IIS Alumni Newsletter 2019–2020

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR

Dear IIS Alumni

Being in the heart of London's Knowledge Quarter for over two years now, The Institute of Ismaili Studies at the Aga Khan Centre has created an inviting intellectual space for building new bridges across geographies and beyond demographics to respond to the needs of our audiences.

In 2019, we hosted several ground-breaking educational programmes. The **IIS Early Child Development Conference** brought together practitioners and coordinators from the global Ismaili community and the Aga Khan Development Network to discuss approaches for a newly developed, integrated curriculum framework. Our **PhD Seminar** provided IIS alumni and others, many of whom are IIS doctoral scholarship recipients, with a platform to connect with peers, present their research and receive critical feedback on their work. We also hosted our annual academic conference entitled **Esoteric Cultures of Scripture** that brought together some of the foremost scholars to investigate the complex interplay of scriptures that has shaped esoteric intellectual cultures and spiritualties.

Through our research and publications programmes, we have been generating essential conversations about the diversity and pluralism of lived Muslim traditions and the legacy of this rich heritage. Professor Zulfikar Hirji (GPISH 1997 alumnus) published a newly edited volume in the IIS Qur'anic Studies Series (QSS), **Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa**. This publication presents the research of numerous international scholars to open up new discourses about Islam in sub-Saharan Africa through the examination of how Muslims in this geographical and socio-cultural context have engaged with the Qur'an, particularly trends in Qur'anic exegesis and the plurality of engagements that Muslims from diverse communities of interpretation have with the Qur'an.

We recently launched the **Aga Khan Library Digital Collections** online in collaboration with Bloomsbury Publishing to showcase manuscripts, artwork, rare books, out-of-print publications, photographs, and maps which have been produced in different periods and areas of the Muslim world. This digital endeavour will enable international scholars, students and other interested users to access a treasure trove of primary sources for research and educational purposes. In addition, we have made available a selection of IIS publications from our back catalogue as **eBooks**, which are available to download from the IIS website. More titles will be available online over the coming months.

I would like to take a moment to pause and remember as well as to publicly recognise the valuable contribution of scholars and friends who are no longer with us. **Kutub Kassam** faithfully served the IIS and the Ismaili Community for more than forty years through his work on the religious education curriculum and for many years as an Editor of many IIS publications. **Raficq S Abdulla**, who has contributed much to the body of knowledge on poetry, art and spirituality, had also published a work through the IIS on *Understanding Sharia: Islamic Law in a Globalised World,* which was co-written with Dr Mohamed Keshavjee. **Professor Abbas Hamdani,** whose academic contributions ranged from the Fatimids to the Ikhwan al-Safa, has made many rare manuscripts available for study through the donation of his family collection to the Institute. The contributions of Kutub Kassam, Raficq Abdulla, and Professor Abbas Hamdani to Ismaili heritage and Islamic studies continue to live on through their writings and our memories of them.

As we continue our journey in these unprecedented times, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your continuous generosity and support to the work of the Institute towards academic excellence and service to the global Ismaili community. We hope you and your loved ones are keeping well and safe.

Dr Farhad Daftary

MESSAGE FROM THE ALUMNI RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Dear IIS Alumni,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of you as well as my colleagues in the Department of Community Relations for the support I have received in my role as the Alumni Relations Coordinator since April 2019. As a recent alumnus of the GPISH programme in 2018, this role has been a significant professional milestone in my career to understand and implement the vision of the IIS through the programmes, events, and new initiatives for our global alumni body. Through these activities, the Alumni Relations Unit is committed to supporting alumni in various stages of their career and professional development, and strengthening their relationship with the IIS and various other Imamat institutions.

Based on the Alumni Profile Report 2019–2020, the IIS Alumni Association now comprises over 670 alumni across more than thirty countries. I am pleased to report that almost 90% of all alumni participated in the IIS Alumni Survey in December 2019, and I would like to extend a big thank you to all who completed the survey. This issue of the *Alumni Newsletter* provides a snapshot of alumni-related events and activities that have taken place in 2019 and the contributions of the alumni community to research and scholarship. A key highlight were the Annual General Meetings held in Sicily, Tajikistan, and Canada, which were organised by the Chapter Group Leadership in Europe, Asia, and North America, respectively. I would like to encourage you to work with your chapter group leaders to bring your ideas and expertise in the organisation of these alumni events so that they can be an even greater benefit to you and as many of your fellow alumni as possible.

The IIS Alumni Community Portal (**https://iisalumni.org**) is our online social platform for you to stay connected with the Institute and the global alumni community. This portal is increasingly becoming a positive social networking resource, and we are looking to improve it every year. As of December 2019, 640 users, including 593 alumni (87%), are registered on the portal. In 2019, 350 events (online courses, webinars, book launches) and 484 professional opportunities were shared with alumni via the portal. We welcome feedback and suggestions that will allow alumni to make full use of the portal's features. Please get in touch with us to pass on your recommendations.

All alumni will be able to access the Aga Khan Centre by providing their name, programme and year of graduation, and photo ID to security at reception. Alumni will be able to access the first three floors, including reference access to the Aga Khan Library.

If you have any queries, comments, or suggestions, please do contact the Alumni Relations Office at **alumni@iis.ac.uk**

Congratulations to our new alumni and welcome to the IIS Alumni Association!

Hussain Daya
Alumni Relations Coordinator
GPISH 2018 Alumnus

ALUMNI CHAPTER GROUP LEADERSHIP FOR 2019 – 2020

ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP

ACG President: Nazira Sodatsayrova
Nazira graduated from STEP in 2009 and received her PhD in Higher Education, Migration and Cultural Studies from the University of Tsukuba, Japan, in 2018. She is currently working as a STEP Teacher in Sydney, Australia.

