



In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of
Grace

'Id al-Adha Khutbah

Claremont Main Road Masjid

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**Fostering Inclusive Muslim Cultural Traditions
and Practices**

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الله أكبر، الله أكبر، الله أكبر، الله أكبر

ولله الحمد

*God is Greater than; God is Greater than; God is Greater than
All Praise, Thanks & Gratitude belongs to God Alone*

Introduction

We express our thanks and gratitude to Allah, the Lord of Wisdom, that this year the entire *ummah* is celebrating *`Id al-Adha* in unison with the pilgrims (*hujjaj*) who have freshly returned from the sacred plains of 'Arafat (*wuquf al-'Arafat*). It is our sincere supplication (*du`a*) that South African Muslims will continue to celebrate *`Id al-Adha* in unison and solidarity with the *hujjaj* and the global *ummah* in future years, *insha-Allah*.

We have gathered here this morning to vicariously celebrate the great achievement of the *hujjaj* who have successfully completed the main rites of the *hajj* at the sacred places in and around Makkah al-Mukarramah. Since *`Id al-Adha* is inextricably linked with the *hajj* it is customary for us to reflect on the significance of this fifth and final pillar of Islam. I would like, however, in this *`Id al-Adha khutbah* to depart from this longstanding tradition of focusing on the symbolic meanings of the *hajj*, and to reflect instead on the theme of the relationship between Islam and Culture. I have chosen this topic for my reflections, firstly, because our 2015 *`Id al-Adha* celebration coincides with our country's celebration of Heritage Day. Secondly, and more importantly, this is a topic that I have for some time now been suggesting is one of *the* most critical challenges facing contemporary Muslims.

In this *`Id al-Adha khutbah*, I am guided by the Islamic imperative that celebrates human diversity and validates sound and beneficial customary practices. I argue first, that culture is

dynamic and constantly evolving, and second, that the current scale of migration of people across the globe has and will continue to have a huge impact on local cultures and identities. In light of this I propose that South African Muslims need to foster inclusive cultural traditions and practices by embracing local African cultures as well as the cultures of refugees and migrants from other parts of the African continent.

Hajj and Celebrating Cultural Diversity

It is fortuitous that this year our *'Id al-Adha* celebrations coincides with National Heritage Day. Muslims have only two religious celebratory holidays, namely, that of *'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Adha*. Heritage Day is not a religious holiday but the idea of celebrating diverse cultures and traditions resonates well with the teachings of Islam. For example, Allah, the Sublime, enjoins Muslims in the Glorious Qur'an in *Surah al-Hujarat*, chapter 49, verse 13, to recognize, affirm and to consciously seek to get to know people of other cultures:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ

وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

**O Humankind! We created you into male and female,
and fashioned you into distinct peoples and tribes that
you may recognize (and cooperate) with one another
(not that you may despise each other).
Truly, the most highly regarded of you in the sight of
God, is the one with the best conduct.
And God is all-Knowing, and is all-Aware of all things
(Q49:13)**

The above verse enjoins human beings to celebrate gender, cultural, and other forms of human diversity through *ta'aruf* – recognition and affirmation of each other through intimate knowledge, and not mere toleration. The Qur'anic concept of *ta'aruf* is an alternative vision to that of racism, xenophobia or bigotry and represents one of the basic core teachings of Islam. Through this verse the Qur'an teaches that differences among humankind are not incidental and negative, but rather that human diversity represents a God-willed, basic factor of human existence.

