

**THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION OF
THE OSMANLI SCHOLAR, ABU BAKR EFFENDI,
TOWARDS ISLAMIC THOUGHT
AND CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

By SELIM ARGUN, December 2000

Abu Bakr Effendi was a distinguished, yet controversial figure. The article endeavours to ascertain the context and consequences of his coming to the Cape of Good Hope. At a certain stage of his life he was namely chosen by the sultan of the Osmanli Devlet, after a request by the monarch of great Britain, Queen Victoria, to come to the Cape. Why was he selected? What were the circumstances of the request both abroad and in the Cape? Finally an evaluation will be attempted of Abu Bakr Effendi's contribution with regard to various fields: legal, cultural-educational, political and as far as his family is concerned.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ABU BAKR EFFENDI

It is generally known that Abu Bakr Effendi al-Amjadî was born in Khashnaw in 1835. This village laid in the plains of Shehrizûr, 192 km south of Lake Urmia.¹

His family

Abu Bakr Effendi came from a family, which belonged to the ancient Aryan race of the Kurds.² His genealogical lineage goes back to the Prophet Muâammad (May peace be upon him) and to the *Makkan* tribe of the *Quraish*. Due to the this fact he was a *Sayyid*. The titles *Sayyid* and *Sharîf* reflect that the person's genealogy goes back to the prophetic household.

¹ Da Costa, Y.; Davids, A. 1994. *Pages from Cape Muslim History* p. 81.

² Van Selms, A. 1968. Abu Bakr Effendi, in the *Dictionary of South African Biography*. vol. 1, p. 4-5.

In this regard, attention may be drawn to the fact that the designation *Effendi* is not only a name or surname, but is also a Turkish title of address meaning “lord or master”.

His education

Abu Bakr Effendi obtained his primary education in established a religious educational institute in Shehrizûr.³ After his father’s death he continued his studies at Istanbul. In 1861 when he came to Erzurum, he taught at the central Sarayönü Islamic school.

Abu Bakr Effendi was well versed in Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, he had a thorough working knowledge of the four Sunni legal schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

Overview of Islamic education in the 19th century Osmanli madâris

In comparison with any contemporary Islamic *madrasah* or college’s syllabi, the Osmanli *madrasah*’s curriculum, which extended from orthodox religious texts to real life realities - from *Qur’ân* to economics, from religious belief to human analysis, theology to psychology, from prophetic adherence to development of the sciences, *Âadith* to logarithms - was quite superior and included all spheres of the sciences. All aspects received equal attention, where as nowadays specialization is the general trend.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN EUROPE

As person and scholar Abu Bakr Effendi was destined through his lineage and education to play a prominent role. However, the political circumstances also determined his coming to the Cape.

³ Marufoglu, S. 1998. *Northern Iraq in the Ottoman Era (1831-1914)*, (in Turkish). p. 69.

The Osmanli devlet and the European powers

The 19th century witnessed an increasing Osmanli dependence on the West, both politically and economically.

The treaty of Paris, signed on March 1856 clearly spells out the commitment of the sultan towards the Christian minorities living under the Osmanli Devlet. As a result, the British government would also afford the same treatment towards Muslim minorities living under its rule. It was manifested when Abu Bakr Effendi was later dispatched to the Cape because the Cape of Good Hope was, at that time, a British colony and Muslims were a minority therein. It is also important to note that as a result of this cordial relationship, ³ Abd-ul ³ Azîz the 32nd su ltan of the Osmanli caliphates paid a visit to England. It was the first time that such an event happened in the history of Osmanli devlet.⁴

The Political and religious position of the caliphate and its functions

Although the Ottoman devlet was at the decline of its political power, it nevertheless remained the patron of the Muslim world.

The caliphate is one of the most important political institutions of the Islamic civilisation. *Khilâfah* is a related Arabic word which, within Islam, is used to denote the government of the Muslim state of which the *khalîfah* is the head. the caliph is obliged to pay attention to any Muslim in despair and attend to Islamic needs.

It is also important to note that the Osmanli caliphate was the only Muslim superpower of the 19th century. Colonialism was a globalised world order of Europe, which was the dominant civilizational axis of the century.⁵

CURICIMSTANCES IN THE CAPE

The circumstance in the Cape of Good Hope among the Muslim population prior to the time of Abu Bakr Effendi was one of deprivation and cultural isolation and religious disputes.

⁴ *The Encyclopaedia of Americana*, 1995. vol. 1, p. 28.

⁵ Davutoglu, A. 1994. *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World*. p. 47.

The importation of slaves and the historical arrival of Islam in the Cape of Good Hope.