ACG Secretary: Salman Rajani
Salman graduated from GPISH in 2018 and completed his MSc in Education from the University of Oxford. He currently works as a Lecturer and Research Associate at the Greenwich University, Pakistan Campus, and serves as an Honorary Regional Chairperson for ITREB Pakistan.

EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP

ECG President: Nahida Ahmed
Nahida Ahmed graduated from GPISH in 2017 and completed her MA in Language Documentation and Description at SOAS. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Language Documentation and Description at SOAS.

ECG Secretary: Shameer Prasla
Shameer graduated from STEP in 2009 and has worked as a STEP teacher for ITREB Pakistan. He is currently the Coordinator for the STEP Liaison Unit of the Department for Community Relations at the IIS.

NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP

NACG President: Alim Fakirani
Alim graduated from the STEP programme in 2010. He is currently working as a STEP teacher in British Columbia and has previously taught in Quebec for ITREB Canada.

NACG Secretary: Basira Rahimi
Basira graduated from STEP in 2014 and has been working as a STEP teacher in Calgary, Alberta, for ITREB Canada. During 2019, Basira worked as a STEP teacher in New Zealand.

Alumni Body

The global IIS alumni body comprises 678 graduates from the five human resource development programmes implemented by the IIS since the early 1980s

New Alumni

27 students graduated from STEP and have joined ITREBs in their home countries

10 students have completed their final year of GPISH and five have undertaken internships with the IIS and AKDN

Academic Achievements

33 alumni received awards and grants, including fellowships and scholarships

35 alumni published papers in academic journals

43 alumni presented papers at international conferences

5 alumni published monographs

Employment

A significant majority of our alumni

(583 or 86%) are currently employed, with more than half (366 or 54%) in professional employment with Imamat institutions

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANNUAL ALUMNI PROFILE REPORT 2019 – 2020[1]

[1] 587 alumni (87% of IIS alumni body) responded to the IIS Alumni Survey 2019. Orange markers on the map indicate where alumni live and blue markers indicate where some alumni are employed.

Voluntary Contributions

188 **alumni** were able to contribute voluntarily to significant projects or assignments in Imamat institutions

83 **alumni** were appointed to senior voluntary roles within Jamati institutions, AKDN, and external organisations

Continuing Education

124 **alumni are pursuing or have completed further studies** on a part-time or full-time basis

Seven alumni completed their doctoral studies

Aslisho Qurboniev (GPISH 2013): University of Cambridge, Thesis: *Traditions of Learning in Fatimid Ifriqiya: Networks, Practices and Institutions*

Farah Virani (STEP 2009): York University, Thesis: *Who am I?: The Emotional Situations and Identity Constructions of Canadian-Born Ismaili Youth*

Fayaz S. Alibhai (GPISH 2002): University of Edinburgh, Thesis: *People, Places, and Texts: Re/presenting Islam in Edinburgh, Scotland*

Hafeez Merchant (STEP 2011): Georgia State University, Thesis: *Becoming Mentors: Mentor Praxis and Self-Directed Development*

Nausheen Hoosein (STEP 2014): University of Texas, Thesis: *Triumphant Towers and Sites of Spolia in Almohad Spain and Morocco: The Case of the Sevillian Minaret*

Salman Khawaja (STEP 2009): University of Missouri, Thesis: *Naturalising Epistemology*

Shumaila Hemani (GPISH 2009): University of Alberta, Thesis: *Faqirs at the Edge of Modernity in Contemporary Sindh*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS: SICILY, TAJIKISTAN, CANADA

The European Chapter Group's Annual General Meeting (ECG AGM)

The ECG AGM was held in Palermo, Sicily, Italy, from 28th June to 1st July 2019. The theme of the AGM was *The Fatimids in Sicily and the Influence of Islamic Art in Urban Palermo*. Guest speakers for the ECG AGM were Dr Shainool Jiwa, Dr Delia Cortese, Dr Alessandro Cancian, and a keynote address by Dr Aziz Esmail. Two alumni presented their work: *Ismaili History in Family Records* by Dr Karim Javan (GPISH 2004) and *Sunni Tradition under the Fatimid Caliphate* by Dr Aslisho Qurboniev (GPISH 2014).

Sixteen alumni attended the ECG AGM from UK, France, and Sweden. The group visited different historical sites, which highlighted the traces of the Fatimids throughout Arab-Norman Palermo.

Al Noor Daod Nathoo, GPISH 2013:
"The backdrop of the Mediterranean Sea provided an ideal setting to revisit Fatimid history, especially in Sicily. The educational field trips to the Cappella Palatina and Monreale allowed us to see and experience what was presented by our fantastic guest speakers. I especially enjoyed the Opera dei Pupi because it gave us a taste of the local culture. The chapter group meetings are always amazing opportunities for the alumni to meet old friends and forge new friendships."

The North American Chapter Group Annual General Meeting (NACG AGM)

The NACG AGM was held at the Aga Khan Garden, University of Alberta Botanic Garden, Edmonton, Canada, from 27th to 28th August 2019. The theme of the AGM was *Cross-Cultural Adaptations*. The guest speakers were Dr Karim Dharamsi, Chair of General Education and Professor of Philosophy at Mount Royal University, and Professor Mojtaba Mahdavi, Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Alberta. Four alumni presented some of their recent and current work: Naheed Mukhi (GPISH 2017) on Including Religious Pluralism in Early Childhood Curriculum: Madrassa ECD Program in East Africa; Farhad Mortezaee (GPISH 2005) on Islamic Garden Design; Perwaiz Hayat (McGill 1987) on Mughal Gardens with Special Reference to the Shalamar Gardens; Aleem Karmali (GPISH 2009) on Islamic Gardens: Catalysts for Change. Thirty-five alumni attended the NACG AGM from Canada and the United States.

