



Shamila Mpinga - breaking barriers from Dambuza to Oxford

Maryam Patel interviews Shamila Mpinga who got her LLB summa cum lauda from UKZN has been awarded Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford University

Tell us about yourself, your background, education, interests.

I am a young Muslim woman from Dambuza township, in Pietermaritzburg KwaZulu Natal. I was raised by my uncle and aunt. My mother, who is a domestic worker, also had a huge role to play in my upbringing. Notwithstanding the limited resources, she always ensured that I was well taken care of. I have felt the effects of "it takes a village to raise a child" through the kindness and support of the Muslim community to which I belong. I was taught independence at a young age and voluntarily started working at the age of 12 and have not stopped since. I attended Maritzburg Muslim School for Girls on a bursary from the school. I completed high school with 5 distinctions and was nominated by the school for a scholarship to further my studies. The nomination earned me a merit entrant scholarship to study law at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). After my first year of study, I was awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship for being in the top 25 first year students in the entire university. After four years of studying, my degree was conferred on me summa cum laude. I then decided to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT). To read for a Masters in Mineral Law at UCT, I was awarded the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship in 2017. After a very rigorous process, I am now a Rhodes scholar-elect. As a Rhodes scholar, I intend on reading for an MSc in Law and Finance and an MBA at the University of Oxford. I have varying interests which complement each other to uphold my wellbeing. These include politics, commerce, fashion, hiking and socialising.

You were recently awarded the Rhodes Scholarship. What does this mean to you?

It means the world to me! It is the last item on my list of adolescent medium-term goals, which means that my bucket list is formally empty, and I need to start drafting a new one. At a deeper level, I trust that my earning the Rhodes Scholarship provides hope for individuals with backgrounds similar to mine to push the boundaries, surpass expectations and to not be a victim of circumstances.

If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title should be?

A simple girl with big dreams and high hopes.

If you had six months with no obligations or financial constraints, what would you do with the time?

Volunteer at two types of organisations: one aimed at finding sustainable solutions to alleviating poverty and the other aimed at drastically reducing unemployment. I would also travel to learn more about other nations, people and ideas because I don't know what I don't know.

Who do you admire most and why?

People with good character, because it is through good character that people are able to perpetuate good and build others.

Tell me something you have done that goes against all social conventions, yet you did it anyway because it was the right thing to do.

Pursuing tertiary education. I am the first person in my family to get a degree. When I started studying, I had no idea where my degree would take me, but I knew that it would present me with great opportunities to improve the situation at home. Having gone through years of studying, I have realised that my reach stretches beyond my family and that I have the potential to have a positive influence nationally and even globally.

What inspires you?

The hope of a more equal world.

What are you known for?

Good character (I've been told)



Pretend you're the President of South Africa. What three concerns about the country's future keep you up at night?

- Improving the standard of education & living;
- Providing good health services and alleviating poverty; and
- Reducing unemployment

What's the most interesting thing about you that we wouldn't learn from your CV alone?

Happiness is a huge priority of mine. My decisions are influenced by whether I will fulfill my purpose of making this world a better place and being happy while pursuing said decision.

How would you convince someone to do something they didn't want to do?

If my life is a testament of anything, it is that the best adventures are often least expected. I have always wanted to become an aalimah (teacher of Islamic thought). Ten years ago, if someone had predicted that I would have a law degree and preparing to study at Oxford, I would have laughed at them. But, I find myself here. In short, I would not try convincing someone to do something they would not otherwise do, I would just encourage them to be open to other possibilities.

Former MYM President Tahir Sitoto Graduates with PhD in Religious Studies from UCT

On Thursday 13 December 2018, Tahir Fuzile Sitoto, was formally granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies at a graduation ceremony at the University of Cape Town. His doctoral thesis was titled: "On Africana/Islamica Existential Thought: Don Mattera and the Question of Transcendence" and was supervised by Professor Abdulkader Tayob. Sitoto's doctoral thesis places the renowned South African anti-apartheid icon, Don Mattera's poetry, fiction and self-understanding in conversation with African existential thought, with a particular focus on Black Muslim experience in the United States of America.

Tahir Sitoto hails from humble beginnings in the KwanoBuhle Township outside Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape. He was part of the thousands of young South Africans who participated in the 1976 Soweto youth uprisings against the apartheid regime's proposed imposition of Afrikaans medium school instruction. He subsequently joined the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (MYM) and attended the first Islamic Training Programme (ITP) in December 1977. He rose up in the ranks of the MYM and served as its President from 1994-1996. Tahir Sitoto holds a BSocSc (Hons) and MSocSc degrees from UCT. He also studied at King Saud University in Riyadh, and was a Fullbright Scholar at the

State University of New York at Binghamton with the late Professor Ali Mazrui. He currently serves as a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics.