During the seventeenth century wars of resistance against the Dutch, Muslims were among the captives and political prisoners who were taken out of the field of conflicts to be enslaved and imprisoned, or exiled in places such as the Cape colony.⁶ They lost their freedom, self-esteem, language, and often, even their religion.⁷

The Cape of Good Hope was under the rule of the Dutch colonial power from 1652 to 1804.⁸ It served as a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) at the time. When Jan van Riebeeck started the first such refreshment station in the first month of his stay and the first big shipment, including Muslim slaves, was a group of Malay people in 1667.⁹ The colonists also believed that a Muslim slave, being sober, makes for a better domestic servant and a trustful guard in their wine cellars.¹⁰ The reason being that Muslims are not allowed to consume alcoholic drinks according to Islamic precepts.¹¹

Religious restrictions and the political rejection of religious pluralism in the Cape

During the 143 years (1652-1795) of DEIC rule in the Cape, legal controls over religion were exercised directly by the company.¹² In 1657 the Cape Governor John Maetsuycker issued an edict forbidding Muslims to practice Islam in public or to convert the local population, whether heathen or Christian. Punishment for violating this order was specified as death.¹³

⁶ Chidester, D. 1992. *Religions of South Africa*. p. 150.

⁷ Levzion, N.; Pouwels, R. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. p. 338.

⁸ Parker, G.; Pfukani, P. 1984. *History of Southern Africa*. p. 55.

⁹ Voolgraaf H. 1997. *The Dutch East India Company's Slave Lodge at the Cape*. p. 9-10.

¹⁰ Naude', J.A. 1985. Islam in South Africa: A General Survey. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 6:21-23.

¹¹ Al- Qur'ân chapter 5 (al-Ma'idah), verse 90.

¹² Chidester, D. 1992. *Religions of South Africa*. p. 149.

¹³ Chohan, A.A. 1988. Muslim Education in South Africa: Its present Position (special emphasis on the Western Cape), *Muslim Education Quarterly*. 2:69.

The language, culture and traditions of nations are vital to the preservation of their identity. Changing these values often causes collapse of their social structures and political losses to their people. The colonised native people of Africa or those who were brought in as slaves to Africa, to a great extent lost their identity under European colonial powers.

One may presume that although the Cape Muslims, in the time of A.B Effendi, were quite enthusiastic to know more about their religion and to practice it, they were ignorant of some of the basics of their religion since they had forgotten their home language. This caused the loss of contact with their religious books and treatises, simply because, after more than a century and a half, they couldn't read the Javanese texts and there were no Islamic books written in the Cape Dutch language.

ABU BAKR EFFENDI'S COMING AND STAY IN THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

Abu Bakr Effendi's trip to the Cape of Good Hope

On the 3rd of October 1862, an Imperial decree was issued for the dispatch of Abu Bakr and Omar Lutfi Effendi's to the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁴ On the 1st of December 1862, they went to London via Paris and then left for Liverpool. From there they started their journey to the Cape of Good Hope, which took 44 days of sea voyage. The Muslims of the Cape of Good Hope knew of A.B. Effendi's arrival and he was welcomed on his first day of arrival by a group of *imâms* and *âadjies*.¹⁵

LEGAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF ABU BAKR EFFENDI

Abu Bakr Effendi's juristic contributions are well-known, yet some detailed aspect are often neglected.

¹⁴ The authors are M. Baktir and C. Eraslan in an article in *Islâm Ansiklopedisi* titled Ebu Bekir Efendi. 10:276-277, and Heshâm Ni'metullah Effendi's Personal Document, no. 10.

⁶⁴ Mehmet Cemil Pasha is the son of Mustafa Resid Pasha, master mind behind the Tanzimat of 1839.

¹⁵ Effendi, O.L. 1991. *A travelogue of my journey to the Cape of Good Hope*. p. 13.

Problems in the Mosques and A.B. Effendi's Solution for the neverending Jan van Boughies or Palm Tree Mosque dispute

The appointment of each and every *imâm* in the Cape created some conflict in the nineteenth century. The Cape Supreme Court heard about twenty cases, which involved either the contesting of the appointment of an *imâm* or his practices in the same century.¹⁶ Many fights broke out in the confines of the mosques. *Imâms* had supreme powers and were not answerable to any one. The position itself had definite monetary benefits. The *imâm* received generous donations from his congregants and could lead a life of fair comfort without having to toil for an income.”¹⁷

The position of an *imâm* seems to have led to a “clerical order” in the community which has no sanction in Islam. For instance at wedding receptions, the daughters of *imâms* were given seats nearest to the bride's table, next in seating came the daughters of the *Gatieps*, and so on. Even marriage partners in most cases were also matched in this way.¹⁸ A. Bakr Effendi highlighted that these actions are totally against the *Sharî³ ah* and are neither based on any verses of the Qur'ân. The interference of Abu Bakr Effendi with some of the local Muslims customs obviously affected the personal interests of some *imâms* who had also previously welcomed him when he arrived in the Cape.

