

GABORONE MUSLIM COMMUNITY: A VIGNETTE INTO THEIR LIVES

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Abstract

This article focuses mainly upon the contemporary developments that have taken place in Botswana's capital city where most of the Muslims reside and work. It intends to pinpoint, describe and briefly analyze all the major role players and institutions present that have contributed towards creating a unique Gaborone Muslim Community.

Keywords: Botswana, Muslim community, Social change

Introduction

South Africa's Muslim minorities have been growing at a steady pace through procreation, conversion and migration. These Muslim communities have rooted and embedded themselves onto the Southern African soil and have contributed in varied ways to the respective countries where they reside and live. Apart from South Africa's well-documented Muslim community, very little attention has been given by scholars to the Muslim communities in its neighbouring states. When one surveys the region, it becomes evident that nothing substantial has been written about the Muslims in Namibia, Swaziland and Lesotho, except for a few popular journalistic articles, and that some attempts have been made by a few scholars to write about the Muslim communities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Botswana. This article will therefore try to look at the lastmentioned country with specific focus on the Gaborone Muslim community. This article complements the academic studies that had been produced in 1989 and 1998/2000 respectively.

Way back in 1989 Dr Saroj Parret, an Indian scholar who was then attached to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana, published her article titled "Muslims in Botswana"; this appeared in the *African Studies* journal (48[1]:82-82, 1989) based at the University of the Witwatersrand. Subsequent to her exploratory study Dr James Amanze, who was and still is a member of the same department, produced his *Islam in Botswana 1882-1995*; it was published as one of the Uppsala Research Reports in the History of Religions series no. 15 during 2000. In the interim period he reworked the first part of his monograph and this appeared in *Botswana Notes and Records* (vol. 30, 1998). Amanze's publication (i.e. the article and the monograph) was based upon primary and secondary sources as well as extensive fieldwork that was undertaken during the early 1990s and continued over intermittent periods by the end of 1995; even though it is more of a descriptive socio-historical text, it has been able to bring together important data on this largely undocumented Muslim community.¹

¹ See this author's review in *Botswana Records and Notes*, vol. 12, 2001, pp. x for further comments on Amanze's contributions.

This article focuses mainly upon the contemporary developments that have taken place in Botswana's capital city where most of the Muslims reside and work. It intends to pinpoint, describe and briefly analyse all the major role players and institutions present that have contributed towards creating a unique Gaborone Muslim Community. Before providing background information and other relevant data, it becomes necessary to define the term 'community' and also to explain the notion of a 'religious community' as opposed to other sociological communities.

Gaborone Muslim Community: Towards a Definition and Understanding

The term 'community' has been considered as an imprecise and ubiquitous one by social scientists;² despite their problems in offering a suitable definition, they have appropriated Tönnies' sociological model that helps to explain the term. The latter distinguished between two types of communities; the first is what he described as '*Gemeinschaft*' and the second as '*Gesellschaft*.' In the case of the former, it refers to a community that expresses feeling and the latter refers to associations that make up the community. Tönnies himself prefers to view community as the greater and more important entity than society; he argued that society is in essence made up of communities.

Community is thus the very foundation upon which society is based or created. The community is "...usually associated with an array of positive connotations such as solidarity, familiarity, unity of purpose, interest and identity."³ Social scientists have, however, generally accepted the idea that it may be defined as a "type of collectivity or social unit" or "a type of social relations or sentiments." By collectivity is meant that the group shares a defined physical space or geographical area, and shares common traits or has a sense of belonging; and that it maintains social ties and that their interaction with one another shapes them into a distinct social entity such as ethnic or religious community.⁴

From amongst the different religious communities in Botswana, the Muslim community stands out as one of the more significant ones; aspects of their significance will be elaborated upon later in this article. However, since the focus is upon the Gaborone Muslim community it can be cogently argued that they fit within the definition and the explanation provided by Rabinowitz and others; the Gaborone Muslim community shares a physical geographical area and is made up of a variety of socio-linguistic and ethnic groups. And these different groups, inter alia socialize with one another in the business arena, participate with one another in religious functions, such as the celebration of the birth of the prophet, and involve themselves with one another in select sporting codes. And whilst many of this community's members are associated with their respective linguistic groups such as the Swahili speakers who are economic migrants from East Africa or Urdu speakers who are

² D Rabinowitz's 'Community Studies: Anthropological,' in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, (eds.) Neil J Smelser & Paul B Baltes, 2001, New York: Elsevier, vol. 4:2387–2389, and BD Jacobs mentions in his 'Community Sociology,' in IESBS:2383–2387 that the term is "open to wide interpretation." Also consult Horace M Miner's 'Community – Society Continue' in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, ed. David L Sills 1972, New York: Macmillan Co. & Free Press, vol. 3:174–180, reprint edition.

³ See Rabinowitz p. 2387.

⁴ Victor Azarya's 'Community,' in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, eds. Adama Kuper & Jessica Kuper, 1996, London: Routledge. He points out that the "community" is a "type of social unit" or "a type of social relations or sentiments", which share physical geographical space and common traits such as a sense of belonging that brings about interaction that shapes it further into a distinct social entity, namely a religious community.

economic migrants from South Asia or any other organizations and associations, they see themselves as part and parcel of the Gaborone Muslim community.

Basic Background Information

Botswana is a fairly big country (528,000 sq km) with, according to the 2003 UN statistics, a small population of just about 1,8m people; most of them are located along the eastern border of this landlocked state – surrounded by Namibia in the west and north, Zimbabwe in the east and South Africa in the south – because the western region is covered by the Kalahari Desert. Located in this part of the country are popular game reserves such as Central Kgalagadi and Khutse Game Reserve; and slightly to its north are the Okavango Delta and the Chobe National Park. It has a few significant towns scattered around the country; some of them are Lobatse, Mamuno, Chanzi, Maun, Francistown, Serowe and Mahalapye. Gaborone, founded in 1890, became the capital of this state in 1965; this city has grown into a sprawling city with a population estimated in 1992 at 140,000 and in 2002 at about 200,000.

