

## ABU BAKR EFFENDI'S CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE MUSLIM WOMAN'S LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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### Article History

Received: 15/05/2023

Accepted: 07/06/2023

Published: 09/06/2023

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### Abstract

Ottoman State sent a professor of Islamic theology Abu Bakr Effendi to the Cape of Good Hope in 1862. As an Ottoman theologian, Abu Bakr Effendi's approach to women in Muslim society should be important in order to understand his noteworthy works on the Cape Muslims. Also as far as it is understood from his works, as soon as he got the opportunity, he opened a separate school for Muslim girls and appointed his wife TahoraSaban as the headmistress of the school in 1866. When he began to perform his educational activities certainly, he also had to have considered the status of Muslim women in Ottoman society. In the nineteenth-century South African Muslim community, there were hardly any women recognized in its society. At this point, it is seen that Abu Bakr Effendi not only opened a school for women but also made his wife TahoraSaban the school principal by educating her. The impact of this perspective on South African female identity is undoubtedly significant. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabî (AH 560-638), who lived more than eight centuries ago, should have declared that woman and man are absolutely equal in terms of human potentiality. Ibn 'Arabî says that a woman shares the degree of perfection with a man, and that man is favored by superlative perfection. Ibn 'Arabî writes of the true significance of women, showing the exceptionally high regard in which he holds them. Ibn 'Arabî is keen to underscore that it is the metaphysical significance of women, and not their physical form, that was made beloved to Muḥammad. Abu Bakr Effendi used Arabi's Fusus al-hikam in his school and taught it to his students. Certainly, Tahora was aware of this book and used it in her school curriculum. The first time, Tahora's handwritten notes will be used in this research. This study will reveal the influence of Abu Bakr Efendi on South African Muslim woman and their identity in society.

**Keywords:** Abu Bakr Effendi, Ottoman State, South Africa, Cape Muslims, School for Muslim Girls

### INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to reveal a role model Muslim scholar of the nineteenth century in South African history, Abu Bakr Effendi, and his impact on the Muslim community which catalyzed the emergence of South African woman's identity and Effendi's contribution to educational life at the Cape Colony. As an Ottoman theologian, Abu Bakr Effendi's approach to women in Muslim society was significantly important in order to understand his noteworthy works on the Cape Muslims. Especially after the Tanzimat reform within Ottoman society in 1839, several reformist developments were made in the Ottoman constitution which

affected the lifestyle of women in Ottoman society towards to more liberal daily life. (Ortaylı 2007: 164) When Ottoman women began to gradually socialize in daily life, they had some opportunity to show their presence in society through educational activities. As a result of constitutional development, the social position of Ottoman women not only began to change but also was modernized. In this regard, when Abu Bakr Effendi began to perform his educational activities, he also had to have considered the status of Muslim women in Ottoman society.

From this point of view, the role of Muslim women in educational life could be understood in order to Effendi's influence on women's lives at the Cape of Good Hope. Abu Bakr Effendi analyzed the status of Muslim women not only according to Islamic rules but also in relation to daily Ottoman life before he started to implement his reformist changes in society. It seems a very radical thought to teach Muslim girls in his school without distinguishing them from boys at the Cape in the second half of the nineteenth century. This shows how he determined his focal point for Islamic education in South Africa. Also, as far as it is understood from his works, as soon as he had the opportunity, Effendi separately opened another school for Muslim girls and appointed his wife Tahora as a headmistress of the school in 1666. (Vuslat 2003:76)

### As a role model, Effendi and his family in South Africa

After the arrival of Ottoman scholar Abu Bakr Effendi, for the first time, Muslim women had begun to show their existence in South African Muslim society. As it's well-known, Abu Bakr Effendi was sent to Cape Town from Istanbul by the Ottoman sultan, Caliph Abdul Aziz Khan, in order to resolve the religious disputes among Muslims at the Cape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Effendi observed the socio-cultural situation of the Cape Muslims and immediately decided to open an Islamic school at the Cape of Good Hope in 1863. (Gençoglu, 2013: 45)

