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## South Africa: an Ottoman Colony?<sup>1</sup>

Marloes Cornelissen<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The relations between the Ottoman Empire and Muslims in South Africa started with the religious mission of scholar Ebubekir Efendi to the Cape of Good Hope in 1862. This mission can be understood as an early example of Pan-Islamism as a political ideology, as it is a precedent of the emissaries that sultan Abdülhamid sent around the world in the service of Pan-Islamism. Besides for its religious and 'civilizing' reasons, the Ottomans also used this connection to strengthen their ties with Britain. Over time Britain started to question Ottoman interest in the Muslims in their colony. The sultan tried, with his title of Caliph, to influence Muslims in South Africa, and besides offering them support he also expected their support and loyalty in return. By establishing consulates, schools and a pro-Ottoman sentiment, the Ottomans succeeded in establishing a base of power within the Cape.

When after Ebubekir Efendi's death the Malay Muslims, as the Muslims in South Africa of those days were called, turned to Mecca for religious matters, the Ottomans started to focus more on the Indian Muslims of South Africa. The Indian Muslims needed the support of the Ottomans to the same extent as the Ottomans were in need of their support for their Pan-Islamic ideology. The Ottoman 'grip' on these Muslims was also a strategic move in relation to the Ottoman stance towards Britain.

My purpose is to show how the Ottomans perceived the Muslims of the Cape Colony as spiritually under their leadership, in a fashion similar to the "spiritual colonies," then a popular term referring to (their territory in) Africa and Central Asia, even though the Cape was, territorially speaking, not part of the Ottoman dominion, and the Ottomans could not claim any political power over it. And to demonstrate how with this power over the Muslims they were able to 'threaten' European powers with the support of Muslims all over the world.

**Keywords:** South-Africa; Nineteenth century; Ottoman Empire; Colonialism; Pan-Islamism.

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2 Marloes Cornelissen is a Ph.D.-candidate in History at Sabancı University in İstanbul, Turkey.



## **Introduction**

The relations between the Ottoman Empire and South-Africa started on an economic basis, with the import of Angora goats via India to the Cape Colony in 1838 (Orakçı 2007: 33). But some 25 years later the relations took on a different shape and gained a rather missionary character, when the Ottomans were requested, via London, to provide an Islamic scholar, in order to educate the Malay Muslims in South Africa in the year 1862. During Abdülhamid II's reign (1876-1909), the Ottoman attitude towards South Africa turned away from the Malay Muslims and now focussed more on the Indian Muslims who had migrated to South Africa earlier on. Under the umbrella of the Pan-Islamic ideology, the Ottomans angered Britain with their grip on the Indian Muslims. This article aims to evaluate the relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslims of South Africa.

Did the Ottomans perceive South Africa, which was an English colony by the nineteenth century, at first as an opportunity to improve relations with the British? Were the Muslims in South Africa yet another group that could partake in the Pan-Islamist policies of sultan Abdülhamid II? Or could we even go as far as to state that the Ottomans perhaps saw South Africa as some type of colony as well? I hope, by finding answers to these questions, with the use of contemporary documents, to gain insight in the way(s) how the Ottomans addressed the Muslims in South Africa, and how these Muslims saw their own relationship with the Ottomans in their turn.

## **Muslims in South Africa**

In short, the Cape of Good Hope was first colonized by the Dutch in 1652, then passed to Britain in 1795, to the Dutch again in 1802 and finally back to Britain in 1806. The first group of Muslims, who were called Malays, were brought to the Cape during Dutch rule, from the South-East Asian islands, Bengal, Malabar and Madagascar. From 1658 onwards they came to the Cape as political prisoners, slaves and convicts; some were however voluntary immigrants. Among these Muslims was also a number of prominent religious scholars, such as Imam Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam from Tidore (d. 1807), better known as Tuan Guru ("Mister Teacher"). Abidin Tadian Tjoessoep of Makassar, known as Sheikh Yusuf (d. 1699), who was an influential religious leader and political exile and considered to be the founder of Islam in Cape Colony, was also sent to Cape by the Dutch, where he arrived in 1694. The institutionalization of Islam started in the Cape when Tuan Guru established the first mosque after an 1804 ordinance which allowed the practice of other religions than the Dutch Reformed Church. The extent of the influence of these early scholars remains however speculative (Mandivenga 2000: 347; Malherbe 2008: 6).

During the 1830s conversion to Christianity in the Cape had come to a standstill, and Islam spread rather quickly among the slaves. Around that time, in 1834, slavery was completely forbidden, and therefore the era of slave emancipation was considered the golden age of Islam in the Cape in terms of converts among slaves (Orakçı 2007: 19)<sup>3</sup>. Slowly, as the power of the Dutch East Indies waned, the effectiveness of the connections of the Malay Muslims with their former home-countries weakened. They lost their native language and adopted the language of their colonial masters. The thorough knowledge of Islam and the traditions of the Malay Muslims diminished. By this time, due to the deterioration of the “correct” Islam, the existence of certain Islamic sects and corrupt imams, an Ottoman religious scholar carrying the name Ebubekir Efendi (d. 1880), was sent to the Cape.

New generations of Muslims also established relations with Islamic states outside the colony. This move was enhanced by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. During the 1870s some went on pilgrimage, learned Arabic and came back with a new religious fervour and a desire to spread Islam. They often became influenced by the Wahhabi form of Islam that was prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula.

The second group of Muslims to arrive in the Cape were Indian indentured workers and traders from Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Gujarat. They were brought firstly by the British to work in Natal on the sugar plantations. Among the first to arrive in South Africa was Sheikh Ahmad (d. 1886, also known as Badsha Peer, “enraptured saintly saint”) in 1860. After a period of three or four years, as long as their period of employment lasted, they became free residents in the area (Mandivenga 2000:349). Although most of these Indians were Hindu, not Muslim, a second wave of mostly Muslim Indians arrived in South Africa in 1869, as passenger migrants. They came to make a living in South Africa as entrepreneurs and settled in Transvaal. Interestingly enough, they differentiated themselves from the labourers of the first wave, and called themselves Arabs or Arab Ottoman subjects, perhaps to distinguish themselves more as Muslims, or to avoid the “Asiatic Regulation Act” during which all Indians were made to register (Mandivenga: 349)<sup>4</sup>. It was this group that formed the core of Muslims in South Africa from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

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3 Referring to N. Levtzion and R. Pouwels (1999) *The history of Islam in Africa*, Cape Town: David Philip, pp. 331-332.

