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The Tablīghī Madrassas in Lenasia and Azaadville: Local Players in the Global ‘Islamic Field’

The Islamic schools in Lenasia and Azaadville in South Africa represent prominent examples of schools that provide religious education in a format which is firmly rooted in traditions and interpretations of Islam originating outside South Africa. Established by the Muslim minority community of the country, the schools follow the Deobandi interpretation of Islam from South Asia. Its tradition goes back to the Islamic seminary Darul Ulum (1866) in the town of Deoband in north India (Metcalf 1982). Its inceptors were promoting a purist form of Islam designed to revive Islamic knowledge, practice and piety in the face of the expanding colonial rule of Britain shaped by its western and Christian traditions.

The Deoband school serves as the spiritual *alma mater* and reference point of hundreds of schools (*madrassas*, *Dārul ‘Ulūms*) in South Asia, but also in other regions of the world. These schools have become part of translocal and transnational networks of religious education and activism that have gone global (Reetz 2007, 2010b). They are transcending political and cultural borders. At the same time the schools reflect local requirements and perceptions where they often intersect with social stratification and mobilization, but also with identity politics. As the two localities of Lenasia and Azaadville hosting the schools were reserved for the ‘coloured’ Indian minority under the Apartheid regime, the schools reflected the evolution of the religious and ethnic politics of South Africa. They thus mediate between the Global and the Local which represent different sides of the same phenomenon. They demonstrate the correspondence between social structures, symbolic labour as a function of religion, and mental dispositions in what Bourdieu called the unfolding of the religious field (Bourdieu 1999). To understand these multiple attachments, the paper will discuss the schools within their competing reference systems, represented by the South African nation state, the Deoband tradition in Islam, the missionary and Sūfī aspects of the schools and their global networking.

1. Deobandi influence in South Africa

For a long time religious teaching in the Muslim world had been a rather personal affair between a teacher (*shaykh*) and a number of students, at the mosque, or often at home. Although formal madrassas as institutions have been known from various Muslim empires of the middle ages, by the nineteenth century religious teaching in Islam was probably much more private than in Christian or public institutions. The school in Deoband reintroduced a high degree of formality to teaching Islamic knowledge. It featured a regular curriculum with standard course duration, a fixed time-table, salaried teachers and a hostel.

The religious schools in Lenasia and Azaadville are part of a growing number of institutions maintained by Islamic organisations in South Africa. They provide religious education in a structured format as degree courses. They are run like fee-based private schools complete with a fixed teaching programme, permanent teaching and administrative staff. They offer campus-style facilities with separate buildings for administration, teaching, hostels and common kitchen facilities. The most popular courses are aimed at teaching students to become a Ḥāfiẓ or Qāri who memorizes the Qur’ānic verses and recites them during Islamic rituals. More advanced courses of 6 to 7 years teach theology and the classical Islamic literature. Thereafter students become a scholar of Islam, or ‘ālim (pl. ‘ulamā’). Some of these religious schools also teach secular subjects as part of the so-called national curriculum. Yet, they are distinct from “Muslim schools” that primarily teach secular secondary education in a religious environment with added religious subjects.

In South Africa, the two schools in Lenasia and Azaadville would be primarily viewed as regular Islamic institutions with a conservative slant where the sectarian attachment is not necessarily obvious. But students attending the schools and graduating from them will easily identify them as Deobandi schools. This connection is reflected in the curriculum and the choice of books and subjects, but also in the format of teaching. It is equally evident in the community background of the teachers and the students. Furthermore, the two schools are part of a wider network of religious schools associated with the Organisation of religious scholars of the region (Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal – JUT). This organisation follows the blueprint of similar Deobandi groups in the Southasian subcontinent while it retains local roots in South Africa.

The JUT organisation in South Africa was established in the early twentieth century, in 1923.¹ Its inception was likely influenced by the freedom struggle in colonial British India and the mobilization of Muslims there. In India, the first association of Muslim scholars, the Jamiatul ‘Ulamā’ -e Hind (JUH), had formed in 1919 with a very pronounced political agenda against the British and for the establishment of an Islamic way of life. The JUH particularly helped to shape the up-and-coming Khalīfat movement that became enormously popular in India. It was directed at the preservation and, later, restoration of the Ottoman Caliphate which was being abolished when the Ottoman Empire was dismantled after the end of the First World War in which the Ottomans were on the losing side.

As Muslims of Indian/South Asian descent formed a large part of the South African Muslim minority, the JUT and other Deobandi organizations found it easy to expand their influence in South Africa. From the 1960s onward their clout visibly strengthened with a reformist campaign against followers of ‘traditional’ forms of worship associated with Sūfi rituals and the Barelwi school of thought that had previously dominated ‘Indian’ Muslims in South Africa. Today, the Deobandi-related associations and schools represent probably the most influential segment of orthodox Muslim institutions, although Barelwi schools and institutes have also strengthened their organisations (Vahed 2003; Tayob 1999). In South Africa, the contestation between Deobandis and Barelwis was

1 <http://www.jamiat.co.za/profile/history.htm>. [29-11-10]

framed as the Tablīghī-Sunnī controversy. The ascent of the Tablīghīs stood for the rise of Deobandi views and practices. Tablīghīs are followers of the Islamic missionary movement of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt (TJ) founded by the Deobandi scholar, Muḥammad Ilyās (1885-1944) in 1926 in India, which is currently spread all over the world. 'Sunnī' was appropriated as a label by the followers of the Barelwi movement as they maintained to be the only true followers of the Sunna, i.e. the ways of the Prophet and his companions. The Barelwi movement emerged from Bareilly in north India, not far from Deoband town, where it was founded by Aḥmad Raza Khan (1856–1921) around 1900. His followers insisted they were the only true 'Sunnīs' largely in defence against accusations by the Deobandis, that Barelwi practices and rituals, particularly where they related to Sūfī-inspired shrine worship and saint veneration, constituted deviations and impermissible innovations (*bid'a*).

Since the end of Apartheid the Deobandi religious scholars' association, coming from local and regional pockets of influence, has striven to become more inclusive and national towards different sections of the Muslim community. In 1994, it united its patchwork of branches in a new umbrella group, the United Ulama Council of South Africa. While the association and its functionaries remained strongly orthodox they opened to other Muslim communities, such as the 'Cape Malay' Muslims and the rival Barelwis. The 'Cape Malay' Muslims represent a strong voice on the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) in Cape Town. The Barelwis are represented by the Sunnī Jamiatul Ulema. Both are now also associated with the JU network (For an overview of the United 'Ulamā' Council of South Africa member institutions, see Table 1).

