

**Gaborone Muslim Community: A Vignette into their lives♦**

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**0 Introduction:**

Southern 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 have 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 last mentioned 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 entitled 'Muslims in Botswana;' this appeared in the *African Studies* journal (48[1]: 72-82, 1989)<sup>1</sup> that was based at the University of Witwatersrand. Subsequent to her exploratory study Dr. James Amanze, who was and still is a member of 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

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♦ My thanks goes to Dr. F. Moorad, UB staff member, and Mrs. Munira Mall, former senior teacher at Al-Nur High School in Gaborone, for having critically gone through the text and made valuable suggestions. Gratitude should also be expressed to Muhammad Arbi and Ishaq Poeletswe for their inputs. They are however not to be blamed for some of the incorrect information or mistakes that appear in the text.

<sup>1</sup> Mohamed Amra presented a paper entitled *Islam in Southern Africa: A Historical Perspective* (Durban: Islam in Africa Project) at the Islam in Africa Conference between 19-22 April 2001 at the Institute of Global Cultural Studies located at Binghamton University; in this paper he made ample use of Parratt's article for his coverage of Botswana on pages 9-11. However, he also based himself on Ms. Munira Mall's interview, a senior staff member at Al-Nur Muslim School.

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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<sup>2</sup>.

This article mainly focuses itself 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 that are around and 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 to also explain the notion of a 'religious community' as opposed to other sociological communities.

### 1. (Gaborone Muslim) Community: Towards a definition and understanding

The term 'community' has been considered as an imprecise and ubiquitous one by social scientists<sup>3</sup>; despite their problems in offering a suitable definition, they have appropriated Tonnes' 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. Tonnes 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."<sup>4</sup> 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 an ethnic or religious community<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See this author's review in *Botswana Records and Notes*, vol. 32, 2000, pp.217-218 for further comments on Amanze's contribution.

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

<sup>4</sup> See Rabinowitz p.2387.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Azarya's 'Community,' in *The Social Science Encyclopaedia*, eds. Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper, London: Routledge, 1996.He points out that the 'community' is a 'type of social unit' or a type of

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

### **2. 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; since the western region of the country is covered by the Kalahari desert, most of the population 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. Located in this part of the country are popular game reserves such as Central Kgalagadi and Khutse Game Reserve; and slightly to its north is the Okavango Delta and the Chobe National Park. It has a few significant towns scattered around the country; some of them are Lobatse, Ghanzi, 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 in 1992 estimated 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 mentioned towns and a handful in 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, Dada, Khan and Moorad families. The first family to have based itself in Gaborone is the Moorad family; they came to Tlokweng in 1960 and they were followed by the Osman Saidoo family in 1967, Ayoub Khan family in 1968, the Angamias and the Arbis. The *Botswana*

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social relations or sentiments', which share physical geographical space and common traits such as a sense of belonging that bring about interaction that shape it further into a distinct social entity, namely a religious community.

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*Muslim Directory* published in 2002<sup>6</sup> gives a fair overview of the individual and families in Gaborone and the other towns around the country.

### **2. 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 themselves to Gaborone. Some of them trekked to Botswana's hinterland to pursue their trade, and others remained in the mentioned 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 Bechuanaland Muslim Association (hereafter BMA), which was later baptised as the Botswana Muslim Association because of the renaming of the country, came into being.

A quick dip into BMA's constitution<sup>7</sup> 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 madrasahs and Muslim schools
- encourage the formation of Islamic centres in different parts of the country;
- 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 their weight behind the building of the first mosque in the country in 1967 in that town. The first appointed imam was Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan; the latter was trained as a Muslim theologian at Aligarh University in India and he

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Mukram Sheikh was the compiler & editor of this directory and it was published under the auspices of the BMA.

<sup>7</sup> BMA printed an undated (circa 1997?) twenty page constitution that was circulated at the BMA's AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2001. Prior to this meeting the Gaborone Management Committee of the main mosque held its elections on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2001; the latter as well as the earlier mentioned meeting were held at the mosque complex. The only other significant meeting after 2001 was the GMC's general meeting that took place during March 2004; at this meeting, which is held every three years, there was another election where new members came on board to drive the activities of the committee.