4 This was to no avail, as the Transvaal authorities distinguished between the Jews and Christians subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the Arab Muslims.

Besides these two groups there were also smaller groups of Muslims from Africa, partly consisting of immigrants from countries like Malawi, and partly of converted indigenous people (Tayob 1997: 730).

### **Ebubekir Efendi and his mission**

By the 1860s there was no coordinating council of Islamic authority in Cape Colony and as a result each imam in the Cape tended to the interests of his own community (Orakçı 2007: 44)<sup>5</sup>. After several religious controversies and conflicts among the Muslims in Cape Colony which had divided the community, a request was sent by Cape parliamentarian De Roubaix<sup>6</sup> to London for religious books explaining the orthodox position on certain questions and also for further guidance. It was assumed that De Roubaix had not consulted the local Muslim community, but apparently it was the Muslims who first requested a scholar and books by themselves, by way of a letter. Ömer Lütfi, cousin and assistant of the scholar who was sent to the Cape Colony, copied the letter in his travelogue. It reads:

*As it is well known, when 85 years ago some of the Javanese islands fell into the hands of the previous government, we were all tied up in chains, enslaved and brought here. We were afflicted with suffering and problems. But soon the Glorious British Empire, under whose august sovereignty we are, set us free from the slavery of the previous government and gave us freedom and liberty. For that we thank the aforementioned Empire for its help and grace, and in case of necessity it is incumbent upon us to sacrifice ourselves for its cause. We once again express our thanks and gratitude.*

*It is obvious that each nation has to know and apply its religion and school of law properly and it is natural that we also ought to observe our doctrine and school of law. But we forgot our language of origin, the language of the Javanese, the books and treatises are all written in that language and therefore we obviously need a teacher to read and teach them. Since the sorrowful situation is*

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to I.D. du Plessis (1944) *The Cape Malay*, Cape Town: Maskew Miller Limited, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> It is also said that he was the Ottoman consul, but according to official documentation from the Cape State Archive, already in 1853 a certain William John Greig had been recognized as consul of the Ottomans in the Cape Colony. After a while P.E. de Roubaix was appointed officially to this consular mission. (Orakçı 2007: 42, referring to the following record: KAB CO Vol. 4069 Ref. 147).

*like this it is requested to bring a scholar-teacher from a Muslim country in order to teach and train us.  
16 Shawwal 1278 (April 1862)  
(Signed) Muslim people. Cape of Good Hope<sup>7</sup>.*

The request was passed on by the Ottoman Ambassador in London, Kostaki Musurus Pasha, to the Ottoman sultan, who was then considered to be the highest ultimate authority on such matters, as he was regarded as the Caliph. Either way, the request was discussed in the Supreme Council of Justice and the decision was made that besides some works on religious matters, a salaried scholar would be sent. After the approval of the sultan, statesman Ahmed Cevdet Pasha made the investigations for a suitable scholar. Kurdish scholar Ebubekir Efendi (d. 1880) was interviewed on the 16th of May of 1862 and in September the sultan appointed him to the post. On the first of October of that same year Ebubekir Efendi and the son of his brother Ömer Lütfi Efendi<sup>8</sup> arrived via London in Cape Town, which was the capital of the British Cape Colony at that time. Their mission in the Cape Colony was to open a school in order to teach Arabic and the principles of the Islamic faith. It was hoped that in this way the indifferences and disputes between the Muslims of Cape Town could be resolved.

Besides the opening of the school and the teaching practices, Ebubekir Efendi was also expected to conduct a hunt against fake sheiks, corrupt imams and

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7 Bundan 85 sene mukaddem Cava adalarından bazıları hükûmet-i sabıkanın tasarrufuna geçtiğinde cümlemizi kayd ü bend ederek esira buraya getirdikleri ve burada çektığımız mihn ve meşakkatler ma`lûm rahimaneleri oldukta, aradan az vakit merurunda, metbu`-i müfahhamımız bulunan İngiliz devlet-i fahimesinin kullarını hükûmet-i sabıkanın esaretinden halas ile cümlemize hürriyet ve serbestiyet ihsan buyurduğu cihetle devlet-i müşarileyhanın bizlere olan şu `inayet ve merhametine doğrusu teşekkür ve hin-i iktizade rahinde can ve baş feda eylemekliğimiz lâzimedden olduğundan betekrar ifaza-yı teşekkür ve mahmedet eyleriz. Ma`lûmdur ki her millet kendi din ve mezhebini layıkı vechle bilip icra eylemeye mecbur bulunduğundan biz dahi meslek ve mezhebimiz üzere meslek olmaklığımız tabi`idir. Halbuki bizim lisan-ı aslımız olan Cava lisanını unuttuğumuzdan ve yadımızda bulunan kitap ve resa`ilin dahi Cava lisan-ı mezkur üzere bulunduğu hesbile onları da okuyup anlamağa bir mu`allime muhtaç olduğumuz bedbîhîdir. Böyle olduğundan bizim ta`lim ve tedrisimize bilad-ı Müslüminden bir mu`allim celb ve hal-i pür-melâlimize merhamet eylemenizi ricâ ve niyâzi babında ve herhalde irâde efendimizindir. 16 şevval 1278. İmza. Ehli-i Müslime. Ümid Burnu Transcribed from Ömer Lütfi, Ümitburnu Seyahatnâmesi, İstanbul: Ahmed Efendi Matbaası, 1292 (Atatürk Kitaplığı, K/ 2792), pp. 9-10. This transcription differs slightly from the modern Turkish version (2006) of Ömer Lütfi's travelogue.