> **Shazia Manji, STEP 2016:**
> *"The Aga Khan Garden serves as an incredible example of synergy, bringing together traditional features of Islamic landscape and architecture and adapting them for a northern climate. For me, the NACG AGM was a great opportunity to reconnect with fellow alumni and see how they are taking what they have learned from the IIS and using it to further enhance our institutions. This year's AGM allowed an opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues in a unique space for intellectual discussion."*

The Asian Chapter Group's Annual General Meeting (ACG AGM)

The ACG AGM was held at the Ismaili Centre in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, from 17th to 19th August 2019. The theme of the AGM was *Social, Political and Religious History of the Shia Ismaili Communities of Central Asia and the Contemporary Issues Affecting the Community*. Guest speakers for the ACG AGM included Dr Daniel Beben, Assistant Professor of History at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, Mr Kishwar Abdulalishoev, CEO of Aga Khan Foundation Tajikistan, and Mansour Shakarmamadov, ITREB scholar Tajikistan (GPISH 2004). The ACG AGM was attended by 33 alumni from Australia, India, Pakistan, Singapore, and Tajikistan.

The group had field visits to the Sufi shrine of Yaqub Charkhi and Gurminj Museum to learn about Central Asian culture and life in Tajikistan, which showcased local efforts to preserve musical and cultural traditions in the region. During these visits, Tajik alumni took a leading role in facilitating conversations between the local leaders of the shrine to educate non-Tajik alumni about how the shrine plays an important role in the religious life of local Tajik. One of the highlights for all alumni was the musical performance by the hosts of the Gurminj Museum with local instruments from Tajikistan and greater Central Asia more widely.

> **Shabinaaz Dhamani, STEP 2018:**
> *"In the exquisite combination of elegance, colours and culture meshed in the space of the Ismaili Centre Dushanbe, the warm interactions with fellow alumni, the magical tunes of the musicians with the daf and the rubab at the Gurminj Museum, the serenity at the Sufi shrine of Yaqub Charkhi, the stories of survival and thriving of the living traditions of the Ismailis in Tajikistan, the endeavours of the AKDN in the development of the country ... all of this came together to make it one of the finest and the most memorable experiences of my life."*

NEW IIS GRADUATES

GPISH 2019 Graduates:

Aisha Ali, Huma Gul, Kainat Jalaluddin, Rayhon Jonbekova, Nazma Kazani, Zehra Shallwani, Samra Siraj, Suhaib Ud Din, Tabish Virani, Mishaal Zulfiqar

STEP 2019 Graduates:

Faridoon Haidary, Sadia Rajwani, Alyssa Karim Lalani, Mina Safdari, Karishma Nazir Nathoo , Karishma Nizar Patel, Ruhee Farooqshah Kassam, Sahista Siraj Chawdawala, Samaneh Niktinat, Afshan Fazal, Aly Ahad Mawji, Anita Ali, Auranzaib Noor Ali, Rozina Qasim, Seema Ghadir, Zohra Parveen, Zulaira Khimani, Farida Abdulodzhonova, Nigora Dorobekova, Shahzeen Hanif Rashid, Afzan Perwaiz Tharani, Sanya Tejani, Sofia Ali, Tanisha Akbar Hassam

ALUMNI INTERNSHIPS 2019 – 2020

Each year, the Alumni Relations Unit creates internship opportunities for new GPISH graduates to facilitate their transition from student to professional life and further their career development. With the support of the IIS, AKDN HR and the Department of Jamati Institutions, the ARU developed internship opportunities for five GPISH graduates in 2019:

- **Nazma Kazani – Aga Khan Academy, Mozambique**
- **Rayhon Jonbekova – Aga Khan Foundation, UK**
- **Samra Siraj – Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Pakistan**
- **Suhaib Ud-Din – Central Asian Studies Unit, IIS**
- **Zehra Shallwani – Tourist Promotion Services, Pakistan**

REFLECTIONS ON INTERNSHIPS BY ALUMNI

Samra Siraj

"The Alumni Internship Programme has provided me with the opportunity to bridge the gap between my academic training and a professional career in international development. The well-designed placement along with a responsive procedure to guide me at each successive step has ensured that graduates like me opt for the relevant AKDN organisation and gain the best exposure in their fields of interest. This internship has offered me a springboard to seek an exciting career with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Pakistan. It has provided me with an unparalleled opportunity to learn a great deal, make professional connections, and mentorship that has given me further clarity for not just my future career ambitions, but also for my life goals and aspirations. I am extremely grateful to the IIS for carving out this unique opportunity, without which I would not have realised the intensity of my interest in this sector. This placement makes GPISH a complete package to equip students with intellectual foundations for thriving in the professional world as well as contributing meaningfully towards the betterment of communities and serving the core philosophy and purposes of GPISH."

Rayhon Jonbekova

"The three-month internship with the AKF UK Partnerships Unit was extremely valuable to further expand my knowledge and skills in international development, such as strategic planning, donor relationship, resource mobilisation, grants management, finance management, as well as proposal development related to programmes in Central Asia, South Asia, East Africa and the Middle East. I was exposed to projects across many development sectors: energy, health and nutrition, education and early childhood development, water and sanitation, infrastructure and livelihood, climate change and disaster risk reduction, financial inclusion and economic development. By working at the Aga Khan Centre (AKC), I had a chance to build relationships with colleagues in the AKF UK office and with those in other AKDN institutions to learn about their work while enjoying the beautiful atmosphere of the AKC. Last, but not least, the internship enabled me to get a Partnership Officer position with AKF Tajikistan. The experience gained in the AKF UK office prepared me to transition smoothly to my new job and make valuable contributions to the AKDN through my work with AKF."

