of an *ummah*, which can be conceived of as a community. The *ummah* is imagined as a transnational Islamic state transcending race, gender, geographical locations and national borders (Ataman 2003: 89).³⁷ Due to this understanding that all Muslims

³⁶ This is the meal to break one's fast in Ramadan.

³⁷ This identity originated under the Prophet Muhammad. This conceptualisation of the Muslim *ummah* as a community is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), in which he asserts that communities are characterised by their shared experience and a joint imagination. Take, for instance, our example of the Islamic *ummah* – a Muslim who is reciting the same Qur'an in the same Arabic expression, praying the same way and celebrating the same holidays; for instance, in India is doing the same as one as far as Finland.

are members of this *ummah* (Ataman 2003), it is therefore unacceptable to hear of the suffering of one's fellow Muslims and not try to alleviate it through donating. AMA has mastered the art of this religious "pressure" on the local Muslim population in Cape Town. Sadouni (2007: 112) argues that AMA deploys an alarmist tone in their appeals for contributions to locals, therefore exercising moral pressure on Muslims who are under a religious obligation to help ease the suffering of their Muslim brethren.

My participant observation with AMA corroborates Sadouni's initial point, positioning AMA as a *da'wa* organisation. What is meant by this assertion is that AMA would give out copies of the Qur'an and dua books containing prayers and other invocations. These materials are available in multiple languages, including IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, and Afrikaans. The distribution of this literature takes place at feeding schemes and other events where proselytisation would be appropriate. Moreover, Chanfi Ahmed (2009: 427) explicitly asserts that the organisation's founder has stated on multiple occasions that the central aim of AMA is to provide *da'wa*, medical services, and educational and social services. This has been exemplified in their activities in South Africa and the broader African continent through the establishment of Islamic schools.

The strategic use of media marketing has bolstered AMA into one of the leading Islamic NGOs in Africa. The activities of AMA in Malawi and other parts of the continent range from building schools and community centres to water well projects. The distributed pamphlets are informative and detailed on how one can finance the building of a water well. These projects are often done in Malawi, Mozambique, and other areas with villages where water is scarce. The use of *hadith*, which details the divine reward of such a charity, is employed. Rabiah shared with me that the main projects in these areas are to provide secure drinking water to the residents, mainly by establishing water wells. The organisation would appeal to donors and advise them to donate towards building a water well or a borehole in a remote African area. The organisation recognises that Cape Town is in need of donations, however due to municipal regulations and laws, they cannot build wells the same way it can be done in Africa. To borrow from Ataman (2003) again, AMA uses the idea of the *ummah* to get these donations sent to other parts of the continent. Therefore, it is not strange for a person in South Africa to donate

to other causes in Africa or even the Middle East. This idea for donating towards the building of a water well is a concept known as *sadaqat ul jariya* (characterised as perpetual charity).³⁸

Similarly, when a donor gives to an orphan's well-being, sponsors an education, or does any other long-lasting, impactful work, they stand to earn rewards from this as long as they live. When a patron or potential donor visits the AMA website, they are welcomed by multiple campaigns running simultaneously, all of which are substantiated with Qur'anic verses and narrations of the Prophet Muhammad. The website is regularly updated according to the time of the year. For instance, during Ramadan and Eid al Adha, the campaigns surrounded iftar and Qurbani (animal sacrifice) of the multiple campaigns that one can donate to currently on the website, many fall under the concepts of *sadaqah* and *sadaqat ul jariya*. While the projects and donations campaigns are not limited to one region, there are some local campaigns a local donor could contribute towards or fully fund themselves.

The use of well-known Islamic maxims and the rhetoric of assisting members of the *ummah* is a strategic method for obtaining more donations for AMA projects. For instance, the pamphlets advertising the water projects in Africa open up with a narration of the Prophet Muhammad responding to an inquiry about the best kind of *sadaqah* for a deceased person, to which the Prophet responded that water was the best. Upon this, the questioner dug a well so that his mother should receive blessings.³⁹AMA's website advertises six charitable projects: water wells, boreholes, Winter Warmth South Africa, Qurbani 2024, Orphan Hope, and Empower South Africa.⁴⁰ Each project listed has a dedicated donation link. Looking closely at the social impact and infrastructure of these various projects demonstrates that AMA is constituting a moral economy that contributes to counterbalance social problems in different ways.

³⁸ There are a couple of ways people can give *sadaqat ul jariya*: sponsoring a water well, participating in borehole projects, supporting orphans and widows, and constructing schools and hospitals. This form of giving can be described as charity with long-lasting impacts. This is the voluntary almsgiving, which is characterised as perpetual charity. It is the giving that keeps on giving, as it were. In the Muslim tradition, this kind of charity is said to generate heavenly rewards for believers even after their death. Another example of giving *sadaqat ul jariya* is planting a tree to shelter animals and shade and fruit to passersby. The most popular form of *sadaqat ul jariya* differs in every geographical context. Still, it is generally accepted in some circles that erecting a mosque in the memory of a loved one is the most popular, next to digging a well for a village.

³⁹ Africa Muslims Agency, *sadaqat ul jariya* projects pamphlet.

⁴⁰ <https://africamuslimsagency.co.za>

4.4 Threads of Change: Africa Muslims Agency in South Africa

On the 9th of June, I went to the industrial area of Epping in Cape Town with Rabiah to observe how AMA gave out blankets to organisations they collaborated with. This event, part of the Winter Warmth SA project, which is run during the coldest months of the year, and blankets are distributed to local NGOs focused on humanitarian aid. While these projects fall under ongoing charity, they are also *sadaqah*. The project involves 15 independent NGOs working with AMA. Noticeably, the Mustadafin Foundation also attended, with their primary driver, who goes by ‘Q’. The event included an imam who opened the event with a prayer and the vice-president of the Muslim Youth Movement, Mohammad Groenewald, giving a speech on the importance of Muslims looking after one another for the sake of Allah (God). At the end of the event, more than 200 packs of blankets were distributed, along with copies of the Qur’an and other Islamic literature, such as *du’a* books containing invocations and prayers.