The essence of Deobandi teaching is embodied in the cleansing of existing rituals and beliefs followed by Muslims, in conjunction with what is considered to be the 'true' and correct Islam. These cleansing efforts refer to beliefs and practices of the founding generations of Islam, the pious forebears (*salaf*), which is why sometimes they are considered Salafīs. But the Deobandis cannot be easily merged with other Salafīs who often reject the law schools of Islam which formed later in the middle ages. The Deobandis in contrast strictly follow their own legal tradition and the teachings of their elders in a concept called *taqlīd* (adherence). As is common in South Asia, the Deobandis are Ḥanafīs and therefore particularly attached to the Islamic legal tradition of Abu Ḥanīfa (699-767). But this attachment has never prevented them from providing space for other legal traditions as well, both in South Asia and also in South Africa. 'As early as 1927, the JUT published its first book designed for Shāfi'ī students and adults.'¹ The Deobandi understanding of true Islam is largely based on the study of the Prophetic traditions, the *ḥadīth*, which comprises a large part in their theological curriculum. It is from that understanding and feeling of superiority that they have strongly criticised dissenting readings of Islam. Their critique was originally directed at the Sūfī-related Islam, which then organised through the Barelwi institutions. It was later also directed against followers of the Islamic Party (Jamā'āt-i Islāmī) of Mawlānā Sayyid Abū 'Alā Maudūdi (1903-1979), of the Ahl-i Ḥadīth from South Asia, against Hindus and other Non-Muslims, and in

particular against the small group of followers of Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad, the so-called Aḥmadi sect. The Aḥmadis are regarded as heretics and are the subject of fierce hostile rhetoric. In Pakistan they routinely become victims of sectarian violence. The strong ideological slant of Deobandi sectarianism has also inspired *jihādi* groups, notably in Pakistan and Afghanistan, though it is difficult to identify one with the other. The vast majority of Deobandi institutions focus on religious studies and pious character formation.

Table 1: Islamic institutions associated with the United ‘Ulamā’ Council of South Africa

Institution	Website	Founded	Remarks
United Ulama Council of South Africa		1994	Founded after the end of Apartheid to unite different institutions
Jamiatul Ulama Johannesburg (formerly Transvaal)	www.jamiat.co.za	1923	Branches in Laudium, Lenasia, Benoni, Klerksdorp, Middelburg, Azaadville; zonal offices in Vaal, Limpopo, Springs, Delmas, Rustenburg, Bloemfontein (http://www.jamiat.co.za/profile/branches.htm)
Jamiatul Ulama Kwa-Zulu Natal	www.jamiat.org.za	1955	Office: Durban
Muslim Judicial Council	www.mjc.org.za	1945	Office: Darul Arqam, Athlone, near Cape Town
Sunni Jamiatul Ulema KZN	www.sju.co.za	1978	Office: Overport (Barelwi)
Sunni Ulema Council			Office: Crown Mines, Johannesburg
Eastern Cape Islamic Congress			Office: Gelvandale, Port Elizabeth ¹
Northern Cape Ulama Council			Office: Kimberley, Northern Cape
Council of Ulama Eastern Cape	www.councilofulama.co.za		Office: Port Elizabeth
Al Quds Foundation	www.alquds.za.net		Offices: Cape Town, Gauteng
MJC Halal Trust	www.mjc.org.za	1945	Western Cape Region
National Independent Halal Trust	www.halaal.org.za		

¹ http://www.esinislam.com/African_Muslim_Directories/South_African_Muslim_Directories/South_African_Muslim_Organizations.htm#poverty [29-11-10]

Source: Derived from material received during interview at the JU office in Johannesburg, 22-02-2005, with additional internet research

In South Africa, as in general outside South Asia, Deobandi thought is not known to have been linked to militant activism. At the same time it has generated ideo-

logical and sectarian polarisation in Muslim communities where it had not existed before. In South Africa it led to the expanding contestation between reformist Islam of the Deobandi variety and Sunnī groups leaning towards the Sūfī-inspired Barelwi interpretation of Islam (Tayob 1999). However, the nature of Deobandi education in South Africa is not as homogeneous and univocal as in South Asia. It is not only a *madrassa* movement of educational institutions, but it is also shaped by the missionary movement of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt and by Sūfī scholars of Deobandi background. Those influences tend to be more inclusive in nature. Deobandi thought, unlike conventional Salafism, has never cut itself off from mystical Islam and Sufism in particular as long as it is consistent with Islamic law (*sharī'a*) and the injunctions of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions (*ḥadīth*).

The two Islamic schools in Azaadville and Lenasia under study here are prime examples of this composite trend. They embody not only the Deobandi tradition, but also intimate connections with the Tablīghīs. They equally demonstrate close affinity with the disciples of the Deobandi scholar and Sūfī Shaykh Muḥammad Zakariyya (1898-1982) who was a co-founder of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt and a nephew of its inceptor, Muḥammad Ilyās. In this, the schools reflect a more general trend among global Deobandi affiliates: a number of them owe their existence to the impact of Tablīghī activism.² In addition, several of the Deobandi key seminaries outside South Asia were inspired by Zakariyya and his disciples.³ The affinity reflects not only ideological proximity but also logistical convenience: the missionary movement of the Tablīghīs and the Sūfī network of disciples find the expansion by branches across borders around the globe comparatively easy as translocal and transnational networking is the nature of their religious and social operation.

In the expanding religious and Islamic field in South Africa, Deobandi schools, beyond theological qualifications, offer religious and cultural capital in the mold Bourdieu notes, that is seen as beneficial also for social advancement. It is this context that contributes to the continued growth of Deobandi schools offering orthodox Islamic training in a society driven by the goals of advancement and modernisation (see the list of schools in Table 2). The local evolution of the two schools makes those benefits more tangible and concrete.

2 This, for instance, applies to the Deobandi schools in Nizamuddin (Delhi, India), Raiwind (Lahore, Pakistan), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Temboro (Indonesia, East Java), Dewsbury (UK), where they are attached to the local centre (*markaz*) of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt.