8 Ömer Lütfi Efendi was presented as Ebubekir Efendi's son in the official documentation, in order to prevent potential problems at the border.

to prevent sectarian and Hindu influences on Islam. The Cape Muslims were actually Shafi'i in ritual practice, while Ebubekir Efendi had to teach them the Hanafi practices. Moreover, because under the Dutch colonial rule Muslims had not been allowed to worship publicly, they practised their religion at home according to a more mystical tradition. These corrupt imams who received loyalty and support in their mosques, tried to extend their power to the broader Cape public. They often attempted to take leadership of the wider community. For that reason many mosques were forced to go to court to settle disputes. According to Ömer Lütfi, these corrupt imams divided the Muslims into twenty parties and each party developed some kind of anger and hatred against the others. Every imam had given a different meaning to the religious books they had brought from Mecca and felt himself more learned than the others and misled his followers (Lütfi 1292: 75-6, 2006: 57).

Fifteen days after his arrival, Ebubekir Efendi opened The Ottoman Theological School for boys. Within twenty days he had gathered 300 students and also taught adults in the evening time. About the people he was teaching he comments, in the foreword of the Bayan al-dîn ("Explanation of Religion" or in Afrikaans "Uiteensetting van die godsdiens"), one of the works he wrote for educational purposes:

*I found to my regret that some of these people were very ignorant and so completely degenerate that religion had lost its significance. [...] Indeed they had but little knowledge of the Muslim religious rules and regulations necessary for the proper observance of Islam. These then were the people I had to reform and teach, and having come so far a country, I was determined to fulfil my mission. (Brandel-Syrer 1960: Intr.XLV-XLVI)*

And this mission in his eyes was as follows:

*It was with the hope of guiding and helping these people, and of teaching them to be good Muslims, that I came to these shores from Istanbul, a journey of nearly 15.000 miles, to a strange country so far away, inhabited by people of different habits, and speaking a different language. (Brandel-Syrer 1960: Intr. XLV)*

Also in one of his letters, which have been published regularly between 1863 and 1880 in the Ottoman newspaper Mecmûa-i Fünun, he sees their ignorance

as the main source of the disputes within the Muslim community on the Cape<sup>9</sup>. In yet another letter, he relates for instance of the fact that the Muslims do not distinguish halal from haram meat (Uçar 2008: 158)<sup>10</sup>. Ebubekir Efendi also describes his methods in the foreword of the *Bayan al-dîn*:

*I then began teaching the Koran to those of my followers with some education. In time I succeeded in training some of the more intelligent among them in the Arabic language, and in the essentials necessary for the proper servant of the Muslim religion. After some time and with much patience I could rely on a few of the more advanced pupils to become teachers in their turn. [...] I also opened a separate school for the women. (Brandel-Syrer 1960: Intr. XLVI)*

Ebubekir Efendi taught Arabic, but also learned the language of the local community, Afrikaans, within seven months. For the *Bayan al-dîn* he adapted the Perso-Arabic alphabet. His work was completed in 1869 and printed in Istanbul at the government press in 1877<sup>11</sup>. After it was printed Ebubekir Efendi spread copies of his work in the Cape Colony and Mozambique. His work is one of the earliest examples of such Arabic-Afrikaans or Ajami works<sup>12</sup>. The Arabic-Afrikaans literature came into existence since the children were familiar with Afrikaans, but not with its script, as they were barred from attending the public schools. They could read the Arabic script, which they had to learn for liturgical purposes, but were not able to speak the Arabic language (Dangor 2008).

The *Bayan al-din* is essentially a text on Islamic law based on the Hanafi madhhab. It is rather similar to the frequently used work of Hanafi fiqh of Ibrahim b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Halabî, which carries the name *Multaqa al-abhar* (Brandel-Syrer 1960: Intr. XXXV). The Afrikaans text is not a translation of the entire Arabic text, but a paraphrase of the original. In fact,

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9 This letter was published in *Mecmûa-i Fünun*, C.I, No. 9, Ramazan 1279 (1863). This particular letter has been copied in Ömer Lütfi (2006) *Yüz yıl Önce Güney Afrika. Ümitburnu Seyahatnâmesi*, Istanbul: Kitabevi, pp. 79-83.

10 Referring to *Mecmûa-i Fünûn*, C. III, Nr. 25-36, 1282 (1866).

11 It is rather significant that the *Bayan al-dîn* was only printed under the reign of Abdülhamid II, probably as a part of his Pan-Islamic ideology.

12 For a study of such texts see for instance: Haron (2001) "The Making, Preservation and Study of South African Ajami MSS and Texts" in *Sudanic Africa* 12: 1-14. Other studies of such literature have been conducted by Hans Kähler, for instance (1971) *Studien über die Kultur, die Sprache und die arabisch-afrikaanse Literatur der Kap-Malaien*, Berlin: Reimer.

the Afrikaans text is full of Arabic (and sometimes even English and Malay) words as these are mostly related to Islamic practices and probably had no Afrikaans equivalent. Afrikaans was at that time also only a spoken language, and therefore various spellings of similar words were frequent. One such example from the Bayan al-din is:

*Diese fasl praat van die waters wat reg is vir taharat en van ander.  
Es ga'iz maak abdast en gusl en was uit wat vuil geword met die  
skone water wat mutlak es ya`ni wat sain naam es water alien  
(Van Selms 1979:12-13)*

In English translation it reads:

*This section discusses water which is proper for cleansing and  
other things. It is allowed to do the ritual washing, bathe and wash  
the things that have become dirty with this water which is clearly  
clean; that is to say of which its name is 'water only.'*

Another example from one of Ömer Lütfi's letters will serve to demonstrate this Afrikaans-language literature. Ömer Lütfi Efendi (Lütfi 1292: 94-5):

