

# Resisting the Statist Reduction of the Self: On the Effects of Shaykh Yusuf’s ‘anti-politics’

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## Abstract

Shaykh Yusuf al Maqassari (1626-1699) is noted for both resisting Dutch expansion in the East Indies as well as his role in building the Cape Muslim community. But rather than politics, his writings focus on mysticism, in particular, the principles of the Sufi path and Sufi metaphysics. When there is a reference to politics, it is ‘anti-politics’ in that he advises the spiritual aspirant to withdraw participation in matters of the state. This paper explores the effects of Shaykh Yusuf’s ‘anti-politics’. It argues that in the context of the post-Westphalian state, Shaykh Yusuf’s ‘anti-politics’ was a way of resisting being inscribed by the economic logic of that state and its reduced notion of the self; that his mysticism offered alternative ways of being and acting in the world; and that these alternative ways helped the Cape Muslim community maintain its durability in the face of a number of historical pressures.

**Keywords:** Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar, mysticism, anti-politics, Islam in South Africa, modern state and the self

## Introduction

Shaykh Yusuf al Maqassari (1626-1699) is widely seen as a seminal figure of Islam in South Africa. He was exiled to Cape Town in 1694 after resisting Dutch expansion in the Indonesian archipelago. Though he was in the Cape for only the last five years of his life, he played a critical role in building what has proven to be a durable Cape Muslim community<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the biography of Shaykh Yusuf, see Bruinessen (1991), Azra (2004) and Gibson (2007).

What is curious about Shaykh Yusuf is that, despite his long-standing confrontation with the Dutch, his writings do not appear to mention them at all nor does he seem even interested in politics in general. Rather, his writings focus on mysticism, in particular, the principles and guidelines of the Sufi path and various aspects of Sufi metaphysics. When there is a reference to politics, it is 'anti-politics' in that he advises the aspiring spiritual seeker to withdraw from participation in matters of the state.

This paper argues that Shaykh Yusuf's 'anti-politics' was a way of resisting being inscribed by the logic of the state and its reduced notion of the self; that his mysticism offered alternative ways of being and acting in the world, that is, alternative views of the self, time, space and causality; and that these alternative ways helped the Cape Muslim community maintain its durability in the face of a number of historical pressures.

This essay, of course, does not claim that Shaykh Yusuf's thought is singular in this regard. Rather, it is an instantiation of the alternatives offered by Sufi perspectives in general. But more broadly still, it is an instantiation of the alternatives offered by mysticism, across religious traditions, to the re-ordering of desire ushered in by modernity and made palpable through capitalism. Christian mysticism, for example, as Michel de Certeau has pointed out in relation to European mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, similarly performed the function of resisting the logic of the emerging modern state (de Certeau 1992). This is irrespective of whether mystics 'intended' such resistance or not. Rather, as we point out in the case of Shaykh Yusuf, it is the effects of their alternative ways of viewing and approaching the world that merit consideration.

## **The Self in Early Modernity**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1632, the Dutch polymath and humanist scholar Caspar Barlaeus stood before the prosperous merchants assembled in the Amsterdam Athenaeum and proceeded to give a famous lecture entitled 'Mercator Sapiens' – 'The Wise Merchant'. His intention, as quoted by Weststeijns, was 'not to condemn but to control the strivings for possessions through the reins of right reason' (Weststeijn 2012: 185). The prudent pursuit of profit was to be equated with the public good. This welding together of profit and public good represents a radical shift from the medieval past which viewed a concern for wealth in a more suspicious manner. Saint Francis of Assisi, for example,