3 As far as known currently, this applies to the following schools: Madrasa Saulatiyya, Mecca (f. 1873 by Mawlānā Khalil, the spiritual mentor of Zakariyya); Darul Ulum Bury (Holcombe), UK (1975), Mawlānā Motala; Darul Ulum Dewsbury, UK (1981), Hafiz Muhammad Ishaq Patel – today the Amir of the TJ Europe; Darul Ulum Azadville, South Africa (1982); Darul Ulum Zakariyya, Lenasia, South Africa (1983); Darul Ulum Stanger, South Africa (Mawlānā Yusuf Tatla). In addition, several schools are named in his honour, such as the Jamia-Tul-Imam Muhammad Zakaria in Bradford, UK (cf. Reetz 2007).

Table 2: Islamic seminaries for Boys (Darul Uloom) in South Africa recognised by the 'Ulamā' Council (JU)

Qaasimul Uloom	First Darul Uloom opened 1998 ²
Madrassah Ta'leemuddin	Isipingo Beach ³
Darul Uloom Numaniyyah	Chatsworth, Durban ⁴
Darul Uloom Al-Mahmudia	Stanger
Madrassah Inaamiyya	Camperdown
Darul Uloom Newcastle	Lennoxton
Darul Uloom Miftahul Falah	Harding
Jamiah Mahmoodiyah	Springs
Darul Uloom Zakariyya	Lenasia
Darul Uloom Azaadville	Azaadville
Jami'atul Ulum Al-Islamiyyah	Fordsburg – Johannesburg (at JU office)

1 <http://www.islamicmedia.co.za/dev.htm> [30-11-10]

2 <http://www.eastcoast.co.za/muawiya> [30-11-10]

3 South African Muslim Guide and Directory Services – Educational Institutions: Darul Uloom – <http://www.islam4u.co.za/uooms.html> [30-11-10].

Source: Derived from material received during interview at the JU office in Johannesburg, 22-02-2005, with additional internet research

2. The teaching programme at Azaadville and Lenasia

At the core of the schools' attraction is their teaching of the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān (*Hifẓul Qur'ān*) – which they do part- and full-time, and the Deobandi curriculum of Islamic theology, which is often also named after the degree it confers on students, the *Ālim* course. It is the latter which has become their signature degree course as it creates some form of theological equivalent to the bachelor and/or master courses of the secular Anglo-Saxon education system. It is recognised in varying degrees in Pakistan, India, and by individual schools, such as the International Islamic Universities in several countries, which will regard it as equivalent to a bachelor degree in Arabic/Islamic studies. Others, such as the Jamia Millia and Hamdard Universities, or the Aligarh University in India, equate it with secondary education, requiring students to take additional exams in English or other subjects to meet university admission requirements (Reetz 2008, 97). In South Africa, there is no formal recognition of the course. The school functionaries argue defensively: "There were many 'Ulamā' of Deoband who did not even take a certificate after qualifying as this was not their aim" (Muhammad 2000b, 4). For many Deobandi scholars, the education acquired there is supposed to be a value in itself.

While Azaadville has become known for its theological *‘Ālim* course, Lenasia is valued for its Qur’ānic memorization *Ḥāfiẓ* classes.⁴ In Azaadville, the theological degree course of the *‘Ālim* (scholar) or *Fāzil* (graduate) level will be taken concurrently with classes to become a prayer leader (*imām*), a *madrassa* teacher and elocution classes to pronounce and read the Arabic text of the Qur’ān correctly (*tajwīd*, *qirā’āt*). There are also a preparatory class (*i’dādiyyah*) and a legal course (*iftā’*) available (Muhammad 2000b, 16).

The Deobandis have formalised and standardised Islamic teaching on the basis of the *Dars-e Nizami*, the traditional curriculum of Islamic teaching current in South Asia. It was conceived in the late seventeenth century–early eighteenth century by two scholars from Lucknow in North India, Mulla Qutb al-Din Sihawī (d. 1691) and his son Mulla Nizam al-Din of Firangi Mahal (d. 1748) after whom it was named (Robinson 2001, 211). In Deoband, the *‘Ālim* course is calibrated to be completed in 8 years.⁵ The mainstay of the course are studies of the founding texts of Islam, such as the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions (Ḥadīth). The exegesis of the Qur’ān and Qur’ānic commentaries (*tafsīr*) are important; so are Islamic principles of belief (*‘aqā’id*), morals (*akhlāq*), mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and history. The main division is into divine (*manqulāt*) and derived rational subjects (*ma’qulāt*), which owe their existence either to the Prophetic revelation or human interpretation. Much space is given to commentaries and glosses of classics of Islamic theology which critics argue often makes the study formulaic, especially as it is largely based on rote learning. The last year is usually called the *Dora-e Ḥadīth*, the year of the study of the traditions, which carries special significance. Often, students go to institutes of higher reputation to complete this final year, along with the degree. The degree is structured around the books being taught, for which a teaching license, or *sanad* is being granted. The junior degree is *Fāzil* (graduate), awarded after 7 years, completed with *‘Ālim* (scholar) after the 8th year, and *Kāmil* (master) after a 1-2 year course of post-graduate qualification in Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), law (*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), or Arabic literature.

Outside South Asia, the *‘Ālim* course has been modified in terms of commentaries used, and also for its duration. At Azaadville and Lenasia the duration is 6 and 7 years, and for girls 4 and 5 years, respectively. The programme has been condensed on the basis of selecting books that cover several subjects. In addition, the Azaadville curriculum pays particular attention to learning Urdu, Arabic and English, historical subjects, including the Prophet’s biography (*sīra*), even social welfare (*al-mu’āshara*), and social etiquette in life and for students in particular (Muhammad 2000a, 25-7). The teaching of many subjects in Urdu is justified to “fully maintain the legacy of our past luminaries of the subcontinent” (Muhammad 2000b, 5).⁶

4 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa/page4> [30-11-10]

5 http://darululoom-deoband.com/english/sys_of_edu/index.htm [30-11-10]

6 For the curriculum of Darul Uloom Zakariyya in Lenasia, see <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?27235-Madrassa-Zakariya-Park-%28Darul-Uloom-Zakariyya%29> [30-11-10]

The orientation of the schools, here as much as in any Deobandi or other *madrassas*, depends highly on the tradition and perspective of the founder of the school. He and his family will guide the school for generations and shape its profile through their cultural roots and doctrinal profile. It is therefore the personality and family network of Mawlānās Abdul Hamid Ishaq and Shabbir Saloojee, who shape the personal atmosphere of the schools in Azaadville and Lenasia, respectively. The function of the principal will often remain in the family, becoming almost hereditary. It is not uncommon that those Darul Uloom are run like family enterprises. The theological argument given is that the spiritual blessings (*baraka*) can best flow within the family, ideally from father to son.