In the early years of Effendi's arrival, he wrote a book of family law in order to provide proper marriage guidance according to Islamic rules. This family law was translated into English by the Belgian consulate Mr. Henri who learned the Ottoman language while he was working in Istanbul at the consulate. This topic had even taken place in local media as follows:

The Turkish deputy, Abu Bakr Effendi was on Saturday last, a contemporary state, introduced at the government house to the governor by the Hon. Mr. de Roubaix. The Effendi was most favorably received and subsequently had an interview with His Excellency of a very satisfactory nature. The Belgian consul-general, M. Henri, kindly acted as interpreter on the occasion. It is understood that Sir Philip has received instructions from the secretary of state for the colonial respecting the professor and assured that gentleman that he will receive at the hands of this government such facilities as he may require in furtherance of the object he has in view. (South African Advertiser and Mail, 20 October 1866:6)

No trace has remained of the book of family law by Effendi, however, according to an archival source Abu Bakr Effendi intended to implement Islamic rules within religious affairs such as death, marriage, and divorce for the South African Muslim community. (Gençoglu, 2013: 29) As far as it's understood from this archival document, this family book was not totally his own written work but rather a translation from an earlier Islamic text and also contained some of his explanations on Islamic obligations. In one letter, it is possible to see that Effendi tried to challenge Muslim society at the Cape. Another archival document illustrates a social relationship that developed after Effendi came to Cape

Town. According to the Ottoman Ambassador Petrus Emanuel de Roubaix:

Despite the doctrinal disputes between two groups, (Tarief and Abdulmejid) most of the imams agreed with Effendi and his solution regarding Friday prayer. Effendi already investigated the factors of religious disputes among Muslims. He studied particularly marriage practices and the legacy to prepare a text for the Muslims. This text was translated to English from Turkish by the Belgium consulate Mr. Henri and one copy was transmitted to me as well as the Cape Governor. Earlier, Muslims were requesting help from the authorities of Islamic affairs in Turkey. Whereupon, His Excellency, Sultan Abdulmejid sent him a salaried professor earning £360 instead of a written answer. I am expecting you to show the necessary respect for this scholar who is an expert on Islam which you need. (BOA HR.MTV. 608-22, 1864)

As seen above, Effendi also wrote a marriage law book for Cape Muslims to improve their lifestyle. In spite of religious conflicts among the imams, it may be said that the religious disputes among the Muslims developed the Islamic Culture and understanding at the Cape in the nineteenth century. Effendi's jurisprudence brought new approaches and knowledge into Muslim Society. An archival document surprisingly sheds light on the topic which was captured in a letter written by Effendi for the Cape Muslims.

Sir, I wish you to grant my request as I am stated in this British Colony as having liberty in matrimony law in the Muhammedan religion for those pupils under me or those under my instruction, I beg His Excellency to pass a free bill for marriage and death. My pupils and I wish to have assistance from His Excellency so that I may have full power and authority in the Muhammedan religion in this British Colony with the consent of His Excellency. (Cape Town Archives, Co 4129 E6: 1863)

This was a demand from local Muslims who requested an Islamic text for the regulation of their affairs in Cape Town, instead of using the colonial constitution of the Christian State in South Africa. This might have been a turning point in Muslim society in terms of the development of a new humanitarian religious understanding. His activities sparked important debates and enabled reformist changes to occur in some religious practices, which in turn strengthened Muslim consciousness in Cape Town.