Imam Dr Rashied Omar (left) of Claremont Road Mosque seen here with Dr Tahir Sitoto at the graduation

I've known Tahir Sitoto from his days as a student at As-Salaam. He has always been a very humble and committed person. Tahir started off as a member of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) where he soon became the President. He's been a valuable part of many Islamic organisations and involved in academic teaching for several years at the University of KwaZulu Natal. He was also a trustee of the IPCI (Islamic Propagation Centre International), IROSA and the Islamic Development Bank Scholarship Trust. We are elated with his remarkable achievement of obtaining his Doctorate. There is no limit to what one can achieve and Tahir has aptly demonstrated this. Although he hails from the Eastern Cape he has spent most of his years in KwaZulu Natal where he has served the community and organisations with distinction. On behalf of the Islamic Forum, MYM, Sanzaf and the IPCI we congratulate him on being granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies. Our duas are with him. **Ahmed Saeed Moola for Islamic Forum**

Professor ASLAM FATAAR Receives Chancellor's Award for Research at University of Stellenbosch

At a University of Stellenbosch's December 2018, graduation ceremony, Professor Aslam Fataar was honoured with the Chancellor's Medal for Excellence in Research. Prof Fataar is former Vice Dean: Research of SU's Education Faculty and former HOD of the Department of Education Policy Studies. He started his academic career as a junior lecturer in 1995 at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and served there as Vice Dean and HOD in the Faculty of Education. He also previously taught at Lotus River High School for six years. He completed his MA in 1992 and PhD in 1999 at UWC, has served as a Visiting Professor at Ohio University in 1999 and did a Fulbright Research Scholarship at Illinois University from August 2005 until June 2006. Professor Fataar has published widely and his most recent edited volume is titled: *The educational practices and pathways of students across power-marginalised spaces* (2018). Professor Fataar has served on the Councils of three universities in the



Western Cape; UCT (2004-2006), UWC (2007-2009), SU (2016 - current), and has been serving on a range of Faculty and University committees, in addition to being external examiner for five universities. He currently also serves on the Board of the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA) and is a former national executive member of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa and its Deputy President from 1991 to 1993, in the same period that Dr Tahir Sitoto was the MYMSA President.



Uncle Ebrahim Rhoda Receives Gold Medal Award for Community Service from University of the Western Cape

Cape Muslim historian, Ebrahim Rhoda, has been awarded a gold medal For Commitment to Community Service at a December 2018 graduation ceremony at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Uncle Ebrahim, after retiring from teaching for more than 30 years, enrolled for a Master's degree in History at UWC and completed it in 2006 at the age of 68. He has since published three seminal books and a number of articles on the history of Islam and Muslims at the Cape. The most famous of these being *From Slavery to Citizenship* was published in 2011. Uncle Ebrahim is currently 80 years old and is dedicated to training young upcoming Muslim historians and lay individuals to recover the rich history of Islam and Muslims at the Cape.

Maulana Kharsany ask Graduates to Add Value to Society at IMA Dinner

The Islamic Medical Association of South Africa's (IMASA) Graduates Dinner is an annual event that has been held, without fail since the inception of the organisation. Initially it was held at the homes of the executive members in Durban. Now with the growing numbers and with other health-care institutions accepting students from all race groups, larger venues are needed and such functions are held in Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town. These functions may also allow some centres an opportunity to raise funds for the organization's many social welfare projects. The primary aim of these functions is to introduce the graduates to the IMASA and its activities and invite them to join the organisation and help enhance and further its workings. Invited speakers provide motivational talks to advise graduates on Islam's value system.

This year's event in Durban was held on the 28 November 2018 at the Orient Hall. The guest speaker, Moulana Junaid Kharsany, emphasised the need for minorities to rise above the mundane and to be the "sugar" in the country by being instrumental to the uplift-

ment of the poor majority. By way of example he quoted the role of the Parsees in India and Pakistan, who are a tiny minority but have created entities such as Bata and Tata which are tremendous assets to the country and its people. He went on to give the following advice: "A Muslim understands that Islam requires us to benefit society as a whole. Historically, minorities were valued in their host societies because of the principled values they contributed. If we as a generation of graduates are going to excel, we must be propelled not by the desire of monetary gain or rank, but by the promotion of compassionate service, the very cardinal quality of Islam. Be as enthusiastic and motivated when serving our country's disenfranchised, as you would serving the elite. Be as compassionate in a rural South African hospital as you would in a Palestinian clinic. After all, a Muslim is called on to serve all of the creation of Allah Ta'ala. May you be the pride of the Ummah and the beloved of the Almighty."