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came in 1961 when the school was opened. He was later joined by Mualan Kanti, another Indian trained theologian.

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'a mosque was laid way back in the 1970s; prior to this the Muslims performed their prayers in the house belonging to Mr. Angamia, who owned the Gaborone Garage next to the railway station. 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 Qari Sayid who was the first Imam (religious leader) and Muslim teacher; he initially came from Dhabel in India to serve at one of the mosques in Johannesburg's Lenasia and later shifted to Gaborone. Another important personality was Shaykh Ali Mustapha, a Surinam born and Karachi/Medina 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<sup>8</sup>. He only remained here until 1989<sup>9</sup>. And by then the total Muslim population reached 1,500.

Subsequent to Shaykh Mustapha's departure there seem to have been a lull in missionary activities; however, in the meanwhile the Libyan embassy has been able to offer a few Batswanas 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. 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; however, Shaykh Hassan's input in terms of doing missionary work amongst the local population has surpassed that of Shaykh Ali Mustapha by far..

### 4. The Statistics

The statistics are generally far from accurate since individuals do not give all the data, and as far as what has been established, the earlier surveys generally did not request the individuals to indicate their religious

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<sup>8</sup> According to Amanze (2000), most of them were from the underprivileged class, who were not well educated and not influential politically.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

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affiliation. According the Central Statistics Office of Botswana in 1991 the Muslim population reached 3,628<sup>10</sup>. Between 1991 and 2001, no radical increase in their numbers is noted; the 2001 statistics<sup>11</sup> reveal that their numbers stand at 5,036. Arguments for this increase between 1991 and 2001 may be attributed not to so much to procreation or conversion but rather to an influx of expatriates from South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), East & 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<sup>12</sup>.

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' positions do not impact upon the future of the Botswana population; however, if they had to be considered it would certainly have given a different picture of the number of Muslims in Botswana.

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 figures<sup>13</sup> 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 do a survey for themselves, and compare theirs to the census figures; something

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Amanze (2000).

<sup>11</sup> 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.

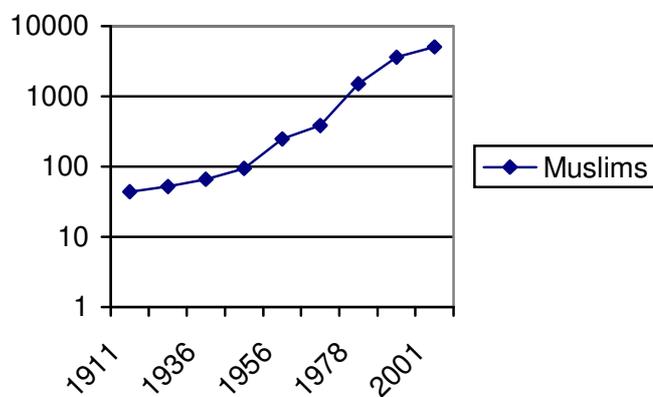
<sup>12</sup> The reader's attention should be drawn to the fact that the Indian community should be further divided into (a) those who form part of two to three generations of Indians that have become motswana, (b) those who have become naturalized after having migrated from other parts of Southern Africa (South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique), East Africa (Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania), & 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 in 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.

<sup>13</sup> That is the 3,000 in 1991.

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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 in fact may 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”<sup>14</sup>. It might be appropriate to make use of the periodical chart that shows the slow growth of Muslims over the years; Amanze’s data (2000: 41) and BC 2001 have been taken together in and thus shown in the figure below:

Figure 1: Botswana’s Muslims’ Demographics



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 20<sup>th</sup> century – 1911 they were only 44 and by 1946 they 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 3628; 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 researcher extracted the statistics that indicated the number of Muslims who reside in three of Botswana’s major cities, and when these numbers are added then 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 2001 survey. The opposite is observed when viewing

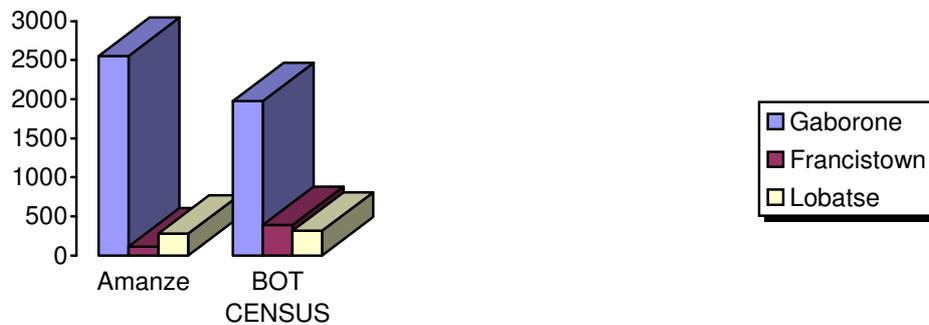
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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Daniel Pipes 2001.