Most of the Muslims are located in the capital city; however, many have also settled in the aforementioned towns and a handful of villages. The Muslims form part of Gaborone's growing multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious communities. Many family networks that grew and spread over the years contributed to the formation of the Gaborone Muslim community; some of the more well-known families are the Abdullah, Arbi, Bhamjee, Chand and Dada families. The *Botswana Muslim Directory* published in 2002⁵ gives a fair overview of the individuals and families in Gaborone and the other towns around the country.

The Muslim Community: Continuity and Change

According to the useful studies of Parret and Amanze, the Muslims resided mainly in the other towns such as Lobatse and Ramotswa before relocating to Gaborone. Some of them trekked to Botswana's hinterland to pursue their trades, and others remained in the aforementioned towns. Their spread to other parts of the country and the changes that had occurred over the years had pushed them into considering ways and means of being represented. The Muslims of Lobatse and Ramotswa thus mooted the idea of forming an association that would represent all of the Muslims in Bechuanaland; this became a reality during 1963 when the Bechuanaland Muslim Association (hereafter BMA), which was later baptized as the Botswana Muslim Association because of the renaming of the country, came into being.

A quick dip into BMA's constitution⁶ shows that as an organization it covers a wide range of activities. It thus has a variety of aims and objectives; some which are to:

- care for the general concerns of the Botswana Muslims;
- build mosques and other religious institutions;
- establish madrassas and Muslim schools;
- encourage the formation of Islamic centers in different parts of the country;

⁵ Dr Mukram Sheikh was the compiler and editor of this directory and it was published under the auspices of the BMA.

⁶ BMA printed an undated (circa 1997) twenty page constitution that was circulated at the BMA's AGM on 16th September 2001. Prior to this meeting the GMC held its elections on the 16th August 2001; both meetings were held at the mosque complex. The AGM after the 2001 meeting took place during March 2004.

- collect funds for its socio-religious activities;
- administer the affairs of the Botswana Muslims; and
- provide scholarships to needy students.

The BMA, whose first chairperson was Mr Arbi, took charge of all the activities on behalf of the growing Muslim community. They were thus involved in 1961 in laying the foundations for the Crescent School that later became a state controlled school in Lobatse; and the BMA also threw its weight behind the building of the first mosque in the country in 1967.

However, as Gaborone gained prominence as the capital and the commercial centre of Botswana, Muslims slowly began to work towards creating religio-educational structures and institutions that would give them a sense of identity. Thus, it was observed, that the foundations for its Jumu's mosque was laid way back in the 1970s; prior to this the Muslims performed their prayers in the garage of a house belonging to Mr Angamian. BMA took charge of all activities in Gaborone and tasked themselves with the building of the mosque. One of the most prominent persons to serve the community was Shaykh Ali Mustapha, a Surinam born and Karachi/Madina trained theologian. A year after the Muslims of Botswana hosted the first SADC Muslim conference in 1977, which was under the auspices of the Riyadh, based World Assembly of Muslim Youth and the Southern Africa Islamic Youth Conference that had its headquarters in Durban, the shaykh was appointed on a full-time basis. The shaykh played a crucial role in drawing many Batswana to Islam, mainly young adults.⁷ He only remained here until 1989.⁸ And by then the total Muslim population reached 1,500.

Subsequent to Shaykh Mustapha's departure there seems to have been a lull in missionary activities; however, in the meantime the Libyan embassy has been able to offer a few motswanas to pursue Islamic studies in Tripoli with the hope of continuing missionary work in Gaborone and surrounding areas. In any case, the missionary activities that Shaykh Mustapha had left behind was later taken up by Shaykh Hassan, a Rwandese who is intimately familiar with Islam and currently one of the teaching staff at Al-Nur Muslim school, who had succeeded him. Although he and a group of others have been serving on the BMA's dawah committee, there is no substantial evidence to prove that their input has substantially changed the statistics of the Gaborone Muslim population in particular, or the Botswana Muslim population at large.

The Statistics

The statistics are generally far from accurate since individuals do not divulge all the data, and as far as has been established, the earlier surveys generally did not request the individuals to indicate their religious affiliation. According to Central Statistics Office of Botswana in 1991 the Muslim population reached 3,628.⁹ Between 1991 and 2001, no radical increase in their numbers is noted; the 2001 statistics¹⁰ reveal that their numbers stand at 5,036. Arguments for this increase between 1991 and 2001 may be attributed not so much

⁷ According to Amanze (2000), most of them were from the underprivileged class, who were not well educated and not influential politically.

⁸ The shaykh returned to Southern Africa on a lecture tour and en route visited Botswana with the hope of taking up an appointment at one of the local mosques; he came during the early part of 2003.

⁹ Cf. Amanze (2000).

¹⁰ These can be obtained from the Central Statistics Office in Gaborone. Also refer to Muhammed Haron's 'Botswana's Population Census 2001: An analysis and interpretation of its different Religious Traditions', a 30 page report that was completed for the CSO at the end of October 2003.

to procreation or conversion but rather to an influx of expatriates from South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), East and Southern Africa (Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Malawi and Mozambique, Zimbabwe and, of course, South Africa); small numbers of Arabs have also trickled in from Egypt and sister states. And the close proximity of Zimbabwe and South Africa has also given rise to a continuous in-and-out flow of Muslim traffic because of familial and commercial ties.¹¹

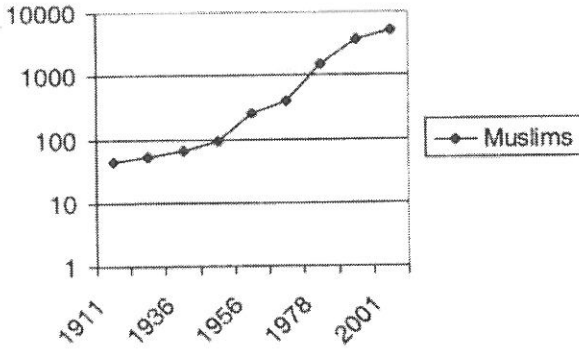
The mix of religio-ethnic groups has created a vibrant and diverse Muslim community; most of these groups usually follow their motherland traditions and thus cause them to remain in close contact with their specific linguistic and ethnic groups. For example, the Kiswahili speakers would normally huddle together at the mosque before or after the performance of their daily ritual prayers, and the same can be said for those speaking the different South Asian official languages and diverse dialects. Unfortunately, the Botswana statistics did not take into account all of these aspects since these were migrant economic workers whose position does not impact upon the future of the Botswana population; however, if they had to be considered it would have been financially burdensome on the government coffers.