مېن تيوي اولكى ان ليفستى موچى  
خنت ان فرخفنس اس اوپ اوى ان اوپ اون سوين خروت خوت وت فر اونس خمك سوين سي  
مېن ليفستى بورر عجبده مېن هارت اس تدانخ سير اوم ايكنى فر اوى سنى فور  
وى ويت دى فادر فر ايكن ويخ خان ايكن فرسوك فن خروت خوت اوم فر اوى وير تسين ا  
مېن فن سوفيري لانت خه بر نك نو سو اسليخ بهانل مت مېن ايكن هت تدانخ خه هو سو  
ايكنى مېر خه خوتنى تو ايكن ويخ خه خان نو ايكن مېن خداختى بخان فر مېن مير اس  
خمكلك اوردى خروت سى تخان آس اوندر دى فادر وير تخان ايكن واس دنيسداخ بى دى  
ى واس سو كو وات اس فر مېن سو هى نكس مت مېن سام خه پراتنى ايكن فادر خه ويس ه  
سيدي ان اوپ آلدى منسى فر سوكن فن خروت خوت فرخفنس فر هم ماسكى هى هو كو  
فت هت ليف فر مېن  
المض

In Afrikaans, in Latin script the letter states:

*Myn twee oge en liefste moetjie,  
Onsen groot God wat voor ons gemaak syn segent en vergifnes  
is op u en op myn liefste broer Ubeyde. Myn hart is tedanig seer  
om ek ken nie voor u sien nie voor ek weggaan. Ek versoek van*

*groot God om vir u weer te sien. U weet die vader vir myn van so ver land gebrenk. Nu so sleg behanel. Met myn ek het tedanig gehou, so ek ken nie meer gegoed nie toe ik weggegaan. Nu ek myn gedagte begaan voor myn meer is gemaklik oor die groot see tegaan. As onder die vader weer te gaan ek was dinsdag by die vader gewees. Hy was so kwaad es vir myn sy hy niks met myn saam gepraat nie. Ek versoek van groot God vergifnes vir hem ma seki(?) hy hoe kwaad is vir myn en groot God moet geef segent op myn vader Hasan en op myn moeder Reside en op al die mense wat het lief vir myn.*

*Imza. Dit brief is van Ömer Lütfi wat van hart seer oor die groot see gegaan.*

The Afrikaans in this letter used by Ömer Lütfi is not without mistakes, but that is obviously quite natural for a non-native speaker. In English the translation of the letter would be:

*My two eyes and dearest sister, The blessing for all that has been made for us and forgiveness of the great God is upon you and my dearest brother Ubeyde. My heart is filled with pain as I could not see you before I left. I pray to God to see you again. You know that my father has brought me to this far away land. I am (was) not well now. I am pretty patient, but I could not stay patient, and therefore I left. Now it came to my mind that it was easier for me to cross the ocean. Tuesday I went to father to say farewell. He became so angry, he did not speak and refused to talk to me. I ask for forgiveness for father from the great God, because he was this angry with me. And may the great God bless my father Hasan and my mother Reside and all the people I hold dear.*

*Signature. This letter was written by Ömer Lütfi who crossed the ocean out of heartache.*

Ebubekir Efendi was much better equipped and more capable of communicating effectively with the people to whom he had been sent than the envoys that later were to be sent during Abdülhamid II's reign. Those envoys were in most cases not very successful because they lacked sufficient language skills. Ebubekir Efendi was quite capable of using the local language and stayed in South Africa for 18 years, until his death in 1880.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century some (Malay) Muslims had also settled in other parts of the Colony, for instance in Port Elizabeth,



Johannesburg and Pretoria. Sultan Abdülaziz had for example sent a sum of 400 liras for the construction of a mosque in Port Elizabeth<sup>13</sup>. Ebubekir Efendi also travelled to a number of these other cities to preach there. He also went to Mozambique and Mauritius. Ebubekir Efendi also influenced the clothing style of the Muslims; the women started to wear a veil, the men a fez.

Sixty ulema and hadji's from the Cape wrote a letter to the sultan in 1863, stating their gratitude for the sending of Ebubekir Efendi. Letters were also sent to congratulate the sultan on his birthday and ceremonies were organized to celebrate the occasion. The fact that the sultan's birthday had not been celebrated before the coming of Ebubekir Efendi demonstrates that he definitely created a pro-Ottoman atmosphere in the Cape. Ebubekir Efendi was also granted permission by the sultan to pray for the Ottoman Caliph during Friday prayers. This practice soon spread out over the Colony.

The relations between Ebubekir Efendi and the Cape Muslims were however far from ideal. Although he had resolved some former disputes, with the establishment of a Hanafi-based school, a new dispute arose. Because the Cape Muslims were followers of the Shafi'i madhhab, and Ebubekir represented the Hanafi school of law, the former had difficulties accepting Ebubekir's changes in customs, such as the prohibition of the consummation of some of the Muslims' favourite foods. In 1869 an unsuccessful petition requesting Ebubekir Efendi's removal from the Cape also added to the complicated situation in Cape Town.

Ebubekir Efendi was involved in a number of court cases, related to his troublesome marriages, and his faithfulness was actually questioned, as he himself claimed to have always been a Shafi'i (probably because of his Kurdish background), although he described himself as a scholar of all four madhhabs in the foreword of the *Bayan al-dîn*. He was also accused of trying to convert as many Muslims to the Hanafi school as possible, only to receive a raise from the sultan (Van Bruinessen 2000). The community actually became polarised between the Shafi'i majority and the smaller Hanafi community around Ebubekir Efendi. His influence was neutralised by the time he passed away in 1880 because of the influence of the hadji's that returned from Mecca who brought with them a renewed religious fervour. Eventually after his death, members of the Cape community asked for the condemnation of Ebubekir's criticism of al-Shafi'i, which was granted accordingly.

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13 The Grace Street Mosque was completed in 1864, documentation on the mosque can be found in BOA, Y.MTV 214/95 and HR.MTV 608/6.