Both schools, through the personality and orientation of their leaders, are strongly embedded in the Sūfī traditions.⁷ The principal of Darul Uloom Zakariyya in Lenasia, Mawlānā Saloojee, is a disciple (*khalīfa*) of Mufti Mehmood al-Hasan, following the Sūfī lineage (*silsila*) of the Chishtiyya Sabriyya Imdadiyya Rasheediyya being the traditional lineage of Deobandi Shaykhs taking pride in being initiated in all the 4 major orders (*ṭarīqa*) common in South Asia. Mawlānā Ishaq following Hamid Akhtar from Karachi (see below) adheres to the Chishtiyya Sabriyya Imdadiyya Ashrafiyya lineage, that puts special emphasis on the legacy of Muḥammad Ashraf ‘Alī Thanwī (1863-1943).

The teaching of an ‘*Ālima* degree course to girls is in itself a very interesting development that originated in South Asia. It is still being debated whether it leads to the emancipation of girls from conservative and religious families with far-reaching consequences in the religious field, in the Bourdieu sense of acquiring religious/cultural capital, or whether it helps to cement gender separation and the imposition of limitations on the social roles of Muslim girls (Bourdieu 1991). Student activism is integrated into the school course through study circles and wallpaper writing on theological, and also political topics with relevance to Islam. Students also train to hold religious debates preparing them for roles of Imāms and similar functions.

Increasingly, the schools as institutions and the students use new media to project the schools to the wider public and to network among themselves.⁸ They thus reflect the compulsions of the religious market space in the sense of Bourdieu sense (Bourdieu 1991). Conversion objectives towards non-Muslims and – often even more importantly – to other Muslims of different traditions, are also well served by the new media. Websites such as YouTube and Facebook have witnessed a new wave of video and media activism of students from Islamic schools testing the limits of social and moral proprieties and standards in Islamic teaching.⁹

7 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?20387-Listing-the-Shuyukh-of-Tasawwuf-in-West/page5> [30-11-10]

8 For the introduction of the Zakariyya school, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjAFr9NgPTg>; for a listing of videos of lectures and ceremonies at the Zakariyya school, see http://www.google.de/#q=darul+uloom+zakariyya&hl=de&tbs=vid:1&ei=1DZkTP_6O8q6jAffzJ2wCQ&start=10&sa=N&fp=b2ce21fcffd198b6. [30-11-10]

9 See for instance the relaxed communication among students of the Azaadville school at their group page on facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=wall&viewas=0&gid=13091542129>.

3. Two South African hamlets of Deobandi learning

Today the two schools present themselves as small walled townships, complete religious settlements, which under modern conditions seek to recreate the pious community of the Islamic forebears. Yet the history of the schools is very much marked by the parameters of Muslim institution-building in South Africa, and as such, displaying a very local history with many common elements. In the process both schools went through similar stages of evolution. Those could be conditionally classified as –

- (1) private beginnings;
- (2) institutionalisation;
- (3) modernisation and expansion; and
- (4) ideological and public commitments.

For the two schools, those stages were marked by the following features summarised here:

(1) During the first stage of private beginnings, teaching was started as a personal initiative by individual religious scholars. The 1970s and 1980s were the heydays of identity politics in South Africa when not only its black majority, but also its ethnic and religious minorities were searching for its place and role in the country's racially segregated society. "In 1392 A.H. (1972)," as the school's prospectus narrates for Azaadville, "a student desired to become an *Ālim* in Germiston. His lessons started in a humble way – one student and a part-time *ustāz* (teacher). Little did we realize that this, however, was the seed for something much more in the future. Yearly students began enrolling for the *Ālim* classes." (Muhammad 2000a, 9) Teaching proceeded in Azaadville under improvised conditions until 1981:

Lessons carried on in an informal way with classes taking place at the rear end of the *Jamāt Khāna* [prayer hall] while the students lived in the *mu'azzin's* room [who calls for prayer]. Alhamdulillah, in this humble way, four students graduated as *Ālims* and about twenty as *Hāfizul Qurān*." (Muhammad 2000a)

(2) When the number of students kept growing beyond the expectations of the schools' founders, formal schools were created starting the phase of institutionalisation. In Lenasia, a small town to the south-west of Johannesburg, a separate school building opened after a Muslim philanthropist from the area donated twenty acres of land there in 1983. In Azaadville, near Krugersdorp, to the north-west of Johannesburg, a madrassah opened formally in 1982. It was located in a double-story house with eight students doing the *Ālim* course on a full time basis at first (Muhammad 2000a, 7). "Within a month, we were forced to open a Hifz class due to its demand. Within a year, three more Hifz classes were established with approximately forty students" (Muhammad 2000b, 6).

The choice of locations for building these institutes was not coincidental. It was connected to another structural process where 'coloured' people of South Asian heritage – similar to others – were forcibly removed from non-segregated areas in Johannesburg. Under Apartheid policies they were resettled to 'Indian

group areas' around 1970 (Horrell et al. 1972, 158-9). It was in this context that Azaadville gained prominence as the West Rand Indian group area to the south of Krugersdorp and Lenasia near Johannesburg. The names of the settlements were a testament to the strong sense of cultural and religious belonging with the Muslim traditions of South Asia and their historical and political context. The school in Lenasia was built in Zakariyya Park, named after Muḥammad Zakariyya, the Muslim theologian and co-founder of the missionary movement of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt from India. He had visited his friends and followers in South Africa in 1981 with great impact and had probably initiated both schools. The township of Azaadville named after the Urdu/Hindustani word *azad* meaning 'free' was a reminder of the freedom struggle of India and Pakistan from the British. It may have also reminded local citizens of the travails of partition between secular India and the Muslim majority state of Pakistan.