### Abu Bakr Effendi, as a family man

In 1864, Effendi married a local Cape Muslim woman Rukiye Maker. (Cape Town Archives, Csc 2/1/1/138 84: 1869) He was a doctor of Conan Law of Islam and with his immense knowledge he impacted and to an extent educated his wife during his marriage. During the marriage Rukiye continued to attend her husband's theological school in town and improved her Islamic knowledge, reading and writing Qur'an. After a while, because of some domestic issues, Effendi divorced his wife in 1866. After the separation, Rukiye opened her own school and taught reading and writing Quran as well as language, Afrikaans / English in her school in Buitengragt Street at the Cape of Good Hope. (Cape Town Archives Co 4164 M 90:1870) In spite of the bitter ending of the relationship, Effendi still financially supported his wife in

order to look after his son, Ahmet Ataullah, who was the only child from this marriage.<sup>1</sup> (Davids-Da Costa 1994:8) When Ahmet Ataullah stayed with his mother, he went to Mc Leahlen Academy secular primary school for his primary education. Ataullah stayed with his mother until 1876 and when he was twelve years old, he traveled to Turkey with his father. (Gencoglu 2014: 21)

In 1866, Effendi entered into his second marriage with one of his female students, TahoraSaban Cook, who came from an established English family in South Africa. Effendi opened another school for girls at the Cape and appointed his wife, Tahora as the headmistress of the school. (Uçar 2000:300)

While Effendi was busy teaching male students in his Ottoman theological school, his wife, Tahora began to teach her female students in her school. (BOA, YEE, 18.553/585) An interesting and unique booklet makes us aware of Effendi's educational discipline. It was written by his second wife, Tahora who was the headmistress of a Muslim girl's school at the Cape. In the school program, Tahora gave importance to using early Arabic sources when she was explaining the religious topics regarding religious obligations. The book contains the school program and religious knowledge on Islam that was based on the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his close friends (Companions), among whom are the Prophet's cousins Abbas and Ali, and his children. Caliph Omer and Abu Bakr were frequently mentioned in the school curriculum in order to reveal the lifestyle of the first Muslims at the Cape. This also indicates that Tahora Effendi used primary sources for her teaching which was based on Quran and Hadiths.

According to the school program for the Muslim girl's school, Tahora was teaching Tafseer Holy Quran from all Tafseer Schools, in the early time of Islam, reading, writing, and reciting Qur'an, Afrikaans, and the English language. (Cape Archive: Co 4129 E6,1863) Many students graduated from this school and many also became teachers at Effendi's school. (Gençoglu 2013: 45)

Some of them opened new schools in Cape Town and taught numerous pupils. According to an Ottoman archival document, when they were asking for financial help from the Ottoman Caliph, the general situation of the Muslim school for girls was explained in the letter. some of Effendi 's students were also satisfied with his efforts and teaching methods in Cape Town. A letter from a later period gives information about the impact Effendi made at the Cape:

We are Muslims living in Cape Town, in Southern Africa who desire to educate our girl children at a school, but as yet do not have a school for girls. For 14 years, the girls were educated at a Muslim school for girls, which was established by the late Abu Bakr Effendi. After his death, the school was kept open by his students Hesna, Ghatije Abdurrahman, and Waliyt Muhammad Mufti. At the present, only 80 girl students can attend the school.

<sup>1</sup>AchmadDavids mistakenly stated that Rakea's second son disappeared in history which is incorrect. Rakea's second son was Ahmet Ataullah Effendi who was a historical figure in South African History.

As a result of the poverty at the Cape, hundreds of girls walk around on the streets unattended. They need to be educated and guided. Due to financial constraints, we cannot afford the expense of a school. If Your Majesty may please help the school, we would appreciate it very much. Otherwise, this school may close.(BOA, Y.A, Private, 310\62 1894)

As it is seen from the letter above, the school was established by Effendi but as time went by the Muslim school was neglected and was struggling to flourish in its educational activities. Abu Bakr Effendi also impacted women's dress code among Muslims and brought new dress styles for Muslim women. (Muhendis Bey Faik 2011:52) With his innovative rules, Muslim women found themselves in a better position in society. Effendi 's dress code for Muslim women at the Cape was a significant event in South African Muslim History. (Mecmua-iFunun, Volume. III no; 25-36:1866) In this regard, it can be ascertained that Effendi 's dress code was a social-cultural reform for society. This event had taken place in the media at the Cape. Dorothea Fairbridge states:

