

# REVIEWS

Schulz, Dorothea E. 2012. *Muslims and New Media in West Africa: Pathways to God*.

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Before January 2012, when an armed conflict involving Tuareg rebels broke out in northern Mali, the country had been a stable democracy for more than a decade. During this time, the country attracted the attention of numerous researchers from different parts of the world. These researchers include anthropologists who have been fascinated by the socio-cultural developments in this country. One such researcher is Dorothea Schulz: a polyglot who is not only conversant with French, English, German and Arabic but also with Bamanankan, the main Malian language. Schulz, who wonderfully captured Mali's cultural transformation in her text on *Culture and Customs of Mali* (Greenwood 2012), decided to turn her attention to how 'Islamic renewal' is taking shape in this ever-changing society.

In the text under review, Schulz demonstrates to what degree the new media such as radio, video players and audio-cassette recorders play a pivotal role in the 'reconfigurations of conventional forms of religiosity' among the Malians (p. x). Schulz's captivating and informative study is based upon field research, which took place between 1998 and 2006 in Mali's San; a dusty and vibrant market town located north of Bamako between the Bani and Niger rivers. In addition to Schulz's work in that town, she also conducted fieldwork in three Bamako neighborhoods in order to offer the reader a comparative perspective of the socio-religious discourses and developments in southern Mali. It

was necessary for Schulz to protect her interlocutors and interviewees; many of them were members of the Ansar Dine (Eng. tr.: Helpers of Religion) reform movement that was led by the charismatic Shaykh Sharif Haidara. In view of this, Schulz chose to change their names and identities as well as the neighborhoods that she covered.

Schulz titled her work *Muslims and New Media in West Africa: Pathways to God*. Perhaps this title is rather too broad as the focus is specifically on the above-mentioned Malian town, San, and the three Bamako neighborhoods. That aside, she divided her work into seven revealing chapters and these were, in turn, preceded by a preface (pp. ix-xv), a register of acknowledgments (pp. xvii-xviii) and a lengthy introduction (pp. 1-23) that contextualizes the research project. She concluded the text with an epilogue (pp. 228-236), a catalogue of notes (pp. 237-256), a list of references (pp. 257-290) and a useful index (pp. 291-306). In the first few pages of the 'overture' that Schulz titled 'Publicizing Morality: Islam's Female Face', she informs the reader about the *Union Nationale des Femme Musulmanes du Mali* (UNAFEM) that is an affiliate of Ansar Dine and that forms part of the 'Islamic renewal' process; a process that, according to Schulz, is well known in other parts of the (West) African continent and one that fundamentally appeals to different groups within Malian society.

Schulz finds intriguing the attraction 'to move closer to God' among Mali's (Ansar Dine) women specifically and the men in general. She observes that the 'pathways to God', an issue dealt with throughout the text, are diverse. Moreover these pathways, which involve 'a process of mediation' (p.4), do not follow a fixed pattern as has been

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witnessed among numerous West African Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyyah or Tijaniyyah *tariqah*. Schulz stresses that the 'Islamic renewal' process should be viewed alongside the new media's invasive existence and she conveniently constructs a frame within which to comprehend 'mass mediation', on the one hand, and 'religious experience' on the other. With this theoretical frame as a backdrop, Schulz shifts to the opening chapter (pp. 24-46) in which she introduces Mali's significant protagonists of 'Islamic renewal' and locates them within 'One Nation's Authentic Traditions'; here, she examines the 'Law Reform and Controversies over the Common Good, 1999-2006.'

After having alerted the reader to the paradoxes that are at play throughout the democratic period, when democrats were challenged head-on by conservatives, Schulz discourses in the second chapter about the 'Times of Hardship: Gender Relations in a Changing Urban Economy' (pp.47-72). Since Mali's government did not succeed in ensuring the basic conditions of social survival, Schulz evaluates the area's socio-material changes. Among the issues that she focuses on in this chapter are: first, explaining briefly how women and men manage social networks that have been deeply affected by the economic liberalization policies and second, commenting incisively on the vibrant spousal relations that are being influenced by socio-economic, cultural and other related factors.