The highlight of the evening is the taking of the Oath of the Muslim Health Care Worker by all the graduates after which they are treated to a sumptuous dinner and leave with gifts (mainly of beneficial Islamic literature with the advice to study these for the real "final exam").



MEDICAL

Zakaria Ahmed Ismail
Khalid Ebrahim
Mohammed Yousuf Kazi
Abu Bakr Arbee
Sideeq Arnold
Taherah Makada
Zakkiyah Patel
Fathima Bhorat
Fathima Osman
Mahadi Gabralla
Nabeelah Karimulla
Mohamed Thamish Carrim
Asif Ahmed Solwa
Ebrahim Kamdar
Faizan Nadvi

MEDICAL - CHINA

Abdur Rahman Paruk
Abdur Rauf Dosani
Yusuf Amra
Naeem Khan
Zain Peermamode
Leeya Jasat
Ahmed Gora Mahomed
Zaheer Lorgat
Mohammed Goga
Sehrish B Khan
Mohammed Bassa
Yusuf Trook
Ziyaad Moolla
Kajee
Yusuf Peer

Reaz Moolla
Shehzaad Soomar
Maneeza Ismail
Sayed M A Kader

MEDICAL - ROMANIA

Muhammad Ja'far Mehtar
Ahmed Kauthar Peer
Zaheer Dawjee

MEDICAL - MAURITIUS

Nazmeera Khalil

PHARMACY

Aalia Dawood
Asma Chohan
Basheera Ameen
Fathima Zahra Tayob
Fathima Azzahra Suleman
Hanifa Bibi Amod
Humraaz Kaja
Juwairiyyah Vahed
Kaneez Fathima Fakey
Maryam Ashraf Karodia
Maseeha Bayat
Maseeha Muslim
Mohamed Hoosen Suleman
Naseerah Jadwat
Saajida Khatoon Rizvi
Salma Patel
Sumaiya Motala
Tasmia Ahmed Suleman
Yumna Moosa

Zeenat Ebrahim

PSYCHOLOGY

Khadija Jamal
PHARMACY - RHODES
UNIVERSITY

Koketso Moropa
Muhammad Solwa
Yusuf Vahed
Sumaiyah Moosa
Taufeeq Mahomed
Fathima Zahraa Hoosen
Safwaan Vahed
Sadehya Khan
Zakariyya Ganie
Muhammad Raja

AUDIOLOGY

Jahaan Paruk
Husna Mahomed
Zahrah Cassim
Tasnim Dawood

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Usraa Gani
Mishkah Ally
Husna Yusuf
Raeesah Sahib
Arshiya Dahal

OPTOMETRY

Naseerah Simjee
Karima Khan

Jauhara Khan
Tasneem Amod
Husna Paruk
Uzair Amod
Ahmed Randeree

SPEECH THERAPY

Hamida Mahomed Jooma
Lutfiyya Lakhi
Saadia Mayat
Kadhija Hoosen
Leyya Muslim
Khadijah Desai
Aamina Randaree

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Ilhaam Ahmed
Layla Suffla
Hawa Khan Essop
Siddeeqah Kader
Raesa Simjee
Humayra Rawat
Farzana Moosa
Aziza Mulla
Zahrah Patel

NURSING

Waseem Ballim

POST GRADUATES

Emad Elhuni
Hossam Ghamo
Mohammed Mitha

Farook Khan and Kevin Joseph's book, *Mandela in Focus* which was launched last week is in demand. Among the host of exclusive stories and photographs, is a riveting account of President Nelson Mandela's inter-action with Islam while on Robben Island. Here is an extract:

"Then there is the Muslim influence on President Nelson Mandela. His two friends from his days' at Wits University were Ismail Meer, Ahmed Kathrada and the "seniors" in the struggle in those days were Moulana Ismail Cachalia and Dr Yusuf Dadoo.

They met at a flat in Kholvad House, the first black owned high-rise building in the Johannesburg Business Central District. But the deep insights into Islam came from his incarceration on Robben Island.

Two major events occurred: One, while still a prisoner, President Mandela heard that a Muslim leader from Kensington, Cape Town, Sheik Ahmed Al Kaderi had been given permission to find a grave of a Saint who was also imprisoned on the Island some 300 years ago. Sheik Abduraghaman Motura was a political prisoner brought from Malayasia and was restricted to this desolate place which had no water supplies of its own.

The man who was to become President expressed a keen interest and when the grave was eventually found, he volunteered to be part of the work team to build a shrine.

It was duly built and was concentrated in June 1969 and just 185 Muslims were allowed to attend this auspicious ceremony. None of the prisoners nor was President Mandela allowed to attend this event.

However, as the years went by, another man took over the upkeep of the shrine.

Abdul Latief Rawat was fast asleep one night during 1972 when he dreamt of a grave and a voice, which said, "Come and visit me. I have a problem."