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the statistics for Francistown and Lobatse respectively; in the case of the former the increase was over 200% whilst in Lobatse by 37%.

Figure 2: Comparative View of Botswana 2001 Census and Amanze's Findings



The comparative figures in the diagram above and the table below give one an accurate view of the comparative growth rate 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:

Table 1: Comparative View of Botswana's 1991 and 2001 censuses

	CENSUS 1991 AMANZE	CENSUS 2001 CSO-BOTS
GABORONE	2,555	1,976
LOBATSE	280	317
FRANCISTOWN	115	390
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,950</b>	<b>2,583</b>

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.

### 5. The Mosques & 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 67 km from Gaborone. However,

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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 house of one of their co-religionists. A prayer centre (jama'at khana) was established in the African Mall in Extension 2 Jabavu close in 1973, and it was in use for approximately 8 years before the main mosque was built. The gradual increase in the number of Muslims meant that there was a demand for a mosque. The community thus rallied under BMA and laid the foundations in the mid 1970s; this became popularly known as the central Jami' mosque.

And since the central mosque became small in accommodating the growing number of worshippers, 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 30<sup>th</sup> of August after the maghrib salat (i.e. the sunset ritual prayers). The new one can accommodate 800 compared to the 600 hundred 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-Jam'at 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 300 on Fridays<sup>15</sup>. 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 institution; 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 or at the National Stadium. During 1995 the first 'Id salah was performed at the National Stadium opposite the University of Botswana and a walking distance away from the central mosque; the prayer was led by Maulana Mall. Subsequently, depending upon the weather conditions and circumstances, 'Id salah was performed either on the mentioned school premises or at the stadium. For example, in November 2000 'Idul-Fitr salah was performed at the school, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2004 and 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005 the 'Idul-Adha and the 'Idul-Fitr ritual prayers were respectively performed and celebrated by the Muslim community at the National Stadium. More than 1,600 congregants (mainly males) participated in the special ritual prayers, which were led by the veteran Imam, the popularly known Qari Sayyid; a few women accompanied their husbands and family members.

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<sup>15</sup> This estimate might be disputed since the presence of two big mosques in Gaborone; however, for quite a while prior to the building of Gaborone West mosque, a sizeable number of congregants attended the mosque.

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### 5.1 Religious Leadership in the Community

The Qari and a number of others mentioned earlier form part the growing religious leadership that serve the Gaborone Muslims; in fact, he played a very crucial role in the formation of the subsequent imamate leadership. 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 during the 1970s and 1980s; the more recent imams have had their training during the 1990s.

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 invaluable role in cementing and guiding the Muslim communities in particularly majority non-Muslim environments such as Botswana.

Over the years the community had the services of Maulanas Abdul Hamid Khan, Kanti, and Abdul Kader; all of whom were Indian born and trained theologians. The last mentioned 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 at the Darul-'Ulum in Newcastle and later in the respected Indian based Darul Ulum in Nadwa - Lucknow, was appointed imam in Gaborone during 1991 and directed the Islamic centre, which was under the management of BMA, until 1994. He was accompanied his wife, Munira, who joined the emerging and developing An-Nur Muslim School in 1994. 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 since 1995 at irregular intervals. In addition to these, he has been producing *Minaret*, a monthly tabloid for the community, over the past 9 years. In addition to these activities, he has been intimately involved with missionary activities in Rasesa, a town outside Gaborone where he established a madrasa and conducts weekly classes with the help of one of the locally trained personnel. 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.