This event demonstrated what AMA lacked in the department of logistics and distribution; they made up for in their expansive network. Simply put, AMA possesses the financial capabilities to sponsor communities through food or essential needs – whether through emergency response or otherwise. However, on the other hand, they do not have the facilities and infrastructure to cook enough food to distribute to more than 400 people in one event. In contrast, Mustadafin can undertake such a strenuous task, which needs a sizeable number of volunteers to help cook food and distribute it in a timely manner. The AMA have a symbiotic relationship with Mustadafin in that the AMA will procure ingredients and funds, whereas Mustadafin will gather staff and volunteers to cook in their kitchen and distribute food, *zakat* packages and blankets to poor communities. It is not only the Mustadafin Foundation that has this relationship with AMA; many other organisations are involved. Paying attention to the scale of AMA’s network and the amount of its donations and distribution provides evidence of the extent and ways in which AMA constitutes a moral economy.

AMA in South Africa has branches in various cities, including Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Pretoria. The AMA office in Cape Town is in the heart of the Muslim community in Belgravia Estate. Over the years, AMA has received multitudes of volunteers in surrounding areas and has amassed a vast network of volunteers, workers and donors alike. Sadouni (2007: 111) observes that AMA South Africa has been able to dominate the field of Islamic humanitarianism by modernising their approach to receiving donations through media usage. For example, they use local radio stations catering specifically to the Muslim community, such

as Radio786 and the Voice of the Cape (VOC) Radio station. By buying out advertisements on the airwaves, they can reach thousands in their homes, cars, or places of business and trade.

I have had multiple interviews and informal conversations with Rabiah, who works at the AMA Cape Town office. Rabiah has worked at the Cape Town AMA office for the past ten years. Her position at AMA allows her to share firsthand experiences on the abject poverty that AMA encounters and assists with alleviating in different parts of the world. Rabiah and her team conduct surveys and a needs assessment in areas before deciding how much aid is needed. In areas such as Manenberg, the survey and assessment are family-based. Representatives from the office make their way to the location, find out how many Muslim families reside in a particular neighbourhood and ensure to report these numbers to the Cape Town office. Following this, the information is kept on a spreadsheet and when donors send their *zakat* payments, it is then distributed to the Muslim families. Payments titled *sadaqah* are then used to fund transportation and other logistical matters.

While the organisation has a policy of *da'wa*, this does not negate their humanitarian outreach. For instance, their disaster relief efforts have been noticed in Cape Town during the heavy winds and rains on the 11th and 12th of July 2024, which resulted in the destruction and damage of 500 homes.⁴¹ The immediate response by AMA displays the moral and social obligation they are inspired by. On the night of the storms, text messages went out requesting volunteers to avail themselves for the distribution of blankets, canned goods and other essential items. Without fail, many heeded the calls and went into townships to help the disaster response teams. I want to highlight and underscore Alhourani's argument on the embeddedness of piety, care and social commitment, which inform the ethics of Islamic giving and philanthropy that AMA participate in (2024: 21). Beyond disaster response, commitment through pious acts of giving can be seen through their general presence in the community. On many visits to the office in Belgravia Estate, I witnessed several people approaching the gate and asking for food, and a staff member would give out what was left in the pantry or basement to the person asking. Following this, the person will be given a leftover *zakat* hamper, and the giver will utter the words "*Bismillah*", invoking the name of God in Arabic, in an effort to bless the food they are giving. The narrow, small office allows for a deeply religious aesthetic and sensory experience.

⁴¹ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/government-interven-es-assist-families-amid-cape-town-heavy-rains>

Another local campaign on the AMA website is the Empower SA initiative, which runs projects that collect and distribute stationery and rehabilitation projects. These regional projects are significant and sometimes overlooked because mass advertisements for campaigns run outside of South Africa exist. Other local campaigns include ‘Food for SA’ and the ‘BU Campaign’, focusing on distributing sanitary towels for girls, ‘Sponsor a Young Leader’ and ‘Support the Al Furqaan Islamic Centre’, based in Finetown, Johannesburg.⁴² The Al Furqaan Islamic Centre is a private school for males geared towards disadvantaged communities. The school offers both secular and state-approved education alongside an Islamic education from grades 9-12. This project has gained traction with the local community. Buşra shared in an interview that a mother wanted to enrol her child into the school and was willing to allow her child to embrace Islam if needed. When asked why she would go to this extreme, she replied: “Because I know Muslims value education, and I want my son to have this opportunity.” This is an indication that the school has a good academic track record and students who attend perform well academically. The long-lasting social impact of an Islamic centre in a poor community in desperate need of vocational training, education and skills is astounding. The Al Furqaan school in Johannesburg is the foremost example of physical and social infrastructure.

Orphan Hope is another project that focuses on financially supporting orphans in Afghanistan, Syria, Palestinian children displaced in Lebanon, Yemen and parts of Africa.⁴³ The Orphan Hope project is focused on assisting these children with access to water, food, education, clothing and medical services; the sponsorship from the donor covers all of these needs and essentials. Rabiah explained that while Orphan Hope provides a profile of the child and updates on their wellbeing, they prohibit direct contact with the donors and do not allow adoptions. These various projects allude to the extent to which AMA constitute a moral economy of donation and distribution in South Africa and the continent at large.

