# Life Trajectories in the Language Games of Islamic Reform and Pentecostalism in Cape Town[1]

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## Abstract

I present two individuals in Cape Town as they became religious leaders in Islamic reform and Christian Pentecostalism respectively. This essay pays attension to the place of charisma generated in their practices, how they relate to existing traditions and institutions, and how they introduce innovations over their life trajectories. Unlike most studies on Pentecostalism and Islamic reform, this essay analyses lesser-known leaders in their respective congregations and communities to illustrate what Wittgenstein has called a 'language game'. The latter offers a perspective on how individuals inhabit a movement without being constrained by it. The language games of these movements come alive in the life trajectories of my subjects.

**Keywords**: Religious leadership, charisma, religious reform, Cape Town, post-apartheid South Africa, Islamic reform, Pentecostalism

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# Introduction

Shaykh Alawi[2] is an Islamic reformist leader and teacher, while Pastor Paulus is a Christian Bible teacher at a house church founded by his sister. Both are operating in so-called colored (brown) communities in the Western Cape and enjoy admiration and authority from their congregations. Both are very conscious of a new constitutional and economic regime that has changed the nature of politics and public life in Cape Town and South Africa. Taking their life trajectories as performances over time, this article reveals how they balance the demands of change and continuity as Islamic reformist and Pentecostal religious leaders in the city.

This essay combines the theoretical insights of life trajectory studies and the making of a language game as suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein. From the performative nature of life trajectories, cultural practices are not as stable as they appear at first sight. Careful observation shows continuity, multi-dimensionality, and unexpected innovations. Life trajectories point to the tensions or contradictions between an actual life and a religious movement or tradition. A closer look at Wittgenstein's insights shows that a language game offers a way to appreciate a unique life within a tradition. Life trajectories provide a perspective on how individuals represent and interact with a language game in their lives.

# Life Trajectories and Performances

Life trajectories are used in the humanities and the social sciences for understanding social phenomena and personal developments. Jill Lepore has called the study of biographies 'micro-history' through which historians focus on the relationship between an individual life and broader social and cultural patterns: '[E]ven when they study a single person's life, they are keen to evoke a period, a *mentalité*, a problem: The origins of religious beliefs, the power of popular culture, the clash of Western and non-Western peoples' (Lepore 2001:132).

Lepore regards the value of life trajectories as they interact and reflect greater movements and developments in societies. Life trajectories bring to life the challenges and problematics of a time and place. Laura Carpenter

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2   All names used in this essay are pseudonyms of individuals that I have interviewed and whose practices I have attended.

develops a similar idea in her study of sexuality and change. In her view, a life trajectory is always negotiated with and against a cultural script: '[S]exual beliefs and behaviors result from individuals' lifelong accumulation of advantageous and disadvantageous experiences, and their adoption and rejection of sexual scripts, within specific socio-historical contexts' (Carpenter 2010:157).

According to Carpenter, a cultural script represents the accumulated norms of a society and expected trajectory to be followed by individuals. Individuals feel compelled to conform, but sometimes cannot help but deviate from what they perceive to be irrelevant, incongruous, or outdated expectations. Cultural scripts and actual life trajectories stand in tension with each other. They may reflect each other, but they often deviate in small, subtle, sometimes even major ways (Carpenter 2010; cf. also Laborde, Lelièvre, Vivier, & Cole-man 2007; Rabelo & Souza 2003; Riley 2004).

Wittgenstein's articulation of a language game offers a way of understanding both the script and the contingencies of life. He is well-known for proposing that human practices are guided by a grammar. We come to know religion, science, and the everyday by being shown their grammar in practice. Wittgenstein asks that we pay close attention to how language games are constituted by rules that must be revealed: '[T]he term "*language-game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (Wittgenstein 1958:§23; original emphasis).

Wittgenstein offers the city as a metaphor to illustrate the dynamic nature of a language game: 'Our language can be seen as an ancient city: A maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses' (Wittgenstein 1958:§18). The form of life inscribed by a language game is complex and dynamic. It grows and develops, always revealing aspects of the past and the present.