In 1861 the women still wore the charming costume which is today giving way to the yashmak. They were dressed in stiffly starched skirts over innumerable petticoats, full white lawn sleeves, and a gay little shawl of colored silk drawn tightly about their shoulders. Their heavy black hair, polished with coconut oil, was plied high and fastened with elaborate gold skewers, and on each olive cheek, a flat black curl was pressed. Unluckily, a few years 'later two Muslim missionaries were sent from Turkey to inquire into the conditions of the souls of the faithful in this remote outpost of Islam. They were scandalized at the uncovered heads of pretty, graceful Malay girls and... they sailed away leaving every women's head covered with a dook. (Du Plesis 1972:32)

These important matters would have been the topic of conversation by the notables of the Cape, because as emphasized before, in spite of Effendi's considerable independent activities, the governors of the Cape British Colony had never been happy having a Muslim scholar at the Cape from the Caliphate. (Cape Archive CSC, 2/1/1/160:1865) From this point of view, it can be said that Effendi was a social reformer in the Cape Muslim Society.

Abu Bakr Effendi also emphasized the importance of women's dress and wearing in his book according to Islamic rules. Many rules and explanations of women's life are interpreted based on the Qur'an and Muslim catechisms in early times as well as hadiths. According to a local newspaper, one of Effendi's female students who graduated from this school became an erudite intellectual woman in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and bequeathed educated pupils behind her. When Ma haji Gulsum passed away this news was in the media. Archival records provide further evidence about this from the reports around the death of a well-known teacher of Islam. (Gençoglu 2013:89)

Mrs. Hadji KoolsumMoerat's died on Friday at her house in Rurger Street, Cape Town, at the age of 79. According to media reports, "Ma Hadji was highly respected in Moslem circles in the Cape Peninsula. She was a teacher of the Islamic religion and had been a pupil of Sheikh-al IlimMoofy Sayed Abu Bakr Effendi founder of the imperial Ottoman school in Cape Town, and was

looked upon as the most learned woman in Islam at the Cape. (Cape Standard 1938:2)

This shows us how Effendi impacted Muslim society with his educational works. At the beginning of his arrival, Effendi realized the significance and importance of education for Muslim women in South Africa. (Cape Archive, CSC 2/1/1/159) In this school, for the first time, he taught social sciences such as geography, mathematics and a couple of languages (Dutch, Arabic, and English) Professor Tayob also emphasized that

Effendi's inclination to the growing reform movement in the Middle East is also shown by his concern for the education of women. Muslim women were generally neglected in the mosque schools set up by the imams in Cape Town. Effendi recognized this need because of increasing Christian missionary activity and began his school for women in 1870. (Tayob 1995: 80)

As is understood from Tayob's sentences, Effendi also considered the influence of the Christian missionaries among the Muslims at the Cape. It is rumored that numerous Christians converted to Islam because of Effendi's educational activities at the Cape. As a result, Effendi's educational heritage remained directed to the Muslim society, which was one of the most significant legacies of his challenges at the tip of Southern Africa.<sup>2</sup> (Gilomee & Mbenga 2007:9)

### First Muslim Female Students and Emergence of Muslim Woman Identity in South Africa

After Abu Bakr Effendi's educational endeavors Muslim women in South Africa had begun to show their existence in society. After the death of Effendi, second generations of Muslim women remarkably played important role in society. For instance, interesting news regarding Muslim women in South Africa took place in the media at the beginning of twenty century. Local South African news provides more information about her study in London and her relations with Dr. Abdurrahman Abdurrahman:

