

# The Quest for 'Malay' identity in Apartheid South Africa

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This study examines identity construction in twentieth-century South Africa, where successive white minority regimes attempted to define individuals according to reified notions of race and ethnicity, and demarcate 'race' groups deemed to have essential origins from other similarly constructed groups. Strong sanctions were imposed on those transcending narrowly inscribed race boundaries. This narrative of the life of cricketer, school teacher and Imam Sulayman Kirsten, popularly known as 'Solly', considers the meanings of being 'Malay' in this context. How were racial stereotypes formed and sustained? How important was culture, religion, class and other factors in shaping identities? Was differentiation purely a result of the racial project advanced by the apartheid regime, or did racial and ethnic identities pre-date apartheid? Did race discourse have a discursive power and was it internalised by those to whom labels were attached? How crucial were racial and ethnic identities in interpreting social behaviour in everyday life? Do such racial and ethnic identities continue to have everyday meanings or have they dissipated with the installation of a new democratic non-racial order.

This biographic narrative focusing on formative aspects of Solly's past and present life relies heavily on popular memory. The research process began with Solly recounting his life in a non-directive manner, and was followed by specific queries during the writing process to fill gaps and clarify issues. Solly, well-educated and self-assured, was instrumental in determining the flow of research, a methodology that holds dangers, as Edward Said (2000:178f) warns:

The art of memory for the modern world ... is very much something

to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain .... People now look to this specifically desirable and recoverable past, this refashioned memory ... to give themselves a coherent identity ... a place in the world.

Individuals 'reorder and 'redeploy' memory to gain a coherent place in the world. They may also manipulate certain information, and elevate events in a functional way for specific purposes (Said 2000:181). This danger has to be balanced against the effacement of the majority from South African history. As Harrison (1993:409) reminds us, for too long, the

language of objectivity and value neutrality has served to mask and obscure mechanisms of silencing, alienating and subjugating the voices of ... descendants of the colonially conquered people denied history.

Used with appropriate caution oral history is an indispensable means of bringing to light the 'silenced' voices of Black South Africans like Solly.

### **'Malay-ness'**

In the South African context 'Malay' refers to Coloureds of the Muslim faith, many of whom were descendents of slaves imported to the Cape from South and Southeast Asia. Until the twentieth century, they were referred to as 'Mohammedan', 'Malay', 'Mussulman' or 'coloured Muslims' in British and Dutch records and unofficially as *slamse*, a corrupted form of 'Islam' with pejorative connotations (Jepe 2001). An Malay ethnic identity, according to Jepe (2001) was constituted from the 1920s, largely as a result of the work of anthropologist Izak David Du Plessis of the University of Cape Town, whose book *The Cape Malays* (1944) formally isolated Coloured Muslims from the broader Coloured community by presenting them as a separate 'race', 'Malay', even though this 'community' comprised descendents of slaves from South and Southeast Asia, Arabs, Khoi-San and Mozambique.

Haron suggests that the notion of Malay distinctiveness predates Du

Plessis' work. He points out that during the nineteenth century Coloured Muslims were seen by Colonial authorities as 'respectable persons who did not drink and were hardworking and reliable; they were thus different from other 'Coloured' groups and seem to have maintained those distinctions mainly because of their religious and cultural traditions'. The term Malay was given further authority during the 1910s and 1920s when it was used by the Cape Malay Association (CMA), which sought political favours for Malays from the then South African government (Haron 2001).

The few cursory references also suggest that a distinct Malay identity had formed in Durban during the early decades of the twentieth century, and that there was contact with the wider South African Malay community. The following report in *Latest* (29 January 1927) attests to this:

Mr Abdullah Mahomed, the genial Chairman of the Durban Malay Association, informs me that a party of 50 Malay pilgrims for Mecca sailed from Durban on Tuesday last. They are expected to reach their destination on or about the 27<sup>th</sup> of February next. During their brief stay in Durban the pilgrims were the guests of Hajee M. Jaffar of 68 Lorne Street, a prominent leader of the local Malay community, and Mr B. Marley, also of Lorne Street, Durban. Some of the pilgrims domiciled at Mr Abraham's residence.

D.F. Malan, prime minister in apartheid South Africa during the 1950s, commented on the closeness of Malays and Afrikaners in 1925 when he was Minister of Interior and Education:

The Malay community ... form one of the oldest elements of the South African nation. They came virtually at the same time that the white man and experienced the same history as the white man .... The white man did not come here to give the Malays civilisation. They were always civilised, and came here after they had adopted the white man's civilisation .... Together with the Dutch-speaking white man they developed that language [Afrikaans] (in Jeppe 2001: 85).

Malan's speech suggested an essence to Malayness, a coherent and whole culture transplanted at the Cape. By the time the Nationalists came to power,

Malan's position had changed. The Population Registration Act of 1950 divided South Africans into four race groups, Whites, Indians, Africans, and Coloureds. Coloureds were defined as 'not a white person or a native', and sub-divided into 'Cape Malay', Other Coloureds, Khoisan, Bastards et al. Cape Muslims were placed into the 'Cape Malay' category. This designation was carried by Cape Coloured Muslims who migrated to other parts of Southern Africa (Haron 2001:3).

Malays began arriving in Durban from the turn of the twentieth-century as tailors from Johannesburg and Kimberley, and artisans from the Cape. They were cohesive because of their small number and close proximity. Cassim Jaffar of the Cape Malay Vigilance Society described the Malay community to the Town Clerk in October 1962 thus:

The Malay community of approximately 700 adults is not a wealthy one, and consists mainly of the artisan class. Owing to their religious and racial structure, they have always based their activities on a communal basis.