The rules of a language game must be shown, but their showing does not have to duplicate the past. In one example, Wittgenstein sketches the practice of playing ball games. While rules may be followed strictly in a formal game, Wittgenstein turns our attention to the full extent of playing with a ball. He asks rhetorically if 'there is not also the case where we play and – make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them

– as we go along?' (Wittgenstein 1958:§83). Following a rule in an official game is not disconnected from kicking around a ball or throwing it against a wall. According to Wittgenstein, this informal play is also part of playing a ball game. In this informal game, moreover, rules are followed and invented. Wittgenstein suggests that we be attentive to how rules are followed in a dynamic and creative way (Wittgenstein 1958:§23).

A language game through life trajectories offers valuable insights for the study of religious leadership and authority. There is a language game played by religious leaders which is related to the norms of traditions, trends, or movements in which actors participate. Through a common language game, practices and expectations are shared between religious leaders and their audiences and participants. However, individuals follow unique life trajectories that reveal the deviations, innovations, and the idiosyncrasies of life. Focusing on the practices of religious leaders as participants, students, and leaders over a period of time, we can begin to appreciate the dynamic nature of a language game in religion.

## Islamic Reform and Pentecostalism

Islamic reform and Pentecostalism have become prominent in the religious landscape of South Africa and elsewhere. They are the most vibrant and dynamic Christian and Islamic religious movements respectively of our time. However, by their nature, they are also very complex and have taken on varied meanings over the last 100 years. Here, I will point to some dimensions of their global and local South African 'language games' in which my subjects of research are engaged.

Islamic reform draws its strength from a long tradition in the history of Sunni Islam (Ali 2000). The Prophet Muhammad prophesied that a renewer (*mujaddid*) will appear regularly in Muslim societies at the beginning of every century: 'Surely, Allah will send for this community (*umma*) at the advent of every one hundred years a person who will revive its religion (*al-din*) for it' (Tayob 2014:261). Since the end of the 19th century, once colonial power was established in many different societies across the globe, Islamic reform movements mushroomed. Reform entailed a strong critique of practices and values not supported by the Qur'an and authentic traditions of the Prophet. Some, like the schools founded in Deoband (India) in the 19th centu-

ry focused on personal practices to protect Muslim identity and piety (Moosa 2015). Others, like the so-called Islamist movements that emerged in the 1920s, included a political renewal in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad (Humphreys 1982). Lesser known are reform movements within Sufism (Brigaglia 2017; Wright 2015). Reform has been anything but uniform over the course of the 20th century (Roy 2003).

Islamic reform emerged in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, led by graduates of seminaries in the Muslim world. In India they were supported in no small measure by the Tablighi Jamaat mass movement whose members traveled from mosque to mosque across the country. Whilst transforming prayer and dress practices, their activities also led to significant conflicts in communities and mosques (Vahed 2003; Moosa 2000). In general, their reformist project has had a transformative impact on religious practices and attitudes in mosques, homes, and in the streets of South Africa.

However, this was not the only type of reform in South Africa at the time. Inspired by literature from Egypt and the Indian subcontinent, Islamic reform also inspired school and university graduates to engage in social and political reform. In South Africa, this was soon directly related to the struggle against apartheid. The movements and individuals differed on their interpretation of the founding texts of Islam (the Qur'an and hadith) and on their participation in the South African anti-apartheid movement (Jeppie 1991; Tayob 1995). However, they agreed that Islamic reform should not ignore the social and political implications of the Prophet Muhammad's life for South Africa.

The leadership implication of Islamic reform has been studied for its potential challenge to existing leadership structures. With the rise of literacy and printed books, it has been argued that Islamic reform challenges the structure of authority in Muslim societies (Robinson 1993). However, the resilience of religious leaders who also championed reform cannot be ignored. In South Africa, it may be argued that reform informed and inspired by religious leaders has had a greater impact in society.

