

South Africa

SINDRE BANGSTAD

Two years after the first free elections in the history of South Africa, which brought the liberation movement to political power, a new twist was added to the seemingly ever-present violence of the gang-lands of Cape Town. A vigilante movement dominated by Cape Muslims, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), launched a series of assassinations of local drug lords and vowed to free the post-apartheid townships of the scourge of crime and drugs. Since autumn of the year 2000, PAGAD's militant actions have ceased to pose a security threat in Cape Town. Most of the militants of the movement are behind bars. But even long after the movement reached its zenith and decline, academics have failed to reach a consensus over what the peculiar phenomenon of PAGAD actually represented.

members that appeared in the media. On the other hand, the white-dominated media was lambasted as 'Islamophobic' by PAGAD on various occasions.

The Muslims of Cape Town

The coloured Muslims of Cape Town are the descendants of slaves and political exiles brought to the 'Mother City' in the period between 1658 and 1808, and of misce-

the Muslim community vis-à-vis the post-apartheid authorities.³

The internal conflicts

The assassination of Rashaad Staggie in 1996 exposed the conflictive interests and opinions of Cape Muslims. The state apparatus, represented by the senior ANC minister Mohammed 'Dullah' Omar, had initially sought to bring PAGAD into alignment with the government through talks with the leaders of the movement, but through the assassination of Staggie, PAGAD had in effect made this impossible. PAGAD was labelled a vigilante movement by the government, and the minority of Cape Muslims supportive of the ANC government turned their backs towards PAGAD's actions, which they regarded as counter-productive. The path towards an increasing anti-state rhetoric of PAGAD leaders in the following years, and the process of government labelling of PAGAD members as 'urban terrorists' that ensued, lay open. But PAGAD could count on massive support from the Cape Muslim community. In a survey published in November 1996 it was found that 62 per cent of Muslim respondents were supportive of PAGAD. In comparison, a mere 17 per cent of Christian respondents were supportive of the movement.⁴ The support of the Muslim middle class and lower-middle class in coloured residential areas appeared to be particularly strong. In sum, PAGAD had popular but not intellectual support. Many Cape Muslim intellectuals paid a heavy price for distancing themselves from PAGAD's actions: in 1998, a pipe-bomb was thrown at the house of the senior scholar in Religious Studies, Dr Ebrahim Moosa. A prominent imam, Sa'dullah Khan (imam at al-Quds Masjid in Gatesville, one of the largest mosques in Cape Town), received death threats and opted to leave the country; whereas the senior ANC politician, Ebrahim Rasool, lived under constant police surveillance for long periods.

But the toll exacted on ordinary township residents was – as usual – higher. As the assassination attempts on gangsters on the Cape Flats degenerated into regular warfare between PAGAD and the gangs, civilians were caught in the crossfire. In the community of 'Mekaar' (the name of which has been altered), where I was to undertake fieldwork two years later, stray bullets killed a six-year-old girl in November 1998, as was the case with two other minors the same year. Two suspected PAGAD members, both practising Muslims, were later convicted for her murder on the grounds of 'common purpose'.

Academic representation of PAGAD

The academic literature on the PAGAD phenomenon is limited. No systematic investigation of the movement has been undertaken. There are however, a number of theses, articles, and reports, the most significant of which have been produced by academics affiliated to the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape in Bellville.⁵ These authors' analyses of PAGAD diverge on one point in particular. Tayob and Esack point to the links between Islamist rhetoric and PAGAD's actions, whereas Jeppie and Pillay are sceptical about attaching importance to such links. Pillay perceives PAGAD as an expression of