Furthermore, AMA’s projects and funding campaigns extend to disaster support and relief. As a Muslim organisation, they closely follow the plight of oppressed Muslims across the globe, particularly the political conflict in Gaza. Potential donors have three options to choose from: ‘Donate towards Gaza’, ‘Business Involvement’, which includes one involving their small or medium business in the selling of Palestinian-themed goods and the proceeds going towards

⁴² <https://africamuslimsagency.co.za/south-africa/>

⁴³ <https://africamuslimsagency.co.za/orphan-hope/>

Gaza and lastly ‘Host a Mini-Event’—these range from cake sales, fitness days and *dhikr* nights in local mosques, schools or parks. The proceeds are donated to the campaign, and funds help families in Gaza. Additionally, there are other campaigns which run for the donation of goods to Palestinians living under the war in Gaza. Such projects are Feed 100 Families for R17,000, Water Tanker for R12,000, Medical Assistance valued at R5,000, Mum & Baby Hamper for R1,200 and Feed a Family for R170.⁴⁴

The above demonstrates AMA’s approach to Islamic philanthropy which is based on Muslim ethics, and an embodied piety. Additionally, this demonstrates a deep ethic of care for suffering people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, in different parts of the world. While Africa Muslims Agency uses a *da’wa* as a development approach, this is not devoid of its practices of care, deeply religiously entrenched ethics, and piety. In fact, its vast transnational network helps the agency achieve its objectives and goals for each of its operating areas. And perhaps due to its vast donor network, their activities are not limited to Cape Town. To date, there has not been any physical infrastructure to serve the community in Cape Town, unlike Johannesburg with the Al Furqaan Islamic Centre and the Aman School in Lebanon. This lack of physical infrastructure does not point to not caring about the Cape Town Muslim community or the broader South African Muslim community but instead reflects donor interests. However, their moral economy is exemplified by this donation and distribution paradigm. As discussed above, donors can decide where and how their money is spent through a *niyyah* form. Depending on the donor, the funds can be sent to support orphans in Afghanistan or feed families in the townships of Cape Town.

I held four semi-structured interviews with Rabiah at the Cape Town AMA office. She has shared a more humanistic side of AMA. The side that can articulate the care and showcase the responsibility of being entrusted with vast amounts of donors’ money and ensuring that it is distributed just as intended. While there is an understanding of the dire situation that townships and many other parts of the continent are in, Rabiah made it very clear that there needs to be a different approach to giving. In one of our conversations, she shared:

“Education is the key...You can feed, feed, feed and water for the rest of your days... or you can change by giving the tools of education and empowering a human being to empower

⁴⁴ <https://africamuslimsagency.co.za/for-gaza/>

themselves to create a community that is not reliant on aid for the rest of their lives... I am a firm believer in giving a hand up, not a handout. When you give a hand up, it is temporary – a handout becomes permanent. Because then you create a level of expectancy [and dependency] in the recipient that a handout will always come. You foster an expectation, and that then becomes an entitlement.”⁴⁵

In the above quotation, she talked about the Aman School in Lebanon and the Al Furqaan Islamic Centre, underscoring the importance of education and its long-lasting social impact on a community. Beyond that, Rabiah highlights that while giving as Muslims is something we ought to do, giving cannot solely be providing food. Rabiah echoed the same sentiments that Nazlie from the Mustadafin Foundation shared regarding the approach to humanitarian aid in the townships having to change to something that provides people with skills to be able to provide for themselves and their families. And by building schools, AMA has made significant strides. Through this, Rabiah has shared that the boys in impoverished areas around Johannesburg could attend a private school and receive a quality education, participate in sports, which took them away from drugs and gangster activity on the streets, and finally receive a sound *religious* education. Through this, she highlights that someone who benefitted from such a school would be able to enter a university and move socially upward after they finish their studies. Through giving a ‘hand up’, as she puts it, families become self-sufficient, no longer relying on aid. She further explained her issue with the problem of entitlement. Rabiah feels strongly that if organisations continue to provide food and clothes, they will not be solving the problem of poverty in the townships; instead, they will be contributing by normalising a culture of dependency. This point here relates to Mona Atia’s concept of pious neoliberalism. Her book argues that religious charity in Egypt has taken the form of capitalism and piety. Through this lens of looking at Islamic charity, Atia (2013) argues that recipients are expected by faith-based organisations to be entrepreneurial and to make for themselves a way out of poverty by running projects that consistently generate capital. One such example made by a donor was farming and selling produce; another is investing in skills such as sewing and welding, to name a few.

The idea that young men must go out and find work is prevalent in multiple circles. The dominant position is that able-bodied men who can work must strive to attain employment to

⁴⁵ Interview with Rabiah in Belgravia Estate, Athlone, 6 July 2024.

provide for themselves and, by extension, their families. This is not to say that young men waiting in food lines would be turned away. However, there is nevertheless a disdain that they are met with. Further explaining the point, she spoke about her time at a feeding event that took place in Manenberg. She recalls:

“We did a small analysis in Manenberg. We worked with the soup kitchen. I was adamant when I briefed them that they should feed the old first and the children; the rest of them must wait. And we found that men like you [referring to the author] were standing there with a cigarette hanging from their mouths, also waiting in line for their free food. But the child who cannot feed themselves from nothing and the elder who cannot feed themselves from nothing were beneficiaries – and that was the intention. However, when the pot of food came out, the men of your age group were first in line demanding the food. There was an entitlement; they were entitled to that food as much as a man of 60 or 70 years was. So, this is the mindset, and this is where we have to draw that fine line where we distinguish between a hand-out and a hand-up.”⁴⁶