REMEMBERING KUTUB KASSAM

Fayaz S. Alibhai – Class of GPISH 2002

'Kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings.' Sound advice from Stephen King's *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2012), often proffered to writers. And where authors are resolutely unable to kill their darlings, it falls to their long-suffering editors to do so. In his role as Senior Editor at the Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP) at the IIS, Kutub Kassam was a magnificent editor and if he suffered from reconciling authorial vagaries with institutional sensibilities, he certainly did not show it.

Dr Isabel Miller, Senior Editor

"Kutub was a most conscientious and thorough editor, unfailingly ready to devote the time and care that each project required and deserved. And I try to follow his example, especially as I now find myself with the daunting task of editing some of the Ismaili Texts and Translations, which was the series that in particular he worked on. I am very conscious of the need to maintain his high standards and continue to ensure that material is published with the same level of excellence that his work enjoyed."

Kutub and I were colleagues. In fact, it was on his recommendation to Dr Daftary, Co-Director of the IIS, that I joined the editorial team in 2006. Kutub's first task for me was to review a manuscript he had just received. Eager to prove myself, I was rather blunt in my assessment. Kutub was kinder, and more forgiving of its shortcomings (although we never did publish the book). This, I was to realise, was an unfailing characteristic of Kutub across all the various projects we worked on together. Still, his gentle approach did not diminish his critique and I remember many afternoons together poring over the merits of manuscripts that came our way. These were spent in his office, from which one could step out, almost illicitly it felt, onto the terrace abutting it at the grand building that then housed the IIS at Grosvenor Gardens. Kutub had a keen mind and a wry sense of humour. A private person, he did not write or say very much about himself. He was a poet, too, and although only a select few were privy to his poetry, they remembered of it fondly a fiery passion that belied his mild exterior.

Dr Reza Shah-Kazemi, Senior Research Associate

"Kutub was much more than an editor – as many of us who have had the honour of working with him will testify. When he 'edited' a book, he entered into the universe of meaning from which the author was extracting a particular set of facets, and, like an artist, Kutub would help us to paint a much better, more refined, more inspiring portrait of what we were trying to convey. In my own case, the book Justice and Remembrance owes more to Kutub's vision than my own efforts. This is not hyperbole. I had written a couple of conference papers on Imam Ali, and it was Kutub who saw that, with the addition of an introductory chapter, these papers could be put together as a book. Being a complete beginner as regards Imam Ali – as I was then and remain now – I did not dare to presume I was capable of writing a book on him. But it was Kutub's encouragement, indeed, his insistence, that resulted in my consent to his proposal to expand the two essays into a book. And, in the process of expansion, it was he who continuously acted as my intellectual confidant, helping me to think through the subtle esoteric implications of Imam Ali's inspiring teachings. I cannot thank Kutub enough, and shall remain forever indebted to him, not only for his help in creating this particular book, but for all of the illuminating discussions with him on a wide variety of spiritual subjects during the nearly two decades that we worked together at the IIS."

Kutub loved words. Not bombastic rhetoric, but the careful and measured discourse of one determined to find the right word and turn of phrase that was his even in the way he made it an author's. If his empathy, curiosity and patience enabled him to get into an author's head, then his sensitivity to the text he was responsible for and to the audience it was intended for was equally evident. Authors and translators, particularly of the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, benefited hugely from his critical pen and quiet exposition. He often rewrote and reframed entire passages to better put across authors' points of view and arguments. Wise authors welcomed and accepted these interventions knowing their work was richer for it.

Much editorial work is invisible, at least in its final, published form. Aside from corrections, edits, and amends that need to conform to a particular style, there are also all those numerous queries, comments, conversations, and debates that take place – not only in the marginalia of the manuscript, but also over emails and phone calls in the many scripted and scriptorial dances between author, editor, and publisher. I do not know that Kutub was ever credited enough, not least because he often brought a novel and engaging perspective to the issues at hand. I often wished he would write more for – and as – himself. Still, he seemed to derive greater satisfaction from engaging meaningfully than in merely imposing. In that way, he was an enabler – quiet, confident, and distinctly unshowy – and he has left a lasting impact not only on me but on other colleagues at the IIS.

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO LIFE: A GROUNDED-THEORY STUDY OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS IN BADAKHSHAN

Shahnaz Savani – Class of WTEP 1993

Suicide is a serious and complex problem facing the world. Most suicides occur in Asia and yet research has predominantly studied suicides in the West. Suicide in Central Asian countries is poorly researched, and there is virtually no research on suicide in Badakhshan. This research is an exploratory qualitative study on the phenomenon of suicide in Badakhshan, Tajikistan, using a social justice lens. It seeks to understand the perspectives on the experience of suicide among individuals who have attempted suicide in Badakhshan within their socio-cultural context. The participants in this study developed their understanding of suicide through their own religious and moral code, the societal norms and their values and beliefs regarding suicide. The objectives of the study are to describe the lived experiences of individuals who have made a suicide attempt in Badakhshan and identify the factors that contributed to the attempt using Grounded Theory methodology. Fieldwork for this study was conducted over two months in Badakhshan, Tajikistan. Interviews were conducted with 12 participants (seven female and five male) who had attempted suicide.

Three core categories—experiencing extreme hardship, getting help and factors associated with suicide—formed the bedrock of the emerging theory. The categories coalesced to form a linear social process of experiencing extreme hardship, managing to survive, encountering an added stressor and making an attempt. Most participants did not get help because they did not believe that others could help them, or they did not wish to burden others. Having easy access to means of suicide and impulsivity were significant risk factors associated with suicide. The resilience of the participants, the sheer will to keep going, and having a strong moral stance on suicide were protective factors for suicide in Badakhshan.