Schulz, for example, makes reference to Deniz Kandiyoti's functional term 'patriarchal bargain' in order to show how existential circumstances offer married Malian women the opportunity to take over familial responsibilities that automatically enhance their bargaining powers when their husbands face unemployment and are unable to contribute to the family fund. An outcome of the husband's inability to add to the family's coffers is a loss of his patriarchal influence and authority within his household in particular and in the community at large. She draws evidence from some of the weekly radio call-in and other related live radio programmes that deal with, among other issues, the education of females. Here, the men claim that education might lead to moral laxity and impact negatively on gender relations. Although this chapter raises a range of critical issues

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pertaining to the dynamic relationship between the males and females, it does not describe or discuss the Muslim theological positions that might have helped to shed further light on present-day Malian male-female relations.

In the third chapter titled 'Family Conflicts: Domestic Life Revisited by Media Practices' (pp. 73-97) Schulz shows how Mali's urbanites make use of the mass media, especially the 'talk shows' on television and radio stations, to express their concerns publicly regarding structural adjustments and their genuine desire for moral reform and transformation. In this chapter, Schulz discusses media practices in urban Mali and she goes on to state that young Malian viewers critically

debate social issues that they watch on television or listen to on the radio; according to Schulz, this debate shows that they do not blindly accept the Western values expressed in mainly American soap operas and telenovelas. She observes that some critical Muslim intellectuals highlight the resemblance between the Malian society's lived conditions and the values espoused by the regularly televised soapies and telenovelas. Since television as a medium of communication is heavily criticized by theologians who have adopted an extremist or fundamentalist approach towards television and related media technologies, one wishes that Schulz had included in the discussion how Mali's Muslim theologians view the growing status of the film and video industry, and widespread viewing of television in the contemporary Malian society.

Schulz complements chapter three by assessing 'Practicing Humanity: Social Institutions of Islamic Moral Renewal' (pp. 98-135) in the fourth chapter. Here, she explores those Muslim associations such as Ansar Dine that form the 'backbone of the (Islamic) renewal movement in Mali' (p.101). These are made up from a 'novel mix of associational forms and rationales' (p.106); she points out that these associations are led by charismatic religious leaders such as Sharif Haidara and they can easily mobilize Muslim urbanites along with patrons from rural areas. Since Schulz is keenly interested in the status of women in UNAFEM, she narrates the role and ideas of Amina, who is one of the association's

respected female members; she then highlights Mali's moral predicaments and encounters. Despite UNAFEM's detractors, individuals such as Amina, according to Schulz, are among those who consider Muslim humanitarian aid as a counter measure to the erosion of morality that is gradually taking place and they also encourage the pursuit of religious knowledge as a pathway to reach nearness to God. In the concluding part of chapter four, Schulz underline the fact that the acts of these Muslim associations are inspired by, *inter alia*: (a) transnational Muslim reformist trends, (b) Muslim missionary activities, (c) discourses of a developmental state, (d) support of Western aid agencies, and (e) internal Muslim debates regarding Muslim identity (see p. 134).

'*Alasira*, the Path of God' (pp.136-172), is the title of the text's fifth chapter. Here, Schulz considers the various sectors 'in which Muslim women intervene(d) in order to realize their quest for ethical improvement and at the same time contribute(d) to their collective well-being' (p. 136). Schulz analyzes the social interaction between the reform movement's Muslim women, on the one hand and between its female and male members, on the other hand; this interaction, she avers, reveals the way in which 'inter-subjective meanings of Muslim piety...' (p. 137) are constructed. She uses the comparative examples of Hadja Bintou (from the Badialan-Bamako community) and Hadja Maam (from the Missira-Bamako community) who reflect to what extent the women's role as pious religious individuals in publicized (video-taped) rituals match and transgress the society's 'conventional norms of female propriety.' Schulz also narrates the story of Aiche, a woman from the same district as Hadja Maam who mentored her; Aiche, she states, articulates her views on the correct performance of the public ritual prayer and she stresses the disciplining effects of this ritual. In addition to Aiche's narrative, Schulz mentions other female religious leaders who openly support the performance of mass prayer and who emphasize the donning of proper apparel in public.