Rabiah is not the first person to speak about entitlement and dependency. Ghairunisa and Nazlie have raised this issue. Dependency here is described best by Dawood Hamzah as “the result when aid is used as a long-term strategy which prevents or slows development. As a result, this leads to progress or reform being slowed down, or in some cases, completely impossible” (2019:37). This should not be looked at as though it is an individual problem, rather a community issue that needs to be addressed. The solutions are complex and far from a one-size-fits-all approach. Rabiah mentions an intentional focus on education as one way to counterbalance the dependency on philanthropy. Following education, there needs to be an investment in the poor communities, and this could range from funding small businesses to equipping people with critical skills to sustain themselves. This was also done in Cape Town with the Mustadafin Foundation in Athlone. Yet another example of the relationship between the two organisations. Rabiah remembers a late donor who donated copious amounts of fabric, sewing machines, and other materials needed for such projects. Unfortunately, this sewing project did not take off as intended. She mentioned dwindling numbers every week, mainly because these workshops were free. “*People would only come because there was a parcel of food*”, she says. She says that because this workshop was free, people did not take it seriously

⁴⁶ Interview with Rabiah, 6 July 2024.

or value the skills they received, and they could leave it. She concludes by saying: “*If it is for free, then it is rubbish. That is the mindset*”⁴⁷. The solution that Rabiah tacitly gives us is that workshops and other skills-building activities have to bear a nominal fee, some monetary commitment from the recipient, that they can afford. This will ensure that they value the skills that they are given and put them into practice.

The theory of pious neoliberalism dictates that one should be proactive in their relationship with God. Atia’s research uncovers how faith-based development organisations in Egypt support projects that employ people and turn them into responsible entrepreneurial subjects (2012: 822). Rabiah argues that a similar approach should be adopted in the Cape Town humanitarian sector. However, it is ultimately up to the donors how they would prefer to support the needy. And as mentioned, currently, the modus operandi focuses on feeding and providing clothing instead of jobs and skills development. What is important to note here, is AMA’s concern for individual and collective employment, which indicates that their philanthropy is not only about *da’wa* and Islamisation but is also driven by social commitment and an ethics of care.

Buşra, who works at the AMA Cape Town office and was one of my interlocutors, shared her ethics of giving with me. Growing up Muslim, Buşra was taught to give back to her community, but not mindlessly. She shares that there had to be an intentional factor in her giving and that she had to do so at a grassroots level. For Buşra, giving has to be mindful and informed. Her role in AMA is to ensure that *zakat* funds reach the destination they were sent to. She made an example using the Orphan Hope program, detailing that her job entails ensuring that the donor/sponsor knows the destination of their money and sees that the child receives the money, and their basic essential needs are met. This includes clothing, food and education to some extent. In her line of work, she asserts a deep ethic of care. She explained that the Orphan Hope program runs in South Africa and other countries as well, and in our example, she used Lebanon.

While there is a relationship between the donor and the child, who is the primary recipient of the *zakat*, Buşra mentioned that they do not feed into the donor's saviour complex, which means they do not allow any contact between the donor and the recipient. This is an essential point as

⁴⁷ Interview with Rabiah, 6 July 2024.

“it protects the recipients of such aid from having to be grateful and having to reciprocate” (Mittermaier 2019: 4). Furthermore, the donor will receive pictures and regular updates on the child's progress in school and general life. This line of work requires a great deal of care on behalf of the worker. However, an essential aspect of this relationship, Buşra added that the child felt cared for and loved. An essential aspect of her line of work is administrative and, in her words, ensuring that the “human spirit” is looked after and nurtured. While the donor does not have direct access to the child, the support that is provided for the child is invaluable.

“It is very important for the child to know that someone out there cares about their wellbeing and future other than the immediate reality that surrounds them - where the most they can aspire to is working in the fields, getting married and providing for their family. It means for their child that someone believes that they can become a pilot or a doctor one day. That fire inside them that dream does not die, especially when they have access to a good education, which the Aman School provides. So, what does this mean for the donor? It means much more for the donor that they can fulfil their religious obligation, a need to help someone. The fact that they are able to help realise the dreams of a child and contribute positively to someone's life. So, the feedback means the world to them, and frequently, what we find happening is the building of a relationship between the donor and the child. For example, we will share a video from the donor with the child and a letter. It is more than dispensing their zakat and sadaqah; they don't care who it goes to unless the duty is fulfilled.”⁴⁸

The above quote puts into perspective the crucial relationship for both parties. From a spiritual point of view, a dynamic exists in which both parties benefit. In Islamic understanding, the poor person's existence is a blessing for the donor because they receive an opportunity to enact an essential obligation and pillar of Islam. Similarly, the recipient receives their sustenance through the donor, who is ‘giving to God’ but still cares about the children’s progress and future. Buşra’s explanation shows a strong culture of care threaded through the organisation, reaching the bureaucratic and administrative side as well. Contrasting this to Mittermaier’s (2019) ethnography of the Egyptian capital, which uncovers that bureaucracy can hinder compassion and care. This concept seems to not apply to Buşra and her department.

⁴⁸ Interview with Buşra, at AMA office Belgravia Estate, Athlone, 22 July 2024.

Buşra's quote shows that the moral economy of Islamic philanthropy transcends borders and nations. It is evident through her statement and data found on the AMA website and social media forums that the conditions of the particular place they are in will affect the mode of engagement with a community. For example, in war-torn regions, direct relief for those populations affected and, on the other hand, long-term philanthropic support for places such as Cape Town towards education and development. The interplay of these factors considers each region's context and responds directly to the populations' needs, including charitable traditions and current practices and analysing where change can occur. Thus, charitable practices in South Africa and Lebanon cannot be sufficiently compared and contrasted. With this in mind, Buşra recognised that AMA had yet to do much work in Cape Town beyond feeding schemes, blanket distribution, and disaster relief. Most of the infrastructure work done in South Africa has been concentrated in the Al Furqaan school in Johannesburg. Beyond South Africa, the Aman School in Lebanon also educates refugee children up to grade 9, according to Buşra. The minimal fee required from parents is \$100 (USD) per year, and the AMA team abroad will have made assessments to ascertain whether families can afford this fee.