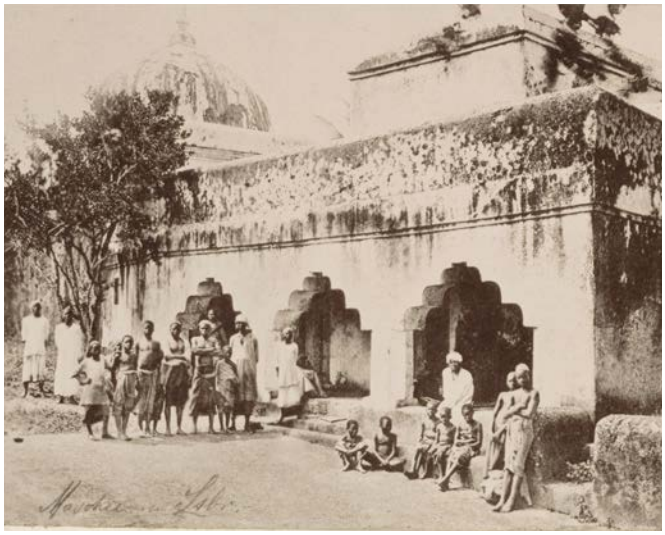
This study was the first to examine suicide in the socio-religious-cultural context of Badakhshan and lays the foundation for intervention research to be initiated. It provides a glimpse into lived experiences of suicide in Badakhshan from the perspective of those who have experienced it. A renewed commitment to live is a grounded theory of struggle, survival, experiencing a suicide attempt and emerging stronger by making a renewed commitment to live.

REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY IN ZANZIBAR

Taushif Kara – Class of GPISH 2017, IIS Doctoral Scholarship Recipient

The architecture of Stone Town – Zanzibar's urban centre – is often marshalled by scholars as material evidence of the island's layered and cosmopolitan Muslim past. Indeed, it was labelled a site of world heritage by UNESCO and painstakingly restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for precisely this reason. The plan for its restoration enthusiastically notes that "although the different forms and building types and their origins – African, Arab, Indian or European – can be recognised, it is the *synthesis* of these various cultures and influences that creates Zanzibar's unique urban and architectural environment."[1]

One common example of the sort of 'synthesis' mentioned above might be found in the many carved wooden doors located throughout Stone Town, and indeed across the waters and along the coast as well. Variously labeled as Swahili or Zanzibari, the doors and their 'imposing proportions and elaborate ornamentation', according to one art historian, 'serve as reminders of the unique and restless history of the time and place that spawned them, as they symbolize the values, aspirations, and wealth of the ambitious men who commissioned them'.[2]



Often adorned with heavy brass studs and ornately carved motifs – rosettes, chains, fish, date palms, and frankincense – their vague formal qualities allow both researchers and tourists alike to project whatever vision of cosmopolitan synthesis they prefer, secular or otherwise, onto them. The teak wood of the door panels and brass studs affixed to them, like those who commissioned the doors, often came as imports from around the littoral. Aesthetically and discursively, then, these doors easily fit within a rhapsodic vision of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, with the materials themselves brought from distant lands only to be worked on and adapted by local craftsmen – an apt metaphor for the history of Islam itself.

Yet, these doors tend to conceal as much as they reveal. For over a century, Zanzibar was at the centre and the periphery of two empires, simultaneously. In the 1830s, it was made the capital of the Omani Sultanate, and went on to become a major node in the circuits of trade and migration that have long sustained the Indian Ocean world. Those with wealth and power – that is, with land and slaves – commissioned the most elaborate and striking of doors. Like the very oceanic cosmopolitanism such doors have come to signify, their openness is intimately linked to that which they close off.

During my archival fieldwork in Zanzibar during the summer of 2018 I became fascinated by this historical and conceptual dissonance, and more precisely with the many internal contradictions behind such lofty claims to cosmopolitanism. How and why did architecture and the built environment become the site of this dissonance? And how did Khoja architecture in Zanzibar – from the caravanserai to the *jamatkhana* – complicate or contradict these histories?

After returning to the UK, I began to reflect more deeply on these questions and eventually submitted a reflective and largely historiographical article to the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* on the problem of reading architecture as archive. I saw the island of Zanzibar as a case study to think through a much broader trend in architectural histories of Muslim contexts, in which researchers fall prey to an architectural archive of a glorious and cosmopolitan Muslim past, one that can provide a tempting historical distraction from an imperfect present. In a secular reverence akin to prayer, the architectural archive as well as the past it has come to signify are elevated to a kind of sacrality. Zanzibar – with its complex history of revolution and restoration, and its important position in the history of Islam in eastern Africa – presented a unique way to explore this problem.

Pray to the Archive: Abstracting History in Zanzibar, is published in a special issue of the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* on 'Field as Archive/Archive as Field'.

[1] Francesco Siravo, *Zanzibar: A Plan for the Historic Stone Town* (Geneva: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1996), 31. Emphasis my own.
[2] Nancy Ingram Nooter, 'Zanzibar Doors', *African Arts* 17.4 (1984): 34.

ENGAGING THE MINDS OF TOMORROW – A REFLECTION ON THE STEP CAMPS IN PAKISTAN

Rehana Adil – Class of STEP 2017

The STEP camp programme in Pakistan aspires to create long-lasting teacher-student relationships through meaningful conversations and interactions with the youth. It is a space where Ismaili youth from across Pakistan, from different regions, form new bonds with each other, with their teachers and with their counsellors to find their calling. The programme is a six-day non-residential summer camp for Ismailis aged 14 to 18 years old. Each year, these STEP camps bring over 1,400 participants, 300 counselors, local camp coordinators, and volunteers, as well as 33 STEP teachers to 24 camps across 10 regions and 22 areas across Pakistan. Together, these 1,733 individuals strive to create an environment that is highly stimulating and full of intellectual and social activities.