Furthermore, Allah in the Glorious Qur'an proclaims, in *Surah al-Rum*, chapter 30, verse 22, that human diversity is a sign of the existence of Allah (*ayat-Allah*) and should thus be celebrated and embraced:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلافِ اَلْسِنَتِكُمْ
وَاللّوَانِكُمْ

اِنَّ فِيْ ذٰلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْعٰلَمِيْنَ

**And of the wondrous signs of Allah is the creation of
the heavens and the earth and the variations and
diversity in your languages and in the pigmentation
or colours of your skins;
For in this there are messages for those who think
and reflect (Q30:22)**

The above Qur'anic verse encourages us to celebrate people of different languages and skin pigmentations. In doing so, believers affirm signs of the existence of Allah. For those of you who have been on *hajj*, you will know that *hajj* affords one the opportunity to catch a small glimpse of the Glory of this human diversity when people of all cultures, languages and nationalities gather together on the plains of 'Arafat to seek the Forgiveness and Mercy of Allah. One may also interpret the above verses to mean that all kinds of xenophobia and racism are tantamount to a denial of the wondrous signs of Allah and the marvel of His Creation.

The Qur'an and the Cultural Imperative

In addition to the above verses that extol the existence of human diversity, the Qur'an also advises the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to accept sound customs and practices of local communities and to adopt them as part of Muslim customary practices. In *Surah al-'Araf*, chapter 7, verse 199, Allah, the Sublime proclaims:

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ

Accept (from people) what comes naturally (for them).

Command what is customarily good.

**And turn away from the ignorant
(without responding in kind) (Q7:199)**

In the above verse the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is commanded to make due allowances for people's distinctive customs and to govern in accordance with sound cultural norms and conventions. Historically Muslims have understood the above Qur'anic verse to mean that Islam is a culture friendly religion and have thus responded to this positive imperative by validating local cultural norms and traditions, which do not violate the Islamic value system. For example, according to Ibn `Atiyya al-Andalusi (d.1147), a classical commentator of the Qur'an, this verse not only upheld the sanctity of indigenous culture but granted widespread validity to sound and beneficial customary practices which are not repudiated by the primary sources of Islam.

Some contemporary *Salafi literalists* consider all cultural expressions of Islam as innovations to be rejected (*bid`a*). However, I concur with the viewpoint of that of the great classical jurists of Islam such as Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d.1388) and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d.1505) that Islam does not *a priori* condemn cultural innovations (*bid`a*) in and of itself. Only

cultural innovations, which violate explicit teachings of Islam, should be discouraged. The process of adopting sound customary practices from local cultures was facilitated by Islamic jurisprudence through the technical process known as *al-‘urf* or *al-‘adah*. All the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhahib*) recognize this process as an essential part of Islamic law. Furthermore all of them recognize that *al-‘urf* or *al-‘adah* did not mean a blind acceptance of all the norms and traditions of other cultures pejoratively known as *tashabbuh*. Consequently jurists distinguished between *‘urf al-sahih* (wholesome cultural norms and practices) and *‘urf al-batil* (cultural norms and practices that violated key principles of the Islamic value system). Moreover, one of the five maxims in Islamic law (*al-qawa'id al kulliyat al-khams*) is that “cultural usage shall have the weight of law’ (*al-‘ada muhakkama*). This means that sound cultural practices have authority similar to that of textual evidences found in the Qur’an and prophetic traditions (*ahadith*).

Globalisation and the Estrangement of Religion and Culture

One of the most defining aspects of the twenty first century is the global migration and movement of people in search of personal safety, food security and economic wellbeing. This unprecedented migration is being driven by refugees, who are forced to flee war-ravaged areas, as well as migrants, who relocate from poorer to richer countries in search of better living conditions. It is not just the scale of this refugee crisis that is the challenge, but the speed at which it is growing.

At this historical juncture we are witnessing a record number of people fleeing war-torn Syria and other parts of the Middle East and Africa. Human rights groups have described the current situation as the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. According to UNHCR statistics, as at the end of August 2015, 293 000 refugees have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. This is more than double the number of refugees arriving in Europe in 2014. One journalist has suggested that if the current numbers of refugees were a nation, the population of displaced and dispossessed people would be the 24th largest country in the world. It would also be a young nation as more than half of all refugees today are under the age of 18.