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### 5.2 The Imams at the mosques

That said. It is an established fact that there are a sizeable number of maulanas/imams who are stationed in and around Gaborone. The two big mosques, namely the central Jami' and new Gaborone West mosques, are presently served by five imams, four of whom had been 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 until 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 this 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 hafidh (memorizer of the Quran), 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/huffadh 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<sup>16</sup>. By the early part of 2000 the situation changed and the GMC appointed Maulana Dawood Dhansey, another Cape Townian, as the principal Imam; he was however trained at the Zakariyya Darul-Ulum in Gauteng. In 2001 he was joined by yet another Cape Townian, namely 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 resigned in January 2004 to return to his home city.

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

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<sup>16</sup> Popularly known as 'The Malay Quarters.'

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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 Jamiát ul-Ulama of Gauteng<sup>17</sup>. 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.

### 6. 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 create separate Muslim educational structures to deal with these specific religious objectives. The madrasah was thus the outcome of these planned objectives.

#### 6.1 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 Jami' and the Shah Khalid mosques respectively. However, these were preceded as has been the case in many Muslim minority communities by house schools that were privately run and managed. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Ms Munira Hoosain was the home-based madrasa teacher known as 'apa poppy.'

The Madrasah Himayatul Islam attached to the central Jami' mosque 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 mentioned madrasah. The madrasah was from then onwards steered by the acting principal, Maulana Dawood until the appointment of Maulana Sulaiman in 2004. However, during Maulana Bashier's reign in 2001, he and his team

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<sup>17</sup> 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](http://www.jamiat.org.za).

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produced *Our Message Newsletter* to highlight the activities completed for that year; a similar newsletter has not appeared subsequently. The newsletter was first produced by Ms. Munira Mall in 1992, 1993 and 1994.

GMC decided that the madrasah at the main mosque will remain the main base for the education of the Muslim children in Gaborone. The decision took into account numerous factors and in particular the immediate needs of the Gaborone Muslim community. For example, although the imams reside on the premises where the new G-West mosque – as it is popularly known - is located, there was no need to construct madrasah facilities because the main mosque is already seeing to these needs. However, it has been argued that if and when the need arises then the GMC will make plans for another branch of the madrasah in the G-West area.

### 6.2 The School<sup>18</sup>

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 kids were housed in porter cabins that served as madrasa classrooms for a while until BMA was able to secure a big plot which is about 5 minutes drive from Botswana's small international Sir Seretse Khama airport, and more than 15 minutes drive from the centre 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, then the junior secondary and senior secondary respectively; the former began in 1997 and the latter only in 1999. The BMA under the guidance of Dr. Fazlur Moorad appointed a school board that oversaw all the activities of the school including the buildings, appointment of teachers etc. Dr. Moorad, being a trained educationist, thus initiated the formation of three committees, namely, education, building and finance and ensuring that the financial statements are annually audited. It was responsible for the appointment of Mr. Nasr Ebrahim as its first principal as well as putting in place a special management team that included Board members and senior staff members.

The school was well established under the able guidance and administrative leadership of Mr. Nasr Ebrahim, the former principal who was born in KwaZulu Natal (hereafter KZN) and graduated in Islamic Studies from the University of Durban-Westville (South Africa) and who presently heads the Al-Ghazali College in Pretoria. During his stint, which ended at the end of 2001, he had set good educational standards and held a firm hand over the school's activities and development. Annually he and his staff organized fetes and produced the *An-Nur Magazine*; this was edited by Ms. Mall who released the first issue in 1995.

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to Munira Mall's 'Al-Nur: Heralding an era of Enlightenment' in *Future-Gen* [July-September 2000, pp.12-15] in which she provided an overview of the functioning of and programmes at the school.

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She also became involved in yet another publication, namely *Al-Nur Muslim School Update*, which started in 1998 and appeared at irregular intervals thereafter. The purpose of the latter hand-out was to keep all stakeholders up-to-date with regards to the happenings at schools. During the absence of a principal, Mrs. Munira Mall was given the task of heading the school. At the beginning of 2002, the school board appointed Mr. Abdul-Majid Khan as the new principal; the latter who comes from KZN, had a long, rich experience in the educational arena.