globalized, Hollywood-style representations of machoism that have been appropriated and localized by both the gangs and the vigilantes. Jeppie suggests that PAGAD reflects a crisis of leadership among South African Muslims, and that it serves as an avenue for the reinsertion of former drug addicts and petty gangsters into society. Hence, to both Pillay and Jeppie the religious imagery invoked by PAGAD appears to be mere strategic posturing for the Muslim township public. Even though one should not necessarily take the assertions of PAGAD members at face value, such analyses risk treating the outward expressions of PAGAD as mere epiphenomena in relation to the social causes of the phenomenon. For instance, there seems to be little doubt that Qibla, a militant organization heavily influenced by Islamism, gained control over PAGAD after the assassination of Staggie in 1996. My experience with PAGAD members during fieldwork suggests that Islamism may be of greater significance than what has been assumed so far. All but one of the alleged PAGAD members in 'Mekaar' had at some point pursued religious careers. One of them was a long-standing member of Qibla, whose formative political experiences had been the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s. This is certainly at some remove from the impressions of the 'gun-ho' machoism that was so central to the local media's representation of PAGAD. As a political and social phenomenon, PAGAD was intimately bound up with the hybrid social formations from which it originated, and was therefore multi-faceted. The question of whether PAGAD is an expression of machoism or Islamism is an awkward one, since it appears to have expressed both.

Notes

1. According to the population census of 1996.
2. Call of Islam, established in 1983, was supportive of the UDF and the ANC. Qibla, established in 1980, had an agenda of implementing the *shari'a*.
3. See also S. Jeppie, 'Commemorations and Identities: The 1994 Tercentenary of Islam in South Africa', in T. Sonn (ed.), *Islam and the Question of Minorities* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 73–91.
4. Africa et al, *Crime and Community Action: PAGAD and the Cape Flats 1996–1997* (Cape Town: IDASA Public Opinion Service, 1998).
5. See for instance A. Tayob, 'Jihad Against Drugs in Cape Town: A Discourse-Centred Analysis', *Social Dynamics* 22/2 (1996): 23–29; F. Esack, 'PAGAD and Islamic Radicalism: Taking on the State?', *Indicator S.A.* 13/4 (1997): 7–11; S. Pillay, 'There's a Fundamentalist on My Stoep: Problematizing Representations of PAGAD', Unpublished seminar paper (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 1998); S. Jeppie, 'Islam, Narcotics and Defiance in the Western Cape, South Africa', in K. King (ed.), *Development in Africa – Africa in Development*, (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 2000), 217–233; and B. Dixon and L. M. Johns, *Gangs, PAGAD and the State: Vigilantism and Revenge Violence in the Western Cape* (Braamfontein: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2001).

Sindre Bangstad graduated with a cand. polit. degree in social anthropology from the University of Bergen, Norway (2002), and is affiliated with the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway.
E-mail: Srinkebangstad@yahoo.no