advised his fraternity ‘not to pick up money or coins [nor] to accept or to have received them in any way ... for we are to have or to expect benefit from money or coins no more than from stones’ (Soelle 2001: 238). Money was a necessary evil, voluntary poverty an esteemed aspiration and acquisitiveness was frowned upon. Instead, in this medieval European view all creation partook of a Great Chain of Being and played their particular roles on ‘God’s stage’. ‘Who one is’ was defined by one’s duty. One was what one did. The individual self was submerged beneath that overarching sense of duty (Baumeister 1987: 171). And merchants too had their particular duties. But with Barlaeus the merchant does not now simply do his duty, namely trade. Given that his wealth equates with the public good, his acquisitiveness is quietly encouraged. He is, further, not simply another human being placed and monitored by God on a stage but, because of his particular skills, has now become ‘self-acting’ (Jacob 2008:10). He is both philosopher and merchant, whose cultivation of the classical humanities is crucially linked to the skills required to be successful at trade. Trained in these dual fields, he can thus assume social and political responsibilities that went beyond the remit to which he was accustomed in the medieval chain of being (Rauschenbauch 2013). He had now come into his own.

Barlaeus’s thoughts reflected a gradual but radical shift in the view of the self that was characteristic of early modernity (1500-1800). According to Baumeister, this period ‘came to stress the distinction between the inner self and outer self [that is, one was more than one’s duty], to value individuality, and increasingly, to recognize human development and change’ (Baumeister 1987:163). It was in this period, more particularly in the seventeenth century, that the concepts of self-consciousness and self-awareness became prominent. The period also saw the loosening of social hierarchies, the onset of social mobility and the rise of the middle class. The consequent decline of traditionally fixed social bonds also meant the erosion of the concept of community as the basic unit of society, to become increasingly replaced by the notion of the individual in this regard (Baumeister 1987: 165, 169). The individual self begins to break through a cosmic hierarchy that had previously, in a profound sense, anonymized it.

The emergence of the individual self, in turn, facilitated the rise of capitalism. The sovereign self, namely the self not philosophically bound by tradition, community and cosmic hierarchies, is in principle free to pursue his or her self-interest (Asad 2003: 133-134). This, of course, is the foundation for

a capitalist mindset. But capitalism itself sets into play a regimen of desires that helps shape the seemingly sovereign self in various ways. According to Bell (2012), reflecting the insights of Deleuze and Foucault, capitalism is premised on the construction of desire (and hence the self) in particular directions. If desire (Deleuze) and its corollary power (Foucault) are diffused throughout society, and in fact provides the precondition for its ordering, it is the ends to which that society is ordered that become the critical issue. In a society diffused through and through with capitalist power, the desires fostered by its regimen becomes a foundational concern. Thus, in an example provided by Bell, the seemingly daring transgression of sexual mores on display in a contemporary New Orleans Mardi Gras is not so much an assertion of the sovereign self but a product of complex marketing and commodification of desire (Bell 2012: 53-54). Capitalism is then not to be seen so much as a mode of production but as an organizing principle for thinking and, consequently, arranging society. For Bell, capitalism is a theology because 'it reflects a particular understanding of how reality hangs together – what the nature and end of the material world is, how that world operates, and the place of humans within it, including the nature of their behavior and interactions as well as their purpose and prospects ...' (Bell 2012:91). The elements of this understanding include a vision of the world as being constituted of autonomous individuals (as opposed to community), free to maximize their own interests (as opposed to the common good), underscored by a view of the human being as a creature of unlimited wants and desires (as opposed to being defined by a particular *telos*), in necessary competition with one another – the war of all against all as per Hobbes famous phrase – with relationships maintained for instrumental purposes (as opposed to friendship grounded in the common good) and an approach towards justice that is wholly concerned with the enforcement of voluntary contractual exchanges (as opposed to a concern with deleterious social effects that may result from those exchanges, that is, social justice) (Bell 2012: 93-110). Such a theology obviously runs counter to those commonly found in the world's traditional religions and so works in opposition to the desires they seek to cultivate. However, the resources of the modern state are aligned on the side of capitalist desires. As Bell points out, again following Deleuze, in early modernity the state recognized that the perpetuation of its power depended upon the prosperity of its subjects. It thus developed the sciences of population (political statistics and census). However, it came to the realization that certain aspects of society were bound to escape its control,