Be that as it may, according to the 2001 census, it seems to reflect that the community did not expand numerically over the past 10 years; if the figures¹² recorded by Amanze are more or less accurate, then there has been no significant increase since that time; the 2001 stats reveal that the growth rate between 1991 and 2001 was indeed marginal, and thus does not leave much room for a detailed comparative analysis. However, despite the unsatisfactory statistics, it might be possible to obtain accurate figures if the small Muslim community does a survey for themselves, and compares theirs to the census figures; something like this was apparently done during the course of 2002 when they compiled a register of Muslim individuals and companies in Botswana. Whilst this might appear to be a sound solution to the problem, it may in fact exacerbate it. Instead of offering a way out of the statistical impasse, it might create more of a statistical problem. A conclusion on this issue had been reached by Samia El-Badrey, an Arab-American demographer, who made the point that the data of the group doing the survey “tend to be higher than reality because the sources want to make sure that their numbers are high.”¹³ It might be appropriate to make use of the periodical chart that shows the slow growth of Muslims over the years; Amanze’s data (2001:41) and BC 2001 have been taken together and is thus shown in the figure on the next page:

¹¹ The reader’s attention should be drawn to the fact that the Indian community should be further divided into (a) those who form part of two to three generations of Indians that have become motswana, (b) those who have become naturalized after having migrated from other parts of Southern Africa (South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, East Africa (Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania) and South Asia (Indians, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis), and (c) those who have remained here for many years but have chosen not to become Botswana citizens and demonstrated loyalty to their countries of birth. Distinction should also be made between the latter groups, who form the majority of Muslims in Botswana, from the African Muslims who also hail from Southern and East Africa and who – like their Indian counterparts – came as economic migrants; amongst the African Muslims are Rwandans, Burundians, Kenyans, Malawians, South Africans and Ugandans.

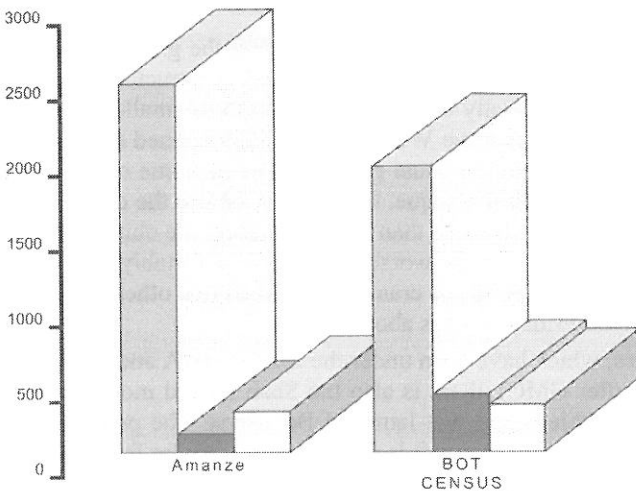
¹² That is the 3,000 in 1991.

¹³ Quoted in Daniel Pipes 2001.



The periodical chart gives an overview of the growth of the Muslims since 1911 in Botswana until the year 2001. A close look informs one that the rate has been steady throughout the early 20th century – in 1911 there were only 44 and by 1946 they had only reached 94; this, however, changed between 1964 and 1978 when the numbers jumped from 384 to 1 500, as well as by 1991 when they reached 3 628; after this period the numbers stabilized. They are currently being challenged by the fair growth amongst the Hindus and Bahais respectively that have almost outgrown the Muslims within the last few decades.

And in the figure below, the research extracted the statistics that indicated the number of Muslims who reside in three of Botswana’s major cities, and when these numbers are added they consist of just over 50% of the total Botswana Muslim population; out of the total of 5 036, these cities are the location of 2 673 Muslims. It clearly illustrates that since the early 1990s the Gaborone Muslims’ numbers dropped by 579 as compared to the numbers presented by the BC 1991 survey. The opposite is observed when viewing the statistics for Francistown and Lobatse respectively; in the case of the former the increase was over 200% while in Lobatse it was 37%.



The comparative figures in the figure above and the table below give one an accurate view of comparative growth rates from 1991 to 2001. The census figures reflect the fall in numbers in the case of Gaborone and the increase in both Lobatse and Francistown respectively:

| | Census 1991 Amanze | Census 2001 Cso-Bots |
|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Gaborone | 2 555 | 1 976 |
| Lobatse | 280 | 317 |
| Francistown | 115 | 390 |
| Total | 2 950 | 2 583 |

There has been a general flow of Muslims from the smaller towns and cities to Gaborone, which is located in the economic, political and cultural hub of Botswana. And because of the gradual increase in the Muslim population in Gaborone, the BMA was forced to consider erecting another mosque to accommodate the increasing numbers. In principle the BMA adopted this resolution and eventually laid the foundations in 2002; they also then had to think along the lines of appointment of extra theologians to assist in the affairs of running the respective mosques.

The Mosques and Religious Leadership

The mosque has always acted as a central meeting point for the secular and devoted Muslims. In Botswana the first mosque was completed in 1967 in the town of Lobatse, about 67km from Gaborone. However, since Gaborone only became the capital city more or less at the same time, its nascent Muslim community had no mosque and thus had to perform their daily prayers, and particularly their Friday congregational prayers, in the garage of one of their co-religionists. However, as their numbers were on the increase, the demand for a mosque was considered to be one of the priorities. They then acquired a plot that was conveniently located near the African Mall, which was then the city centre. The foundations were laid and constructed in the mid 1970s, and it became popularly known as the central mosque.