Instinctively he knew that the voice was that of Sayed Abduraghaman Motura who was incarcerated on Robben Island for 11 years until his death in 1744.

Sheik Ahmed Kaderi, a respected scholar and pious man who was a top leader in the Islamic community of the Western Cape, searched, found and had a shrine built over the grave in 1969. He negotiated and was eventually given permission by the Department of Prisons to search for the grave, which he located in 1969. He went on to secure permission to build a shrine. Once the then authorities granted their approval, Sheik Ahmed Kadri, With the help of political prisoners including President Nelson Mandela built an impressive Shrine (Mazaar,) which was consecrated in 1969.

Unknown to Mr Rawat, the shrine was left unattended for four years and in that time, the windows were damaged, the door leading to the grave was blown away and the building needed attention.

"I got in touch with the authorities to secure permission to travel to Robben Island. At this stage, it was still a prison and one had to get special permission. There was no response and I persisted until such time I got a reply.

"When I eventually I received a letter, it was to the effect that if I wanted to visit the Shrine on Robben Island, I would have to

get permission from Sheik Ahmed Kaderi. I did not know the man and I began making enquiries.

"It took a long time before I traced him to his home in Kensington and I turned up at his house. I found him to be bedridden and extremely ill. I spent some time talking to him before I made my request.

"He turned me down and said that nobody had gone to the Shrine for four years and that neither would I go there. I pleaded with him to give me permission, but he refused," said Mr Rawat.

However, this was a mission, which could not be given up so easily. The pharmacy technician, who worked in a government hospital, was determined to realize his objective.

"I visited the Sheik several times and as our relationship developed, I hoped that he would see my sincerity and give me a letter of authority to visit Robben Island. Eventually, he agreed.



Seated left - Farook Khan and Kevin Joseph with Hassan Kachbal at launch of the book at Regent Business School 4 December 2018

"But the battle was not over, it took about six months with me shuttling between his home and mine before he asked me to write the letter and then he signed it," said Mr Rawat. He then wrote to the authorities and sent the signed letter from the Sheik as well. There was no response. It seemed that the issue did not get any further.

"It was not until 1976, that a complete stranger, a Mr Abdul Kader from Cravenby in Cape Town came to my home looking for me. He had with him a letter from the Department of Prisons. I was suprised.

"He had written to them asking for permission to visit the Shrine on Robben Island. He was told to contact me, as I was now the man in charge. This is how I learnt that I now had the authority to travel to the Island," said Mr Rawat.

It gave him a great deal of joy when he saw the letter and started making plans to

make the trip for which he waited so long.

Sheik Ahmed Kaderi who was very ill, eight other colleagues and himself boarded the ferry, the Diaz which was in bad condition and casted off in inclement weather.

"The rain pelted down and the conditions on the ferry was terrible. The toilets had overflowed and raw sewage was floating around. The stench was just too much for me to tolerate. I went out and stood on the deck.

"By the time we reached Robben Island, I was drenched and water was running off me like one cannot believe. Once on the Island, we walked on the dirt road leading to the shrine. When we got there, I realized the problem.

"The Shrine was derelict, there was at least six inches of water inside flooding the shrine. The windows were all broken and the front door was missing. I then understood the dream I had. My mission was very clear to me," said Mr Rawat.

The small party offered prayers before returning to the ferry and the mainland.

"Since then right until 1994, I visited the Shrine every Sunday and I also took people over and each one of them had to be cleared by the Security Police. Permission was granted for some people while others were refused," said Mr Rawat.

He said that he did not meet any of the political prisoners although he was mindful of who they were, including President Nelson Mandela.

When democracy arrived, a major function was held on the Island, which many dignitaries, Mr Rawat, attended was present.

He said that Mr Mandela had chosen to walk out of jail on the very day, the annual Urs (memorial Service) was held on the Island.

"A week later, he returned to lay flowers on the grave and revealed that he cleaned the Shrine regularly and that when he was finished, he would sit on the floor at the left hand side of the door.

"He told us that the peace and contentment which he experienced was profound," said Mr Rawat.....

On his first visit to Durban after his release, President Mandela attended the annual memorial service (Urs) of Hazrat Soofie Sahib at Quarry Road, Springfield.

Dressed in a green yellow and black knitted "koffiah" thousands of Muslims sitting and standing shoulder hailed him as their hero.

The man from the so called Communist Party did not look out of place, in fact he fitted in and looked every inch a Muslim.

Then on a subsequent trip, he was the guest of honour at the Jumma Mosque in Grey Street, Durban.

The exclusive photographs are by Kevin Joseph. Cost is R599 for this coffee table book and is available from info@mandelainfocus.co.za