### **The meaning of Ebubekir's mission**

Ebubekir Efendi's mission to the Cape Colony was an early antecedent of the emissaries that Abdülhamid II sent around the world in order to spread his ideology of Pan-Islamism, which will be discussed below. Although Ebubekir Efendi's influence lasted only briefly and was soon overshadowed by the shift of orientation of the Cape Muslims to Mecca, it was in a sense more successful than those later missions, as Ebubekir Efendi was better equipped and was able to communicate with the local community in their own language. Ebubekir Efendi's mission shows that Ottoman missionary policies were not initiated by Abdülhamid II, but already by his predecessors. Part of the Pan-Islamic policies was, according to Selim Deringil in his studies on Abdülhamid II's Pan-Islamic policies, the effort to strengthen the position of the Hanafi madhhab over the other schools of law, because the Hanafi school does not insist that the caliph should be of Qurayshite descent (Deringil 1998: 46-50; Van Bruinessen 2000). The Ottoman sultan could therefore only claim to be a Caliph in regions where the Hanafi rules were applied. This may also explain why Ebubekir Efendi taught primarily Hanafi fiqh, even though he himself as well as his students in the Cape were Shafi'i.

These special envoys which were on secret missions from Abdülhamid II that were sent all around the world, were not only meant to gather information on the Muslims living there, but also to spread pro-Ottoman feelings. We should see the mission in South Africa of Ebubekir Efendi and later also of his sons, in a similar vein. He tried to spread pro-Ottoman attitudes with the financial support of the government. Through the Islamic schools that were founded, they gained recognition and acceptance (to a certain degree) within the Islamic societies (Orakçı 2007: 30).

What we can also gather here is that the Ottoman interest in South Africa was not only a missionary project, but also a way to secure good relations with the British, as the mission was in full cooperation with the British government. As will be discussed below, in the year of Ebubekir's death, relations between the Ottomans and the British had however worsened and the Ottoman presence and influence in South Africa and other locations where similar missions had been sent were now looked upon with fright and suspicion, and clearly no longer wanted.

### **Colonialism and civilizing practices**

By the end of the nineteenth century it appears that some Ottomans somehow adopted the idea of colonialism and 'applied' it to their own domains. All the new empires, such as the French, English and German empires, were an extension of the nation-state; the colonies made them empires. The old empires, (i.e. Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman empires) wanted to share in this wave of colonialism and imperialism. The idea of a certain "core" area

had arisen, which Young Turk Cemal Pasha for instance called *ana vatan* (mother country) or even *Türkiye* (Turkey) while no such country officially existed (Cemal Paşa 1922: 300). By this core area was usually meant Anatolia. Because the Ottomans could not acquire colonies, they changed the ties with their provinces or the “periphery” of the Empire. They started to conquer areas within their own empire and thereby literally occupied their own provinces. In this manner one could say that a new empire or state was constructed. Suddenly the provinces of the Empire were sometimes referred to as colonies, with the following terms: *müstemleke* (colony, but in a confiscating meaning) or *müstemare* (more neutral, colony). In his memories Cemal Pasha refers to “Turkey” and the dominions in North –Africa in the following manner:

*What would Turkish public opinion think of our Government if it saw that unhappy Turkey, after being the victim of countless attacks for three or four years and losing 99 per cent of her European territory and the whole of her African colonies, had now to give compensation for the recovery of her own islands to which she had a claim by treaty? (Cemal Paşa 1922: 78)*

Although there were officially no colonies nor a country called “Turkey”, both had come into existence in Ottoman mind-mapping. Another case of such imperialistic thoughts can be found in the foreword of a travelogue by a certain Mehmed Emin, entitled *İstanbul’dan Asya’yı Vusta’ya Seyahat*<sup>14</sup>. Although Mehmed Emin’s identity is uncertain, it seems that he was not a private but an official on a semi-official or secret trip to Central Asia in the service of sultan Abdülhamid II<sup>15</sup>. The foreword, written by journalist, author and publisher Ahmed Midhat Efendi, discusses the same ideas when in this case Central Asia was to be regarded as the Ottomans’ “original homeland” (*vatan-ı asli*), and the following is stated regarding the provinces: “the Ottoman dominions which are presently in our hand as, so to speak, the spiritual colonies (*müsta’merât ve müstemlekât-ı maneviyye*) of Central Asia” (Herzog; Motika 2000: 187)<sup>16</sup>.

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14 First serialized in Midhat Efendi’s *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* in 23 episodes between no. 138 (15 Zilhicce 1295) and 163 (14 Muharrem 1296), and afterwards printed as a book in his *Kirk Anbar Matbaası* in the winter of 1878/79. The preface appeared in nos. 138 and 139.

15 A discussion on his identity is given in Herzog, p. 180.

16 Mehmed Emin Efendi, *İstanbul’dan Asya-yı Vusta’ya Seyahat*, p. 21. (translated and quoted in Herzog, p. 187, the 2000 version uses modern Turkish, and therefore is irrelevant here).

Midhat Efendi also refers to a certain Ottoman civilizing process with regard to other Islamic countries:

*We really should not be so indifferent towards travelling. The reason is as follows: Europe is progressive with so many inventions and modernized with new laws of civilisation (kavanin-i cedide-i medeniyet) and has really amazed the human mind, while the vast Islamic world in fact needs our guidance in matters of progress and innovation (Herzog; Motika 2000: 142)<sup>17</sup>.*

This Ottoman claim for leadership is rather similar to European colonial expansionist ideas. And despite the fact that the Ottomans missed the chance to have their own colonies, at least they are compensated by being awarded with the political and cultural leadership of the Islamic world, in Ahmed Midhat's eyes.

This civilizing mission of the Ottomans is also reflected in the Empire's relations with South Africa. This was already clearly the case when Ebubekir Efendi was sent to the Cape Colony. Nevertheless, when the Ottomans shifted their focus from the Malay Muslims to the Indian Muslims, this civilizing mission and the idea of the Ottoman sultan as Caliph of all Muslims were especially expressed and put into practice through the Ottoman Pan-Islamic ideology. Although the Cape Colony was not an Ottoman colony, their influence on the Muslims was quite extensive and caused the British to closely watch and disapprove of the Ottomans' practices in their territory. The support that the Ottomans received from the Indian Muslims was yet another cause for Britain to fear the Ottoman influence.