And since the central mosque became small in accommodating the growing number of worshippers and their vehicles, another mosque was planned and constructed during 2002 and completed by August 2003. The capacity of the central mosque is smaller than that of the new one, which has been built in Gaborone West, and officially opened on the 30th of August after the maghrib salat (i.e. the sunset ritual prayers). The new one can accommodate 800 compared to the 600 at the central mosque. On Fridays, before the opening of the new mosque, it was filled to capacity with more than 750 (excluding the children) squeezing in. When looking at the capacity of both, the worshippers can comfortably perform their prayers without being squeezed out of the line or crammed between two other worshippers. The total numbers for these two on Friday reaches about 1 500.

In addition to these mosques, which have been under the care of BMA and its Gaborone Management Committee (hereafter GMC), there is also the Shah Khalid mosque that was established in June 1995 by the Ahle Sunni wal-Jamat of Botswana. The premises where the mosque is located was formerly a house; and it is not stationed very far from the central mosque and draws a crowd of more than 250 on Fridays. Theological disputes between the Brelvis and Deobandi schools of thought have spilled over from India wherever their followers went, and because of these the latter mosque was viewed as a Brelvi oriented institu-

tion, but despite these differences a few members of the community who have family members in both groups have tried to maintain the doors of communication open when it comes to certain activities such as performing 'Id' salah together at the An-Nur School; the first 'Idul-Fitr' salah was performed in November 2000 at the school. On the 1 February 2004, when Idul Adha was celebrated, the Muslim community performed the 'Id' ritual prayer at the National Stadium opposite the University of Botswana and a walking distance away from the central mosque. More than 1 600 congregants (mainly males) participated in the special ritual prayers, which were led by the veteran Imam, popularly known Qari Sayyid.

Religious Leadership in the Community

The Quari and a number of others mentioned earlier form part of the growing religious leadership that serves the Gaborone Muslims; these individuals are paid by the respective mosque committees. Many of those who have become part of this group have trained in Muslim theological seminaries in Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan and South Africa.

Whilst it is an accepted fact that there is no 'priesthood' in Islam, the emergence and significance of the theologians' role over the many decades cannot be underestimated nor overlooked. They came to play a crucial if not valuable role in cementing and guiding the Muslim communities in particularly majority non-Muslim environments such as Botswana. Over the years the community had the service of Maulana Abdul Kader, an Indian born and trained theologian; the latter first acted as Imam in Francistown and later moved to Gaborone to contribute to the religious welfare of the community. Although retired he still makes his input to the community. He was later joined by the Indian trained Maulana Salem, who hails from Bosmont (Johannesburg); the latter worked for about three years before moving into the private sector to run his own business. And for a short stint of approximately two years, Shaykh Muhammad Moerat from Paarl, worked for the community. Then Maulana Mall, a theologian trained in the respected Indian based Darul Ulum in Nadva, Lucknow, accompanied his wife, Munira, who joined the emerging and developing An-Nur Muslim School. Although he holds no full-time post in the community, he has been teaching at his home and conducting Arabic and Tafsir classes at the mosque in the madrasah section over the past few years at irregular intervals. In addition to these, he has been producing *Minaret*, a monthly tabloid for the community, over the past nine years. These are but some of the prominent theologians that currently reside and work in Gaborone. They thus compliment the services rendered by the imams that have been appointed at the three mosques to work on a full-time basis.

The Imams at the Mosques

That said, it is an established fact that there is a sizeable number of maulanas/imams who are stationed in and around Gaborone. The two big mosques, namely the central and new Gaborone West mosques, are presently served by five imams, four of whom were trained in theology. Qari Sayyid Sahib may be considered one of the longest surviving imams in Botswana who was appointed in the late 1970s during the time Shaykh Ali Mustapha, the Surinamese, had joined and served the community for quite a long period (from 1977 till 1989). Qari Sayyid came from India, via South Africa, as a partially trained theologian. He was, however, viewed as someone suitable for the Imamate post because of his extremely melodious recitation of the Quran; he was in fact well known in the region for having had a powerfully unique and outstanding voice that has served him well over the years.

Later the Surti family landed in Gaborone and Maulana Surti and his son, who also qualified as a maulana, became the main imams in the early 1990s; although the father has retired, he still acts as the one who corrects the Quranic recitation of the Imams/huffaz during the special evening Ramadan prayers. And the son still operates as one of the Imams; amongst his duties have been the leading of the prayers every alternate week, teaching at An-Nur Islamic school and the adjacent madrasah. During his time one of the Imams who was appointed was Shaykh Ismail Davids who was born in Cape Town's famous Bo-Kaap.¹⁴ By the early part of 2000 the situation changed and the GMC appointed Maulana Dawood Dhansey, another Capetonian, as the principal Imam; he was, however, trained at the Zakariyya Darul-Ulum in Gauteng. In 2001 he was joined by yet another Capetonian, Shaykh Bashir Benjamin; the latter was trained in Pakistan and in Saudi Arabia respectively. During his imamate at the central mosque he made a good impression on the congregants for his good recitation and well-constructed Fridays' sermons. Since he leaned much towards tasawwuf, he was eventually lured away by members of the Shah Khalid mosque where the congregants are generally practitioners of Sufism. At the beginning of 2002 he requested to be transferred to that mosque; here he acted as co-imam with Shaykh Rashid, a Malawian trained theologian. Since Shaykh Benjamin's family conditions changed in Cape Town, he decided to resign in January 2004 to return to his home city.

Towards the end of 2002 the need for an extra hand at the central mosque led GMC to appoint Maulana Siraj du-Din Parker, who also hails from Cape Town but had been teaching in Johannesburg for quite a while; he was also trained at Zakariyya Darul-Ulum. And in mid 2003, Maulana Sulayman Mohamed, who had been Imam and missionary worker in Nelspruit and the surrounding areas for a few years, joined the two imams to serve the two main mosques on a rotating basis.

