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ISIM Chair at the University of Nijmegen

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Appointment

ISIM Chair at the University of Nijmegen

Abdulkader Tayob, from the University of Cape, joins the ISIM as the ISIM Chair at the University of Nijmegen. His arrival brings with it his wealth of experience in the study of Islam from the perspective of religious studies and South African politics. Tayob is particularly interested in the trends and developments in African Islam since the end of colonial rule. How have Muslims and Islamic institutions developed since the 1960s? Which interpretations of Islam, and which social and political forms, have dominated the public debate among Muslims? In spite of diversity, can one speak of an African experience of Islam? If so, what can this experience tell us about global Muslim experiences? These are the kinds of questions that Tayob will bring to the ISIM in the coming years.

Tayob's attention to public life in Africa has deep roots in his personal life and academic career. As an undergraduate student in a racially segregated university, he was attracted to Islamist politics against conservative religious scholars and apartheid. Until 1984, he played an active role in the Muslim Students Association and Muslim Youth Movement. He has maintained a commitment to the development and transformation of the latter as a columnist for its newspaper, occasional advisor, and honorary historian. Published in 1995, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press) situates the organization in the history of South African Islam, and the history of Islamic revival in general.

Even whilst reading for a degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies, he was really interested in a career as a mathematics teacher. After completing an honours degree in mathematics, Tayob taught the subject at the high school level for two years. However, a short stint in Saudi Arabia to improve his Arabic competency lured him further into the study of Islam. He then obtained a scholarship to complete an M.A. and Ph.D. at Temple University within the framework of the Islamization of Knowledge under the supervision of Prof. Ismail al-Faruqi. His dissertation on the 9th/10th-century Muslim historian, Al-Tabari,

was supposed to be preparatory ground-work for the Islamization of history as a discipline. But, the appeal of history and historians led him to explore the cultural and religious biases that made the writing of history possible. Using the work of Gadamer, Tayob has tried to point out the prejudices of early Muslim historians as both debilitating and empowering factors in the writing of history. Using their religious views on the companions of the Prophet, Tayob showed how the form and production of history (*ta'rikh*) suited the interests of the early historians.

Back in South Africa in 1989, Tayob used his knowledge of the study of religion to evaluate Muslim institutions and responses to colonialism, apartheid and the struggle against apartheid. In addition to personal experience and academic tools, his exposure to the study of religion prepared him well for the task. In the next few years, he published a number of articles and eventually two books on Islam in South Africa. In addition to the one already mentioned, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermon* (Florida, 1999) focused on the emergence of Islamic institutions in the context of apartheid, and analysed Islamic sermons in these institutions during South Africa's transition to apartheid. This work marked a transition from a focus on youth and political developments, to a broader concern about the institutional framework and social-religious patterns of Islamic practice. He explored, for example, the relation between imams and traders, Asian and African Muslims, and men and women. Furthermore, he showed how the sermon during the period of transition became the locus of new interpretations on the basis of the old.

**Abdulkader
Tayob**

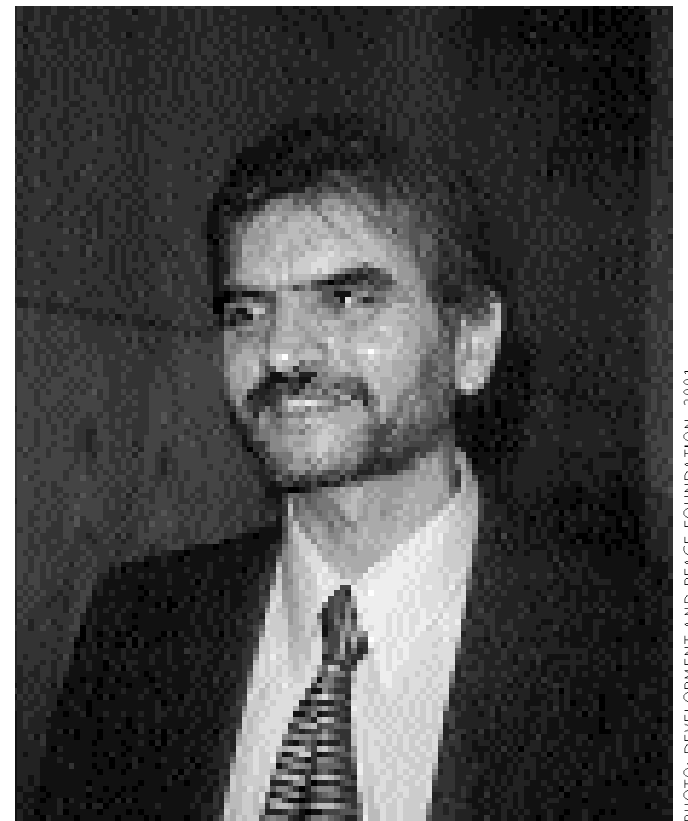


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His interest in classical Islamic thought has continued, and still focuses on Al-Tabari and other individuals and aspects of classical Islam. Tayob taught courses on the Qur'an, Hadith, Philosophy and Sufism. These were all taught as interrelated disciplines from a critical perspective. Using his knowledge of the development of *ta'rikh*, he tried to frame other Islamic disciplines and their development as products of particular interests. In each case, Tayob was keen to show how the values and symbols of Islam were created and articulated in different historical and cultural contexts. *Islam: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999) was the materialization of this intellectual trajectory. In addition, he is also working as an associate editor for a new two-volume encyclopaedia on Islam at Macmillan.

In the meantime, South Africa was rapidly changing with the dawning of democracy. Tayob's interests in South Africa expanded to draw comparisons with religious societies

and communities in other African countries. The focus on African experiences has developed in collaboration with colleagues in Cape Town and abroad. In the first instance, the meaning of religion and public life in a democratic society has been prompted by serious political questions in South Africa itself. A departmental course on Religion and Public Life, taught with colleagues working on comparative religions (Christianity and African Traditional Religions) has stimulated interesting questions. Good partnerships based on similar concerns have been nurtured with colleagues in, particularly, Germany and the Netherlands. So far, one co-edited book on religion and politics has seen the light of day, edited by Tayob and Weisse: *Religion and Politics in South Africa* (Munich: Waxmann, 1999). On an equally productive level, Tayob has participated in and established a series of colloquia for sharing and disseminating research findings with Muslim communities.