It, however, appears that since his appointment the school has failed to upgrade its Islamic studies and Arabic programmes. As a result students who initially enrolled for the Arabic language course dropped out to opt for French. This could be attributed to the unstructured programme that has been adopted over the past few years and the inability of the appointed teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language effectively in a non-Arabic speaking environment. According to developments at the beginning of 2006, the school Board appointed Mr. Goolam Abdullah as the new chairperson. From the outset Mr. Abdullah appeared to have flexed his muscles by scouting for new, capable and experienced individuals to take over the courses in Islamic studies and Arabic. However, it will only be revealed after a year or two whether these new appointees will be able to make a difference at the school.

### 6.3 The Library<sup>19</sup>

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 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 emphasise 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. However, the third phase of the school intends to include a large multi-purpose hall and a library which will serve the school community.

#### 6.3.1 Public: School & 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<sup>th</sup> May 2000 a fete was held to raise money for the library; more than P70,000 was collected,

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<sup>19</sup> 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 & Reception in Southern Africa* 13(2):56-65, 2001.

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which gave 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 the students who have been doing research on aspects of Islam.

The mosque library has a collection of videos, dvds and books in English that covers a wide spectrum and also includes works by non-Muslim scholars<sup>20</sup>. There are a few translated texts such as *Sahih al-Bukhari* and works in Arabic such as *Fath ul-Bari* and *Sharh ibn 'Aqil*. The videos, it is estimated, amounts to about 120 cassettes, and the books come to about less than a 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.

### 6.3.2 Private & Personal:

It is interesting to note that a significant number of Muslims keep a wide variety of literature in their homes as a way of keeping abreast with information on Islam and Muslims. In this context, mention should also be made of the rich, personal library of Mr. Shamshad Khan. The latter purchased and bought books over the years and build 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 audiocassettes 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.

## 7. 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 get connected instantly with their co-religionists regarding relevant issues or matters of 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 neighbouring states such as Botswana, Swaziland

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<sup>20</sup> A random survey was done on 23 August 2003.

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and Lesotho. Attention should first be turned to the print media before commenting on the electronic media<sup>21</sup>.

### 7.1 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 and currently resident in Botswana, namely Maulana Mall and his wife Munira; whilst the Maulana gives full attention to the tabloid and offer 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 and nor does it 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 might be an input but this is kept to a minimal. According to the editor, the paper has been reprinted and circulated in the UK and that he has received positive feedback regarding some of the issues that appear in the paper. Apart from this paper, there are other irregular material that have also been published.

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 Peloetswe, a motswana 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 were circulated in 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 appear regularly as planned, but this will probably change in the near future since the editor's changed circumstances might allow him to have more time to spend with the publication.

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<sup>21</sup> Read Muhammed Haron's: 'Voices from Beyond and within the Southern African Frontiers: The Muslim Print Media' in *ArOr: Quarterly Journal of Asian and African Studies* 73: 13-42, 2005; 'The South African Muslims' making (Air)waves during the period of transformation' in *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15(2): 111-144, 2002; and 'South African Muslims' venture into cyberspace' in *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* 6:20-25, 2003; 'The Alternative South African Muslim Press: *Muslim News & Al-Qalam*' in *Islamic Studies* 43(3): 457-480, 2004.

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In the 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 appears quarterly. It is spearheaded by the former chairperson of the MYM, namely Naeem Bhamjee. Since it’s a very basic newsletter it lifts articles from prominent writers on international issues, and includes a note from the chairperson, notices for the youth, interviews with GMC members regarding the running of the affairs at the mosque, and general articles 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. Since his business allows him to spend time on his computer, he has been regularly surfing the internet to scan relevant material on Islam and Muslims locally and internationally. He has thus created a list of individuals to whom he regularly sends the material that he lifted from the internet and circulated them with the Gaborone Muslim community and in other parts of the Southern African region.

### 7.2 South African & other foreign print media:

However, these are not the only printed media that is been circulated, 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 *Sautul 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; in fact, this magazine is on sale at the OK supermarket in Gaborone. And occasionally individuals get copies of *Crescent International*, the Canadian based journal.