The number of theologically trained individuals has gradually increased over the years, and is mainly located in Gaborone. Perhaps this sets the stage for the formation of Botswana's own theological body that would serve the needs of BMA in particular and the community at large. The BMA has generally been dependent upon the opinions that are handed out by the Jami'at ul-Ulama of Gauteng.¹⁵ In fact, they have always been dependent upon the latter body since the locally based theologians preferred not to exercise their individual opinions on sensitive, religious matters. The only theologian who ventured to contribute in this area is Maulana Mall; he has done so via column 'Darul Ifta', which appears on the back page of his regular monthly paper, *Minaret*. More comments upon the paper will follow later in this article. These theologians have however not only acted as Imams but also served as religious teachers to disseminate basic Islamic education in the madrasah and home-based schools.

The Muslim Educational Institutions

Amongst the many crucial institutions that helped to shape the identity of minority Muslim communities have been the establishment of their educational institutions. Much effort has been made to set up these institutions where the Muslim child could be trained in basic Islamic theology, which pertains to their belief system and ritual practices. In the past the mosque was used to disseminate these theological concepts and practices; however, with the expansion and transformation of the Muslim community monies have been invested to

¹⁴ Popularly known as 'The Malay Quarters.'

¹⁵ BMA is in personal contact with members of the JU such as Maulana Bam who pays regular visits to Gaborone and the surrounding cities. Visit their website: www.jamiat.org.za

create separate Muslim educational structures to deal with these specific religious objectives.

The Madrasahs

The Muslim community has been concerned with the educational developments of their children and thus established madrasahs at the mosques as was the case with the central and the Shah Khalid mosques respectively. The Madrasah Himayatul Islam, for example, has been running regularly under the principalship of the local imams; during 2001 Shaykh Bashir Benjamin, who was trained in Medina and hails from Cape Town, was in charge; he has subsequently shifted to the Shah Khalid mosque to continue with the same activities that he carried out at the central mosque and the aforementioned madrasah. In 2001 he and his team produced *Our Message Newsletter* to highlight the activities completed for that year. The new mosque, the GMC decided, will remain without madrasah facilities until such time as the opportunity lends itself, and the demand increases, to open up another branch of the madrasah at the new mosque.

The School¹⁶

These madrasahs are, however, complemented by the An-Nur School, which had its humble beginnings in 1991 at the central mosque. The prime mover behind this project was Dr Fazlur Moorad, a member of BMA and lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana. The primary school children were housed in porter cabins for a while until BMA was able to secure a big plot which is about five minutes' drive from Botswana's small international Sir Seretse Khama airport, and more than 15 minutes' drive from the center of the city when the traffic is heavy. Over the few years, the school slowly built up its curriculum and programme phasing in the primary and then the junior secondary and senior secondary respectively; the latter began in 1997.

This was done under the able guidance and administrative leadership of Mr Nasr Ebrahim, the former principal who was born in KwaZulu-Natal and graduated in Islamic Studies from the University of Durban-Westville in South Africa. During his stint, which ended during the mid-year of 2002, he was able to set good educational standards and held a firm hand over the school's activities and development. Annually he had his staff hold fetes and produced the *An-Nur Magazine*, and also handed out *Al-Nur Muslim School Update* at irregular intervals in order to keep all stakeholders up to date with regards to events at schools. During the absence of a principal, Mrs Munira Mall was given the task of heading the school. At the beginning of 2003, the school board appointed Mr Abdul-Majid Khan as the new principal; the latter, who comes from KZN, had a long and rich experience in the educational arena.

The Library¹⁷

An integral part of any school is the presence of a library. In fact, it may be described as the engine room for the learners and educators; a place where knowledge is literary stored in books (on the shelves) and retrieved when desired. It is a part of the school structure that

¹⁶ Refer to Munira Mall's 'Al-Nur: Heraldng an ear of Enlightenment' in *Future-Gen* (July-September 2000:12-15_ in which she provided an overview of the functioning of and programmes at the school.

¹⁷ Consult Muhammed Haron's 'A window into the world of personal and communal libraries: case studies from the Cape Muslim Community' in *Current Writing: Texts and Reception in Southern Africa* 13(2):56-65, 2001.

has played a pivotal role in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Muslims have generally been aware of the importance of setting up these structures to emphasize the central role it plays in the formation of the community's identity. Two types of libraries have emerged in many Muslim minority communities; the first is the communal libraries and the second is the personal libraries. In the case of Gaborone, which has a small Muslim population, only one communal library exists at present.

Public: School and Mosque

One sector of the school and the mosque that played and still plays a key role in keeping the community informed is the library. The school has a small library with a variety of books including texts that deal with Islam. On 27 November 2000 a fete was held to raise money for the library; more than P70 000 was collected giving it an enormous boost. However, the library at the central mosque has understandably a larger collection since it serves a bigger readership and with the general public as its target audience. As a matter of fact, its location opposite the main campus of the University of Botswana has attracted the attention of those students who have been doing research on aspects of Islam.

The mosque library has a collection of videos and books in English that covers a wide spectrum and also includes works by non-Muslim scholars.¹⁸ There are a few translated texts such as *Sahih al-Bukhari* and works in Arabic such as *Fath ul-Bari* and *Sharh ibn 'Aquil*. The videos, it is estimated, amount to 120 cassettes, and the books come to about less than 1 000; this includes those that appear in volumes. The collection is fair and has been serving the needs of not only the Muslim community but also the students who have been studying semester – basic and advanced – courses on Islam in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana since 2001. And since the university has been able to offer these courses the collection on Islamic literature has steadily been growing.

Private and Personal

Mention should also be made of the rich, personal library of Mr Shamshad Khan. The latter purchased and bought books over the years and built up a sizeable collection that is comparable to the collection at the mosque library complex; in addition to the books, he also has a range of audio cassettes and videos dealing with a variety of themes such as *Women in Islam* and the Dr Ansari South African lecture series. One can confidently say that Mr Khan has the best private collection of Islamic literature in Gaborone.

