

Book Review

Dangor, S.E. 2019. *Shaykh Yusuf of Makassar*. 3rd ed. Durban: Digniti. 86 pages. ISBN 978-0-620-82304-3.

Morton, S. 2018. *From the Spice Islands to Cape Town: The life and times of Tuan Guru*. Johannesburg/Cape Town: AwqafSA. Illustrated. 126 pages. ISBN 978-0-620-81195-8.

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Detailed studies on early ‘Cape’ Muslim personalities have not been easy to come by since only a few scholars/researchers succeeded to examine their lives. During the decades of the 20th century, most scholars who studied these early ‘Cape’ figures that hailed from the Melayu archipelago, wrote short exploratory essays. Examples are Prof Adrianus van Selms’ bibliographical entry of Shaykh Yusuf Al-Makassari’s (1626-1699) and Prof Gerrie Lubbe’s journal article on Imam Abdullah ibn Qadi ‘Abdus Salam (aka Tuan Guru [1712-1807]). These scholars covered snippets of these personalities’ lives that included brief background notes and other biographical information.

It was only towards the latter part of the previous century that researchers made concerted attempts to provide detailed accounts. In this regard, Suleman Dangor embarked on his MA studies on the Shaykh Yusuf’s life and this he completed during 1981 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where he is currently an emeritus professor. By then and as far as we know, there was no other work in English that dealt with the Shaykh’s biography in such detail. The Shaykh, who was one of Melayu archipelago’s *Orang Cayen* (*noblemen*), came from the island of South Sulawesi where Makassar is located. He, like many others who showed loyalty towards the Sultan of Banten, fought on behalf of the latter by standing up against the VOC. For this, he was captured and banished by the Dutch authorities. Being a threat to

them, they first sent him to Ceylon where he was kept under surveillance for about a decade and of which little has been recorded in Dangor's text and other works. Then, towards the end of 1693, they decided to dispatch the Shaykh and his entourage to the Cape where he eventually died.

Since this was a unique research project that covered early Cape Muslim history, Dangor has decided to transform it into a book. Since then, the text went through three editions, the first of which appeared in 1982, the second in 1994, and the third in 2019. This review reflects on the latest edition. Alongside Dangor's relatively informative book about the Shaykh, this review also assesses a publication that concentrates on another *Orang Cayen* who hailed from Tidore, a twin island with Ternate that is located in the Northern Moluccas which is a few nautical miles northeast of Sulawesi. Shafiq Morton, who is a well-respected Cape Muslim journalist, was commissioned by AwqafSA – a South African Muslim NGO – to write a monograph on Imam Abdullah Al-Tidore's life. Unlike the Shaykh who was not of royal blood but raised in the Makassar palace, the Imam was born into the royal family and for that reason he is also referred to as a prince.

At the Cape, he was and still is fondly referred to as Tuan Guru. This title was conferred on him because of the *mushaf* (copy of the Qur'an) and the compendium of manuscripts that he penned, the *madrasa* (the Muslim managed school) that he had set up, and for having laid the foundations of the first *masjid* (mosque) in the Cape. However, despite this rich legacy, together with these worthy accomplishments, and even though the Imam was also known for his anti-VOC activities as well as for having been recognized as the early Cape Muslims' founding father, South African researchers have sorely neglected to work on a comprehensive biography of this Imam's life. It thus took Morton, a seasoned journalist, to undertake this onerous research task.

Turning to Dangor's notable five-chapter book, it may be stated that this publication on Shaykh Yusuf charted out a biographical pathway that caused a few scholars over the years to consult it as one of their main sources. If one pages through texts and theses prepared by Indonesian scholars and other researchers who either examined the Shaykh's eventful life or analyzed one of his manuscripts, then one will invariably find that it refers to or quotes Dangor's text. This signals that Dangor has laid a good basis from which others could expand and build upon. Dangor's publication, like any other, has its shortcomings and these he has addressed with the production of different

editions. For this edition, Dangor has stumbled across new material during the last few years. These he has used to amend and beef up the current edition.

Compared to Dangor's worthy text on the Shaykh that pursues a purely historical approach, Morton presents a prosaic flowing eleven-chapter work that covers Tuan Guru's life story. It is one that not only differs in style and content from Dangor's, but it also contrasts in approach. Though historical too, it veers off by incorporating other issues (such as myths) as well. These aspects thus shape the Tuan Guru narrative into an interesting spicy story that was untold before. Since material on Tuan Guru's life in Tidore was hard to find and considering the fact that the South African national archives did not have much information to offer a good understanding about the Imam, Morton has done his best to overcome these difficulties by using what he managed to gather in South Africa and on his trip to Indonesia. One should point out that Dangor too admitted that he encountered similar obstacles when he travelled the research road, searching for material on the Shaykh at the turn of the 1980s. It is, however, quite evident that both Dangor and Morton have managed to write and produce moderately readable texts.