Efforts have been made to bring Durban based MYM mouthpiece, *Al-Qalam*, and *Muslim Views*, the Cape based monthly, to Gaborone; these efforts have, however, not been very successful. 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 regular on the Middle Eastern crises on the Botswana Television and radio, jointly printed a special back-to-back issue entitled *Alternate Press* (Issue No. 1) on the Palestinian intifada on 15-21 December 2000. The contribution was very informative to the Batswana 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

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2003 become a daily, is a series of articles in Setswana on the Quran with selected translations<sup>22</sup>; Ishaq Peloetswe had the inspiration to initiate this project with the idea of sharing his inspiration with many others that are interested in Islam & its culture. And on occasions a special Ramotswa insert is included as a 'pull out' supplement in either *Mmegi* or *The Guardian* that contain some texts on Ramadan and which also afford the Muslim businesses to advertise their respective companies and shops.

### 7.3 The Muslim Radio and TV Stations

Since Botswana's neighbour, South Africa adopted a new media policy the moment a new government came into place 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 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<sup>st</sup> June (Friday) and 2<sup>nd</sup> June (Saturday) 2001. The station attracted many Muslims, particularly 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 17h00 till midnight. The Gaborone Muslims therefore have access to this site too.

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<sup>22</sup> 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 appear 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 entitled: 'Dikgaolo tse di tlhophilweng 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 entitled: *Tlhagiso-Leseding ka ga Tumelo ya Islam*. There has been no trace of other pamphlets subsequent to this one.

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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 too.

### 8. Social Welfare Groups

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

#### 8.1 Al-Muslimah

The organization started as means of educating the women in the community. Classes were conducted on Saturdays at the main mosque and a variety of topics was disseminated; for example, tafsir (exegesis), hadith (prophetic statements) and topical issues were taught and discussed. Ms. Munira Mall and Ms. Shahida Timol were among the regular speakers. There were occasions when outside ladies were also granted the opportunity of giving lectures. Whilst these noble efforts were underway to change the traditional mind-set of the position of women in Muslim communities, there have been conservative groups within the community who frowned upon Al-Muslimah and its activities; apart from the Saturday classes, it also organized children's day and 'Id tea gatherings in order to bring the families and community together. In any event, these activities slowly transformed Al-Muslimah into one of the most active and notable social-welfare organizations in Gaborone and outlying areas. This organization started in 1992 and, for the past 10 years, undertook a variety of projects that would serve the needs of the larger Batswana society; it has been amongst those organizations that have been taken seriously by the government for its involvement in social welfare work. Its wide range of activities include feeding schemes, raising the funds for specific purposes such as erecting bus shelters for taxi & bus passengers, fitting out a biology laboratory and purchasing a school bus for Al-Nur Muslim School in 2000. In fact, it produced the *Muslim Digest*, a Muslim women's magazine, in 1996 and in 2002 the *Modern Indian Cooking* recipe book; the latter was published in order to raise funds for charity purposes and to pay for Al-Nur's school bus.

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 rapid floods, the organization with the BMA and affiliates collected and donated cash and kind for the flood victims to the value of

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P130,000.00. It has been pro-active in assisting HIV/Aids victims and their families; this they did with the help of the Nurses Association. And it also gave a hand to the Centre for Deaf in Ramotswa, the Cheshire Foundation for the Disabled, 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 been given the necessary recognition that it deserves<sup>23</sup>. The most recent project was the opening of an orphanage for Aids victims in Letsweletau about 60 km from North West Gaborone; at this event the president of the country, Mr. Festus Mogae, gave the key-note address.

### 8.2 The Muslim Youth Movement:

The MYM was formed in the early 1970s under the leadership of Iqbal Khan and Fazlur Moorad. It acted, in a way, as an independent chapter of the MYM of South Africa that was established in 1970<sup>24</sup>. Since it was closely affiliated it attended regular camps organized by the MYM at As-Salam in Durban. Over the years the organization had a series of jump starts and by the 1990s became more stable in terms of its structure and activities.

The organization has been and is still involved with a number of activities. It is responsible for amongst others the annual distribution of fitra (charity to the needy before the end of the month of fasting), handing out of hampers to the poor, and dishing out meat that had been sacrificed on 'Id ul-Adha. It holds weekly gatherings for its members where various themes and topics are discussed and keeps contact with the youth that attend Al-Nur School. Towards the end of 1999, it organized an important workshop in order to debate 'Islam in the year 2000 and beyond.'