The Muslim Media

The media has and continues as an important vehicle via which identities of communities are shaped. The Muslim print media in particular has been at the forefront in making a substantial contribution in this regard. And with the entrance of the electronic media into the market, it further enhanced the position of these communities in that they could use these mediums to become connected instantly with their co-religionists regarding relevant issues or matters of mutual concern. The community radio stations that came into existence during the last few years have radically changed the scenario, not only in their respective cities, but also in the region. In fact, South Africa's liberal policies on community broadcasting has made tremendous inroads in this direction; and this has indirectly also benefited the

¹⁸ A random survey was done on 23 August 2003.

neighbouring states such as Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Attention should first be turned to the print media before commenting on the electronic media.¹⁹

Local Tabloids, Magazines and Newsletters

This small community has been active on all fronts including the media as noted earlier when reference was made to *An-Nur's School Magazine*. Even before this period attempts were made to sustain other small publications such as *Al-Mujaahidah*; this was, however, difficult and problematic. Renewed efforts were made in the 1990s; here reference can be made to the fairly regular A4 size tabloid that has been produced on a monthly basis by South African citizens currently resident in Botswana, namely Maulana Mall and his wife Munira; whilst the Maulana gives full attention to the tabloid and offers religious classes, his wife acts as deputy principal of An-Nur School. They have been publishing *Minaret* since 1995, and have a set clientele; i.e. the worshippers on Fridays. The paper cannot be described as a newspaper in the conventional sense of the word since it does not tackle hard news or include investigative reports. Maulana Mall, who is described as progressive by some when compared to the other expatriate Maulanas, writes the editorial and comments on international events such as the Iraqi war, and the Bosnian crises. He also lifts articles of interest from international Muslim magazines. Very little information is shared about the Botswana Muslim community; here and there, there might be an input but this is kept to a minimum.

An A4 size magazine, which tried to fill that gap, was *Future-Gen: Unveiling the Truth*; it took off in 1996 but appeared irregularly over the past few years. The magazine is edited and run by Ishaq Poeletswe, a motsana who studied English and Creative Writing at the University of Massachusetts in the USA and had embraced Islam at an early age. He attempted to produce a quarterly publication that would capture the interest of the disillusioned urban youth in Botswana. And since they were his target group, he blended the issues that appeared with features on Islam. One of his features was a focus on Islam in Botswana, and he also tried to demonstrate through these features how closely the Botswana culture was to Islam. In the issues that hit the market, Professor Yvonne Haddad's (the Hartford Seminary based professor of Islamic Studies) articles appeared prominently. However, due to circumstances the magazine did not and could not appear regularly as planned, but this will probably change in the near future since the editor's circumstances also changed. It might be in order to mention that Mr Poeltswe has begun with a translation into Setswana of selected Quranic chapters; these appeared in the *Mmegi's* Setswana insert titled *Naledi* towards the end of January 2004 and during the month of February; he has apparently received a fair response to this set of articles/translations.

Meanwhile, another two publications 'hit the mosques' during the past three years. The first is the *MYM Newsletter*, which is run by the Muslim youth affiliated to the BMA; this group meets regularly every week and tries to organize functions that would draw their interest. The magazine, which is a four pager and appears in A4 size, started towards the end of 2000 and seems to appear quarterly. It is spearheaded by the chairperson of the MYM, Naeem Bhamjee. Since it is a very basic newsletter it lifts articles from prominent writers on international issues, and includes a note from the chairperson, notices for the youth, and

¹⁹ Read Muhammed Haron's: 'Voices from Beyond and Within the Southern African Frontiers: The Muslim Print Media' (forthcoming) in *Islam Today* no. 21, 2004; 'The South African Muslims' making (Air)waves during the period of transformation' in *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15(2):111–114, 2002; and 'South African Muslims' venture into cyberspace' in *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* 6:20–25, 2003.

an interview with GMC members regarding the running of the affairs at the mosque, and a general article on Islam. The second is *Islamic Newsnet*, which started circulating in 2001. The newsletter is produced by Mr Mukhtar Ahmad, a former GMC member and a businessman who was born in Mozambique. He has become extremely concerned with international and local affairs and decided to contribute by lifting information from the internet and elsewhere and sharing these with the Gaborone Muslim community; in addition to this, he also forwards information that he finds on the websites to those who communicate via e-mail.

South African and other Foreign Print Media

However, these are not the only printed media that float about – there are also the Jami'atul-Ulama of Gauteng's *Ar-Rasheed* – which keeps the Muslims abreast of issues in South Africa and elsewhere. There is also the Lenasia based *Al-Kausar* and the Laudium based *Soutul Islam*, which one picks up when attending the Shah Khalid mosque, and Fordsburg based *The Muslim Woman: A Magazine for Today's Woman*, which regularly lands in the hands of members of Al-Muslimah, a social welfare organization in Gaborone. Efforts have been made to bring Durban based MYM mouthpiece, Al-Qalam, and Muslim Views, the Cape based monthly, to Gaborone – these however, came to naught. Before moving on to the social welfare groups in the city, mention should be made of one laudable effort that was not repeated again; this was a one-off issue with the popular weekly critical Gaborone based newspaper, *Mmegi: The Reporter. Botswana's largest Independent Weekly* (Vol 17 No. 50). Mr Shamshad Khan, a prominent entrepreneur who served as mayor of one of the towns a few years back and who commentates regularly on the Middle Eastern crises on the Botswana Television and radio, jointly printed a special back-to-back issue titled *Alternate Press* (Issue No. 1) on the Palestinian intifada from 15–21 December 2000. The contribution was very informative to the motswanas who relished the fact that they were able to read a different and refreshing story. And one of the most refreshing contributions to the *Mmegi Newspaper*, which has since 2003 become a daily, is a series of articles in Setswana on the Quran with selected translations;²⁰ Ishaz Poeloetswe had the inspiration to initiate this project with the idea of sharing his inspiration with many others that are interested in Islam and its culture.