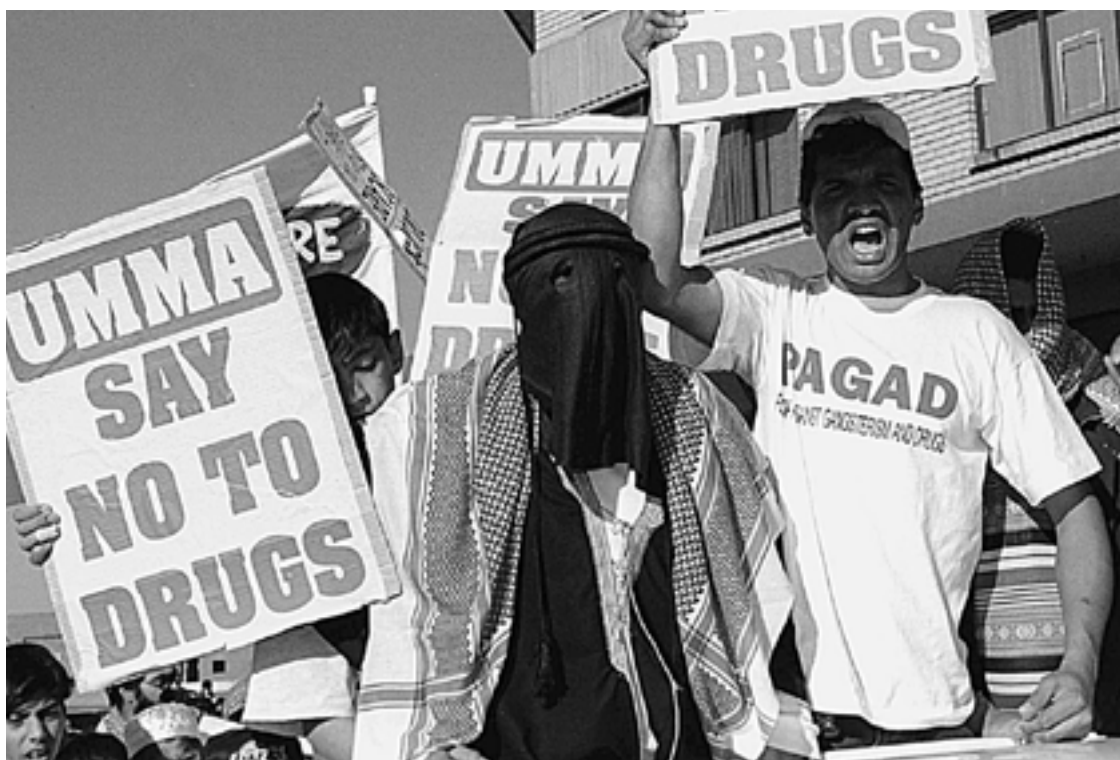


PHOTO: JUDA NGWENYA © REUTERS

PAGAD demonstration in Pretoria's Laudium suburb.

PAGAD grew out of a network of civic movements and neighbourhood watches on the so-called Cape Flats, and was established by a group of predominantly Muslim teachers and social workers in 1996. Cape Flats refers to the residential areas to which Cape Town's coloured population was forcibly removed when strict residential segregation was imposed by the apartheid authorities in the 1960s and 1970s. The living conditions in the townships of the Cape Flats vary, but the general pattern is one of overcrowding, lack of public facilities, and increasing unemployment. For the coloured gangs involved in crime and trafficking in drugs, the Cape Flats had proven to be fertile ground for recruitment ever since the forced removals. Among ordinary township residents, there was at the time of PAGAD's emergence a perception to the effect that the level of crime had spiralled out of control since the abolishment of apartheid, and that the post-apartheid authorities were unable and unwilling to curtail the activities of township gangs.

From the outset, PAGAD was a media phenomenon. The movement burst into the media headlines when a renowned gangster from the Cape Flats, Rashaad Staggie, was assassinated *in camera* by a mob of PAGAD supporters outside his home in the suburb of Salt River on 4 August 1996. South African vigilantism has traditions dating back to the late 19th century. What was new in the case of PAGAD was that this time it was perpetrated by a movement drawing heavily on the religious imagery of Islam. PAGAD's stance towards the local media was ambiguous: on the one hand, PAGAD leaders knew very well that township youngsters in Cape Town were attracted by the visual images of the seemingly omnipotent, scarf-clad PAGAD

generation between the various ethnic groups present in South Africa through and since the colonial era. The Indian Muslims of Cape Town are the descendants of free Muslim tradesmen and some indentured labourers that both arrived in South Africa in the late 19th century. Whereas a mere 1.4 per cent of South Africans are Muslim, approximately 10.4 per cent of Cape Townians are Muslim.¹ Historically, the cultural and religious practices of the Cape Muslims have been heavily influenced by Sufism. The Islam of the Cape Muslims can generally be considered as tolerant, which is indicated by a high frequency of intermarrying and socializing with non-Muslims, especially among the poorer sections of the community.

Throughout the years of apartheid, most Cape Muslims remained politically complacent. Individual Muslims, such as the Pan-Africanist Congress-oriented imam Abdullah Haron (who died in police detention in 1969) made great sacrifices in the struggle against apartheid. The Pan-Africanist Congress was a splinter group from the ANC Youth League, established in 1959 under the leadership of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe. Young Muslim anti-apartheid activists took part in the struggle of the streets in Call of Islam and Qibla, as well as in the umbrella anti-apartheid movement United Democratic Front² in the 1980s, but they were in minority in their communities. In the post-apartheid context, however, one has seen a selective process of remembering among Cape Muslims in which the Muslim contribution to the fight against apartheid, rather than the complacency of most Muslims in that era, has been highlighted. It seems reasonable to regard this as the outcome of the attempts of Cape Muslim leaders to position