(3) Today the schools in both places encompass huge complexes of modern buildings that speak for the modern aspirations of its leaders, but also of its clients and supporters. The schools are financed both through donations and fees. They exude the distinct appearance of settled middle-class institutions – a far cry from the austere and often poor Islamic schools in South Asia which inspired their creation. When this author visited the schools in 2005, they were harbouring far-reaching plans of expansion that would significantly enhance their capacity to take in students, but also further improve their facilities. At Azaadville, the new facilities included modern school buildings, a multi-purpose assembly hall, a large mosque, dormitories, a mess (dining hall) and sports facilities (Muhammad 2000b). Lenasia featured similar institutions such as a large mosque for 2500 attendees; large buildings for *hifẓ* and for general classes (east wing); a comprehensive library; two separate hostels, a large dining hall with a well-equipped modern kitchen; a new laundry block and accommodation for teachers and staff members.¹⁰ Extending the existing dorms, the Lenasia school's capacity would increase to 1,000 students. They were also planning to add a separate library for the literature on the curriculum.¹¹

Additional services turned the campus-style facilities into self-reliant communities. The Azaadville school is complete with a general store, a book shop, a barber, and public telephones. The school emphasises that these services aid the students, who as a result, do not have to leave the premises of the school as they are fully catered for on its grounds (Muhammad 2000b, 13). Rapid quantitative growth added another common feature of modernisation. The number of students increased manifold since the beginning. Both schools now have more than 600 students and 30-40 teachers each (see Table 3).

10 *Darul Uloom Zakariyya* (n.d.) (Lenasia, Darul Uloom Zakariyya) – 8-page flyer received during a visit to the school on 23 Feb 2005; here: p. 1.

11 Interview at the Lenasia school, 23 February 2005.

Table 3: Particulars of teaching and learning at the Azaadville and Lenasia schools

	Madrasah Arabia Islamia Azaadville 1, Azaad Avenue, Azaadville – Krugersdorp 1750 – Gauteng, South Africa (Principal: Mawlānā Shabir Saloojee)	Darul Uloom Zakariyya Zakariyya Park Lenasia, 1820 – Gauteng, South Africa (Principal: Mawlānā Abdul Hamid Ishaq)
Courses	Theology (‘Ālim) – 6 years, girls: 4 y. Law (Mufti – Iftā) (Postgraduate – Takhassus) Preparatory (i‘dādiyah) (1 y.) Qur’ānic Recitation (Hifẓ) Qur’ānic Cantation (Qirā’āt) Mosque and Prayer Leader Training Course (Imām Khatīb) (Madrassa) Teacher Training Course (Ustādh)	Theology (‘Ālim / <i>fāzil</i>) – 7 years, girls: 5 y. Qur’ānic Recitation (Hifẓ) Qur’ānic Cantation (Qirā’āt)
Islamic Activities	Teaching and Learning “Nurturing” (appropriate student behaviour) – Tarbiyah Preaching – Tablīgh (Sūfī-way of) Character Building and Self-Reformation – Tazkiyah-e Nafs and Ihsān (Majlis) Additional Ramaḍān Prayer – Tarāwīh Overseas Book Donations – Ibn Masood Book Distribution Scheme	Teaching and Learning Student associations – Anjuman Preaching – Tablīgh Commemoration – Dhikr Majlis Additional Ramaḍān Prayer – Tarāwīh
Depart- ments	Islamic teaching Office of Islamic Legal Advice – Dārul Iftā Publication Department (222 published books by 2004, posters, pamphlets, quarterly journal <i>An Nasīhah</i> , student newsletter <i>Al Muballigh</i> , text books)	Islamic teaching Office for Islamic Legal Advice – Dārul Iftā Eickenhof Branch – Teaching Hifẓ Publications – Tasnīf Library Medical aid – Doctor on premise Laundry Secular academics (English, Maths, Computer courses) Com- puter centre
Girls	Girls’ Madrassa “Madrassatul Banaat”	Girls’ Madrassa “Mueenul Islam”
Students	638 (‘Ālim: 359, Hifẓ: 150) (2004)	680 (Hifẓ: 300) (2007) *
Teachers	36 (2004)	~ 40 full-time teachers, ~ 40 staff assistants

Foreign Students	310 students (2004) from the UK (20), US (20), Mozambique (55), Zimbabwe (10), Zambia, Mauritius, Reunion, Comoro, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, India, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Barbados, Thailand, Malaysia, Seychelles, Canada (6), Indonesia, Mali, Guinea etc. (breakdown for 2005)	~ 325 (50 %) from 52 countries (2005), incl. Malaysia (70), Mozambique (50), Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Gambia, Senegal, Somalia, Mali, the US (20), Canada (20), Reunion, China
Fees	Appx. 9,600 SA Rand per year (2008) ** plus admission fee 10,000	9,000 SA Rand per year + 250 SA Rand for maintenance (2007, Boys) * 995 SA Rand (2005) per month (Girls) ***

* <http://www.Sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?30431-The-Darul-Uloom-Zakariyya-Thread> [30-11-10]

** <http://www.Sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa/page5> [30-11-10]

*** <http://www.Sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?18606-Madressa-Mueenul-Islam-Information-Thread> [30-11-10]

Sources: Muḥammad 2000a,b; 24th Annual Report of Madrassah Arabia Islamia Azaadville, South Africa (10-10-2004) (Azaadville, Madrassah Arabia Islamia); Darul Uloom Zakariyya [2004/05] (Lenasia, Darul Uloom Zakariyya); interviews at the schools in Azaadville (24 February) and Lenasia (23 February) in 2005. Data partially patchy, and subject to availability.

It is assumed that the modernising slant of the schools are not least the product of their close connection with the socio-cultural networks of the Gujarati trading castes hailing from South Asia. Several teachers at the schools graduated from Deobandi schools in the Indian state of Gujarat, particularly from Dabel and Tadheshwar.¹² The schools were created and supported by many parents who trace their ancestry back to Muslim communities in Gujarat, and who gained considerable economic and social clout in the Muslim communities of South Africa. The modernity of the two schools is thus also a reflection of the newfound prosperity of the South African 'Gujaratis'. It could be inferred from this that graduation from Azaadville and Lenasia thus provides easy entry into the 'opportunity networks' of Gujarati descent.¹³

(4) Along with their modernisation and expansion, the schools took on more visible ideological and public roles within the local Muslim communities, the specific religious networks they were serving and for the whole South Africa. The Lenasia school became a centre of sorts and retreat for the Gauteng province activities of the missionary movement of the Tablīghī Jamā'āt. The traditional weekly Tablīghī meeting, or *ijtimā'*, would be held at the local mosque *Masjid-e*

12 My interviews with respondents in February 2005, in particular with Mawlānā Mohammad Ashraf Dockrat who graduated from the Azaadville school.

13 See also the discussion by Thomas Blom Hansen of the ideological and modernist pretensions of Muslim family networks of Gujarati descent (Hansen 2003).