The Muslim Radio and TV Stations

Since Botswana's neighbour, South Africa, adopted a new media policy the moment a new government came into power in 1994, it also benefited from this. In South Africa Mr Ashraf, who worked and invested much of his funds in the electronic sector and lives in Lenasia, decided to establish a satellite radio station that could beam to different parts of the world. This got off the ground in 2001 and has become the popular medium via which Muslim communities in the SADC region were able to connect with one another. Channel Islam International has been broadcasting to more than 55 countries and Botswana has been

²⁰ This might not have been the first attempt to translate excerpts from the Quran into Setswana; however, this, as far as is known, is the first attempt made by a motswana. See *Naledi*, which appears as a separate insert in *Mmegi*'s February 2004 (on Wednesdays) issues on the following dates: 28 Hirikgong 2004, p. 4; 04 Tlhakole 2004, p. 3 and 11 Tlhakole 2004. The series was titled: 'Dikgaolo tse di tlophilweng tsa Kgorana.' In fact, in June 2001 a small group set up the Botswana Translation Bureau of Islamic Literature with the intention of distributing translated material in Setswana and other local African languages; its base is in Lobatse and it distributed the pamphlet titled: *Tthagiso-Leseding ka ga Tumelo ya Islam*. There has been no trace of other pamphlets subsequent to this one.

one of those that are tuning in. Since the special world space radios were made available Muslims in Gaborone in particular and those in other towns around the country have been kept informed about Muslim affairs via this station; this implies that the Gaborone Muslims need not spend funds to set up their own station if ever that opportunity comes their way.

The GMC has been instrumental in not only selling the radios to the public but also invited the radio to broadcast live for one weekend from the central mosque complex on 1 June (Friday) and 2 June (Saturday) 2001. The station attracted many Muslims, particularly from the different social welfare and educational organizations, living in Gaborone and the surrounding towns, to share their information about Botswana Muslim life.

In addition to this satellite station another has gone the same route and broadcasts from its premises in Durban. This is the Al-Ansaar Foundation managed radio station known as Al-Ansaar Radio Station. Although the station has been in Durban for a few years, it only joined the world satellite group of stations at the end of October 2003 to coincide with the month of fasting. However, it is not on air 24 hours a day and only broadcasts from 17:00 till midnight. The Gaborone Muslims therefore have access to this site too.

But apart from these radio stations, the Muslims who own satellite dishes have also had the opportunity to tune into the TV channels of many Muslim countries. One of the popular TV stations amongst the Arabs and those who are familiar with Arabic is the Iqra TV channel, which broadcasts from Saudi Arabia; the other is Al-Jazeera. The latest channel to go on air is Islam TV known as iTV; the channel is sponsored by the Pretoria based Adam brothers and a few South African Muslim investors. It was launched towards the end of 2003. These are but a few of the many other channels that the Gaborone Muslims have access to.

Social Welfare Groups

The community has generally been active in charitable work. Parrett, for example, showed in her article the contributions made by the Muslims in 1988 when there was extensive damage caused by the floods. This has been the general trend amongst them, and the government has acknowledged their input.

Al-Muslimah

Amongst the most active and notable social welfare organizations is Al-Muslimah. This organization started in 1992 and, for the past 10 years, has undertaken a variety of projects that would serve the needs of the larger Motswana society. It has been amongst those organizations that have been taken seriously by the government for their involvement in social welfare work. Its wide range of activities include feeding schemes, raising funds for specific purposes such as erecting bus shelters for taxi and bus passengers, fitting out a biology laboratory and purchasing a school bus for Al-Nur Muslim School in 2000.

It has also jointly organized activities with other organizations to achieve certain objectives. One such effort was with the Cancer Association of Botswana; they had a jumbo sale to obtain funds for the transportation and treatment of cancer patients. After Botswana experienced flash floods, the organization, with the BMA and affiliates, collected and donated cash and kind for the flood victims to the value of P130 000.00. It has been pro-active in assisting HIV/Aids victims and their families; this they did with the help of the Nurse's Association. And it also gave a hand to the Centre for Deaf in Ramotswa, the Cheshire Foundation for the Disabled and Rehabilitation Centres in different parts of Gaborone and surrounding towns. On the whole, this small organization has made a fair amount of input

to the society over the past few years without being given the necessary recognition that it deserves.²¹

Ya-Seen Group

It was noted that Al-Muslimah was an active group known in the public arena for their contributions; although these have gone unnoticed. Another group that has been working informally and very responsibly is the Ya-Seen Group; the group consists of a few males who come from various national and professional backgrounds. Some of their wives are also connected with the AL-Muslimah group. Ya-Seen group has been working quietly with the blessing of the BMA, and has been assisting imams, dawah workers in and outside the country. One of its most recent projects is the Shashi Islamic Centre located near Francistown in the northern part of the country. Its objective is to help Muslims in local communities, and empower them with the necessary structures and skills to operate and oversee their own activities.

BMA–GMC

Although Al-Muslimah nor the Ya-Seen group has any rival, other affiliates of BMA have also been involved in social welfare work over the years. In fact, many social welfare organizations from neighbouring countries as well as from those as far a field as South Asia have been requesting funds through the offices of BMA; each of these groups have earmarked their specific projects, and have been draining the resources of the BMA itself. A quick list of and glance at some of those who came around will give an overall picture as to the types of persons they are, groups they represent, and the activities they undertake. During the early part of 2003 representatives from the Cape Town based Hafiz School (Schaap Kraal, Zeekoevlei), they were later followed in July by Maulana Qutbuddin who represented the Habibiyah Mosque Complex (Rylands), thereafter in May, Dr Yusuf Da Costa represented the Naqshbadiyyah Order to set up a centre for his organization, and in August 2003 members of Pagad came on a collection drive to assist the families whose breadwinners have been apprehended and imprisoned for defeating the ‘ends of justice.’

That aside, BMA or more specifically GMC has also been doing welfare work by concentrating on a number of other activities. Its Zakar and Lillahi Committee, for example, sees to the Muslim refugees – mainly Somalis – from the Dukwe Refugee Camp north of Gaborone, contributes to needy students, gives to the poor, and distributes clothing and food to the indigent. On the whole the Muslims represented by the BMA have been active in all spheres particularly the social welfare sector; their presence has, however, also been visible in the social, cultural and political arena.