especially the economy. Thus, rather than seeking to control this rather opaque dimension, it put itself into its service. As distinct from directly seeking wealth, the liberal state now seeks to facilitate optimal conditions for the pursuit of individual interests. The realization of these interests depends on a regimen of governing the self-wrought by civil society, for example, the regimen to which factory or office workers are typically subject. Liberalism is hence intimately involved in governance even though this does not necessitate any direct state apparatus (Bell 2012: 70-79). Selves are subtly conditioned in accordance with the economic logic of the state – a logic which in turn reflects the regimen of desires inaugurated by capitalism. It is against this, admittedly sketchy, backdrop, I believe, that we need to see the anti-statecraft politics of Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqassari of Cape Town.

### **The Anti-politics of Shaykh Yusuf**

Shaykh Yusuf (1626-1699), born in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is famous for his struggle against Dutch colonialism in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, particularly from 1667 onward. The struggle, which primarily took place in Banten, Java, led to his eventual exile to Cape Town in 1694, where he was to pass away five years later, becoming an icon for South African Muslims – ‘the father of Islam in South Africa’ – as well as a national hero in Indonesia where his memory continues to be celebrated. But for many Muslims in both countries, he is also regarded as a saint (*waliullah*)<sup>2</sup> whose tomb – and he has one in both countries – is visited to seek God’s blessings. Indeed, prior to taking up his anti-colonial activity, he had already achieved considerable renown as a mystic, a Sufi who was given the title *Tāj al Khalwatīyyah*, or ‘The Crown of the Khalwatīyyah Order’.<sup>3</sup> In this regard he had authored a number of relatively short texts on Sufism, approximately 53 in all, including some that he had composed while exiled in Ceylon between 1684 and 1694 (it was from Ceylon that he was transferred to Cape Town). These texts clearly show him to be a proponent of the ‘*waḥdat ul wujūd*’ or ‘Unity of Being’ school associated with the famous Andalusian mystic, Shaykh Muḥīyuddīn ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240). Remarkably, there is hardly, if ever, a reference to the Dutch in his texts, even in the ones that were written on Ceylon after his confrontation with them. There

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, ‘friend of God’.

<sup>3</sup> On the Khalwatīyyah see Bruinessen (1991).

is also no seeming concern with conventional politics in general, but rather we find in them a reiteration of the principles of *ṭarīqah* (the spiritual path) and *ḥaqīqah* (spiritual realities). Thus, as I have stated elsewhere, his focus on the spiritual path deals with the following principles:

the importance of remembering God constantly, the manner of such remembrance as well as its conditions; the requirement to show fidelity to orthodox Muslim beliefs and to adhere to Islamic law (*Sharī'ah*); the requirement to follow the prophetic example (*Sunnah*) both inwardly and outwardly; the importance of fealty to one's spiritual master; the importance of showing satisfaction with divine decree and ordinance (although to be displeased with sin); the need to inculcate good character; an attitude that advocates the view that politics is beneficial only in so far as it nurtures the soul – otherwise it is better to withdraw from such politics; that the spiritual seeker should always think the best of other people and of God; that they should have a healthy fear of God; and that they should follow the spiritual quest with humility. In brief, all thoughts and all acts must be geared to the continuous remembrance of God (Rafudeen 2017).

As to the themes focused on mystical reality, these are:

... the full awareness that, in truth, only God exists and that everything else is but a manifestation of God's reality; that it is through God's manifestations that creation comes to know Him; the perfect human being is one who is continually conscious of God's reality and thus is able to witness God in all things; that the heart of such a human being is the Throne of God; as such, the possessor of such a heart is involved in an intimate relationship with God; that the goal of the spiritual quest is extinction of the consciousness of one's self (*fanā*) and residing in a state of permanence (*baqā*) with God; and that consciousness of the self results from the distance to God and that such consciousness is the deeper root of sin (Rafudeen 2017).