Pentecostalism in Christianity also traces its roots to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The main motive for Pentecostalism is derived from an experience of the Holy Spirit that overflows into the world. Scholars generally agree that such outpourings of the Spirit emerged in Azusah Street in Los Angeles and then spread across the world (Ukah 2018; Maxwell 1999).

In Africa, the Pentecostal movement has taken on indigenous, colonial and postcolonial saliences. Many such churches emerged in the context of

full colonial control from the 19th century (Njogu 2020). Ogbu Kalu goes one step further by interpreting Pentecostal-like churches in Nigeria and elsewhere as a response to the 'gospel from within a charismatic indigenous worldview' (Kalu 2009). Asonzeh Ukah argues that recent Pentecostal leaders present themselves as African Christians leading global Christianity (Ukah 2018:205).

A Pentecostal trend was evident in South Africa from the 19th century, but it is traced to the founding of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Johannesburg in 1908 (Maxwell 1999:249). Soon black members of this church experiencing various forms of racism founded their own churches. Experiencing the Holy Spirit, they also consecrated African practices into their churches (Anderson 1999; Morton 2017). Another phase of the Pentecostal movement developed around 1970 when more Western-educated black clergy founded independent churches (Anderson 2005; Kalu 2009). Then again after 1994, Pentecostal churches became popular for preaching a prosperity gospel to signal the worldly benefits of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Balcomb 2007).

The implications for authority in Pentecostalism is evident in the power of experience that overrides any long training and study of the Bible and church doctrines. The result has been a multiplication of churches as the 'holy spirit' has been received. Some scholars have suggested that this dimension of Pentecostalism has made these churches extremely creative and dynamic. Others have pointed out, however, that in Africa and elsewhere, Pentecostalism has also led to the emergence of autocratic leaders that have total control over their members (McCauley 2013; Ukah 2018).

Islamic reform and Pentecostalism draw inspiration from their religious pasts. However, emerging in the context of colonial control and social change, they also offer a way of overcoming the immediate past that they inhabit. They seem to capture the condition of change experienced by believers over the course of the 20th century. Islamic reform turns to the original texts of Islam that promise a secure foundation, while the experience of the 'holy spirit' offers an incontrovertible truth for Pentecostalism. While they are very different in their foundational logics, the two movements seem to spawn new directions in a world open to constant change and transformation. Both seem to open the door to new forms of leadership and authority.

## A Note on Method

With each of the preachers whose life trajectories I share here, I conducted one lengthy interview that I transcribed for closer analysis. The interview with Shaykh Alawi was conducted on September 8, 2015 and with Pastor Paulus on September 15, 2015. In addition, I followed them in their religious events. With regard to Shaykh Alawi, I attended Friday preaching events and two *dhikr* (collective remembrance of God) meetings, one at a mosque and the second one at a private home. With Paster Paulus, I attended three events. One was a Sunday church service on September 20, 2015, the second a prayer meeting on October 13, 2015, and an Anglican service for retirees on October 15, 2015. At the latter, I had a chance to talk to some of the Pastor's friends.

In my interviews I focused on turning points in the lives of the leaders around events that they recalled at my prompting. Aleida Assman suggests that symbols, affect, and trauma are particularly strong memory anchors that researchers may use to help participants recall experiences (Assman 2001). Using the idea of memory anchors, I focused on their study trajectories, self-ascribed religious moments, and leadership experiences. With their teaching practices in sermons and prayer meetings, I was able to collate their life trajectories as they recalled them. I shared a draft essay with Shaykh Alawi and Pastor Paulus.

## A Life Trajectory in Reformist Islam

Alawi was born in 1983 and grew up in a lower middle-class religious family in Athlone on the Cape Flats. His father took him to Shaykh Mikail who had just returned from a period of study in the Arab world. He asked this prominent Qur'an teacher of the city to accept Alawi as a student to memorize the Qur'an. Alawi remembered his audacity as a 14-year-old when he asked his prospective teacher to recite the Qur'an for him. Alawi admired him for not taking offence.