### **Pan-Islamism**

Pan-Islamism is a political ideology that aimed at the comprehensive union of all Muslims into one entity. Political Pan-Islamism originated in essence as a defensive policy, essentially aimed at saving all Muslims from non-Muslim dominion, which was mainly personified in European expansionism. Although the idea of Pan-Islam is in fact as old as Islam itself, Pan-Islamism as a religio-political ideology emerged only in the second half of the nineteenth century. The closest Ottoman equivalents are İttihâd-ı İslam, İttihâd-ı Din or Uhuvvet-i Din which had long been used in the correspondence between the Ottoman sultan and other Muslim rulers (Özcan 1997: 24).

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17 Mehmed Emin Efendi, İstanbul'dan Asya-yı Vusta'ya Seyahat, p. 4. (translated and quoted in Herzog, p. 142, again the 2000 version uses modern Turkish and is therefore irrelevant).

The Ottomans were by many seen as the highest Islamic authority, due to their rule over the Hijaz, and because of the sultans claim to be the universal Caliph other non-Ottoman Muslims often sought the Ottomans aid. In fact, the Caliphate was the key to the implementation of much of Abdülhamid II's domestic and foreign policies. Abdülhamid II, seen as the primary advocate of Pan-Islamism, did not regard the fact that the majority of Muslims outside the Empire were under foreign rule as an hindrance to unity. These Muslims could still be spiritually linked to the Caliphate. In this manner for instance Muslims of Indonesia and Malaysia asked the Ottomans for help, and are said to have surrendered themselves to the suzerainty and protection of the Ottoman sultan, already by the sixteenth century (Özcan 1997: 27). In the nineteenth century the Indonesian Muslims appealed to the sultan-Caliph to declare some of the Indonesian islands Ottoman vassal states. The Ottoman protection sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839-1861) offered in 1850 over Atjeh could however not be more than a symbolic declaration of protection. The Ottomans were in no position to stand against the Dutch (Özcan 1997: 27). These are just a few examples of how by the middle of the nineteenth century the Muslims of Asia, including India, had developed a strong affiliation with the Ottomans. By the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was however not the world power these Asian Muslims believed it to be. The sultan could only do so much to protect them.

It was around the mid-nineteenth century that the "Young Ottomans" emerged. Prominent intellectuals, journalists and writers like Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha opposed the traditional system of administration and reforms imposed by the government and instead proposed constitutionalism. The Young Ottomans were able to continue their criticism after their exile from Europe and in this manner stirred public opinion in the Empire. There was also an influx of refugees, especially intellectuals, from other Muslims countries into the Ottoman Empire after their subjugation by Western countries. By this time the Ottoman public was aware of the disabilities of Muslims under foreign rule (Özcan 1997: 33).

Against this background Ottoman intellectuals began to formulate ideas and programmes under a Pan-Islamic ideology for the survival of the Ottoman Empire. Discussions about the possibility of a new state ideology of İttihâd-ı İslam started in the press in the late 1860s. The Young Ottomans were in their ideas also influenced by current ideologies in Europe, such as Pan-Slavism. Namık Kemal advocated that the union of Islam was necessary in order to achieve the progress of the Muslim nations. The purpose to attain this union was not through political and sectarian struggle, but through education and

the guidance of the masses (Özcan 1997: 38)<sup>18</sup>.

The Ottoman Porte also started taking an active interest in the affairs of distant Muslim countries, and especially the Muslims of Central Asia and India. So by the 1870s, around the end of sultan Abdulaziz's reign (1861-1875), a conscious Pan-Islamic tendency became evident in the Porte's policy. After Abdülaziz, Abdülhamid II subsidised several Pan-Islamic ideologues. After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, the Ottoman Empire was forced to give up over one-third of its entire territory. The idea of a unity of Ottoman nations was now completely dead, and the Empire had to rely on its Muslim elements for survival instead. The sultan subsidised agents to spread Pan-Islamic propaganda within, but also outside the Empire. In the constitution that was implemented, not only the sultan's claim as universal Caliph of Islam, but also the statement that Islam was the religion of the Ottoman state and the sultan's role as protector of Islam are mentioned. His efforts were taken seriously by a number of European Powers, although his policies were rather modest in practice (Landau 1995: 248).

Abdülhamid II used his Pan-Islamic policy firstly to maintain the integrity of the Empire. Secondly, he wanted to use Pan-Islamism to create unrest among the European powers and to resist them, The sultan felt they would not hesitate to break up the Empire at the first possible opportunity. By 1880 Britain chose an openly hostile attitude towards the Ottomans, when Gladstone came to power that year. Abdülhamid II on his turn was convinced that the British were responsible for questioning the legitimacy of his title in order to encourage Arab revolt and independence. The greatest blow to the sultan's Caliphal prestige was obviously the British occupation of Egypt (Özcan 1997: 50).

There is no evidence that Abdülhamid ever claimed political sovereignty over the Muslims outside his dominion. He was however persistent in exercising his Caliphal rights to appoint religious officials to former Ottoman territories, which were now under foreign rule (Özcan 1997: 52). In this manner he could maintain his influence among the Muslim residents there. He personally selected and appointed some of the muftis, qadis and teachers to several former domains of the Empire. Moreover, Abdülhamid hoped to create a pro-Ottoman feeling through the presence of the Ottoman consuls in Muslim countries. He also invited influential Muslim figures to his court to strengthen his influence. He treated them exceptionally well in order to gain their support.

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18 Referring to Türköne (1991) *Siyasi İdeoloji Olarak İslamcılığın Doğuşu*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, chapters IV "Panislâmizm veya İttihad-ı İslâm" and V "Bir değerlendirme: "İttihad-ı İslâm", "İttihad-ı Osmani ve Milletçilik."