What immediately strikes one is how abstract these themes are from the cut and thrust of politics – a politics with which Shaykh Yusuf, as the spiritual

advisor to the Banten court and a personal participant in the fight against Dutch hegemony, was intimately conversant. Yet he is apparently, in his thought at least, not interested in matters of state. His focus is strictly on cultivating the subjectivity demanded of his worldview which, in a word, aspires to make God a living reality in an individual's life. If anything, he is not merely disinterested in politics but actively seeks to cut his disciples off from it. While he does believe that, in an ideal politic, the Muslim ruler is guided by the Islamic scholar in fostering a healthy socio-political order, he appears to have come to the view that such an organic relationship is, at the time of writing, impossible given the deterioration of the Muslim state. Given the political circumstances – and he may have had colonialism in mind here although he does not name it as such – Muslim rulers should set their sights on the bare minimum, namely upholding the basic elements of the *Sharī'ah* as far as they could, while those treading the spiritual path should now withdraw from state matters as such. He justifies his position on the grounds that the circumstances in which Muslims then found themselves were 'times of corruption' and he adduces several Prophetic sayings (*ahadīth*) advocating such withdrawal in times of 'greed, passion, miserliness and self-conceit' to the extent that, under such conditions, even the traditional injunction 'to enjoin good and prevent evil' in a public way may be the less desirable option when compared to seclusion (*QA* 2017, *TALAA* 2017, *ZA* 2017).

Such seclusion, or to put it in another way, such explicit renunciation of the political sphere, when seen in conjunction with his overall mystical philosophy, however, does leave a social imprint. Shaykh Yusuf is motivating his readers to a worldview oriented towards the common good (one of the implications of adherence to the *Sharī'ah*), a way of living (*Sunnah*) that does not necessarily fit hand in glove with the desires engendered by a capitalist outlook; a primary fealty that is owed to one's spiritual master rather than the state; a focus on the constant recollection of God rather than, say, one's economic pursuits; a losing of the self to God rather than an assertion of the self; and, underscoring all of this, a shaping of *desire* so that one sees the reality of God in all things (and so for Shaykh Yusuf the Dutch are but one feature in this greater scheme of things) as opposed to cultivating a desire for other than God. If desire is not seen as a product (one either has desire or one has not) but rather, echoing Bell, as a typology (one has different kinds of desire in a zero-sum game) then Shaykh Yusuf's 'Unity of Being' worldview can be seen as a de-territorialization of capitalist desires fostered by modernity's assertion of

the individual self and a re-territorialization of desire for God, a desire to lose the self in the Islamic version of the great chain of being (hence his *jihād* against the Dutch becomes 'unexceptional' flowing as it does from the sense of duty that comes from belonging to this chain and hence he finds no reason to remark on it). His 'anti-politics' is thus a way – an oblique way – of resisting being inscribed within the economic logic of the state. But perhaps it is precisely because of its obliqueness that it was so successful: premised as it is on different notions of time, space and causality, it does not come into direct confrontation with the hegemonic state – although its underpinnings are profoundly subversive of that state – hence helping to ensure the durability of the Cape Muslim community, despite a law that had banned the public display of Islam in the early Dutch period (Mahida 1993: 2) as well as, more generally, the pressure of being a minority within a dominant, specifically Protestant, state-sanctioned Christian context – Muslims were given formal permission to establish South Africa's first mosque only in the 1790's, approximately 140 years after they had first come to the country (Davids 1980). But, it could be asked, what were the specific steps taken by Shaykh Yusuf to cultivate such a perspective among his followers?