Alawi joined his early morning class for a short while, but wandered from school to school in what he called his playfulness. His later went to Johannesburg to study at the Deobandi-inspired seminary called the Dār al-ʿUlūm Zakariyya. However, he missed the Cape and eventually returned to

his family and to his first teacher. During this second time, he also began the study of Arabic on a weekly basis.

Alawi looked upon these years as a time when he put behind his playfulness. He went on the lesser pilgrimage (ʿ*umrah*), during which his teacher asked him to purchase a book of Arabic poetry composed by the great jurist Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (died in 820): 'I remember going around the bookshops of Mecca in search of the *Diwān Imām Shāfiʿī*...I remember, after returning home and gifting the *Diwān* to Shaykh Mikail, he was reading from the compilation one day in class, looked up at me, and with love he said, "Alawi, you *must* study Arabic". 'That was truly a defining moment for me,' Alawi recalled.

The next major milestone in his educational journey was enrolment at the Strand Madrasa (*Dār al-ʿUlūm al-ʿArabiyya al-Islamiyya*) with Mawlānā Ṭāhā Keraan. Alawi described the latter as an ocean of knowledge, mastering both Islamic and Western traditions. From year to year, Alawi marveled at the depth and breadth of the insight that the Mawlana shared with them. Alawi immersed himself in books, reading and memorizing as much as he could. Unlike his fellow students, he told me that he avoided teaching and preaching when he was a student.

Alawi completed his studies at the Strand Madrasa and decided to enroll at the University of Cape Town for post-graduate studies with a topic on the influence of Hadrami scholars and traditions on Cape Islam. He was convinced that his education had prepared him for an equivalent of a Master's degree. However, for some reason this desire to join the University passed.

In 2010, a meeting with Shaykh Habib Umar from Tarim (Hadramawt) in Cape Town changed his life[3]. Alawi dissuaded me from asking him about the 'things that (he) experienced' that opened his eyes to 'an appreciation of (his) relationship with Allah and obligation towards the community'. He reflected at length on the difference between his life as a scholar and the inspiration for community service that he received from Habib Umar: 'Reading, research and writing…one of the problems is that it creates a sense of

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[3] Shaykh Habib Umar has been visiting Cape Town for a few time (2012, 2019, and 2020). His biography suggests that he suffered persecution during the socialist period of Yemen, but has returned to his place of birth at Tarim from where his influence spreads to Uman, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and South Africa (Imam Ghazali Institute n.d.).

harshness perhaps even haughtiness, and you are not really in contact with the community and this unfortunately is the case in so many doctors, so many professors – I don't feel that they're in touch with the community'. Elaborating, he continued: 'Harshness more than anything else, more an aloofness you do not have time for people…maybe my impression of academics is wrong. But I just felt like I was going down that road and Habib caused me to love people…you have to be a human before you can be a follower of any faith; not so to say that I was not human, but perhaps just seeing somebody and doing good for him...[it] did not feel that way'.

Alawi followed an ethical and mystical path with Habib Umar, describing it as a commitment to 'mercy, love, and peace'. He wanted to 'build…bridges through the image of the Prophet' which was 'distorted' in recent times. Extremism, he emphasized, was 'a wholesale misrepresentation of what the Prophet stood for'. 'We do not engage', he continued, 'in politics because politics was not on the Prophet's agenda'. Alawi directed himself towards service, and to an ethic of tolerance and inclusivism. He also alluded to the general mistaken perception of Islam as a violent tradition.

Alawi continued his close association with Habib Umar and with the senior Imams at the Azzavia, a mosque connected to this Sufi order in Cape Town (Bang 2014). Shayk Alawi visited Tarim on a regular basis, but he was reluctant to admit that he was part of the Ba Alawiyyah Sufi order. He was drawing spiritual sustenance from Habib Umar and from Tarim for his work in Cape Town. However, he stayed aloof from taking on the role of a formal Sufi teacher and order.