Socio-Cultural and Political Matters

Local Role Players

This profile of the Gaborone Muslims cannot be considered complete without mentioning a few other socio-cultural and political developments that took place during the last few decades. As has been the case in many other communities, individuals take the initiative to

²¹ *The Daily News* has consistently highlighted the contribution of this organization. In its issue of 6 February 2004 (p. 15) it included a photo of a house which the organization built for a family; Mrs Ruwayda Arbi – one of the main organizers also appears alongside the family in the photograph. Also see a brief article on the organization in the *MYM Newsletter* of October 2003.

participate in the affairs of the broader society. Persons such as Mr Shamshad Khan and others were quite active in the local politics; the latter, for example, became the deputy mayor of Gaborone at one stage and has done a tremendous amount of philanthropic work. Mr Sattar Dada was appointed an honorary member of the national ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party. In their specific capacities, they have been able to demonstrate the preparedness of Muslims to become involved with the society in general.

Shifting to the sporting arena, it is noted that Mr Ismail Bhamjee, who was formerly from South Africa and came to settle here because of his objections to the South African regime, became involved in the cultural affairs of the society and has been one of the key figures in placing the sporting fraternity on the map. For example, he represents Botswana and the region on the Africa Soccer federation. His inputs have been well received by the members of COSAF. It is however unfortunate that he lost the presidency of CAF at the January 2004 elections in Tunisia.

Visitors on Lecture Tours

Despite the drawbacks at the individual level and occasionally at the communal level, the community has been graced with the visits of a number of scholars and interest individuals. During the course of 2003, for example, Dr Deborah Washington was on a Southern African lecture tour; she is an Afro-American Muslim who has been active in her community back in the USA and came to share her experience and understanding with the Botswana Muslim community. Another was Shaykh Ali Mustapha, who used to serve the community for almost 10 years; he came during mid-May 2003. In 2002 the community hosted Dr Irfaan Khan, the late Maulana Fazlur-Rahman Ansari's son-in-law, who was based at one of the mosques in New York City. He gave a series of lectures, which was popular amongst some of the congregants. Prior to his visit Dr Zakir Naik, the Muslim missionary from Mumbai, delivered lectures on Islam and Christianity; his lecture at the University of Botswana was well received because of his in-depth knowledge of the other religious traditions and their sacred scriptures.

The impact of these visitors is incalculable in that the Muslims in Botswana have generally been cut off from the South African Muslims who usually host many of these visitors. However, the close working relations between these two Southern African Muslim communities have chartered out new pathways in which closer cooperation is taking place. This type of connection will, it is assumed, yield good social and economic relations between the respective communities who will benefit mutually from these valuable visits.

The Muslim Community and Vision 2016

With this overview of the Muslim community we would like to address, albeit briefly, Vision 2016, which seems to have taken guidelines from Malaysia's Vision 2020. The project was set up by the government to present a long-term vision. It identifies major challenges that would need to be met in order to achieve the planned Vision. However, for this to succeed ultimately strategies have been proposed that would assist in this regard.

In the light of the challenges and the strategies that have been set out, a question may be posed: To what extent is the Muslim community aware of the document, and how is it working towards realizing those goals that have been covered by it? There are perhaps three responses to this question: The first would be that there is a general awareness but very few are acquainted with its contents; the second is that there is an acknowledgement that it exists but there is a general ignorance about its contents; and the third is that not much is

known about it because the Muslim leadership, particularly the BMA, has to popularize its contents among its constituencies and thus not much is known. If the latter is the case, then indeed the Muslim community seems to be operating in an isolated manner from the larger Batswana society. And if they conduct their affairs without taking into account the general concerns of the society, then it may be assumed that they would either be doomed to failure and their growth as a religious community would remain stagnant, or the indigenous members, who have embraced Islam, would probably raise the issues of discrimination or marginalization meted out by their predominantly Indian co-religionists whom they would eventually replace as the torch bearers of Islam in this country.

In fact, during the past few years the print and electronic media have highlighted some of these internal problems. The once weekly and – since late 2003 – now daily paper, *Mmegi*, has been from amongst those papers that have tried to uncover the issues that have been affecting the indigenous Batswana Muslims and the predominantly Indian Muslims.²² One of the sensitive matters that was debated on radio and TV during 2003 was the slaughtering of chickens, sheep and cows according to the religious laws laid down by Islamic law; there has been much ignorance about the rationale in this regard and lopsided debating has led to an impasse. The Batswana criticized the Muslims for dominating the meat market by imposing their rules and regulations without considering the Batswana. Their monopolization of the market means that they gain financially from it and in doing so, the rest is left out in the cold as regards a lucrative market.

Another matter that was raised in the print media prior to the ‘halaal’ debate was the relationship between the indigenous Batswana Muslims and the predominantly Indian Muslims who manage and control BMA. The former criticized the latter for discriminating against them, and for not creating enough opportunities for them to move up the ranks within the BMA. BMA, which is led by Mr Dada, who is a member of the ruling party, expectantly defended itself but gave no adequate response as to how it is structuring itself to create the opportunities. One glaring example, where there has been a lack of responsiveness on the part of BMA is to assist in training motswanas to eventually become Imams or huffaz. BMA has of course denied any wrongdoing and have been helping to close the gaps in other parts of the country. For example, there are individuals who were sent to Libya for training and others have been sent to Sudan to study Arabic. However, none of these individuals have to date been able to hold important portfolios in BMA. Unfortunately for the BMA, whilst efforts have been made, there were no concerted efforts to address these important issues that will dog them for the years to come. The matters dealt with here are just a few of many that will have to be given the necessary attention by BMA in order to advance its cause and at the same time to demonstrate it has taken *Vision 2016* seriously.

Conclusion

The BMA in particular and the Muslim community at large have been striving to make a contribution in different sectors of the society in Gaborone. They have demonstrated their willingness to make known their inputs whenever the opportunities arise. In the social sector, for example, they have been adequately represented by Al-Muslimah which had been

²² Mention should be made of the fact that Leslie Dodzi, a Motswana who had converted to Islam, had written a critical, unpublished paper on the Muslims in Botswana during the early part of the 1990s in order to improve the lot of the Batswana; members of the Indian Muslim community apparently reacted violently to the text since they disagreed with the analysis and information it contained.

active and whose presence can be seen at some of the bus shelters around the city. This is one indication of flying their Islamic flag high within a predominantly Christian city. The mere fact that this could be and is part of the order of the day reflects that the government has contributed towards creating a diverse but tolerant and respectful society.