Even though chapter five provides many other insights, Schulz does not examine the extent to which the media, such as the television and radio [or audio-cassettes], play a critical role in educating Muslim women about 'pathways to God.' In chapter

five, Schulz also does not inform the reader of the extent to which individuals such as Hadja Bintou employ the radio effectively to disseminate their messages of female piety. These shortcomings are addressed in the sixth chapter. This chapter focuses on Sharif Haidara's use of the mass media such as radio and audio-cassettes and demonstrates the nature of 'Proper Believers' who: Mass-Mediated Constructions of (a) Moral Community' (pp. 173-195). She prefaces chapter six by evaluating how 'Islam Goes Public' by making use of the 'Dynamics of the Muslim Media Landscape' and she draws upon the example of Haidara who belongs to a group of religious leaders who seek a wider audience by recording their sermons and distributing their audio-cassettes widely; these measures, she adds, should not be viewed as an extension of their wish for economic profit nor as an ethical quest for communal improvement; after all, enthusiastic listeners see these recordings of religious lectures and sermons, not as commodities but as instruments that have 'a capacity to sustain (and transform conventional forms of religious) sociability and transfer (tangible) spiritual powers' (p. 182/p.184).

In her final chapter Schulz addresses the notion of 'Consuming Baraka, Debating Virtue: New Forms of Mass-mediated Religiosity' (pp. 196-227). Here, Schulz explores the interplay between the shifting status of religion in the public sphere, the religious

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experience of a selection of faithful individuals and the use of new media technologies such as audio-cassettes and videos. Schulz identifies a few devoted individuals such as Lele and Aissata, who eagerly listen to the recorded sermons and lectures of Haidara and Hadja Bintou. By doing this,

they are somewhat transformed and changed, either because of the content of the lecture or sermon or because they are mesmerized by the voice of the person giving that sermon or lecture. She therefore demonstrates, using several examples, how media powers change into religious powers; in other words, how the individual's media engagements are transformed into what may be described as religiously mediated acts. In essence, the chapter portrays the nature of mass-mediated religious discourse in different parts of the Malian society.

Schulz closes her extremely enlightening and

well-written book with an instructive Epilogue. Here, she poses the following significant question: 'What relevance for anthropological studies of Islam does this isolated case study of Islamic renewal [...] have for the place and public role of religion in this era of postcolonial politics?' (p. 230). She then offers an insightful answer to this question, and goes on to conclude by stating that the book's aim is to make an input 'to a comparative ethnography of moral community building and of a new politics of virtue in an era of nation states whose internal normative and political economies are being radically restructured' (p. 236). In the opinion of this reviewer, Schulz has succeeded in meeting this objective and has made a substantial contribution to our general understanding of how religion intersects with media technologies in the West African nation of Mali.

Schulz's study, moreover, adds significantly to the reader's insight into and understanding of the role of media in Mali's vibrant Muslim communities; these communities like many other African Muslim communities wish for Islamic reform since, to quote Schulz once more, 'Islam operates as a modernizing force in that it becomes crucial to Muslim activists' understandings of what it means to be modern and virtuous ... (and for others) ... being a modern (Muslim) political subject also implies publicly articulating a moral position' (p. 233). This view is held by Muslims who form part of both majority and minority Muslim communities. To summarize: the book makes ample use of theoretical concepts and frames throughout and Mali's San Muslim community is frequently compared to others in different West African areas. In this reviewer's opinion, the book should not only be made compulsory reading in African Studies as such but it should also be listed as a prescribed text in the respective disciplines of Religious Studies and Media Studies.

**Desai, Barney & Cardiff Marney.**  
2012. *The Killing of the Imam*.

**Reviewer: Mary Burton**

**Former TRC Commissioner and Member of IAHER**

Thirty-four years after its first publication, this re-issue of *The Killing of the Imam* is an important

contribution towards understanding South African history, particularly the period of the 1950s and 1960s in the Western Cape. It is enhanced by an interesting collection of photographs, and by a comprehensive preface by Prof Muhammad Haron.

The first chapters portray the young Abdullah Haron, of humble background, brought up by his aunt who ensured his education, and strengthened his faith: she took him to Mecca three times as he was growing up, remaining in Saudi Arabia and Egypt for lengthy periods so that he became fluent in Arabic. In Cape Town he studied Islamic theology under several leading Imams and Sheikhs, especially Sheikh Ismail Ganief Edwards, even as he worked at his father's grocery shop.