Siddiq on 10 Volta Street across town in Lenasia.¹⁴ In the Lenasia and Azaadville schools, students are expected and possibly required to go out for preaching with the *Tablīghīs* every weekend and during their holidays.¹⁵

The Azaadville school also serves the religious needs of the wider Muslim community also by operating an Islamic Legal Advice centre, *Darul Iftā*, sending out religious decrees (*fatwas*) on inquiries from Muslims near and far, by phone, fax, email or post (Muhammad 2000b, 8).

The Azaadville school was particularly active in becoming a centre for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge by publishing and printing many standard works of scholars with a Deobandi and *Tablīghī* background. For this purpose it established its own on-premise printing press. In particular, several of its teachers contributed their own efforts to compiling new books or translating well-known classics from Urdu and other oriental languages into English. Their books helped invigorate the Deobandi networking in many countries around the world. Proudly the school proclaims: “The Madrassah has probably become the largest publisher of authentic Islamic books in the Southern Hemisphere. Thus far more than 160 titles have been published while new titles are published every month” (Muhammad 2000b, 10).

Beside the books, the Azaadville school printed posters for Masjid boards and for the public-at-large. It publishes the quarterly journal “*An-Nasīhah*” (Advice) the student newsletter “*Al-Muballigh*” (Preacher). Supported by public donations it also dispatched Islamic literature to “brothers overseas who cannot afford to purchase good Islamic books” (Muhammad 2000b, 11).

Thus, from a sociological perspective, the schools, despite their traditional and orthodox image and concepts, climbed a steep path of emancipation and modernisation, where they became influential and independent as well as interdependent players in a growing system of Islamic education and Muslim community service. This visibility and strength not only created space for them, but also exposed them to competing challenges of inter-dependence.

4. Translocal battles of re-alignment and competition

As the schools were positioned on the crossroads of competing systems of politics, ideology and religion, they arrived at a fusion of those influences shaping their composite character. With the influences and concepts shifting over time, the schools had to make amends with new trends. Politics moved from the era of Apartheid to democracy in South Africa. Theological competition that had started with the polarisation between reformist Deobandi and Sūfi-inclined Barelwi activism moved to new arenas where Salafīs, secularism and human rights NGOs became more prominent players and Sufism acquired new dimensions. The schools and their translocal networks of *Tablīghī* and Deobandi institutions and activism moved along and readjusted themselves in this configuration.

14 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?27396-Islamic-events-Jo-berg-or-Durban&daysprune=-1> [29-11-10]

15 Interviews at schools in Lenasia, Azaadville on 23/24 Feb 2005.

While the direct impact of Muslim politics in South Africa at the schools is limited, it is mediated by the activist Council of Religious Scholars, Jamiatul Ulama (JU). Due to the connection through the weekly Tablīghī Jamā'āt meetings in Lenasia, many JU leaders regularly interact with the elders of the schools of Lenasia (Zakariyya) and Azaadville. There are also many personal connections between the JU and the Deobandi madrassas in South Africa in general. Several prominent members are actively involved in running madrassa institutions. And, the programme of Darul Ulums is a major element of JU efforts in religious education.

At a national political level, Deobandi scholars in South Africa had to reconcile the politics and ambitions of the Muslim minority with the emancipatory project of the African National Congress. This was not as straight forward as it might appear today. Conservative Muslim leaders had in fact more or less acquiesced in the racial segregation politics of the Apartheid regime. At a time when political affiliations were suspicious, religious groups used the space provided to them as one of the few permitted outlets of public activity. Under those conditions, the project of re-Islamising South Africa's Muslim minority in the tradition of Deoband had started successfully well before the end of Apartheid. Especially in Transvaal, mosque committees and Deobandi scholars had focused on religious life while they left negotiations with the state to traders and professionals of Muslim background (cf. Tayob 1999, 71-3, 139). As soon as the end of Apartheid neared, the more farsighted scholars of the Deobandi-dominated Council of Theologians (JU) joined the ANC in shaping the constitutional and political space of the free South Africa. Their strong concern was to create legal conditions conducive to the introduction and application of Islamic *sharī'a* law for South Africa's Muslim minority. The resultant legislative projects faced some difficulty while moving through the various political and state institutions. Currently, several bills on the introduction of Muslim Personal Law in South Africa are under consideration, mainly pertaining to the recognition of Muslim or religious marriages.¹⁶ At the same time, the Deobandi institutions reorganised more successfully and, in cooperation with the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) from Cape Town, strengthened their own platform with the formation of the United Scholars' Council for South Africa in 1994. Yet today, according to interviews of this author with JU scholars in 2005, the status of the Muslim minority in South Africa, no longer seems to be their only or overriding concern under the new conditions of democratic development. Political conditions in and around South Africa currently confront them with the political and social project of Black and African renaissance. They hope to respond to it by becoming more inclusive towards other Muslim groups and opening up to the Black community which apparently has been a recurrent topic of their leadership discussions. Such opening would also meet more effectively their missionary ambitions of *da'wa* towards non-Muslims. But it is the social and human conditions of Muslims and other citizens of South

16 Cf. Rashida Manjoo, The Recognition of Muslim Personal Laws in South Africa: Implications for Women's Human Rights. Working Paper. Cambridge, MA: Human Rights Program of Harvard Law School, July 2007, at http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/hrp/documents/Manjoo_RashidaWP.pdf [30-11-10].

Africa that provide the starkest challenge. A recent newsletter of the JU, on the 24th of November 2010, demonstrated the nature of political involvement pursued by the council. It discussed Israeli policies on the West Bank and US responses, and it congratulated a Muslim politician close to the JU, Ismail Vadi, for his appointment “to a Gauteng provincial government position of MEC for Transport.” Importantly, the JU functionary Mawlānā Bham highlighted “the importance of public service in an era when community isolationism cannot deliver desired outcomes.” A joint message by the JU and the Muslim AIDS Programme was published on the occasion of World AIDS Day. And, students, nearing the end of the academic year, are warned against the habit of ‘rowdy’ celebrations that usually follow the examinations.¹⁷ These interventions clearly demonstrate the broad spectre of political, social and moral involvement of religious scholars.