The year 1913, will probably never be forgotten by the Moslems of the Cape, because of the distinction gained by three Moslem girls, Miss Rukie Dollie, a cousin of Dr Abdurrahman, is the first Moslem girl to gain the Cape T3 certificate. She was born in London where her father died a few years ago. Miss Havva Effendi, a niece of the Doctor, has just passed the London matric, in the first division in English, French, Latin, Mathematics, and History. She is the daughter of the late A. Effendi, who during his lifetime, was well known in Cape Town and Kimberley. Miss Havva is at present in London and intends to study medicine. The third Muslim girl the distinguished herself is Miss Waradea, daughter of Dr. Abdurrahman. She obtained the Cape Junior Certificate. Our contemporary believes that Miss Havva and Waradea are not only the first Moslem girls but the first non-European girls of South Africa to pass either the Cape Junior Certificate or the London matric. (Indian Opinion 1913:36)

<sup>2</sup>Gilomee stated that; "Many slaves turned to Islam in a rejection of the Christian church that was lukewarm about baptizing the colonist 'slaves or campaigning for more freedom for the slaves'".

In the Indian news of Natal, the first time three Muslim girls graduated from a secular high school and one of them began her university education in medicine. Unsurprisingly three of them were coming from well-educated families, namely Rukiye Dollie, Waradea Abdurrahman, and Havva Khayrunnisa Effendi. Waradea Abdurrahman was the daughter of Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman who was the first Muslim intellectual to fight for colored identity in South Africa. His older sister Muhsine married Abu Bakr Effendi's eldest son Ahmet Ataullah and moved to London. (BOA MF. MKT; 439-35) Muhsine had four children from Ahmet Ataullah Bey who became the Singapore consulate of the Ottoman state and passed away in 1903. (Gencoglu 2014:94)

Ataullah Bey's wife Muhsine was the daughter of Kadija Dollie and Abdurrahman who were relatively affluent Muslim Cape Malays. Muhsine's grandparents were brought by the Dutch East India Company as slaves, and Abdul and Betsy Jemalee later bought their freedom. Muhsine was one of nine children and her brother was a political leader and physician, Dr. Abdullah. Muhsine married Ahmet Ataullah Bey and had four children with him. Mehmet Fuat Ataullah, Abu Bakr Rusdu Ataullah, Havva Khairun Nisa and Khadijah. (Gencoglu 2020a:89)

According to the documents in the Cape Archives, Ataullah Bey's family lived in Cape Town between 1883 and 1893. (Cape Archive Doc 4/1/142, 234 1893) A considerable number of estates were recorded in Ataullah's name at the Cape. He lived in 90 Bree Street but also had houses on Chiappini Street 48, as well as Strand Street. According to the records, Ahmet Ataullah Bey had many properties in the town left to him by his father, including the school at the corner of Wale and Bree Streets. (The general directory the Cape 1885:27)

It is thought that in 1910, Ahmet Ataullah Bey's wife Muhsine passed away in London, while she was looking after her children who were studying there. She was buried in the new cemetery at Willesden, next to the grave of Hajji Mohammed Dollie who was her mother's relative.<sup>3</sup> (Khan 1951:47)

According to archival records, after the death of Ataullah Bey, the Ottoman State looked after his family. Also, an independent house was arranged for Ataullah's wife. By 1905, Muhsine began to receive her salary from the Ottoman State. (BOA, DH.H No 1/1 31) The following year, the Ottoman State provided a bursary for Ataullah's children. After the death of Ataullah Bey, Muhsine moved to London for her children's studies. (Khan 1951:36-38) Her brother Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman was also studying medicine in England at the time. According to the memories of A. Khan, Ataullah Bey's family lived in London and his children studied in the same city. The Ottoman State Archives report that Havva Khairun Nisa studied medicine in London and was supported with a scholarship from the Turkish State until 1922. (BOA Y.MTV.191.15, 1901)

<sup>3</sup> Three grandsons of Tuan Guru, Abdul Rakiep, Abdullah and Mohamad and also Hamien, son of Achmat van Bengalen, and Mohammed Dollie grew up in same environment but also were students of Abu Bakr Effendi in his high theological school.