The book reveals him as a dapper, humorous man, a rugby devotee and a cinema fan: a man of simplicity (although he had a taste for smart clothes), modesty and piety. He married Galiema Sadan, and had three children together.

In 1955 he was appointed at the age of 33 to serve as the Imam of the Al Jaami'ah mosque in Claremont, despite the reservations of some members of the congregation about his youth and his more secular interests. His knowledge of the Holy Quran and of the history of Islam deepened and people were drawn to his teaching. Study circles, youth groups and women's work circles brought people together, as did the picnics and fetes which raised funds for the poor and at the same time strengthened the ties in the community.

His understanding of the strong tradition of Muslim participation in the political life of the community led him to look outwards, and his mission to reach out to African migrant workers inspired him to develop a better understanding of their circumstances. Gradually his political awareness grew, and many young Muslims found a place where their faith could be accommodated with their activism.

The Group Areas Act loomed large over the community; first with the forced removals of people not classified as 'white' from Claremont and other suburbs, to more distant sectors of the city, with all the horrors and hardships which marked this period. Then came the threat to the mosque itself, and this prompted the Imam to declare boldly that Quranic law laid down

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that “the precincts of the mosque are inviolable and the building sacred forever. No mosque can be sold or destroyed.” Eventually the State backed down.

However, the apartheid system continued to spread its tentacles to all aspects of society. For a man so committed to education, not only for his own children but also for all others, and so committed to keeping educated, progressive young Muslims within the faith, it was particularly difficult to accept the increasingly discriminatory and divisive policies of the government. He began to seek ways to obtain bursaries and other support for the studies of the young. He also became more and more involved in discussions with members of political organisations: the Unity Movement, the Coloured People’s Congress and then the ‘Congress Alliance’ under the banner of the African National Congress. This was the time of his growing friendship with Barney Desai, who eventually was forced into exile.

The Imam sought guidance in the Quran for his actions, and prayed for a non-violent end to political oppression. The Sharpeville disaster, when police shot and killed 69 people and injured many more who had been protesting against the pass laws, was a terrible shock. In the following days a state of emergency was declared, and the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress (PAC) were banned and thousands were jailed. He joined many others in speaking out against the government’s actions, and in seeking to alleviate the hardships experienced mainly by African people.

From this point, his involvement grew, and recognition of his leadership spread. He became active in the Defence and Aid Fund, an organisation supporting the dependants of political prisoners, which was subsequently banned. He supported the work of the Coloured People’s Congress. He continued to speak and preach against poverty and oppression (and inevitably, to attract the attention of police informers). He became honorary editor of the respected and often daring *Muslim News*.

In 1966 he planned a trip to Mecca with his wife, seeking some respite from the struggles in South Africa and an opportunity for spiritual renewal. While there he was joined by some of the South African exiles now living in England, and drawn

further into action: he was asked to go to Cairo and then to London. He would support the PAC by finding recruits willing to leave South Africa for training. He met Canon John Collins of the Defence and Aid Fund, seeking new ways of sending assistance into South Africa. He returned to South Africa strengthened and enthusiastic for the work that lay ahead.

The remaining chapters of the book tell the haunting story of how all his efforts were dogged by the searching tentacles of the security police. He tried to be cautious, he devoted himself to the spiritual activities of his mosque, and to his work as a salesman for Wilson-Rowntree (after his father’s shop had closed). But he was a marked man, and many of his former friends and supporters drifted away, fearful of the consequences of being linked to him.

His house was frequently raided and his documents and his bank accounts were checked. A last trip to Mecca, Cairo and Europe was closely monitored. On 28 May 1969 he was arrested, and then began the months of interrogation and torture culminating in his death on 27 September.

The gruelling account of those four months was put together from two letters the Imam was able to smuggle out from his detention, from the accounts of others who were detained and interrogated in the same places and tortured by the same people, and from the inquest held after his death.

It was a remarkable feat for Desai and Marney to have constructed this book at that time, and it is also remarkable that it remains so readable and so immediately accessible. The new edition allows the text to speak for itself, adding only the names of those who were identified for safety’s sake by pseudonym. Although the final part of the story is immensely painful, the book should be read by many because of the clear picture it reveals of the situation not only of an individual but of a whole section of South Africa’s population under the grip of apartheid policies. It should be read especially by the young, who have not had to experience the pass laws, the enforcement of the group areas laws, and the loss of leaders and activists to detention and death.