### **Shaykh Yusuf's Cultivation of the Worshipping Self**

In providing advice to his disciples in his 'A Saving Bequest' (*al Waṣīyyah al-Munjīyyah*), Shaykh Yusuf recommends that they firstly learn the key tenets of orthodox Sunni belief, especially that related to maintaining consciousness of God's transcendence under all conditions, as per the Quranic dictum. 'There is nothing similar to Him whatsoever' [Quran 42:11]. They are also required to learn the laws relating to acts of obedience in Islam and pay particular attention to upholding the obligatory five daily prayers at their stipulated times. This, of course, is a general requirement for all Muslims. But Shaykh Yusuf then recommends a set of devotional practices which structures the day of a disciple in a far more detailed way. Thus the disciple is asked to recite the formula 'There is no god but God' at least ten thousand times in a twenty-four hour cycle, provided that their work and family circumstances permit such an amount. But even if circumstances do not make this possible, they should recite, at the very least, a quarter of this amount. In addition, they should send at least one hundred salutations upon the Prophet a day (these salutations are contained in standard formulas). Aside from this, he provides a comprehensive

set of specific Quranic chapters as well as other litanies that should be read after the obligatory prayers. These litanies, like the formula ‘There is no god but God’ call the reciter to the consciousness that all things are in God’s power and that to Him alone belongs all glory. And, in addition to the obligatory prayers, he urges his disciples to read the well-known optional prayers such as the mid-morning (*duḥā*), post-sunset (*awwābīn*) and pre-dawn (*tahajjud*) prayers, as well as to fast at least three days every month (WM 2017).

Thus Shaykh Yusuf has set into motion a regimen of practices – practices that take up a considerable part of the day – that orients the disciple to desire God. The formulas and litanies prescribed are meant to bring awareness that the world is temporal and that God, the permanent and the reality behind all things, alone is worthy of all devotion. Such a regimen subverts any notion that a pursuit of economic goals – the striving for possessions as a public good as per Barlaeus – should be made a priority for the self. Of course, Shaykh Yusuf recognizes the pursuit of economic activities for livelihood as necessary. (This would form part of the obligations to one’s family as required by the *sharī‘ah*.) But the subjectivity cultivated by the consistent regimen of practices is undoubtedly that of a ‘worshipping self’ as distinct from the individual self that characterizes the *homo oeconomicus*.

But the question may well be asked: why worship? Why cultivate such a self? It appears from Shaykh Yusuf’s work that such a regimen of practices, formal at first, leads to a deepening exploration, and consequent realization, of the nature of the self. So, crucially, the formula ‘There is no god but God’, while recited by the tongue, connects to the spiritual heart (*qalb*), seen as ‘favour of Allah that pours through the openings of the physical heart’ (IK 2017). The ritual recital of the formula is regarded as the key by which to enter the domain of this heart and to ‘rejoice’ in everything that is found there. But the heart is one aspect of a spiritual psychology that includes other faculties such as the soul (*rūh*), the inner heart (*fu‘ad*), and the innermost essence (*sirr*) which too have their formulaic ‘keys’ as means to enter the perceived riches of their domains. This spiritual psychology has, of course, been the subject of wide discussion in Sufism and we have no need here to pursue its details.<sup>4</sup> We simply wish to make the point that its practitioners such as Shaykh Yusuf believe that the self constitutes a microcosm that, via specified training, must be explored and mined.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Valiuddin (1980).

But a microcosm presumes a macrocosm. In Shaykh Yusuf's view, the purpose of the self, the purpose of the cultivated exploration and mining is to become, in a profound sense, 'nothing', to again become absorbed in God and lose consciousness of its own existence. In this ontology, human beings are in reality 'non-existent' and God is the Being that truly exists – all creation being manifestations of His attributes. It is forgetfulness of God that gives the impression that the self has an independent reality and so, in order to recover our true metaphysical location, namely that of non-being, he or she needs to remember God – such remembrance being the *raison d'être* for cultivating the 'worshipping self'.