I attended a Mawlūd (in honor of the birthday of the Prophet) recitation at his mosque on a Friday night after the late-night prayers (September 11, 2015). There were lines of cars parked on both sides of the road. The mosque was full, and those who had come specifically for the Mawlūd were easily identified by their flowing robes and wrapped turbans in a distinctive style, the same style worn by Alawi. Alawi opened the event by inviting everyone in the mosque to send praises and salutations to the Prophet, to learn about the life of the Prophet, and listen to some words of advice from scholars. The Mawlūd started with a circle formed by a group of young men sitting and facing Alawi and senior members of the group. All those close to Alawi greeted him and kissed his hand. A printed book of the supplications (*dhikr)* for the night was distributed among men on the ground floor, and also among women sitting on the mezzanine level above.

For the next hour, salutations to the Prophet were read from this book, from memory, or from smartphone screens. Alawi occasionally identified a person to take the lead in the recitation. After every page, a new leader set the tone, and on a regular basis, the audience recited a refrain or sometimes joined the leader. The young men taking the lead did not skip a beat, and mostly read the difficult Arabic poetry with great ease. Every now and then, what seemed like a Yemeni incense burner was passed among those sitting in the inner circle first and then to the rest. As the incense was received, its smoke was directed to the body and clothing for blessings (*barakah*). Towards the end, the whole congregation rose and stood in honor of the Prophet. At this time, a person passed around with a stick of perfume to be applied to certain parts of the body or clothing. On the day that I was present, a small boy soon copied his father, with his little bottle of perfume. When the recitation was completed, Alawi invited a religious scholar sitting in the back of the room to address the audience. The visitor spoke on the value of remembering God, and to be vigilant on the condition of the heart. Alawi then followed with a short piece of advice on the ethics of the Prophet, focusing on honesty and uprightness that would change how Muslims were perceived by others. The evening ended with a concluding prayer. Rolls of papers were then thrown over the mosque carpet, and food was served.

Alawi did not open the mosque meeting for discussion and deliberation, but he regularly focused on ethics and good living in his talks. He stressed inclusivism among Muslims. More generally, he directed his attention at good ethics on a personal level at every public talk I heard him. In general, he wanted to 'build...bridges through the image of the Prophet'. It was directed against extremism being 'a wholesale misrepresentation of what the Prophet stood for'.


## Pentecostal Home Church

Pastor Paulus grew up in Retreat, a working-class neighborhood in a different part of the Cape Flats. He called his mother a Prayer Warrior who would pray continuously for everyone. According to him, his father was 'deurmekaar' (confused), seemingly being an abusive father. His mother would often bundle her children and join campaigns and crusades organized by the Anglican Church. Every month, they would also join the New Apostolic Church in the

neighborhood. Paulus remembers the contrasting styles between the standardized liturgy in the Anglican Church and the emotional outpourings in the New Apostolic Church. He was comfortable in both churches but stressed the difference on more than one occasion.

Paulus left the Anglican Church when he was 18 but returned to it when he decided to get married. He placed great value on the fact that he was known within the Anglican Church. He sat for a while on the Church Council and became a Steward responsible for making home visits to keep the congregation together. As Steward, he was expected to collect money due to the church. He enjoyed the home visits, but he preferred that his ward members pay their dues on Sundays. He told me with great satisfaction and pride when he saw them rise in church to pay their dues.

Paulus was not formally educated in the church, but he was given responsibilities to teach Bible lessons, the Alpha Class for children, and classes for confirmation. He guided young adults to join what he called 'the family of Christ – to be part of the body of Christ'. Over two years, he prepared them for becoming full members of the church, which he compared with initiation practices in African Traditional Religions or Cape Flats gangs. Paulus seemed quite creative in his task, taking his charges to various places in the city. However, he also took pride in introducing them to what he called the 'tools' of the church, which included how to read the index to the Bible and its three key parts: The Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Acts. He continues to use this three-part model in his preaching.