From 1911-1914, KhairunHavvaNisaBeyan studied Medicine at the University of London. She was probably influenced by her uncle Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman who studied at the University of Glasgow and became one of the first Muslim medical doctors in South Africa. She specialized in gynecology and became one of the most prominent medical doctors in her field. She married a Capetonian of Dutch origin who was a businessman and they moved to Holland. In 1926, she opened her medical clinic in Moda in Istanbul. When her husband passed away in Holland, she moved to Cape Town and stayed there for the rest of her life. These historical events indicate how Effendi impacted on Muslim society as an Islamic scholar. (Colak 2013:71) A local newspaper described Effendi in the following manner:

One of his most distinctive features when compared to other leaders at the Cape of Good Hope was his ability to express an opinion fearlessly on any religious matter even at the cost of sacrificing his popularity.

Effendi was a notable educator not only for members of the Muslim Society but also in his close environment. His strong influence as a teacher affected everyone around him. Firstly he educated his wife, Rukiye Maker and she became a learned person. In 1866 when they divorced, Rukiye opened an Islamic school for girls and taught Arabic to her pupils. She certainly received this Islamic knowledge from her former husband and became an intellectual teacher in the Muslim society at the Cape. Thereafter Effendi married TahoraSaban and within a short time, she also became the headmistress of the Muslim Girl's School. Several women hafiz (reciters of the Qur'an) were brought up in the Ottoman school which contributed to the spread of Islam in South Africa. (Cape Argus 1903:5)

## Conclusion

Abu Bakr Effendi was one of the most prominent Muslim scholars who was sent to South Africa by the Caliphate from Istanbul and spent nearly the last twenty years of his life at the Cape in order to teach Islam. His spiritual role in the Muslim Community can certainly be seen as different from other religious scholars in South African History. The studies on Effendi are not sufficient to understand his extraordinary impact. His religious activities should be analyzed from many dimensions, which may open different doors for scholarly research in terms of re-examining historical facts in South African History. He was a strict religious pioneer at the Cape who contributed to the shaping of Muslim Society in the late nineteenth century.

The Effendi family was instrumental in the shaping of Islamic values in the public sphere in Southern Africa. The prominent Muslim families at the Cape like Hendricks, Effendi, Ghamildien, Davids, Dollie, Allawie, Abdul Rauf and etc. played a remarkable role in the shaping of the Muslim community at the Cape. According to local newspapers in South Africa, these families have been involved educational activities and have taken place in the Muslim sphere up until the present day. Like other students in the newspaper, Waradea also comes from an established family related to both Effendi and Abdurrahman families with marriages. All of these families have given importance to women's education in

Muslim society which has provided a catalyst role in the shaping of the Muslim community at the Cape. As it is understood from the newspaper above, the educational activities of these Muslim girls have gradually increased the significance of education in the community and also developed the role of women in Cape society. Zaunnisa Gool became the first coloured Muslim girl who received her master's degree at the University of Cape Town. She was another daughter of the prominent politician Abdullah Abdurrahman.

All these distinguished Muslim families created an educated Muslim community at the Cape which developed a more knowledgeable social consciousness among Muslim leaders. A student of Effendi, Muhammad Dollie started the Hanafi congregation and opened a Hanafi Mosque in Long Street. A grandson of Tuan Guru, Ahmet Rakeip, one of the most prominent students of Effendi, became Imam at the Nurul Islam Mosque when he was 17 years old. Correspondence circulated between England and Cape Colony around the religious activities of Effendi who became a source of inspiration to some Christians, who converted to Islam. His religious movement affected society in numerous ways. Additionally, the Ottoman Hamidiye Cricket Club was established in Bo-kaap due to his influence. As a prominent reformist pioneer in the history of South Africa, it may be said that Effendi spent his life appealing to the human heart and understanding. In this sense, Abu Bakr Effendi contributed to the shaping of the public sphere at the Cape but also played a crucial role in the emergence of the woman identified in the Muslim society in South Africa.