Much of Buşra's interview focused on the work that AMA does outside of South Africa. However, she did mention that, as she has been in this field for three years, she has recognised some issues regarding the mode of giving in Cape Town, contrasting with her international experience. The first significant issue she outlined was that there needs to be a different approach to marketing and recruitment of donors. The current model solely employs a religious approach to alleviate an immediate problem with little elaboration on how structural issues are ever-present in areas and how donors can contribute to eradicating these. Additionally, the current approach, which posits that contributions or donations will be compensated with heavenly rewards, makes it seem as though the donor is trading with God, as it were. Buşra argues that there needs to be a change in how donors are communicated to while holding on to the idea that one can still be a dutiful Muslim and that their contributions can assist with eradicating broader issues at a structural level. In her response, Buşra alluded to and emphasised the fact that AMA and other organisations engaged in Islamic giving should ensure that they co-ordinate skills workshops for the recipients to be trained in specific trades, enabling recipients to achieve sustainable livelihoods. This sentiment aligns with observations shared by interlocutors during interviews, who highlighted the significant demand for artisanal skills, including welding, plumbing and furniture making among others. Participating in such workshops would offer recipients the potential for meaningful benefits, including improved

access to employment opportunities or the possibility to venture off into their own entrepreneurial pursuits.

Nazlie Behardien of Mustadafin has also echoed the idea that recipients should be trained and upskilled. People working in humanitarian aid and philanthropy are taking this very seriously. The field will have to adapt to the needs of people on the ground to ensure that they are provided with the proper skills to take care of their families without waiting for monthly township visits to have food. Buşra has offered a few ideas on how the modalities of giving in Cape Town have to change. In addition to the skills workshops, she suggests that teams on the ground need to do intensive tests and data collection and analyses to provide AMA and other organisations a proper understanding of the community's needs before they enter to distribute food, blankets and other material.

Additionally, she calls for more donor involvement on the ground as the donors do not come and help distribute the food they have arranged for. Buşra believes this will help donors understand their contribution's impact, feeding hungry people and putting smiles on faces – albeit for a limited time. She contends that this is important in the sight of God and is imperative to Islamic giving. Finally, her last point is that there needs to be more involvement and buy-in from the government. Currently, AMA operates without the support of the local government in Cape Town. Buşra sees their involvement as crucial to improving Islamic giving in the townships.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter sheds light on the AMA philanthropic events in Manenberg, a predominantly “Coloured” Cape Town township marked by poverty and lack of social infrastructure. In these events, the moral economy of AMA was evident, with a vast global network showing humility by reaching out to volunteers to distribute and serve food to the people of Manenberg. As the above ethnography demonstrates, and in line with much of the literature, the AMA is concerned with *da'wa* and Islamisation. However, we also realised that as much as AMA is involved in Islamisation and does this work to a certain extent, it does not neglect their social commitment to needy South Africans and others across the continent and the globe. It was uncovered that much like the Mustadafin Foundation, the Africa Muslims Agency is involved in a moral economy based on long-term economy of donation and distribution, driven by Islamic ethics

and social concern. They attend to both Muslims and non-Muslims, but some situations do not allow for all people in an area to receive food and assistance. To mitigate this, there are many other projects run by AMA that benefit everyone. These include Orphan Hope and Winter Warmth South Africa. All of these projects allude to a deep ethics of care, inspired by religious commands in the Qur'an to take care of the needy. As the chapter progressed, we were exposed to the collaborative efforts between AMA and other organisations in Cape Town. Particularly for Winter Warmth South Africa, where AMA was the leading distributor of blankets to other organisations in the industrial area of Epping in Cape Town. This event also included distribution of Islamic literature and *du'a* books containing prayers and invocations in Arabic.

The resulting interviews guided the research in interesting ways, uncovering a personal dimension to the organisation. The two interlocutors were asked questions about care, religious conviction and a contribution to society. The responses revealed that while employees are pleased with the work that they do, they are also critical of it themselves. They wish to see changes made at higher levels and call for donors to understand what their donations do and steer away from mindless donations. These interviews further revealed that while AMA does not have tangible physical infrastructure in Cape Town, it does have it in Johannesburg with the Al Furqaan High School in Finetown as a prime example. This school serves the community of Finetown and accepts students to a private school wherein they are taught a secular and religious curriculum. Finally, the chapter ended with some personal reflections and insights from my interlocutors and a call to change the field of Islamic philanthropy to make it more sustainable in Cape Town and involve donors more in the activities so they can see where their contribution is being made. The following chapter will focus on the two organisations analysed in this dissertation and make a comparative account of their philanthropic styles and their reach in Cape Town and beyond.



Fig 4.1: Distributing zakat packages in Manenberg. 13 May 2023.



Fig 4.2: *The author accompanied by some volunteers preparing chicken soup for distribution. 16 March 2024.*



Fig 4.3: *Pouring water for the women and children to break their fast in Ramadan. 16 March 2024.*



Fig 4.4: Blankets and books in an Epping, Cape Town storehouse. 9 June 2024. (photo by the author)



Fig. 4.5: An example of a zakat package. 21 September 2024 (Photo by the author).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

From the outset of this study, four questions were posed that we sought to answer. The resulting ethnographic excursions, participant observations, and interviews have culminated in a complex tapestry of responses. The study began as an optimistic inquiry into the state of philanthropy in poverty-stricken communities and an interrogation of the interventions of two Muslim philanthropic organisations in Cape Town: The Mustadafin Foundation and Africa Muslims Agency (AMA). The two organisations analysed in this dissertation have done considerable work in humanitarian aid and disaster response. They have collaborated with multiple organisations in the same field, as well as with the government. Mustadafin is partially funded by the government and gets subsidies from the private sector. Woolworths has a partnership with the organisation, sending them perishable items and items close to their sell-by date. This makes the cooking process for the organisation more manageable, and less money is spent while more people are fed. The relationship between Mustadafin and AMA is also worth noting here. As mentioned in the third and fourth chapters, Mustadafin has facilities for cooking and distribution that the Africa Muslims Agency does not. This symbiotic relationship is marked by AMA sending raw ingredients to Mustadafin for them to be cooked and distributed at an agreed upon location. Both organisations would be present at such events where the food is given out to the community. As this is a strenuous activity, the volunteers would be on their feet serving hot meals to community members all day. This relationship is exemplified by the fact that my interlocutors know each other – Rabiah and Ghairunisa have fond memories of working together, and continue to do so efficiently, and are in contact for many events.