One of the major consequences of this massive global migration of human beings is its impact on culture and identity. The French scholar of Islam, Oliver Roy, is one of a growing number of scholars who have raised the alarm about the destructive tendency of globalization and migration on the relationship between religion and indigenous cultures and practices. He furthermore suggests that the current puritanical movement within universal religions is a product of globalization and its valorization of the individual (Oliver Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion & Culture Parts Ways*, Columbia Hurst, 2010).

I have in previous khutbahs made the point that many young immigrant Muslims living in North America and Europe experience acute identity crises arising out of the two cultural worlds within which they live, their homes and the broader society. This search for identity often renders these young

Muslims susceptible to extremist viewpoints of Islam. Demagogues who peddle a puritanical and culture free version of Islam are extremely adept at recruiting such vulnerable young Muslims. Under their mentorship these young Muslims become extremely conservative to the point of condemning members of their own families for not being Muslim enough and fellow Muslims at *masajid* for being guilty of so-called *bid`a* or innovative practices.

We see the impact of this growing inclination towards ‘culture-free religion’ in our local community, through a mindset that regards culture as something dangerous, inherently problematic, and “un-Islamic”. The ‘culture-free’ advocates within the Muslim community condemn all local cultural expressions and practices as *bid`a* and *haram*. People who advocate so called ‘culture-free Islam’ lose sight of the fact that culture is integral to the development of a healthy sense of self and community (i.e. identity formation and social cohesion). Culture is what gives a community its distinctive character, and cultivates the social skills through which we interact with each other and the world around us. Estrangement from one’s culture leads to fractured community life and a concomitant tendency towards self-centred forms of social and spiritual lives.

Celebrating Heritage Day should thus be viewed as an opportunity for us to inspire new generations of Muslims with a renewed sense of self and community.

In this regard we need to remind ourselves that culture and heritage is not a genetic or racial reality, but rather it is constantly evolving and shaped by changing social conditions and practices.

Fostering Inclusive Muslim Cultural Traditions and Practices

Post-apartheid South Africa has generated social conditions that present all communities with new challenges. One of the specific challenges facing the South African Muslim community is the rapidly changing demography of Muslims in South Africa. The steady spread and growth of Islam in black townships and the large influx of African Muslims from other parts of the continent, has significantly shifted the demography of Muslims in South Africa over the past two decades. Already in 2010, Goolam Vahed & Shamil Jeppie made the bold claim that over the next two decades Black African Muslims are expected to constitute the largest segment of the Muslim population in South Africa. Hence, the challenge facing us today is to embrace the reality of our changing demography and to fashion an inclusive South African Muslim culture that reflects not only our Eastern historical roots but also our African context.

This new reality requires a shift in mindset from an inward looking disposition that seeks to preserve culture such that it becomes fossilized, to a disposition that is embracing of cultural transformation and growth. It is my considered view that the first step towards fashioning inclusive cultural

traditions and practices, is for us to move beyond seeing Black Muslims as merely recipients of need or only contexts for *d`awah* and conversion.

In this regard *al-Shahid* Imam Abdullah Haron serves as an exemplary model. He was one of the first Muslim leaders to regularly frequent Black townships such as Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu. For Imam Haron the primary motivation for his interactions with these communities was to show solidarity with fellow oppressed compatriots. In doing so, he sought to break down racial and cultural barriers that kept communities apart during the Apartheid era, and stubbornly persists today. The legacy and heritage that Imam Haron has bequeathed us is rich and socially relevant. *Insha-Allah*, we shall be commemorating the 46th year since the martyrdom of Imam Haron on Sunday the 27th of September. To honour his legacy, CMRM has invited Imam Haron's grandson, Khalid Shamis, to deliver the pre-khutbah lecture tomorrow, Friday 26 September 2015, to share his reflections on the life of the Imam. Celebrating the life of Imam Haron and reflecting on his legacy allows us to ponder how we too can live in fellowship with all communities, transcending racial and cultural divides in our personal and communal lives.