### 8.3 Ya-Seen Group:

It was noted that Al-Muslimah was an active group known in the public arena for its social welfare contributions; however, much of its work among the Batswana have gone unnoticed and given little prominence by the local newspapers. Another group that has been working informally and very responsibly is the Ya-Seen Group; the group consists of a few males coming from various national and professional backgrounds; some of their wives were also connected with the Al-Muslimah group. The Ya-Seen group has been working quietly with the blessings of the BMA, and has been assisting imams, dawah workers in

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<sup>23</sup> The *Daily News* has consistently highlighted the contribution of this organization. In its issue of 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to Dr. A.K. Tayob's *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town: UCT, 1995).

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and outside the country. One of its successful projects, which were undertaken in 2001-2003, was the Shashi Islamic Centre located near Francistown in the northern part of the country. Its objective was to help Muslims in local communities, and empower them with the necessary structures and skills to operate and oversee their own activities.

The Ya-Seen group was however preceded by other groups such as the Action Group that was inspired by Shaykh Al Mustapha, the then Imam of the Gaborone community. It was active in the 1980s and early 1990s. And it was responsible for the first Islamic nursery school that now forms part of al-Nur School. In fact, the Action Group organized a youth camp in May-June 1992 in Khanye which was graced with a number of speakers such as Maulana Mall, Ms. Munira Mall, Ms. Monira Hoosein, Sh. Murshid Davids and Shaykh Hassan. Towards the end of the 1990s, the group disintegrated and their activities have been continued by others such as the MYM and Ya-Seen groups.

### 8.4 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 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 Hafidh 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,' and members of the Murabitun group also came on a collection drive for their educational project in Cape Town. Although mention was made only of Cape Town delegations that had come, it should also be stated that Muslims requesting funds have been coming from different parts of east Africa (namely Uganda, Malawi and Rwanda) and South Asia to seek financial assistance and as far as is known none of them were refused or turned away<sup>25</sup>.

That aside, BMA or more specifically GMC has also been doing welfare work be concentrating on a number of other activities; its Zakat & Lillahi Committee, for example, sees to the Muslim refugees –

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<sup>25</sup> Strict rule apply for all those who come on a collection drive. A special committee verifies the collectors and their projects before they are given the green light to go on a collection. However, at the tri-annual GMC meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004, it was emphasized to try and spend much money on projects that need attention in Gaborone in particular and Botswana in general.

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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 has been active in all spheres particularly the social welfare sector; their presence has however also been visible in the social, cultural and political arena.

### **9. Socio-Cultural and Political Matters**

#### 9.1 Local Role Players

This profile of the Gaborone Muslims cannot be considered complete without mentioning a few other socio-cultural and political developments that had taken place during the last few decades. As has been the case in many other communities, individuals take the initiative to 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 have done a tremendous amount of philanthropic work. Mr. Sattar Dada was appointed an honorary member of the national ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Mr. Mustak Moorad as Botswana's ambassador to Ethiopia; the latter has been in the ministry for more than 15 years. In their specific capacities, they have been able to demonstrate the preparedness of Muslims to get involved with the society in general.

Shifting to the sporting arena, it is noted that Mr. Ismail Bhamjee, who was formally from South Africa and came to settle here because of his objections to the South Africa regime, got involved with the cultural affairs of the society and has been one of the key figures in placing the sporting fraternity on the map; he, for example, 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.

#### 9.2 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 interested 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 experiences and understandings 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. Erefaan Hossein, 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

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congregants and he also sold quite a few of his publications. Prior to his visit Dr. Zakir Naik, the medical doctor and Muslim missionary from Mumbai delivered lectures on Islam and Christianity during May 2001<sup>26</sup>. Naik's in-depth knowledge of the other religious traditions and their sacred scriptures was well received by those who attended his lecture at the University of Botswana. In 2001 and 2004, Dr. Abdullah Hakim Quick also made invaluable inputs during his respective visits to Gaborone; in his latest visit he was accompanied by Mr. Rafeek Hassan, the present head of the Durban based Islamic Propagation Centre International to conduct workshops on da'wah. In fact on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2006 the BMA's da'wah committee organized a one day workshop in light with the suggestions by these visitors

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

### **10 The Muslim Community and Vision 2016<sup>27</sup>**

With this overview of the Muslim community, we would like to address albeit briefly *Vision 2016*, which seemed 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 ultimately succeed 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 in which way is it working towards realising 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 not popularised its contents among its constituencies and thus not much is known. If the latter is the case, then indeed the Muslim community seem to be operating in an isolated manner from the larger Botswana society; and if they conduct their affairs without taking into account the general concerns of the society then it may be

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<sup>26</sup> More information about him can be accessed from [www.irf.net](http://www.irf.net).