Paulus regarded himself as a spiritual person, open to hear the words of God addressed to him. He related many examples of special moments in his life when God spoke to him directly. The first happened on a Friday night when he was returning after visiting his girlfriend, his eyes still sparkling as he remembered his courting days. As he got off the last bus and started to walk home, he heard a voice calling his name. At the same time, he saw two men following him with a quickening pace. Paulus ran home and found his mother and sisters praying for his safety. He knew that their prayers had sent God to assist him. He heard God a second time when he gave up his job in quality control, for which he earned weekly wages. Soon to be married, he was not so keen on working night shifts anymore. Thinking about this, he narrated, 'How can one work in the dark when Jesus is the light of the world?' God spoke to him and advised him to stop working. His wife rolled her eyes at this decision, he told me, but he got a better job with a transport

company working under a Muslim supervisor (with a Christian name, he emphasized). A year later, the supervisor died, and Paulus succeeded him. For Paulus, this was God intervening for him again.

Paulus' spirituality was also displayed in his approach to the Bible. When I asked him for more information on his Bible classes, he related the example of Isaiah who 300 years before Christ predicted his coming and crucifixion in detail. However, he believed that the power of prophecy was not limited to this biblical example. He would like to teach people how to be attentive to the messages sent by God. As an illustration, he asked me in the middle of my interview to be quiet and open my senses, one at a time, to my surroundings. He alerted me to the smell of books, dust, to the sound of machines and birds in the distance, to the sensations on my hands and body. This was 'mindfulness', he told me, that opens one to the words of God. He learnt this, he said, at a special seminar organized by one of the churches.

Paulus drifted away from the Anglican Church when his priest was involved in a conflict with a gay Bishop. He thought that the priest was naive to think that he could challenge the Bishop. In the hierarchy of the church, the Bishop was above the priest. Paulus thought that his priest did not know his place in the hierarchy. Paulus was disappointed with the 'politics' in the church and decided to leave it. He continues to attend some services, though, but does not preach or teach there anymore.

At around the same time, his sister Sylvia joined the Kingdom Ministries, a Pentecostal church that was promoting and supporting the proliferation of small churches in the colored township called Mitchells Plain. Pastor Sylvia added a room to her house and established a home church in her neighborhood. She recognized Paulus' special skills and invited him to teach Bible on Wednesdays and preach regularly on Sundays.

Paulus explored and pursued various educational opportunities available in the city. He followed a philosophy course for eight months. That helped him to understand key concepts like wisdom, love, and happiness. However, he was satisfied with attending only five weeks of this course. He also attended a short creative writing course from which he developed a habit of writing stories, recording dreams and reflections in a notebook. He took walks around the city and attended the many festivals held in it. He used these opportunities to supplement his knowledge of the Bible, using them at opportune moments in his preaching.

On Sunday morning, September 20, 2015, I arrived at the home church of Pastor Sylvia. The house did not have a marking, and I would not have recognized the additional room that became a church on the government-built house. From the outside, there was no Christian cross or other markings that set it apart. Paulus was waiting for me, having called me a few minutes earlier to give me directions. The small room soon filled up and the service began promptly at 9 am. One of the daughters of the Pastor opened the service with a keyboard and an accompanying guitarist. She first sang three Afrikaans songs praising God and assured the gathering that Jesus was there for them. The lyrics for the songs were beamed on a large roll-down screen. Paulus said that they had gone 'green' and were no longer printing the materials for the service. The screen dwarfed a small cross on the table in front of a vase of flowers. Most of the time the congregants got on their feet and clapped hands to the rhythm of the music. One person in the audience played a more pronounced role. He said the opening prayer and also joined the singing, louder than the rest. Towards the end, a woman broke out in tears.