### **Pan-Islamism and the Indian Muslims of South Africa**

The (sometimes secret) delegations were sent all over the world within the framework of the Pan-Islamic ideology of the sultan. One such an example is the delegation with which Şirvanlı Ahmed Hamdi was sent. He was a member of the Ottoman delegation headed by Şirvanizade Ahmed Hulusi Efendi, which after prior consultation with the British was sent to Afghanistan and Swat in 1877 to convince the Emir of Afghanistan and the Akhund of Swat to enter into an anti-Russian alliance with the Ottomans, and then to wage war with Russia. The mission was a complete failure, as neither the Emir nor the Akhund were willing to make a deal with the Ottomans (Herzog; Motika 2000: 187). Another example is Tripoli notable Muhammed Başala, who was sent to Morocco and Bornu (Chad). He gave information on the power and the glory of the Ottoman sultan and presented an Ottoman flag to the rulers of each tribe.

As explained earlier, especially the Indian Muslims found solace and compensation in the existence of the Ottoman Empire for the loss of their own power and prestige in India, because they recognized the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of all Muslims and the Empire as the last stronghold of Islam (Özcan 1997: 205). From the 1870s onwards the consolidation of British rule in India coincided with the worsening of relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. The Indian Muslims were stuck in a dilemma between these two centres of loyalty. The British were always on the watch for pro-Ottoman developments in India, especially after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. The Ottomans not only expected financial and moral support from the Indians, but they also tried to activate them as a pressure factor to influence the British policy towards the Empire (Özcan 1997: 206).

This political Pan-Islamism was also extended to the mainly Indian Muslims in South Africa. The Malay Muslims were more or less abandoned and the Ottoman focus now turned towards the Indian Muslims that had recently arrived in the Cape by the end of the nineteenth century. While the interest of the Ottomans had been mainly religious at first, now it gained a more political undertone.

The Ottoman representatives in South Africa collected news related to the Ottoman Empire from newspapers such as the Cape Argus and Transvaal Leader, and sent the information to the sultan, as he wanted to follow the economic and political development closely (Orakçı 2007: 30). Consulates were established in several locations of South Africa; the first one, actually called a "honorary consulate", was already established before the arrival of Ebubekir Efendi (Uçar 2008: 489). Communication between the consulates and the Ottoman Empire was channelled through Britain. Other consulates were for instance established in Cape Town in 1861, and in Johannesburg during

Abdülhamid's reign. The consulates were used to create strong pro-Ottoman sentiments and to provide the Muslims with financial and political support.

As the Ottomans tried to improve their image internationally, they participated in the Chicago World Fair in 1893. The year prior to that, the Ottomans had been invited to participate in the 'Kimberley International Exhibition' in South Africa. The Ottoman Ambassador of London, Sir Charles Mills, advised the sultan to participate, as there was a large Muslim population in the city of Malay and Indian origins and he suggested that their participation in it would be a unique opportunity to make the Muslims satisfied and very proud (Orakçı 2007: 66-67)<sup>19</sup>. Although the proposal was accepted and signed by the sultan, it is not clear whether the Ottomans actually took part in the exhibition.

The Ottomans had opened more schools like the ones founded by Ebubekir Efendi, in the major cities of the Cape, carrying the name "Hamidiye schools" (Argun 2000: 30). Ebubekir Efendi's sons also had some influence in the relations between the Ottomans and South Africa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Ebubekir Efendi's son Ahmet Ataulah Efendi also taught at the Ottoman Theological School, (after first having been a teacher at the Ottoman Hamidiye School in Kimberley) and gained the same position as his father had had. Besides English and Afrikaans, he also spoke Urdu. In Kimberley he also worked as an editor for the Muslim Journal which aimed at the religious education of Muslims and helped spread the ideology of Pan-Islamism. Germain, in his article on South Africa and the Pan-Islamic ideology of the Ottoman Empire, even goes as far as to call him a political agent of Pan-Islamism (Germain 1999: 122). In 1901 he was sent to Singapore as the Ottoman Consul-General. His death in 1903 in a car accident was thought to have been the result of an assassination plan set up by Britain for political reasons. No evidence for these suspicions have been found (Uçar 2008: 346-350). Also one of his other sons, Hisham Niamatullah Efendi was a qualified Islamic scholar like his father. He also published some works in the Afrikaans-Arabic script on religion.

### **The Young Turks and the Boer War**

In the 1850s Britain recognised the independence of the Boer Republics in the Transvaal. Besides the independent African chiefdoms and kingdoms, there were two British Colonies; Cape and Natal, and two Boer republics, the ZAR (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) and the Orange Free State. Afrikaner nationalism was stimulated by diamond field disputes and the British

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<sup>19</sup> Orakçı refers to Karpát p. 174, but this is incorrect.



annexations of Grigualand West and the ZAR. Two attempts were made between 1895 and 1899 to bring the ZAR back under British influence. The second attempt culminated into a war when the ZAR and the Orange Free State declared war upon Britain in 1899. During this war nearly 88,000 men fought on the republican side, while around 450,000 men fought for the British side. Nearly 26,000 people died, of which the majority were children. The war destroyed the independence of the two republics.

Immediately after the war broke out, sultan Abdülhamid sent an observer to South Africa to observe and report on the war. He sent Binbaşı Aziz Bey, who stayed in South Africa for a period of six months and received a salary of 200 lira for his work (Orakçı 2007: 67)<sup>20</sup>. The sultan supported neither the British nor the Boers in this war, as it was clear that a stronger Britain could be dangerous for the Ottomans, and because stronger Boer Republics could lead to religious restrictions for the Muslims of South Africa. Some of the Young Turks on the other hand showed their support for the British side and angered the sultan in this manner. The British victory provided the pro-British Young Turks an opportunity for a small demonstration. Most of them wrote articles for the journal called *Servet-i Fünûn* ("Wealth of Science"), favouring Britain. In November 1899, lead by Hüseyin Siyret (a leading author of the journal and Young Turks) and Ismail Kemal (Ottoman bureaucrat and future founder of the Albanian state), they wrote an appeal in which they praised the British; the appeal was signed by 29 supporters (Uçar 2008: 451-2). Ismail Kemal requested of Sir Nicholas, British Ambassador to the Ottomans, that he receive a delegation with the appeal. Upon insistence by Ismail Kemal the appeal was presented to Sir Nicholas, British Ambassador to the Ottomans. 150 people carried out a silent demonstration and many leading Young Turks praised the ideas expressed in the appeal. Sir Nicholas expressed his concerns and the matter was discussed with the Foreign Office. The action was seen as a sign of support of the Young Turks to Britain and as disloyalty towards Ottoman rule. Consequently Hüseyin Siyret and Ismail Safa, two other heroes of the demonstration, were exiled and the others were banished later (Hanioğlu 1995: 139). Sultan Abdülhamid also claimed that if Germany, Russia and France had accepted the Ottoman help during the Boer War in Transvaal, they could have destroyed the "fictitious English castle in India", but they failed to act on time and thus missed the opportunity. According to Abdülhamid that was the best time to ask England to "account for its oppression of the Indians and for the violent, stern action undertaken against other nations" (Karpát 2001: 233).