<sup>27</sup> Consult the Government of Botswana's *Vision 2016*'s booklet that spells out its vision; the project has been supervised by a task team that annually keeps the society abreast of the objectives of the project and the achievements to date.

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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<sup>28</sup>. One of the sensitive matters that were debated on radio and TV during the course of 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 behind this and it has, as a consequence, led to a lopsided debate that resulted in an impasse. The Batswana criticised the Muslims for dominating the meat market and by imposing their rules and regulations without considering the society at large; they further argued that their monopolisation of the market meant that they gained financially from it, and thus benefited more from the lucrative market than the rest of the society<sup>29</sup>. Whilst some of these arguments might have gone a long way in putting the Muslims in a bad light, there have been those that have been aware that their criticisms were not entirely valid.

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 criticised 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. Sattar Dada who is a strong and influential member of the ruling party, expectantly defended itself but gave no adequate response as to how it is structuring itself to create the opportunities<sup>30</sup>.

One glaring example, where there has been a lack of responsiveness on the part of BMA is to assist in the training of Batswana to eventually become Imams or huffadh. BMA has of course denied any wrong doing and have been helping to close the gaps in other parts of the country; for example, there were individuals

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<sup>29</sup> At the GMC meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, the issue was once again raised because of a letter to the editor by Tswaragabo Mmerekhi, it was entitled 'Muslims and halaal going too far' and appeared in *The Botswana Guardian* (Friday 26 March 2004, p.13). It was clarified that the BMA does not get any financial kick-back from the Botswana Meat Corporation for issuing halaal certificates; in fact, it only charges a small service fee; this is about 300 pulas, a meagre amount indeed. It was however pointed out that the BMC is slaughtering the meat according to the Islamic law because it has to supply meat at regular intervals to predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern countries.

<sup>30</sup> 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 contained therein.

## Gaborone Muslims

who were sent to Libya for training and others who have been sent to Sudan to study Arabic. In fact as early as 1968 a group of 10 local, indigenous Batswana were sent to India to study and become Huffadh and theologians; unfortunately, none from this group succeeded in completing their studies. And when scrutinizing at the BMA structure, not one of them hold any important portfolio within the BMA. Unfortunately for the BMA, whilst efforts have been made, no concerted attempts have been done to redress these important issues that will dog them for the years to come. In 2005, there have been a few students that had been granted the opportunity to go and study Islam in Saudi Arabia and Sudan respectively; one student who joined the Islamic University of Medina in September was Masood Shaikhmag, a former al-Nur graduate. The matters dealt with here are just some of the many others that will have to be given the necessary attention by BMA in order to advance its cause and at the same time to demonstrate that it has taken *Vision 2016* seriously.

## CONCLUSION

The BMA in particular and the Muslim community at large have been striving to make a contribution to the different sectors of the society in Gaborone. They realised that they form part of and are connected to a global Muslim ummah (community) and in order to keep abreast with developments in the region and abroad they have to maintain their links and ties with regional and international bodies.

They have thus concretely demonstrated their willingness to make known their inputs whenever the opportunities arose. For example, subsequent to the tragic September 11 event during 2001, they held a protest march against the accusation and allegations made by the USA government against the Muslims. Despite their small numbers they made their presence felt when it concerns their fellow Muslims in other parts of the world. And in the social sector, for example, they have been adequately represented by groups like Al-Muslimah, which had been active and whose presence can be seen at some of the bus shelters around the city. This is another indication of flying their Islamic flag high within a predominantly Christian city. The mere fact that they could teach and disseminate their religious ideas and openly practice their religion is a clear reflection that religious freedom forms an essential pillar of the Botswana constitution, and it also reflects that the government has laid the foundation for the creation of a diverse but tolerant and respectful society.