The songs switched to English for a while. Then, a little ceremony was created for 'planting seeds' for the following week, setting goals and making contributions to the church at the same time. Eventually, Paulus was called to deliver the sermon. He touched on many topics and impressed the congregation with his knowledge of Rastafarianism that he had learnt at the University of Cape Town seminar a few weeks earlier, and on Eastern Gurus (Dalai Lama particularly) that he had learnt about at the St. George's Cathedral. A dominant theme of the sermon was that the church was the culture of the colored people. Paulus emphasized that Coloreds should neither follow the 'cult of Rastas' nor the Eastern gurus who claimed higher spirituality. They had Jesus on their side, and all they needed to do was to bend their knees and pray. His sermon was given in English, but he occasionally switched to Afrikaans.

After the service, he asked me if I understood Afrikaans, and I wondered if the sermons were usually given in this language. Towards the close, Paulus read from the Bible and all those present followed him in Bibles that they had brought with them. Pastor Sylvia then joined him in the front of the congregation and thanked him and me profusely. She led a concluding prayer and then related a story from her childhood. She spoke of her abusive father who had almost burnt his family in their home. Paulus had shared this with

me to some extent, contrasting his Prayer Warrior mother with his 'deurme-kaar' father. The story made the point that Jesus protected everyone.

As the people started leaving, the pastor greeted them, hugging some and shaking the hand of others. Later Paulus told me that hugging was not a practice in all the churches. I was introduced to some of the congregants. The lead singer was doing an MBA at Stellenbosch University; a policeman had recently joined his wife at this church; and a few younger girls came on their own (but not boys). Another female pastor from the neighborhood told me that her church was on the 'outside' providing support and food for people of all beliefs. I was then invited for coffee in the main house. I saw a milk tart and koeksisters (a well-known cake enjoyed in the area). I remarked that this was very familiar to me, and the Pastor told me that she got it from Muslims nearby. I left and heard a few other home churches coming alive in the neighborhood.

On October 12, 2015, I attended a Bible study meeting with Pastor Paulus. There were five people present, and the key texts under scrutiny were taken from the Psalms of David. The text praised David for turning to forgiveness. The discussion quickly turned around the challenges of living this ethic. A policeman and a social worker spoke of the difficulty of living a life of forgiveness in their respective fields. Life was tough and rough in this colored township, they said. There was no easy answer from Scripture about how to lead with forgiveness that evening, and the study group concluded with a set of fervent prayers.

## Life Trajectories and Language Games

The life trajectories of Shaykh Alawi and Pastor Paulus merit closer analysis and reflection. They are recognizable in the language games of Islamic and Christian Pentecostal leaders respectively. Their teaching and preaching practices exhibit familiar settings, contexts, and messages. A closer examination, however, reveals many departures and innovations. Continuities and change are clearly performed in their life language games.

Both Alawi and Paulus have followed familiar trajectories in becoming religious leaders and teachers. Alawi has been part of a general Muslim reformist trend. He memorized the Qur'an at an early age, and then studied at one of the most popular reformist religious seminaries in Cape Town. What

is, however, unique is Alawi's meeting with Habib Umar that put him on a different course. He devotes himself to cultivating an intense devotion to the Prophet and his Sufi teachers. The *dhikr* (remembrance) meetings that I attended are indistinguishable from other Sufi meetings in the city.

Paulus follows a less familiar trajectory of Pentecostal church leaders. He is not formally trained in a seminary and has his fair share of experiences of God (Marshall 2009:34; Meyer 2004; Balcomb 2007). He has accumulated enough symbolic capital to enable him to preach at a church. However, he differs from other Pentecostal preachers in that he scours the city for new knowledge and new experiences. He avails himself of every opportunity to support his preaching. All the while, he is sure of his close connection with the voice of God.

Both Alawi and Paulus adjust themselves to accommodate and engage in the changing contours of the city. Alawi adjusts himself to the greater popularity of Sufism, while Paulus profits from the public educational opportunities he finds in the increasingly diverse city of Cape Town.