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20 Referring to the following document: BOA, Y.MTV 202/3.

### **Pan-Islamism continues in South Africa**

Part of the Pan-Islamic policy of Abdülhamid II was to construct a new railway to the Hijaz. The project was deliberately funded with “Muslim” donations. Hisham Niamatullah Efendi initiated the fund raising campaigns in Cape Colony for the Hijaz railway. The Muslim community from the Cape contributed 366 pounds between 1900 and 1907 to the project. The inauguration of the railway was also celebrated in South Africa. Among the guests was Osman Ahmed, the owner of the Ottoman Printing House in Durban, Mahatma Gandhi, and Wolfgang Frank, the Ottoman Ambassador to Johannesburg. Hisham Niamattullah Efendi was awarded with a medal by sultan Abdülhamid II for his efforts.

Besides aiding with the distribution of medals of honour for this occasion, Osman Ahmed also published the *Al-Islam* weekly newspaper in Durban, between 1907 and 1910. He published articles on the Ottoman political goals and used his newspaper as a political tool for the campaign for the Hijaz railway (Uçar 2008: 483)<sup>21</sup>. The Muslims of South Africa also collected money and showed their support for the injured people of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78. Likewise they protested against and collected money for the war with Italy of 1911-12 and volunteered to defend Tripoli against Italian colonialism. Money was also collected for the Ottoman Red Crescent Society. In the early twentieth century the following three organisations were also active in South Africa: the Hamidia Islamic Society (*Hamidiye Cemiyet-i Islâmiyesi*) which was influenced by Hamidian propaganda of Pan-Islamism, the Transvaal Mohammedan Congress and *Anjuman Islam* (based in Cape Town) (Orakçı 2007: 74). Even Atatürk personally received financial donations from the South African Muslims (Argun 2000: 64).

During the war years it was rather difficult for the Indian Muslims in South Africa to show their loyalty to both the British and the Ottomans. As a result, right before the First World War, Osman Ahmed changed the name of his printing house to “The Union Printing House.” The support for the Ottomans basically ended with the abolishment of the Caliphate and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Britain was suspicious of the loyalty of these Indian Muslims to the Ottoman sultan and Caliph. During the First World War some Turkish newspapers were smuggled into South Africa. The British Government decided to confiscate

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<sup>21</sup> The newspaper was not called *Es-Selam*, as Uçar suggests, but *Al-Islam*, according to Orakçı 2007, p. 73.

these newspapers in 1915 (Orakçı 2007: 77)<sup>22</sup>. Muslims awarded with medals from the sultan were not allowed to wear them, and when in 1920 certain fatwas from the Shaykh al-Islam in Istanbul were requested, it was perceived by the British that the Shaykh al-Islam was trying to establish his influence among Muslims outside the Empire (Orakçı 2007: 78)<sup>23</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslims in South Africa started with the religious mission of Ebubekir Efendi to the Cape of Good Hope in 1862. He went on his mission more than a decade before Abdülhamid II ascended the throne and spread his Pan-Islamic ideology. Pan-Islamism as a political ideology had already started by the end of Abdülaziz's reign, and Ebubekir Efendi's mission is an early example of this, as it is a precedent of the emissaries that Abdülhamid had sent around the world in the service of Pan-Islamism. Besides for their religious and 'civilizing' reasons, the Ottomans also used this connection with the Cape Muslims to strengthen their ties with Britain. Over time the relationship with the British altered and Britain now questioned the Ottoman interest in the Muslims in their colony. They had every reason to, as during Abdülhamid II's reign Pan-Islamic ideology turned the Ottoman interest into a political one. The sultan tried, with his title of Caliph, to influence the Muslims in South Africa, and besides offering them support, also expect their support and loyalty in return. By establishing consulates, schools and a pro-Ottoman sentiment, the Ottomans succeeded in establishing a base of power within the Cape.

The Malay Muslims in South Africa showed their gratitude towards the Ottomans for sending them scholar Ebubekir Efendi, but since they more or less held on to the Shafi'i school of law, Ebubekir Efendi's influence was rather limited. When after his death the Malay Muslims turned to Mecca once more for religious matters, the Ottomans started to focus more on the Indian Muslims. The Indian Muslims needed the support of the Ottomans to the same extent as the Ottomans were in need of their support for their Pan-Islamic ideology. The Ottomans' 'grip' on these Muslims was also a strategical move with relation to the Ottoman stance towards Britain.

The Ottomans clearly perceived the Muslims of the Cape Colony as spiritually under their leadership, perhaps quite similar to the "spiritual colonies"

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22 Referring to the following source from the National Archives of South Africa: SAB GG Vol. 168 Ref. 3/3305.

23 Referring to the following source from the National Archives of South Africa: SAB GG Vol. 162 Ref. 3/3067; Germain, pp. 131-133.

Midhat Efendi mentioned, when he spoke of the Ottoman dominions in Central Asia. Although the Cape was territorially speaking not part of the Ottoman dominion, and the Ottomans could not claim any political power over them, the Ottomans had a strong influence that seriously alarmed and angered Britain. They were able to use this power to 'threaten' European powers with the support of Muslims all over the world.