I opened with a vignette in the first chapter, allowing the reader to contextualise the study. A comparative study that analyses two vastly different organisations operating in the same locality. The Mustadafin Foundation is a local charity and humanitarian aid organisation, while AMA is a transnational organisation with multiple branches on the continent. Both organisations belong to an old tradition of Islamic giving in Cape Town and the Muslim world. The second chapter presented a historical account of Islam and Muslims in Cape Town, starting in the 17th century and moving swiftly into the 20th century. It highlighted aspects of Cape slavery and Muslims' political entanglements amidst regime changes under both the Dutch colonists and the British Empire. Islamic giving in Cape Town enables Muslims to establish

various mosques and learning centres. The advent of the 20th century came with the establishment of more institutions and schools, such as the Rahmaniyya Institute, in 1913. The Cape Malay Association in 1923, the Muslim Judicial Council in 1945, and SANZAF in 1974. The institutions led to much more communal relations between the Muslims at the Cape in this period. Although the period is marked by apartheid and racial segregation, even between Muslims, it laid the groundwork for Imam Haron to start preaching in the townships.

Moreover, the thesis foregrounded the townships as a site of inquiry; the creation of townships and the mass forced removal of Black residents from their homes to townships is one of the main reasons for the social and economic deprivation in such areas. Although Black Muslims had formed part of the early Cape Muslim community, Islam spread in the townships due to the work of various Xhosa-speaking Muslims, such as Muhammad Ngxiki and Dawood Lobi. They are prominent pioneers of Islam in the township, who were essential in laying the groundwork for the generations after them, erecting prayer rooms in their homes and building mosques in the townships. The arrival of Muslims from Senegal and Somalia to South Africa in the late 1990s and early 2000s enhanced the diversity of Muslims in Cape Town and increased the number of Black Muslims in South Africa and, to a certain degree, their institutions. The Tijaniyya tariqa, which most of the Muslims from Senegal belonged to, opened a *zawiya* in the township of Gugulethu. As Molins-Lliteras (2009) points out, this was a deliberate choice to attract more Black South Africans to Islam and uplift the township.

The post-apartheid era has shifted the approach of Muslim philanthropy, which led to an influx of Muslim-funded philanthropy projects in the townships (Sadouni, 2007). This shift of Muslim philanthropy alluded to a Muslim performance of citizenship and belonging to the larger society of Cape Town (Alhourani 2017; 2020). Through ethnographic research with the Mustadafin Foundation, it is argued that Islamic giving has a significant presence in various townships. The social and physical infrastructures of Islamic giving across various townships are evident through the multiple projects the Mustadafin Foundation undertakes and collaborates on. In the analysis to my ethnographic account, I utilise Alhourani's (2024:31) central argument, which positions Mustadafin as a religious moral economy. By considering the plurality of ethics, he describes this moral economy as informed by a sense of citizenship and social commitment, which are underpinned by Islamic ethics. Alhourani (ibid.) ultimately finds that Mustadafin's moral economy is based on a vast donation and distribution system. The organisation receives goods, food, and other resources distributed to communities at no

charge. Further reiterating Keane's (2022) point on how merely being a member of a community positions one to benefit in such economies. As the ethnography showed, the most prominent illustration of Mustadafin's moral economy is the Islamic centre established in Laingville, St. Helena Bay. This centre addresses questions about not only physical infrastructure but also social infrastructure. It serves as a space for people to learn more about their neighbours and about Islam. Furthermore, a kitchen is attached to it, facilitating feeding schemes for the community.

Beyond Laingville, the Mustadafin Foundation also conducts multiple feeding events at their premises in Bridgetown, and there are numerous secular and religious educational programmes—both of which contribute to the social infrastructure built by Islamic giving. While the organisation is known for distributing food, blankets, and clothing, it operates in many different fields. Lastly, their religious moral economy is further exemplified by their disaster response efforts in the event of natural disasters, such as fires or floods in the surrounding areas. Ghairunisa and Nazlie are senior members of the organisation and have known each other since the early days of Mustadafin's activities as a politically inclined group in the latter days of apartheid. Interviewing them was helpful because they explained in detail how their upbringings led to their work with the organisation. As such, I understood and uncovered the deeper motivations behind Islamic giving. The interviews were not the only method through which I uncovered the motivations of Islamic giving and philanthropy. I have had multiple personal conversations with staff and other volunteers at events, who share why they give their time and energy. The majority of responses I have received are because people care for poor people and wish to make a difference in someone else's life. To describe this, I use the feminist term "ethic of care" that permeates and trickles down in the organisation from the director to the unpaid volunteers. The ethnographic account explored the social and physical infrastructures of Islamic giving, and it looks at the strategic objectives of Islamic philanthropy in the townships. Lastly, the interviews uncover that attention is paid to individual empowerment in the townships, although the main focus is collective improvement. What is important is that Mustadafin does not act alone in many events and often collaborates with the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA).