Jan van Boughies, the most prominent of the slaves from Celebes to arrive at the Cape of Good Hope. Jan, also known as *imâm* Asnoon, succeeded *imâm* Abdolgamiet [Abdulhamid] from 1804 to 1846. After his death, the position of *imâm* rotated. It eventually rested on Mamat in the Palm tree mosque. His two assistants, Danie and Ismail, competed against each other to succeed him as *imâm*. To solve the never-ending Palm Tree mosque dispute, the court relied heavily on A. Bakr Effendi and accepted his evidence in the final judgement. This type of conflict and the need for

¹⁶ Davids, A. 1980. *The Mosques of Bo-Kaap* p. 50.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 125.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 126.

solving internal disputes and conflicts among the Muslim community were some of the major reasons for sending A. Bakr Effendi to the Cape and the above excerpt from case law clearly bears testimony to this purpose.

The Crayfish Debate

Abu Bakr Effendi in his book, the *Bayân ud-Din*, passed a verdict in which he states that shellfish particularly crayfish is *âarâm* (i.e. prohibited) to consume. This resulted a conflict within the predominantly Shafi³ î Cape Muslim community, and the matter was even debated in Mecca. Some of the *imâms* and *shekhs* of the Cape believed that there was no clear and categorical proof stating that crayfish is unlawful. They wrote a petition seeking Abu Bakr Effendi's removal from the Cape which was finally presented to the governor Sir Philip Wodehouse. The Āanafis and Shafi³ îs both agree in their classification of crayfish to be unlawful to eat. Both their classification also stems from the fact that it is from the *khabâith* (evil foods) according to some interpretations of the jurists of these two schools. According to another interpretation of the Shafi³ î school, the prohibition is because it is an amphibian.¹⁹ It would nevertheless appear that Abu Bakr Effendi was correct in his elucidation of the Islamic law on the issue.

HIS EDUCATIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In addition to his legal contributions Abu Bakr Effendi had a tremendous influence on the cultural life of the Muslims of Cape of Good Hope.

Abu Bakr Effendi's influence on Islamic dress code among the Muslim community of the Cape

The dress worn by the Cape Muslims seems to have gradually been replaced by the European colonialists. Just after the arrival of Abu Bakr Effendi, the Turkish fez became a traditional headdress of Cape Muslims due to his influence. When during World War I, an Australian troop carrier on its way to the Dardanelles stopped in

Cape Town for coal, a few Australian crewmen, coming across Cape Muslims wearing fezzes concluded that the Turks had occupied the port, and were thoroughly disconcerted. A new, albeit minor, Turkiya had definitely come to Cape Town.²⁰

Educational and intellectual contributions

Fifteen days after his arrival, Abu Bakr Effendi opened up a school at the corner of Bree and Wale streets for boys, named “the Ottoman Theological School”; and within twenty days more than 300 pupils were enrolled. By the time he opened another school for girls, his wife was the principle of that school.

On Sundays, he preached to the crowded gatherings, and gave *Tafsîr* from the *Rûâ al-Bayân*. Meanwhile, he educated himself as well to be understood by the local people. He learned and mastered the Afrikaans and English languages. As a part of his educational activities he visited a number of cities and towns and preached there. He also went to neighbouring Mozambique and the islands of Mauritius.

Abu Bakr Effendi’s Literary Works

The book that he wrote called *Bayân al-Dîn* is considered as the most extensive publication in the early years of the Afrikaans language. It is noted for the ingenious manipulation of the diacritical signs upon the Arabic alphabet. The *Bayân al-Dîn* dealt with such subjects of Islamic law as ablution, prayer, *zakâh*, pilgrimage and dietary laws. Sultan ³ Abdulhamîd II granted permission for publication the *Bayân al-Dîn* on 10th October 1877 and eventually the Ministry of Education published it in the printing house of the state in Istanbul²¹

In 1960, Mia Brandel-Syrier translated the *Bayân al-Dîn* into English and titled it as “The Religious Duties of Islam as taught and explained by Abu Bakr Effendi.” Her book was published in Leiden.

¹⁹ Suyûtî, J.; Mahallî, J. 1968. *Tafsîr al-Jalâlain*, Asâ ul Matabi Delhi, India

²⁰ C.-H. Shell, R, 2000, in the *History of Islam in Africa*, edited by Levtzion, N and Poulwels, R. p. 399.

²¹ Osmanli archives, Will of State Consultative Council, no. 1866 (1294).