At the level of theological doctrine and religious practice, the Deobandis had emerged in direct contestation of public Muslim space with the Sūfī-oriented Barelwi movement. The latter had organised much earlier. The religious activist Soofie Sahib (d. 1910) had been one of the first prominent representatives of this direction (Tayob 1999, 89). Following precedent in the South Asian subcontinent, the Deobandis challenged various practices connected to shrine and saint worship, as well as the expressive veneration of the Prophet through the celebration of his birthday with the *Mawlid* ritual. Yet, this polarisation was not as clear in South Africa as in South Asia from where it emerged. While Deobandi thinking has also integrated some Sūfī practice and doctrine in the concept of *taṣawwuf*, it was the close association with the legacy of Muḥammad Zakariyya which brought the two schools under study here still closer to Sūfī influences. Zakariyya was not only a Deobandi scholar (*‘Ālim*), he was also a recognised and widely connected Sūfī teacher (*shaykh*). The missionary movement he helped bring into being, the Tablīghī Jamā’āt, though transporting a reformist and purist message, made extensive use of Sūfī traditions and practices, including the ritualised commemorative prayers of God, *dhikr* (Reetz 2006b). Still, the main outlook of the two schools in Azaadville and Lenasia was reformist, *iṣlāhī*, with a certain sectarian bent that would regularly criticise all dissenting readings of Islam.

In the late 1990s the ideological alignment among Deobandi schools in South Africa underwent various shifts. The reasons were manifold and diverse: South Africa underwent deep cultural and political changes; a new generation assumed leadership of Deobandi institutions; and the theological and spiritual ties with the South Asian subcontinent weakened and diversified. Previously the schools were connected with particular Deobandi madrassas in South Asia from where many or some of its teachers used to come as graduates. Beside the Darul Ulum Deoband, considered the theological *alma mater* (*madri ilmi*) of all Deobandis, it was the madrassas from Dhabel and Tadkeshwar in the Indian state of Gujarat, and Jalaabad in the state of Uttar Pradesh, not far from Deoband, that played an important role for the Deobandi schools in South Africa. Now an increasing number of teachers were employed from among their own former students. The connection to Zakariyya’s spiritual legacy also loosened. After Zakariyya’s death in 1982, many senior scholars had switched their Sūfī allegiance to one of Zakariyya’s

17 http://www.jamiat.co.za/newsletter/online_newsletter_0547.htm [30-11-10]

most prominent disciples, Mufti Mahmood Hasan Gangohi (1907-1996), the former Chief Mufti of the Darul Ulum Deoband. After the Mufti's death during a trip to Johannesburg in 1996, their spiritual allegiance became more fragmented. According to our information, the founder and principal of the Azaadville school, Mawlānā Abdul Hamid Ishaq, now looked for guidance to Hakim Muḥammad Akhtar from the Sūfī hospice Khanqah-e Akhtari in Karachi. Akhtar had visited South Africa several times and actively courted the allegiance of Deobandi scholars. He ran a school of his own in Karachi that focused on mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) in the reformist (*islahi*) tradition. The reorientation was also helped by a personal controversy between Ishaq and local Tablīghī leaders after which he cautiously distanced himself from local Tablīghī activism. He had previously been a regular preacher at Tablīghī events. Now, he took a back seat and also revised the integration of his school with Tablīghī activism. Participation in Tablīghī preaching was no longer compulsory for students whereas the teaching and practice of *taṣawwuf* was demonstrably expanded. Still the school very much supports participation in Tablīghī preaching as an effective form of Islamic character-building (*tarbiyyat*).¹⁸

From the interviews in South Africa, it also emerged that the Deobandi schools lately feel challenged by the inroads of a new brand of globalised and modernised Salafī teaching. It attracts growing numbers of Muslims seeking religious knowledge and guidance, particularly from among the younger generation no longer so closely attached to the Islamic traditions (*maslaks*) of their parents. Ahl-i Ḥadīth and Salafī scholars from South Asia increasingly target the Deobandis and the Tablīghī Jamā'āt for their 'un-Islamic' adherence to Sūfī rituals. In this respect, the Azaadville school principal, Mawlānā Ishaq, is also targeted.¹⁹

Another challenge is seen in secular educational institutions and their competing demands. Deobandi scholars increasingly invest in Muslim educational institutions, teaching the national curriculum in addition to religious knowledge. This reflects the shifting demands and expectations of the community towards knowledge that is recognised in the economy and society, knowledge that is marketable and standardised. One of the prominent scholars of the Council of Theologians (JU), Mufti Zubair Bayat, was the chairman of the South African Association of Muslim schools.²⁰

The doctrinal and cultural contestation leaves potential students confused, while it opens space for challenges. Some of those issues troubling potential students can be traced through the related internet forums such as www.sunniforum.com. Several students intending to go to the Azaadville school were looking to have Islamic instruction not in Urdu, as required in Azaadville, but in

18 Based on interviews in South Africa in February 2005.

19 Cf. Sajid A. Kayum, *The Jamaat Tableegh and the Deobandis: A critical Analysis of their Beliefs, Books and Dawah*, Ahya Multi Media, 2001. <http://www.ahya.org/tjonline/eng/contents.html> [29-11-10] The book makes reference to the work by Mawlānā Abdul Hamid Ishaq, *The Reality of Tasawwuf and Ihsaan*, Azaadville: Madrasa Arabia Islamia (ibid, Bibliography, 6).

20 See his biography at <http://www.direct.za.org/about/profilezb/profilezb.html> [30-11-10].

English only.²¹ While it was confirmed that Urdu was obligatory, where other schools, such as in Newcastle teach in English only, they in turn were berated by those who disapprove such studies circumventing Arabic as, in their opinion, it would amount to studying from second-hand, i.e. translated sources. Another issue raised was the disapproval of the rector Abdul Hamid of Islamic radio stations, leading to the conclusion the school might have a problem with technology.²² Members were also debating on *sunniforum* the cultural politics of dress and hair. They were told to wear the Pakistani/Indian-style dress called *kafnie* which is shorter than the Arab-style *thobes* and has slits on the sides. One of the participants by the nick name 'Husain' informed: "The principal views these as closer to the *sunnah*, thus the insistence upon them, as he feels that the Arab-Style ones are a symbol of the Salafiyah. Most of our country's 'Ulamā' don't agree with him on it, but it is the rule, so as a student, you have to obey."²³ The admissibility of cellular phones was another issue raised by list contributors.²⁴

The students' concerns mirror the complexity of the cultural, social and theological issues they have to grapple with in order to navigate their academic pursuit of religious knowledge.