STEP camps are known for the creative activities that foster the development of skills in the areas of art, poetry and drama, as well as peer and group collaboration. The engagement of youth with religious education at these camps embodies an integrated approach between enjoyment and learning. What perhaps is most remarkable is that STEP camps put these young Ismailis at the center of their own learning in a world outside their home context. They provide opportunities to explore, experience, and embody the roles and responsibilities in the light of the community and the society in which they live. Young people are empowered with an inviting atmosphere where they feel a sense of belonging and their contributions in discussions are valued. Different modes of learning allow them to reinforce their own styles and capacities while a guiding STEP teacher can help in developing well-informed youth who can become future contributors to the knowledge society of the Jamat.

STEP camps in Pakistan are one of the best practices of ITREB Pakistan where the youth of our Jamat are provided with opportunities to engage with the IIS' Secondary Curriculum modules: *Muslim Societies and Civilisations*, *Faith and Practice in Islamic Traditions*, and *Muslim Devotional and Ethical Literature*. These modules have approached Islam not only as a faith, but presented it as an active engagement with ethics, history, thought, culture and tradition of Muslims across diverse societies. For the past many years, the STEP camp programme is making efforts to develop in young people a commitment to their faith and its practice while making them consciously reflective of their Ismaili identity. It also aims at community development whereby the youth who undertake the camp engage themselves intellectually and ethically in discourses that take place at the community level with counsellors who are trained to support this initiative.

"STEP camp was great because it fulfilled my purpose of joining the camp and the purpose was to learn about my religion. I learned about different traditions, that everyone worships God, but everyone has their own way of worshipping and we can't judge the way they worship. So, it is very important to understand and respect everyone's religion and views."

"STEP camp did not only extend my knowledge of my faith, but it was very helpful to build up my confidence to articulate my learning about my faith and its practices."

All our work is done within the framework of respecting the plurality of approaches - historical as well as contemporary – to the interpretations of Islam. It is our hope that through the initiative of STEP camps we can inspire our youth to bring their learning experiences to other camps and initiatives within community institutions and educational organisations, and perhaps aspire to be STEP teachers in the future.

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS: AN EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

Ahmad Amirali – Class of STEP 2017

Information and communication technologies are becoming an essential part of our lives, especially in the field of education. One obvious benefit is that the use of technology can provide new forms of collaboration to enhance the learning experiences of students inside and outside the classroom. However, in developing countries like Pakistan, the use of digital learning tools in the classrooms is challenging for teachers due to the lack of professional development opportunities to learn about using these technologies and, in some regional contexts, the lack of essential tools such as multimedia projectors and access to or availability of the Internet. It is important for teachers to reflect on the purpose and impact of using technology in their classrooms.

As a 'pro-tech' teacher, I often use animations and online (virtual) tools, including Online Discussion Boards (ODBs), as part of my classroom pedagogy. This article will provide some information about how you can develop and implement your own discussion boards even if you are a 'tech-rookie'. Moreover, I will discuss some of the benefits and challenges of using ODBs and how to overcome these challenges by proposing some ethical guidelines.

What is an Online Discussion Board?

ODBs are web-based communication platforms where students can discuss and explore a topic and exchange ideas. ODBs can be used to complement in-class discussions or content outside the formal classroom hours. Students who feel hesitant participating in the classroom can share and discuss their views and reflections at their convenience and comfort level. Moreover, the teacher can incorporate the insights from ODBs back into the classroom, either as a follow-up task or by incorporating materials from the discussions into their lectures.

How can I set up my own Discussion Board?

There are various software platforms available to facilitate online discussions, for example:

- **Canvas** is an easy way to encourage online discussions within your course website. You can set up class-wide, section-wide or group-wide discussions using the discussion board.
- **WordPress** Plugins can be used to set-up a blog or a website with multiple free plugins that can offer a variety of discussion panels such as The Forum, Asgaros Forum, DDPress, etc.
- **Piazza** is a wiki-style platform that allows students to collaborate and edit answers to questions with options for follow-up comments, polls, instructor answers and instructor-endorsed answers.
- **Google Classroom** is a free web service for schools that aims to simplify creating, distributing, and grading assignments in a paperless way.

Considerations for Using Online Discussion Boards

Pros

- ODBs solve the problem of 'not having high tech gear' or where the physical platform for discussions, such as tutorial rooms and discussion panels, are unavailable.
- Students can continue an in-class discussion outside standard timetabled classes.
- Some students may be more comfortable and willing to contribute to ODBs than in face-to-face class discussions.
- ODBs offer students the space and time to reflect on their thoughts before contributing to discussions.
- ODBs offer the opportunity for students to practice and improve their writing skills.
- Students enjoy the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings with their classmates given the right guidance and when clear expectations are in place.