Such a psychology and ontology presupposes a very different orientation to time, space, causality and the self than those characteristic of modernity. Time is seen as a journey to one's origin as distinct from being seen as simply linear progression. Similarly, in terms of space, this world is not seen as unending matter but rather as a place of sojourning, a testing ground beyond which one returns back to one's home, namely, God. In regard to causality, the view that each and everything in existence is directly caused by God and is a reflection of His Attributes generates a particular relation to creation – creation as various hues, so to speak, of one reality – that sits at odds with the dialectal impetus of modernity. Most pointedly, perhaps, for our purposes here, the view that fulfilment is to be sought in the negation of self-consciousness as opposed to its assertion, marks a profound break with the dawn of the modern perspective described by Baumeister earlier, and the accompanying shepherding of this individualism into the service of capitalism. And while we are not saying Shaykh Yusuf consciously set out to do this, his regimen of practices and the subjectivity it cultivated had the *effect* of resisting such marshalling and consequent reduction of the self to *homo oeconomicus* by offering an alternative way of 'how reality hangs together' to use Bell's term, an alternative way of living the self and an alternative structure of desire. Yet this alternative was not an obvious resistance to hegemony. By its nature it could not be. This is a point that requires some elucidation.

## **Mysticism as Oblique Resistance: Breaking out of the Prison of the Ego**

In her magnum opus, *The Silent Cry*, Dorothee Soelle quotes Rumi, the celebrated mystic poet, as follows: 'Why, when God's world is so big/ did you

fall asleep in a prison/ of all places?’ (Soelle 2001: 29-30).

The prison referred to here is the ego which, according to Soelle, ‘does not allow the bundle of desires, drives and needs in us to come to resolution. This is precisely how it shores up in us such profound dependency on this world’ (Soelle 2001: 209).

The ego, in other words, in its untrained state, is enslaved to the world. It covets the source of its imprisonment. But it is driven by mercantilism and, later, industrial and global capitalism, towards such covetousness. In her analysis of Meister Eckhart’s sermon on Jesus driving money changers and merchants from the temple, Soelle notes that Eckhart (1260-1328) must have been acutely conscious that he was preaching in Cologne, at that time an emerging centre of trade between Western and Eastern Europe. For Eckhart, it was not any supposed dishonest dealing by the merchants that upset Jesus – in fact, they are described as honest and religious people – rather, it was the mercantilist spirit itself that was the source of his opprobrium. This spirit is based on creating a relationship of distance between buyer and seller, subject and object as well as a mindset that God ‘owes’ a person for his or her performance of good deeds. It thus leads, according to Soelle, to ego-fixation, to what in later capitalism was unabashedly called enlightened self-interest. For Eckhart, on the contrary, to be free, the ego must be made empty or ‘being rid’ (*ledig*). This word, as Soelle informs us, means, amongst other things, being unburdened, unencumbered, not being a serf. In other words, it must free itself from the pull of desires and self-interests that characterize the mercantile spirit and again become egoless – an egolessness that then allows the temple of the soul to be flooded with God (see Soelle 2001: 214-216; as well as Eckhart 2017)<sup>5</sup>.

Such egolessness can only be achieved, says Soelle, not by looking at ourselves in the mirror but by ‘looking at something different and being captured by something outside ourselves’ (Soelle 2001:212). In the case of the Sufis’ *dhikr* the resolution to the ego’s unrelenting pursuit of desire is achieved by replacing ‘God-forgetfulness’ – of which Soelle observes the ego is a concretization – by God-remembrance, *dhikr* (the repeated utterance of God’s

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<sup>5</sup> Eckhart’s sermon, under the title ‘Merchandizing Truth’ can at least partially be found at the Plough.com website:

<https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/holidays/easter-readings/merchandising-truth-an-easter-reading> (Link active 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018).

name as in the formula 'there is no god but God'). That is, it is to be drowned again in God and thus lose consciousness of one's ego (Soelle 2001:210). The images which flood the ego to stoke its covetousness, and thus its existence as an 'I' in the nominative (the 'I' that makes its claim on the world) is replaced by an image, which in the zero-sum game of desire, lessens the attachment to these other images, replacing it with a desire that places that 'I' in the accusative – 'I' as an object of creation, a link in the great chain of being, an actor on a stage directed by God<sup>6</sup>.