5. Alternate transnational globalities

The contribution of the two schools in Azaadville and Lenasia to servicing their local communities and contesting ideological fault lines, owes much of its effectiveness to their share in global networking. Both of them play a strong role in the regional and global networks of Islamic education and mobilisation beyond the borders of South Africa. Their share of students from outside South Africa is reaching or exceeding 50 percent. This applies to most of the established religious seminaries (*Dārul 'Ulūms*) in South Africa, as was acknowledged by representatives of the Scholars' Council in Johannesburg in 2005. The scholars saw this not only in a positive light in terms of missionary efforts, but also understood it as a potential problem. The high share of foreign students at a time when the local student body is not significantly expanding into the non-Muslim, and black communities, could in their eyes be seen as an impediment to meeting their objectives in South Africa itself. They feel that the organisation is still too much under the impact of the racial segregation of the past. They believe they would have to move beyond the followers of Asian descent and address the needs of the black community more vigorously. The more politically aware scholars feel that the Muslim minority community needs to position itself towards the political trends of the African renaissance which they can neither oppose nor avoid. Re-

21 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa> [29-11-10]

22 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa/page2> [29-11-10]

23 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa/page4> [29-11-10]

24 <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?35704-Darul-Uloom-Azaadville-South-Africa/page9> [30-11-10]

phrasing this statement, one could perhaps assume that Muslim activists would prefer to extend their missionary efforts first to the black population in their own country, rather than serving those efforts in the neighbouring countries.

Yet, the schools apparently hold a strong and growing attraction for foreign students. In Azaadville and Lenasia, their numbers have also reached 50 percent, with a strong focus on the African countries located to the immediate and near north of South Africa where movements of Islamic revival gain pace. Mozambique has a particularly large share in this process, apparently also connected to its Muslim minority of South Asian descent (Table 3). The schools are also very popular with South East Asian Muslims, notably from Malaysia, in South Asia, from where the Deoband and Tablīghī traditions emerged, and in the UK, the US and Canada with their own set of Deobandi institutions. It became clear through field research by the author that Deobandi schools in several countries increasingly rely on graduates from Azaadville and Lenasia. The two schools and their graduates are functioning as network multipliers between Deobandi schools worldwide. The printed publications from Azaadville play an increasing role in this context as well. Especially for teaching the Deobandi curriculum of the degree course to become a religious scholar (‘*Ālim*’) in the English-speaking world, books from Azaadville have become increasingly useful.²⁵ These connections would also point to a growing economic dimension of Islamic teaching and publishing around the globe.

The religious and doctrinal orientation of the schools make them pivotal points of communication in the worldwide system of Deobandi institutions as well as the related, but not identical, global Tablīghī network, and the personalised networks of Deobandi Shaykhs and their disciples, where the legacy of Mawlānā Zakariyya played a key role, but is currently being overtaken by several other scholars and networks. Teachers, graduates, publications, doctrinal concepts and flows of donations and teaching fees bind the two schools together with similar institutions (Reetz 2007). Closest to them on the international circuit seem to be several Deobandi *Dārul ‘Ulūms* in Great Britain, the US, Canada, Pakistan and India. In Britain, the closest affinity is with schools which Mawlānā Zakariyya helped found. First among them is the Darul Uloom Holcombe, Bury.²⁶ Its rector Sheikh Yusuf Motala published a biography and a listing of the 105 recognised disciples of Zakariyya (Motala 1986). In the US (Chicago, Buffalo, New York), Canada (Toronto) and the UK (Dewsbury, Bury), a new generation is joining the ranks of religious teachers at Deobandi madrassas, where the graduates of Azaadville enjoy a special reputation.²⁷ They seem to combine the sophistication of religious instruction in the Deoband tradition with a worldly knowledge of English and secular subjects.

For the Tablīghī Jamā‘āt, the two schools are important switchboards for their preaching activities in South Africa, in Africa proper and around the world. The

25 Books from Azaadville can be found at various Islamic internet bookstores, such as *kitaabun*, <http://kitaabun.com>, *al-Huda*, <http://www.alhudabookstore.com>, *al-Rashad*, <http://www.al-rashad.com>, etc. [30-11-10]

26 <http://www.inter-islam.org/Pastevents/darululoom.html> [30-11-10]

27 My field research in March, May-June 2010.

schools play host to incoming groups and send their students to all destinations near and far. A large international congregation of the movement in 2008 at the school grounds of Darul Uloom Zakariyya bears witness to this trend. Interestingly, its programme captured in the video on YouTube featured Nashid singers Junaid Jamshed from Pakistan, Wahid from South Africa, counselling centres and Muslim drug rehabilitation efforts, thus depicting the whole gamut of the multiple attachments discussed above.²⁸

In this way the schools play alternating roles in the regional and global Islamic revival through their foreign students and the Tablīghī Jamā'āt, in strengthening Islamic education in the Deoband tradition and promoting spiritual devotion in the legacy of Mawlānā Zakariyya and his disciples to the modern world. The schools have thus grown from private study rooms to the status of global players in the religious economy of Islamic instruction and mobilisation. They have demonstrated that Muslims today are not necessarily objects of globalisation if they follow their religious pursuits. On the contrary, they play an active role in the process, forming 'alternate globalities' (Reetz 2010b). As far as the two schools in Azaadville and Lenasia are concerned, their role in shaping these alternate globalities is not only owed to their very visible and growing contribution to Islamic learning, but also to economic linkages of Muslim trading groups, particularly of Gujarati extraction, that operate in the background, as several respondents confirmed. The unique and elevated social, political and legal status of the Muslim minority community in South Africa equally helped the schools to function as global switchboards of Islamic knowledge in the Deoband tradition, of their moral values and experience of interaction with a modern secular society that helped them to obtain and retain particular relevance in the global exchange. It is a cultural economy in line with the thinking of Bourdieu on the relevance of religion as religious and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991). Through these 'alternate globalities' which strive to pose as contrasting developments to financial and economic globalisation as centred on the west, institutions like these two schools help to unfold a global Islamic field and market where religious and cultural competence is turned into potential social and economic advancement. Bridging the gap between tradition and orthodoxy, on one side, and secular modernity, on the other, they face intense contestation from various angles, doctrinal, political and social. This contestation in itself again help the graduates to precisely play this role of global mediators that by now the two schools have come to be known for in the global communities of Deobandi and Tablīghī followers. It is here where the explanation for their success has to be found, while their efforts for Islamic conversion and re-conversion anxiously watched by western strategists are more a corollary to this moral economy rather than an end in itself.

²⁸ See the video on the congregation on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLW7ISzcJTA>. [30-11-10]

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