Cons

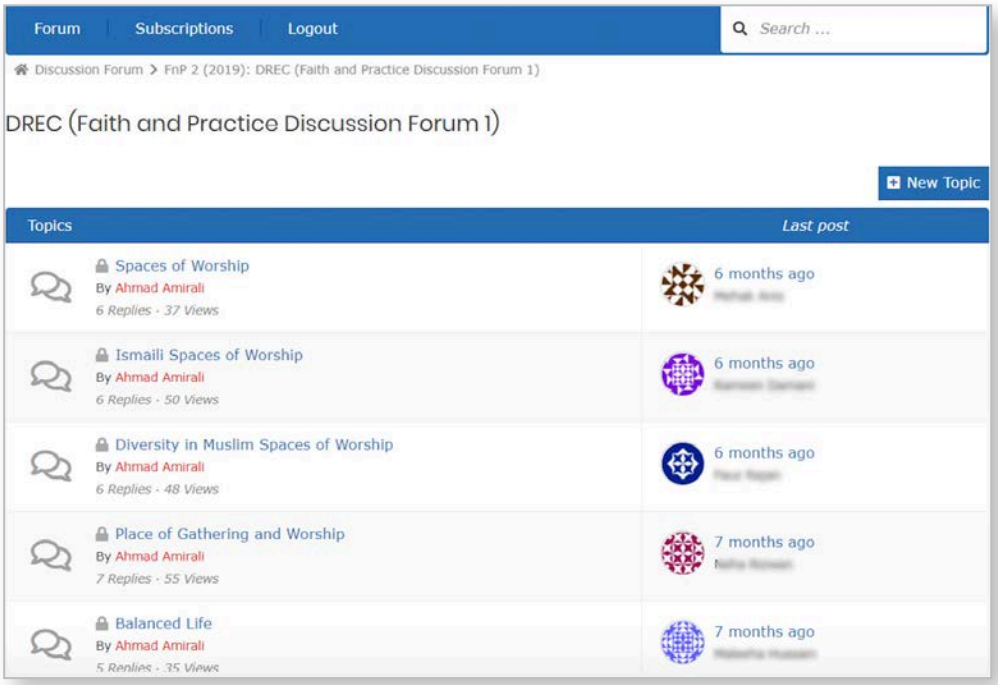
- The freedom and virtual anonymity of online platforms might make students think that they have 'unlimited' freedom to write, which can potentially lead to conflict and misunderstanding in the classroom.
- Sitting in front of a computer screen, while connected to the Internet, allows for a whole world of distractions. It is easy for students to become distracted from the learning tasks in the discussion forum to other web content (e.g., social media or online gaming).
- Discussion groups can quickly get off-topic and can lead to some discussions and issues that may not be appropriate.
- Cybersecurity is a recurring issue and a risk (especially if secure IT infrastructure is not in place or technical support is not available). Consult IT support within your institution to be educated about the potential risks of using ODBs or other social-educational virtual platforms.

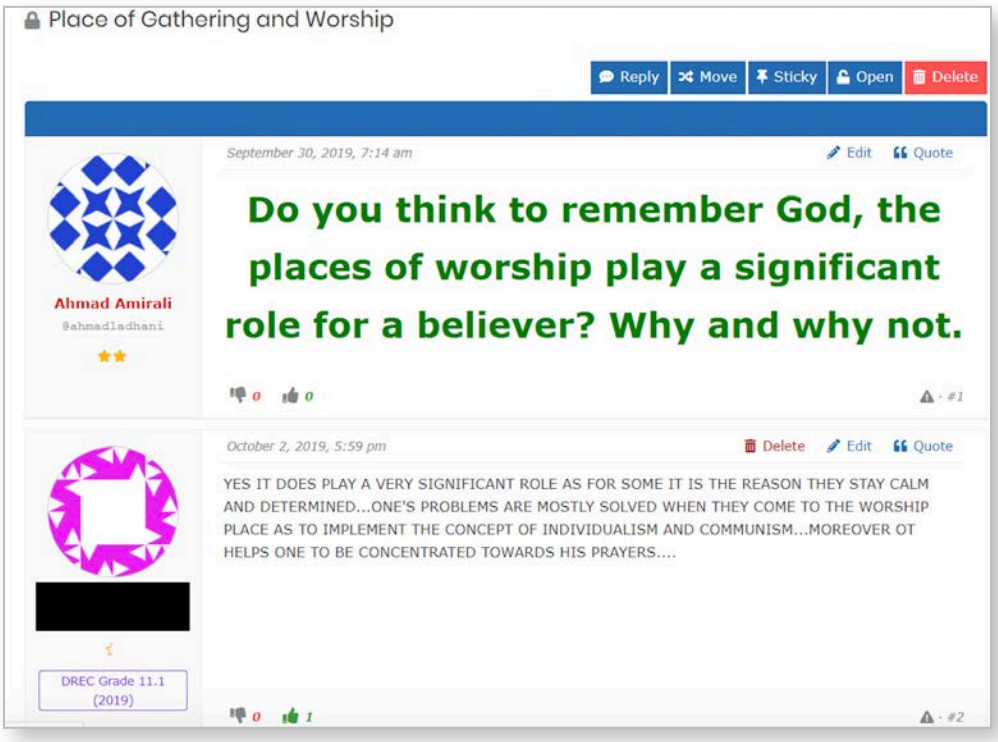
How to Avoid Cons?

- Ensure students are educated about the potential risks before introducing online educational platforms inside or outside the classroom. In addition, set expectations about what the platform is being used for and the reprecussions if it is used inappropriately.
- Provide every student with a separate ID and password for their boards.
- Set up the 'Role' of students as 'Contributor' instead of 'Subscriber' or 'Author' or 'Writer'. This will limit their privileges and discourage students from adding 'new topics', manipulating other students' answers or writing rude comments.
- Make your board visible only to the 'Logged-In' users.
- Make sure that each post/reply requires moderator's approval before going public.

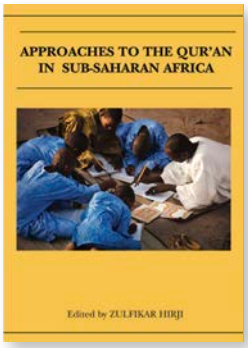
- Monitor the visibility of user/member profiles to control any harassing or bullying situations (if they occur).
- Add and enable the 'Black List' rule for discussion boards to avoid the use of inappropriate content or words by contributors.
- Add parents to the discussion board as 'Viewers'. (This will also encourage parental involvement.)

Overall, facilitating a discussion via online discussion platforms (not limited to those outlined here) is an important teaching skill and an opportunity for further professional development for STEP teachers. STEP teachers are encouraged to identify and explore ways to engage their students with technology in ways that are well-informed and innovative.