Soelle's reflection on the place of *dhikr*, I believe, provides us with an important opening for understanding Shaykh Yusuf's seemingly abstract writings as an act of resistance. Directly, of course, the *dhikr* formula that Shaykh Yusuf himself recommends his disciples to recite, at least 2500 times a day, would be the practice by which such egolessness is facilitated. Yet the *dhikr* itself, as alluded to in the previous section, inducts the disciple into a world where time, space, causality and the nature of the self are regarded rather differently. That is, it provides an alternative psychology and ontology as already mentioned. In Soelle's terms, it provides a 'different relation to the ego' (Soelle 2001: 212).

This relation, in the thought of Shaykh Yusuf, is viewed as real. From his perspective, his writings are a description of how things really are. It is *in effect* an alternative to the prevailing hegemony but it does not purposively set out to construct itself as such. On the contrary, its roots extend far back into the Islamic tradition, well before colonialism, to a stream of thought most notably connected with the 13<sup>th</sup> century figure of ibn 'Arabī already mentioned, but beyond this mystic to earlier ones in the Muslim tradition who had expressed similar outpourings, as well to his previous masters in the spiritual chain of the Khalwatiyyah who, like all other Sufi orders in Islam, trace their authority to the Prophet. Thus from the perspective of Shaykh Yusuf, his picture of reality is not so much an alternative, but a natural continuation of the teachings he received from his masters, and they from their masters and so forth and so, far from being just an opinion among others in Islam or, worse still, a deviation from the religion, it represents its very core. It is also important to remember that Shaykh Yusuf's teachings are still, in the postcolonial era, being actively taught by the present day successors of his branch of the

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<sup>6</sup> See Soelle (2001) for her employment of Buber's concept of nominative and accusative in this regard, p211.

Khalwatīyah order in South Sulawesi<sup>7</sup>. From these analyses and interpretations, it is thus a teaching that, in crucial respects at least, is impervious to the vicissitudes of history.

This, I think, is significant because it reflects the oblique nature of the critique made in Shaykh Yusuf's thought. His description of a different relation to the ego, to time, space and causality may be thoroughly at odds with that cultivated by the mercantilist mind-set but it is not necessarily in open conflict with the latter, except where the dictates that follow from following the *Sharī'ah* requires *jihād* or another sort of confrontation. But, mostly, it offers a *parallel* way of life. A different relation to the ego, to time, space and causality does not always require confrontation but plays out in consciousness. Human beings are made aware that there is a different mode of reality than that on offer in hegemonic discourse. Egolessness represents the culmination of the properly trained ego, a gradual emptying of dross via replacement with the wholesome. And so, from the perspective of the ego at least, egolessness does not initially present itself as a direct challenge to the ego's authority, even though the former will prove to be profoundly subversive of this latter. Similarly, Shaykh Yusuf is not directly challenging market time or market space, that is, linear time and space, but he radically relativizes linearity by according it a particular reality amidst other dimensions of time and space. Likewise, seeing God as the cause of each and every moment does not negate apparent material causes: however, recognizing God as the reality behind every appearance does result in a transformed view of how reality hangs together. The critique, then, is directed towards consciousness and awareness and this may be described as an oblique criticism of the Dutch East India Company's mercantilist mindset. But such criticism should not be seen as wholly intangible. The alternative consciousness cultivated needs to be communicated to disciples and practised and this in turn requires teaching circles, mosques and Sufi orders. And the cultivation of a new trajectory of desires accomplished through such institutions would in turn generate further ones. We have already mentioned the living tradition of Shaykh Yusuf's teaching in Indonesia. In

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<sup>7</sup> For a list of the spiritual masters of the order up until the present day see the blog entitled PROFIL JAM'İYAH KHALWATIYAH SYEKH YUSUF AL-MAKASSARIY.