In 1968, Prof. van Selms of Pretoria University wrote about A. Bakr Effendi and the *Bayân al-Dîn* in the *Dictionary of South African Biography*.

THE POLITICAL HERITAGE OF ABU BAKR EFFENDI

Political circumstances played a role in Abu Bakr Effendi's life both prior to and after the time he spent in the Cape.

The development of the Osmanli Caliphate's relations with South African Muslims during and after Effendi

From 1862 until the collapse of the Osmanli devlet (state) in 1922, the relationship between the Muslims of Cape of Good Hope and the Osmanlis had a positive development. That link was presumably established by Abu Bakr Effendi, and even after his death, the bond remained alive throughout the decades. Very surprisingly, the Muslims of South Africa had actively wanted to participate in the war of Tripoli in 1911 between the Osmanli state and Italy. They contributed generously to the Ajâz railway construction campaigns. The Osmanli chamber of commerce in Istanbul had participated in industrial and commercial fairs in South Africa.²² Sultan Abd ul-âamîd II, sent an observer to the Anglo-Boer war. Muslims of South Africa hoisted the Osmanli banner in the Cape harbour as an expression of their solidarity to their caliphate.

According to Turkish archives, even in World War I, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had personally received financial donations from South African Muslims to the amount of 17.634 lira and 875 pounds.²³

ABU BAKR EFFENDI'S FAMILY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CAPE HISTORY

Abu Bakr Effendi came to the Cape as a foreigner but through his marriage and family became linked by blood to the people of the Cape.

²² Uçar, A. 2000. *Güney Afrika'da Osmanlılar* (in Turkish). p. 288.

²³ Document of Private Atatürk Archive, no. 107.

His marriage and children

Abu Bakr Effendi married twice during his stay in the Cape of Good Hope. He married Rukea Maker on Wednesday 8th April 1863 in Cape Town. Communication difficulties led to many quarrels and domestic fights and eventually later Abu Bakr Effendi had to divorce her.

On the 30th of December 1864, Abu Bakr Effendi married Tahora Saban Cook. This marriage proved to be a happy one, produced five sons and a daughter, namely Ahmet Atâullah, Feherna, Hesham Ni³ metullah, Muâammad Alâuddin, Omar Jalâluddin, and Hussein Fawzy. Tahora Effendi later on became principal of the Girls' Ottoman Theological School.

Ahmet Atâullah was the eldest son of A. B. Effendi, born in Cape Town in 1865. He received his elementary education from his father. Later on he was placed in an Arabic school in Makkah and finally he completed his studies at the Jâmi³ al-² Azhar in Cairo. In 1884, Sultan Abdulhamîd II appointed him as principal in the Kimberley Ottoman Hamidiye School. Ahmet Atâullah Effendi was furthermore the only Cape Muslim who ever contested a seat in the Cape Parliament. Early in 1893. Although Effendi was defeated in 1894, he gained over 700 votes, enough to have secured him a seat before the abolishing of the cumulative votes.²⁴ He died in a traffic accident on the 11th of November 1903. There was scepticism about the accident where he was appointed as the first ambassador of Osmanli caliphate in Singapore.²⁵ It was related that there was a conspiracy to assassinate him.

Hesham Ni³ metullah Effendi followed in his father's foot steps and wrote three books in Arabic -Afrikaans in 1894. Due to his remarkable activities in the educational field and in the Âijâz Railway fund raising campaigns, sultan ³ Abdulâ amîd II

²⁴ Bickford-Smith, V. 1995. Black Ethnicities, Communities under political expression in late Victorian Cape Town. *Journal of African History*, 36:443-465.

²⁵ Osmanli Foreign Affairs Decree, 10 M 1319, no. 22, Personal Records, no. 96, p. 187.

awarded him a medal of the fourth degree.²⁶ He died in 1947 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.²⁷

Omar Jalâluddin Effendi was born in 1871. He worked and eventually took his retirement from the mint in Cape Town. On the 25th of March 1907.

Presently, the Effendi surname identifies a well-known family in South Africa. Some of Abu Bakr Effendi's progeny went back to their father's original country, Turkey. Others immigrated to Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Abu Bakr Effendi's death and burial

Abu Bakr Effendi on 29th June 1880 at the fairly young age of 45 years died at his home in Bree Street, Cape Town. He was buried in the oldest existing Muslim cemetery in South Africa, the Tana Baru cemetery at the top of Longmarket Street.

Final Remarks

Abu Bakr Effendi is a name in the history books but also one who will remain alive in the memories of the people both in Turkey and South Africa.

²⁶ Osmanli Archives, The Deed of Honour, 28 Ca 1312 no. 80.

²⁷ Hesham Ni'metullah Effendi's Personal Document no. 5.

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