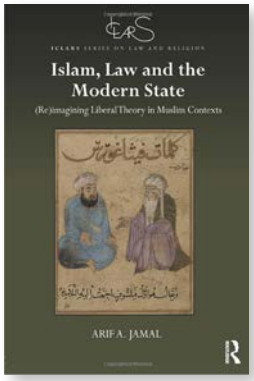
ALUMNI PUBLICATIONS



APPROACHES TO THE QUR'AN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Edited by Zulfikar Hirji (Class of GPISH 1997)

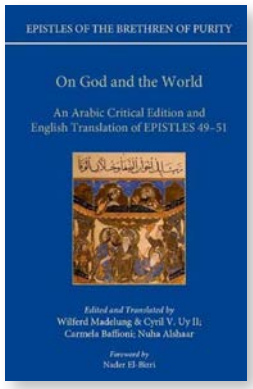
Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa opens up new discourses about Islam and Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa through the examination of how Muslims in this geographical and socio-cultural context engage with the Qur'an. In seeking to understand the plurality of engagements that Muslims from diverse communities of interpretation and from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa have had with the Qur'an, this innovative collection adds to the scholarship on the Qur'an as well as the scholarship on Islam and Muslims in Africa.



ISLAM, LAW AND THE MODERN STATE: (RE)IMAGINING LIBERAL THEORY IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS

Arif A. Jamal (Class of GPISH 1997)

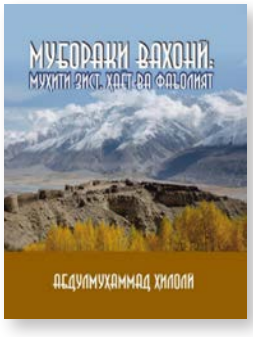
Within the global phenomenon of the (re)emergence of religion into issues of public debate, one of the most salient issues confronting contemporary Muslim societies is how to relate the legal and political heritage that developed in pre-modern Islamic polities to the political order of the modern states in which Muslims now live. This work seeks to develop a framework for addressing this issue. The central argument is that liberal theory, and in particular justice as discourse, can be normatively useful in Muslim contexts for relating religion, law and state. Just as Muslim contexts have developed historically, and continue to develop today, the same is the case with the requisites of liberal theory, and this may allow for liberal choices to be made in a manner that is not a renunciation of Muslim heritage.



ON GOD AND THE WORLD: AN ARABIC CRITICAL EDITION AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF EPISTLES 49 – 51

Wilferd Madelung, Cyril V. Uy, Carmela Baffioni, Nuha Alshaar (Class of GPISH 2003)

The Brethren of Purity, the anonymous adepts of a tenth-century esoteric fraternity based in Basra and Baghdad, hold an eminent position in the history of science and philosophy in Islam due to the wide reception and assimilation of their monumental encyclopaedia, the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. The texts presented here, from the section on divine and legal sciences, work towards the conclusion of the world-view of the Epistles. In Epistle 49, the Brethren of Purity utilise their usual array of sources – Islamic, Hellenic, and far beyond – in probing the entire hierarchy of existence, from the nature of God to the most basic elements. Epistle 50 describes the 'proper attitudes' towards body and soul, for the attainment of wellness in this world and the hereafter, before addressing religious and philosophical worship. Finally, in Epistle 51, the Brethren consider the arrangement of the world as a whole, restating the Pythagorean theory that all existents are analogous to numbers, knowledge of the characteristics of which is therefore necessary for understanding the world. In advance of the final epistle, on magic, the vast encyclopedic project thus comes full-circle, directing the reader back to the topic of numbers with which the corpus begins.



MUBARAK-I WAKHANI: CONTEXT, LIFE AND THOUGHTS

Abdulmamad Iloliev (Class of GPISH 2002)

Ismaili-Sufi polymath Mubarak-i Wakhani (1839 – 1903) was born and lived his entire life in the Wakhan region of Badakhshan (modern Tajikistan). He was by far the most productive Persian author of Islamic mysticism in nineteenth-century Badakhshan. His works, covering a wide array of topics, seek to establish a state of equilibrium between Ismaili and Sufi ideas expressed in the finest mystical spirit. Being the author of more than sixteen books of prose and poetry in Persian, he also had a good command of the Arabic language and wrote poetic commentaries on selected verses of the Qur'an and prophetic *hadith*. He was also interested in art, calligraphy, music, astronomy and paper-making – skills which were well-endorsed by his contemporaries and later generations of intellectuals.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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The Bagh-e Babur, Kabul, Afghanistan
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Page 2:
Dr. Daftary, Co-Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS)

Page 3:
Hussain Daya, Alumni Relations Coordinator, IIS
IIS Alumni Association Chapter Group Leadership, 2019 – 2020

Pages 4 – 5:
Map of IIS global alumni body in 2019 – 2020
Image from: IIS Alumni Community Portal

Pages 6 – 7:
Images: ECG, ACG, NACG group photos with alumni, speakers, and guest faculty

Page 8:
Images of IIS GPISH and STEP graduates. Images provided by IIS Student Services

Page 9:
Images for alumni internship reflections provided by:
Samra Siraj (top), Rayhon Jonbekova (below)

Page 10:
Image: Kutub Kassam. Image provided by: Hussain Jasani

Page 11:
Image (top of page): Landscape en route from Darvaz to Khorog, Tajikistan. Image credit: Christopher Wilton-Steer / AKF UK

Image (below): Shahnaz Savani. Image credit: University of Houston Downtown

Page 12:
Image (top left): Taushif Kara. Image credit: Taushif Kara
Image (right): Door of the main entrance to the Khoja Caravanserai, Zanzibar. Image credit: Taushif Kara

Image (bottom): Khoja Jamatkhana and burial grounds at Mnazi Moja, Zanzibar, photograph by J. Sturtz, c. 1890.
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Page 13:
Images: (top-left) Rehana Adil.
Images (top right and bottom): students at STEP camp.

Page 14:
Image: Ahmad Amirali. Image provided by Ahmad Amirali

Page 15:
Images (top-left, bottom-right): Examples of Online Discussion Boards. Images provided by Ahmad Amirali

Page 16:
Book cover for *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa*
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Humayun's Tomb Gardens after rehabilitation, New Delhi, India
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