Alawi and Paulus are engaged in familiar practices that provide places and communities for belonging and social recognition. The weekly gatherings to remember the Prophet (*mawlūd*) are unmistakably choreographed. It is a place where leaders and followers know where to sit, where the young and old are loved and honored, and where women and men take their places. The sounds and melodies used in the recitation of the *mawlūd*, and in the prayer formulas are also all familiar. Similarly, the Sunday service at the home church of Pastor Sylvia follows a set routine of opening prayer, songs, collections, sermons, vote of thanks, and farewell. Everyone seems to know what is to come next, and they follow without needing to be told. The language games of both are confirmed by audience responses and participation.

The use of media in their respective meetings in the city also displayed the language games fully. These include songs and recitations, music in the case of the church, special clothing, aromas, and shared food in the case of the Muslim context. The multiple media that accompany the prayers and appeals are fully integrated in the events. Attendees in both mosque and church are roused to participate in both regulated and spontaneous fashion. Although more saturated with media in the form of dress, aromas, and sounds, the mosque gatherings provide relatively little space for spontaneity.

Another good example of examining the language games that the two preachers inhabit can be seen in the use of language. The contrast in the use

of English and Afrikaans was in Paulus' gatherings, reflecting the working-class context of the church. The Sunday church service began with Afrikaans songs, and Afrikaans also dominated some of the impromptu prayers. I was also informed that the formal prayers at the Anglican Church service for the elderly were previously presented in Afrikaans. However, the sermon was delivered in English, and most of the songs and prayers were done in English. In Alawi's case, most of the formal prayers were recited in Arabic. English was used for the formal talks and sermons. However, Afrikaans was used by participants when they were talking to each other, and when sharing meals.

The use of English in formal events is evident throughout South Africa. While the country has eleven official languages, English is the dominant language of politics and commerce. It seems that English was also becoming dominant in formal religious discourse. In this context, Alawi and Paulus created space for the value and familiarity of Afrikaans. The presence of Afrikaans added a local dimension to their respective language games.

A sense of belonging and identity in the meetings of the two leaders cannot ignore the project of the nation and its values in South Africa. Paulus was at pains to reject the value of inclusivism pervading the public discourse of the city and promoted to some extent by the mainline churches. His partial break with the Anglican Church also indicated his attitude to changes in its theology. Whilst not explicitly rejecting gay priests, he drew a clear line between the church and Christ on the one hand, and the values of South Africa's democratic ethos on the other. Like a good Pentecostal leader, Paulus rejected the need for any other way. However, his exclusivism contrasted sharply with his insatiable desire for exploration and experimentation offered by the city.

A similar sense of identity and exclusivism was promoted by Alawi, but in a different direction. I attended a class on *ḥadīth* presented by him at the Strand Madrasa on October 14, 2015, where I listened to a refutation of Joseph Schacht's thesis on the historical validity of prophetic statements. The class was a reading of an Arabic text by Mustafa Azami, a prominent scholar who dedicated his life to counter Schacht's argument. Azami's main thesis was that the historical approach that Schacht and his Muslim followers promoted was surpassed by the historical tradition invented and perfected by *ḥadīth* scholars (al-Azami 1985). This rejection of Western scholarship was repeated in interviews that I conducted with Alawi. It was a deeply held conviction of the sufficiency of the Islamic intellectual tradition against modernist scholarship.

## Conclusion

Alawi and Paulus are not innovators in any radical sense of the term. Their life histories may be closely matched against the grammar of the language of Islamic reformist and Pentecostal preachers respectively. A close examination has revealed, however, creative and innovative directions and turns that both reflect and depart from their respective language games. Alawi and Paulus are religious teachers over a long period, whose roles and engagements may be appreciated in their uniqueness. Idiosyncratic experiences in their life trajectories reveal them to be both conforming and creative. These departures seem to be related to their personal experiences in the city of Cape Town and South Africa.

Life trajectories force us to look at the contingencies in the assumption of roles. They point to the nuances and idiosyncrasies of religious leadership. They lead us to appreciate subtle changes and deviations, leading eventually to major changes over time and over the life of many individual religious trajectories. Changes are not always dramatic but exhibited equally by ordinary preachers and teachers who show the dynamic nature of their respective language games.

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