A second step towards fostering inclusive cultural traditions and practices is for South African Muslim organisations to convene provincial and national *imbizos* i.e. dialogue forums, in which we can confront the challenge before us and jointly propose concrete strategies for combatting racism and xenophobia and fostering inclusive Muslim cultures and

identities. One of the key challenges to such *imbizos* is the question of language. Due to practical reasons we are compelled to use the language of globalization and privilege, namely English for dialogical encounters. However, we need to make provisions for participants to express themselves in vernacular languages and to simultaneous translations. Even better, we should learn at least one indigenous African language, not merely to facilitate communication and interaction with our brothers and sisters in their mother tongues but also as a means of healing our souls from racism.

A third step towards fostering inclusive cultural traditions and practices is that of engaging the growing numbers of refugees and migrants from other African countries living in our midst. A useful practical example of facilitating dialogue and interaction between diverse Muslim communities in Cape Town is the Inter-Community Forum (ICF), of which CMRM is a part. This is an initiative that is attempting to break down racial and cultural barriers between local Muslim communities in Cape Town. The ICF has made every effort to bring together representatives from diverse immigrant Muslim communities in Cape Town, as well as representatives from Black township Muslim communities. Currently, many of these communities are isolated from mainstream Muslim communities either due to the legacy of apartheid geographical locations or language and cultural barriers.

For example, one of the largest Muslim immigrant communities in Cape Town is the Somalis and they have already established a masjid and madrasa in Bellville that has

become the hub for Somali community gatherings. This is not a bad thing in and of itself for nurturing community spirit. However, I would strongly recommend that we all need to take responsibility to ensure that all our spaces are welcoming of all communities. It is only through welcoming spaces that we can get to know one another. The ICF has for example initiated a jumū'ah exchange programme between communities and also a very successful iftar programme during Ramadan where families from different communities came together to share a meal. They are also planning on hosting a leadership programme for youth and an inter-community festival for Cape Town.

Last, but not least, we need ongoing awareness programmes to educate ourselves about African history and culture. Better informing ourselves in this way, will empower and enable us to meet the challenge of fostering inclusive cultural traditions and practices. The Muslim media, especially our community radio stations and Islam television channels could play a significant role in this regard.

Conclusion

Let us use Heritage Day as a starting point to fashion inclusive South African Muslim cultural traditions and practices.

On this great day of *ʿId al-Adha* let us spare a thought for the thousands of refugees fleeing the tyranny of the Syrian regime, the brutality of ISIS, and others who are victims of war - including in large swathes of our continent. These individuals

and families seek refuge in safe zones because life in their home countries has become intolerable and desperate. Our humanity should transcend race, ethnicity and religion and we should welcome such desperate people to our shores. We express our condolences to families who have lost loved ones and pray that refugees reach safety and the hope of a better future. We condemn the racism and xenophobia directed towards these refugees. We call for borders to be opened, for the humanitarian needs of these refugees to be met and for long term sustainable solutions to the problems that give rise to such crises.

Finally, let us remember all the pilgrims (*hujjaj*) who were on the sacred plains of `Arafat yesterday. At this hallowed time of `Id al-Adha please join me in making a special supplication for our *hujjaj*:

Supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنَا حَجًّا مَبْرُورًا ،

O Allah! Grant our pilgrims an accepted hajj

وَسَعِيًّا مَشْكُورًا ،

And let their strivings and endeavours be rewarded

وَذَنْبًا مَغْفُورًا

And forgive them their sins and trespassers

وَعَمَلًا صَالِحًا مَّقْبُولًا ،

And accept their good deeds

وَتَجَارَةً لَّنْ تَبُورَ ،

And let not their assets perish

يَا نُورَ النُّورِ ،

O Light upon Light

يَا عَالِمَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ ،

O Knower of all that is in our hearts

أَخْرِجْنَا يَا اللَّهُ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ،

Lead us forth from Darkness unto Light

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