The discussion of AMA shows that the organisation operates in many parts of the country; however, its primary focus in Cape Town lies in Manenberg. The ethnographic account of the AMA focused on two events: one was in March 2023, and the second was in Ramadan, March

2024. The respective events were a *zakat* pack distribution and feeding scheme and an *iftar* event at the local mosque for the community. The discussion put forward that AMA has a different approach to Islamic philanthropy than Mustadafin. AMA foregrounds Da'wa and Islamisation as the primary objective for their philanthropy. AMA Islamisation project is overt in their distribution of Islamic literature in various events. This is not to say there is no social solidarity behind their activities. In my interview with the organisation director and other staff, they expressed grave concern regarding social development and individual empowerment. The AMA approach is the same as Mustadafin, including the doling out of *zakat* packages in feeding events and long-term development programs such as sewing workshops. AMA's religious moral economy is motivated by Islamic ethics of caring about the other and the social. My interviews with Buşra and Rabiah uncovered how AMA's moral economy operates in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The Al Furqaan Islamic Centre is a school in Johannesburg, and it is a stark example of the physical infrastructure of Islamic giving. In Cape Town, the organisation works in townships and with poor communities to address the social infrastructure. The interviews also unearthed motivations behind AMA's giving; beyond responding to a religious obligation, it is also due to a commitment to the people of the communities. The overarching reason that the organisation worked in Manenberg was to alleviate hunger and poverty, but also to foster social and individual empowerment. This plurality of ethics and motivation is also applicable to Mustadafin.

Both organisations have accepted that criticism comes from all spheres of society. My interlocutors have said they know they cannot address all social ills in the township, and it is futile to assume they can. However, they can address a few ever-present problems, such as hunger, lack of education, and the lack of clothes and blankets. Projects such as the Winter Warmth project, run by AMA and joined by Mustadafin in the winter months, provide multiple blankets to families across the city and the province. The BU Campaign and the Feed SA projects also do essential work in multiple areas that require hunger alleviation programs. AMA's moral economy, much like that of Mustadafin, is powered by distribution, education and disaster relief efforts.

Looking comparatively at both organisations offers an insight into the plurality of ethics that motivate Muslim philanthropy and how it constitutes a moral economy. While Mustadafin Foundation is focused on citizenship-driven initiatives and is embedded in the local community through its programs, the AMA is occupied with *da'wa* and is embedded in a vast global

network, which makes it rather difficult to focus all resources and volunteers in one place and make long-lasting changes that impact more than one group of people. Mustadafin has an excellent working relationship with the local and provincial governments, receiving grants from them and alleviating a load of social responsiveness on their behalf through feeding schemes and education programs. AMA, on the other hand, does not currently have any relationships with the government. There has been a range of partnerships between AMA and other organisations, such as SANZAF. However, the concluding remark on these two organisations that this chapter has chiefly analysed is their commitment to the local community. Without any discrimination towards race and creed, Mustadafin and AMA have exhibited through their actions and their online presence their Islamically driven concern with society and alleviating the issues that arise. My interlocutors have agreed that there is no one way to fix all the problems that persist in the townships and surrounding areas; however, as long as there is a good intention to ensure that people are taken care of, and some pressure can be alleviated – this means that they are doing something important. Mustadafin giving point directly to a religious moral economy that Alhourani (2024) argues; here, I wish to extend it to the Africa Muslims Agency. Through the AMA economy of food and blanket distribution in Cape Town, the school built and operated in Johannesburg and the multiple projects run across the continent for the past 38 years, it can be accepted that they constitute a moral economy.

Mustadafin Foundation is a local charity that is unapologetically Muslim. Their websites across various social media platforms illustrate their Muslim identity and how Islamic ethics drive their giving practices. Of the multiple reasons for their giving, Mustadafin also reveals their political and social activist side, feeding the needy in Bridgetown and places as far as the province's West Coast. Mustadafin collaborates with other local philanthropy organisations to maximise their reach. Food, blankets, education programs, and religious classes are only a few examples of how this vast moral economy manifests itself in Cape Town. Much like AMA, the organisation collects *zakat* and *sadaqah* with the intention of distributing them in townships to alleviate poverty and empower residents to a certain extent.

When one looks at AMA's practices, they are similar. However, AMA is known to operate internationally. While still paying attention to the local population of Cape Town and other parts of South Africa, AMA also has ties with communities in the Middle East region. More similarities between the two also include their usage of media – AMA and Mustadafin can be heard on Muslim radio channels, as well as Hilaal TV, advertising their respective organisation,

requesting donations from the Muslim community to assist any particular causes that need urgent attention, either here in Cape Town or elsewhere abroad. Branding has also become a crucial element to running NGOs. AMA branded bakkies and cars are no strangers on the roads when transporting goods from one location to another. The same applies for the Mustadafin Foundation, which has a highly functional social media presence on Facebook. Both respective organisations have a physical presence as well. Mosques in various parts of the city have AMA stickers (Fig. 5.1). Both organisations are affiliated with various mosques and other Islamic institutions, however, AMA has ties with Masjid-Al Quds in Gatesville, Cape Town – one of the most influential in the city due to its sheer size and international reach.

The differences between the two organisations are stark. The most obvious one we have emphasised in this dissertation is how AMA is a transnational organisation with a wide donor network and is headquartered in Kuwait. Their operation in many African countries is nothing short of brilliant. Mustadafin, as a local organisation, cannot reach such an international level. For all the good work done in many parts of the world, AMA does not have much tangible infrastructure in Cape Town. While reaching many people, the Cape Town office cannot physically cope with large-scale cooking. However, because of their collaboration with Mustadafin Foundation, they remedy this by providing ingredients for cooking and distribution among communities. Another difference between these two is their attitude to religion. As I mentioned, scholars describe AMA as an agent of Islamisation through the distribution of Islamic literature. My ethnographic account in the fourth chapter also affirmed this argument, yet it showed the AMA approach to Islamisation is not devoid of social commitment. Further, the AMA does not have ties with local government, unlike Mustadafin – which collaborates with various actors in the humanitarian field. Mustadafin Foundation accepts donations from Woolworths, which are given to the needy. They work with local government to reach poor areas. This cannot be said for AMA.