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*The Imam and I* (2011). Director: Khalid Shamis  
 Reviewer: Faieka Esau-Wong  
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In this documentary, titled "The Imam and I," it is apparent that the novice director Khalid Shamis is well aware of the necessary ingredients of marketability. Thus, he employs those ingredients by applying tried and tested strategies with news footage, cartoon drawings and voice overs. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine the documentary for its politics. Society and government make rules and define boundaries, but these are continuously transgressed and questioned. Imam Abdullah Haron, or Imam Haron as he is popularly known, is seen to breach social taboos, including the established hierarchies of the older generation and the youth. He also breached the racial divide under apartheid and this led to his untimely demise.

In the director's quest to find out more about the legendary figure of his grandfather who was killed by the South African security police in 1969, the viewer becomes aware of Shamis's experience and his perspective. .

Despite the unsuspecting title, the documentary made this reviewer aware that its message is not only interesting but also may have implications that expand beyond the 80-minute length of the documentary. Its relatively open-minded character initially made this reviewer question the full identity of the director, and underscore the idea that 'breaking the rules' has social and political repercussions.

The film tells the story of the director's grandfather, whom the director has never met, but of whose life he has heard from personal accounts and from the legend that surrounds him. In the director's quest to find out more about the legendary figure of his grandfather who was killed by the South African security police in 1969, the viewer becomes aware of Shamis's experience and his perspective. With the understanding that apartheid laws were intermeshed with interpersonal relations, the director explores the personal dimensions of Imam Haron's life, recognizing his personal life as part of a broader socio-political context. Shamis highlights the importance of the apartheid discourse by mentioning that Imam Haron was referred to as the 'Kafir Imam' because of his efforts in forging links with the 'natives' in the townships. He also notes that Imam Haron was castigated by some people

for not upholding the laws of segregation. In the documentary tradition, Imam Haron's widow and his three children, as well as 'ordinary' people, testify to their experiences under apartheid and recall their memories of the Imam. This documentary draws on the memory of the past and bears testimony to the view that no single viewpoint can be adequate in comprehending the life of Imam Haron.

What is evident from the testimonies in the documentary is that people lived under a climate of fear under the nadir of apartheid in the 1960s, and those who sought to transgress the laws of the land could be said to have a 'death wish.'

Deprived of political and civil rights, any peaceful attempts for reform, notably by the liberal whites, were either ignored by the oppressive regime or were met by brute force. There were absolutely no lawful means of protest or reform under the oppressive regime. Even Nelson Mandela abandoned his chapter

on non-violent struggle and went underground in the early 1960s.

With this political backdrop, the Imam's story is all the more remarkable, because Imam Haron did not compromise his beliefs and did not obey the directives of apartheid; he was seen to live on the edge, a life perceived to challenge the prevailing structures. From this reviewer's understanding he was not intentionally 'seditious.' In the documentary, Shamis prods the interviewees, and viewers get the impression that at times the Imam Haron's presence is portrayed as unsettling. At the age of 31, he became an Imam with subversive potential who would challenge not only the apartheid state, but also the conservative '*ulama*, or Muslim religious leadership who preferred not to make 'political sermons.'

Shamis depicts the 'human' side of Imam Haron by describing a man equally comfortable quoting from the Quran and the latest James Bond movie, and one interested in the latest rugby results. Not only did the Imam have a fondness for chocolate biscuits, which he requested from his prison cell, but also named his house 'The Golden Eye,' paying homage to the James Bond spy film series. The creative orchestration of voices in the documentary allows for the ending that defies a tragic conclusion.

It is fortuitous that Khalid Shamis found it necessary to make this documentary about his grandfather, for it captures and records a piece of history, which is also a part of the reviewer's own history, having also grown up in that community. This documentary took six years to make and since

its release in 2011, some of the interviewees have passed away. These include Reverend Wrankmore, who fasted as a protest in Cape Town in 1971 in order to demand an investigation into the death of Imam Haron, and James Matthews, the South African writer and poet.