Dangor and Morton demonstrate that their subjects, who lived during dissimilar socio-historical periods (i.e. the 17th and the 18th centuries respectively), had varied experiences when they encountered the Dutch. Shaykh Yusuf met up with the Dutch when they gradually entrenched their presence onto the Melayu archipelago soil, while Tuan Guru confronted the Dutch during the period when they had firmly embedded themselves regionally. This was after they wrenched away the lucrative spice trade from the indigenous communities in the Moluccas region. Though the Dutch diplomatically and purposefully befriended some of the Sultanates to have control over the spices and access to the trade routes, they too had to deal with their adversaries, the Portuguese and Spaniards. When they succeeded to overcome these rivals, they had to contend with the Sultanates.

Both biographies demonstrate that the two *Orang Cayen* personalities as well as a string of others did not side with those who worked closely with the Dutch authorities. Many of those who opposed the Dutch and their allies either landed up in Ceylon or at the Cape. Dangor and Morton offer insights into their respective statuses during the periods when they were isolated and incarcerated in the Cape. While the Shaykh and his entourage were isolated

on a distant farm from Cabo de Goede Hoop's center, Tuan Guru was twice imprisoned on Robben Island. The Dutch authorities' shrewd intentions were revealed in the way that they (man)handled those that countered their socio-political and economic rule. They imprisoned them geographically distant from their motherland, punishing and forcing them to remain exiles in far flung territories such as the Cape – a place that was off the radar screen of those who came from the Melayu archipelago. One can only imagine the intense trauma and the psychological pain that these people had to undergo when they were agonizingly and cruelly shipped off to unknown countries.

While it might be argued that Dangor was rather economical in his narration of Shaykh Yusuf's life by remaining devoted to pure historical facts, Morton was less so. Morton has weaved into Tuan Guru's biographical story aspects that offered an interesting vignette and understanding of the circumstances in which Tuan Guru was raised – this, one could gather after having read the first few chapters. Morton, however, traces Tuan Guru's genealogy to a fascinating familial *Wali Songo* (*revered saints*) connection. He shows that Tuan Guru was brought up in a princely Tidore homestead like that of the Shaykh. Dangor illustrates that, unlike Tuan Guru, the Shaykh's familial ties and roots go back to Makassar and he shows how dutifully the Shaykh served the Banten Sultanate after he returned from an absence of about 20 years or more, accumulating knowledge and pledging an oath of loyalty to various Sufi orders in and beyond the Arabian Peninsula that was partly under Ottoman rule.

Unfortunately, in the absence of archival material and other sources, Morton was unable to easily identify where and how Tuan Guru fitted into the intellectual network that the Shaykh formed part of; he could also not discover who Tuan Guru's teachers were. In these circumstances, one should appreciate Morton's scholarly interventions knowing that he had to work with a limited amount of material. Apart from that and in one of the chapters, as Morton approaches the end of his book, he provides an informative overview of portions of Tuan Guru's compendium, known erroneously by the title *Ma'rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman* (*knowledge of Islam and faith*) – a compilation of manuscripts that Tuan Guru had memorized. It was confirmed that Tuan Guru had reproduced each of these from memory.

According to Morton's reading, the compendium was probably written between 1781 and 1786. This could be so, but Tuan Guru could also have done that while he was incarcerated for a second time from 1786 until

1793. Morton thus gives the reader a partial synopsis of this wonderful compendium. Now, if one goes back to the Melayu archipelago's intellectual map – considering the fact that Tuan Guru's lineage goes back via the *Wali Songo* – then it may be argued that Tuan Guru inserted himself on that map with this compendium. Though he did not churn out any known manuscripts like the Shaykh, it may well be declared that he rightly belonged to that intellectual *cum* spiritual matrix.

When returning to Dangor's study, one observes that the Shaykh was among those intellectuals that made their mark as Sufi Shaykhs, in other words, he was one of the leading neo-Sufis that shaped and cemented the archipelago's spiritual foundations. It was from these Sufi texts that Tuan Guru and many others benefitted. For the record, one of the manuscripts that Tuan Guru had memorized that was penned by Shaykh Yusuf, was titled *Bidayat al-Mubtadi* (*The beginning of the novice*). The manuscript that was rewritten appears towards the end of the extant Tuan Guru magisterial text. Tuan Guru's compendium, it may be claimed, tangibly proves that the Shaykh's works – including the one mentioned as well as two others, *Zubdat al-Asrar* (*The essence of the secrets*) and *Sirr al-Asrar* (*The secret of the secrets*) that Dangor translated into English – formed part of a series of religious writings that reinforced the Muslim identity across the Melayu archipelago.

Before concluding, I would like to highlight a few points. First, both mentioned texts provide informative, imperfect biographies of these two *Orang Cayen* figures. Although much of the focus understandably slants towards the times when they were isolated and incarcerated at the Cape, these are reasonably reliable texts that researchers can draw upon for further research. Second, the two publications are noteworthy studies, particularly in light of the challenges that both researchers have faced as they made sterling efforts to piece together what were difficult tasks. Third, while Dangor's training in Islamic studies placed him in an advantageous position, compared to Morton who was trained as a journalist and who had to get to grips with scholarly research, it did not stop the latter from preparing and putting together an excellent biography. Fourth, and on a technical front, both these documents have typos and incomplete bibliographical data. This is more glaring in Dangor's text than in Morton's publication. Lastly, if both decide to produce new editions, then one would recommend that they include a user-

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friendly index – one that would be valuable for both the established researcher and the novice.

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