Both organisations have contributed immensely to the poor communities in Cape Town. My ethnography provided evidence of social and physical infrastructure in Laingville and in Manenberg. The clothing drives, blanket distribution programs, madrassas, and skills workshops. All of these come together and create a moral economy of Islamic philanthropy, underscored by piety to God, social responsibility and conviviality.

In conclusion, this dissertation has raised critical questions about the strategic objectives of Islamic philanthropy, its motivations, and how it manifests physically and socially. The study has explored the moral economy of Islamic philanthropy in Cape Town, highlighting the case of two organisations. While the two organisations are in the same field, they operate differently from one another. An important point to note is that while AMA has an Islamisation project about them, it does not negate their social concerns and solidarity – as expressed by Rabiah and Buşra. The reverse is true for Mustadafin Foundation – their attention to national belonging and citizenship acts does not mean that they neglect their Muslim identity and ethics – in fact, it is one of its strong motivations to do the work that they do in many parts of the province.

The work that Mustadafin and AMA undertake is not only done by them. Numerous organisations either collaborate with them or independently attempt to alleviate the challenging situation in various townships; however, there is just too much need and too few resources to go around. As revealed in this dissertation, many volunteers and members of the organisations on the ground call for change when it comes to the methods of giving and donation practices. Calls for workshops, skills building opportunities, as well as employment opportunities are many, with few sufficiently responding. The humanitarian's work is never finished as there will always be a need and lack in some part of society, however, this would be dramatically brought down should philanthropic organisations take into consideration the experience of the poor and provide employment and empowerment as opposed to contributing to dependency.

To borrow from social historian Bodhisattva Kar (2007:2), this project is unfinished and simultaneously unfinishable. Due to ethical considerations, this study did not include interviews with recipients. At many events, pictures and videos of people were taken without their consent and approaching a recipient in a line while waiting for food would have been inappropriate. The lack of recipient insights may hamper a deeper understanding of philanthropy, which centers on the phenomenological experience of the poor. This omission, while not detrimental, does leave gaps for future research to thrive. Future research studies could include interviews with the recipients of Islamic philanthropy and use Johannesburg as a case study.

Appendices

Department for the Study of Religions



Faculty of Humanities
Department for the Study of Religions

Information Sheet for Research Participants

Title of research project:

The Moral Economy of Islamic Philanthropy in Cape Town: The Case of Mustadafin and Africa Muslims Agency

Nature of the research:

Empirical research that uses live human research participants.

Name of researcher:

Osarumwense M. Asemota

Telephone	0623629665	Email	ASMOSA002@myuct.ac.za
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Name of researcher's thesis supervisor/course lecturer:

Dr Ala Alhourani and A/Prof Elisabetta Porcu

Telephone	0648612406	Email	Ala.alhourani@uct.ac.za
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Department address details:

Room 5.36, Leslie Social Science Building, Upper Campus, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 7701

Telephone	(021) 650 5818
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What are the implications of your involvement in this interview/project?

Your role as the participant is to consent to a 45-60 minute interview, which will be recorded, on your understanding of Islamic philanthropy in Cape Town and its surrounding townships. I will be asking structured questions and the answers given will be used as part of my data collection. The implication is that your views are important and will be used as part of my project, it will be published and made public for people to access; the identities of the participants will be made

anonymous on request. However, there is no danger that may come to the participant because of their involvement with this project.

The participant may choose to withdraw from the study when they want to. They have a right to skip questions and no penalty will come on them. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no form of compensation, remuneration or payment for taking part.

CONSENT FORM

Good day.

My name is Osarumwense Asemota. I am from the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Cape Town. I am doing this research for my Master of Arts Project. This is a Master's project being conducted by a student researcher from the University of Cape Town for the purposes of an MA degree.

I am studying the views of givers and recipients of Islamic philanthropy in and around townships in Cape Town, to learn more about how Islamic philanthropy functions and how it is perceived in the townships.

I would like to discuss these issues with a member of your organisation in an interview. Every person in the organisation has an equal chance of being included in this study. All information will be kept confidential. Your household has been chosen by chance. I would like to choose an adult from your organisation.

This interview will take about 60 minutes. There is no penalty for refusing to take part. If participants do choose to take part, they may stop at any time or skip any questions they do not wish to answer without penalty. Do you wish to proceed?

Questionnaire for Master of Arts Research project titled: The Moral Economy of Islamic Philanthropy in Cape Town

Questionnaire for Staff Members of Africa Muslim Agency and The Mustadafin Foundation.

Context:

This research is focused on the practices of Islamic giving in the townships in Cape Town and investigates how Islamic giving could be a constitutive part of a moral economy. This research is important because it investigates the motivations of giving in the townships of Cape Town, which has a small but growing Muslim community which is in a dire socioeconomic situation that requires aid to either develop them or help sustain them. Islamic giving is easily characterised as *zakat* and *sadaqah*.

Questions:

1. As someone who pays their zakat, do you ever wonder where your money goes after you click send?
2. How do you give your zakat?
3. Whenever you are participating in events that include giving, soup kitchens, distribution of zakat food packs, etc., do you ever think that you could do more outside of immediate hunger alleviation programs?
4. As a Muslim who is involved socially, do you believe that the mode of giving in Cape Town can be revised to include a developmental and transformative aspect? What exactly do you think needs to change?
5. What do you think the social and physical infrastructures of Islamic philanthropy are in the townships?

6. What motivates your personal giving?

7. When you think about giving, donating and volunteering - do you view it as an act of social solidarity or purely for religious purposes?

8. As someone who gives, whether regularly or occasionally, would you say that you care for the people whom you are giving?

9. What do you understand by the Quranic command that the poor have a right in the wealth of the rich? How does this make you feel as someone eligible to pay *zakat* and can pay *sadaqah*?

10. In your experience, how has the recipient of any Islamic philanthropy or giving perceived the act of giving in the township?

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