<http://profilejamiyahkhalwatiyah.blogspot.co.za/> , 16 February 2016 (Link still active on 6 March 2018)

Cape Town, while the atmosphere in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was far more restrictive, institutions and recital groups have clearly been inspired by him. Indeed, as early as 1704, Muslims in Cape Town had already made his own place of burial such an institution – a *kramat* (a building constructed in honour of a saint) to be precise. The oblique critique implied in living a parallel mode of the self necessarily had a social, and consequently, political imprint. At the very least it helped ensure, together with other factors of course, that Cape Muslims had an alternative tradition by which they could reflect upon and experience reality – the survival of which tradition simultaneously contributed to their survival as a fundamentally intact community amidst a tumultuous history.

## **Conclusion**

I think it is important not to confine Shaykh Yusuf's activities to the realm of the mystical, something that has little do with his political activity. As I hope I have indicated at least in part, there are profound interconnections between the two. Moreover, we now know through the genealogical turn in the social sciences that the construction of these fields as distinct domains has largely occurred under the impetus of the Enlightenment (Asad: 1993). From a perspective such as '*waḥdat ul wujūd*' these fields do not have separate realities. Rather, as indicated, the perspective is undergirded by specific views on time, space and causality within which *all* reality unfolds. Thus all reality has to partake of a time that is both linear but also occurs in a divine 'now', of a space that is physical but is transcended by spaces that are not visible, and a causality where, in reality, God is the direct cause of each and every act. When reality is viewed in such a way, the questions that an adherent of such a worldview would pose are rather different to one whose subjectivity has been shaped by more secular concerns. So, for example, with regard to time, the concern for the adherent of the 'unity of being' perspective would not be: what role did someone – now dead – play in history? Rather, the question would be: where is that someone *now* in relation to a continually unfolding reality. In such a perspective what we would commonly see as politics is simply part of metaphysics.

Thus Shaykh Yusuf's perspective offered the beleaguered Muslims of colonial Cape Town, namely slaves and free blacks, a radically different way of experiencing time, space and causality, that is, a parallel mode of living reality. This mode of reality offered the self possibilities of fulfilment that were

not defined, nor contained, by the economic logic of the state. In any case, as an oppressed underclass, such economic logic did not serve their interests, and they found themselves oppressed precisely because they were at the receiving end of those who were served by its logic. Thus they were certainly not invested in the status quo. Moreover, through this parallel mode, Muslim slaves and free blacks could make sense of their situation in the greater scheme of things, helping them to maintain their faith in the face of the historical odds with which they had to contend.

There may perhaps be a question worth considering here for our current decolonial moment. To what extent does resistance to coloniality imply resisting the deep assumptions – the assumptions of space, time and causality – on which it rests? These assumptions in turn rest on those of the modern project itself with which colonialism is historically and logically intertwined. The question, I think, is important because insufficient attention to the genealogy of these assumptions risks decolonial activism being inscribed in the very colonial legacy it opposes. To what extent, for example, is the existentialism that characterizes ‘Black Skin, White Masks’ itself inscribed in the project of modernity? (Fanon 1986). Or, conversely, how can John Mbiti’s exploration of the anti-modernist nature of time in various African religions (a time that absorbs back rather than projects forward) be viewed as preeminently contributing to the decolonial project? (Mbiti 1967). Of course, we are not advocating a wholesale dismissal of modernity’s assumptions nor, on the other hand, a simple embrace of the assumptions that underlie a mystical system such as Shaykh Yusuf’s or in the systems explored by Mbiti. Rather, Shaykh Yusuf’s mysticism should at least help prompt greater self-reflexivity regarding the underlying philosophical bases of decoloniality.

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My reading of Shaykh Yusuf’s texts is based on a number of translations done by members of the Shaykh Yusuf Project in 2017. The project has aimed to translate a representative portion of Shaykh Yusuf’s writings as well as provide a detailed historical context to them. Members of the translation team were Professor Yousuf Dadoo, Professor Suleman Dangor, Shaykh Ebrahiem Moos and myself. The translations are yet unpublished but the original texts can be

found in a manuscript housed at the University of Leiden, namely, MSKBG 101, F Or A 13d UB Leiden. The texts that were used are as follows. Please note that the translated titles are followed by the bracketed original titles:

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