In Durban most Malays lived in Block AK in Greyville, in an area bordered by Mitchell Road and First Avenue. According to Solly physical proximity resulted in a 'deep identity of being Malay'. This changed under apartheid when the Group Areas Act resulted in the dispersion of Malays throughout Durban.

### **Being 'Malay' in Durban**

Solly Kirsten was born on 22 April 1932 in Vrededorp, known popularly as 'Fitass', in Johannesburg. He was the third of five children of Muhammad and Khadija, sandwiched by elder brothers Achmat and Ebrahim, with Abdurrahman and sister Amina following. Solly's mother Khadija Kimmie hailed from the small Malay community that moved to Rhodesia in the late 1890s. The Kirstens and Kimmie's were intimately connected by marriage. Solly's father's sister Maryam was married to his mother Khadija's brother Sulayman. The Kimmie family of Rhodesia achieved huge publicity when Khadija's brother Ebrahim Kimmie became the first person to travel overland from Rhodesia to Saudi Arabia for Hajj in the early 1960s in the now vintage Volkswagen Kombi.

Fitas, where Solly spent his formative years, was relatively mixed. Whites lived on streets one to eleven, Indians, Coloureds and Malays from streets twelve to 22, and Africans from streets 23 to 28. The first mosque in Fitas was built on 23<sup>rd</sup> street and bordered the African section of Fitas. Solly attended Krause Street School. The school's enrolment included African, Malay, Coloured and Indian children. The Kirsten family was beset by heartbreak in the mid-1940s when Mohammed, an upholsterer by trade, and Khadija parted ways. Both remarried and remained in Johannesburg. Achmat, who had married by this time, also stayed in Johannesburg, but Solly, Ebrahim, Abdurrahman and Amina moved to Durban with their father's sister Amina and her husband Rushdie Boomgard. Amina was known in the community as Ouma Tittie, 'Tittie' being a term of respect and endearment among Malays, signifying a person of high stature. 'Ouma' added to her status.

In Durban, Solly lived at 75 Prince Edward Street, where the famous Kismet Arcade was later built. Solly tried unsuccessfully to enrol at the nearby Anjuman Islam in Leopold Street. Even though the Kirsten's were Muslim, he was refused admission because Malays were classified 'Coloured', while Anjuman was strictly for Indian Muslims. Solly attended Umbilo High and subsequently qualified as a teacher at Umbilo College. Teaching and medicine were 'the' thing for people of colour at the time', according to Solly. Malay parents, mainly working-class, emphasised education, hard work and perseverance. Kirsten remembers his father always stressing: 'Don't try your best, make sure you do your best so you do not end up like me'.

Malays were in an ambivalent position. They could not easily integrate with Coloureds because of religion, and with Indian Muslims because of race, the latter referring to them pejoratively as 'Bushmen Muslims', according to Solly. Straddled between Indians and Coloureds, Malays negotiated several cultural and political identities. Their ambiguous position in Durban is illustrated in the naming of their children. Since Malays were required to attend Coloured schools, parents gave their children non-Arabic names to avoid being ostracised or denied entry. For example Rahma was registered Rachael, Hafsa as Mona, Ebrahim as Abie, Anwar as Enver, Yusuf as Joseph, and Sadick as Dickie.

The family name 'Kirsten' added to Solly's ambivalence. The

Kirstens are one of South Africa's most famous cricket and rugby families. Peter and Gary Kirsten, who are 'white', represented South Africa, following the country's readmission to international cricket in 1990. Solly's great-great grandfather was white, Jan Frederic Kirsten from Marico. In 1969, a copper mining company, commemorating a century of its existence, randomly chose the Kirsten name and presented family members with a plaque tracing the Kirsten ancestors. Jan Frederic Kirsten is listed on the plaque. Company representatives were flabbergasted when they discovered that Solly was not white, but presented him with a plaque nonetheless. Kirsten also recalls that as a child his grandmother Magiesa Kirsten spoke fondly of Gesiena Kirsten, Muslim name Hasiena, a distant relative of hers whose name appears on the plaque.

Solly asserted his Malayness, unlike fellow Malay pupils at Umbilo who downplayed this aspect of their identity. He recalls that in his first year at school, at the end of the Ramadan, the month of fasting, he expected to get the day off to celebrate the festival of Eid. Fellow Malay pupils advised him to take the day off and produce a 'sick certificate' rather than request official permission to be absent. Uncle Rushdie would not hear of this. He argued that Muslims were entitled to a day off on their religious festival and instructed Solly to speak to Coleman, the principal. Coleman was surprised there were 'Malays' in the school, and asked Solly: 'Aren't you Coloured?' He also asked Solly whether 'there were others like him' in the school. Coleman admired Solly's honesty and gave him the day off. They developed a frank and open relationship and Solly went on to become the school's first Malay head prefect. Solly cited this incident to illustrate that while young Malays practiced Islam in private spaces they were ambivalent about declaring this identity publicly. Some Malays preferred being identified as 'Coloured' rather than 'Indian' because of the stigma attached to Indians who were not considered permanent citizens and for whom the threat of repatriation remained real until 1961.

Growing up in an atmosphere of cultural and religious ambivalence, a visit to Cape Town with Rosslynns Cricket Club in December 1948 had a huge impact on Solly. He was 'overawed' among 'my people, their mosques, culture and way of life':

It was nice being part of a large majority community. In Durban we were drowned by Indian Muslims and Coloureds. On Friday, when

we went to Black River mosque, every Muslim wore a fez. This was a completely different scene. I felt really at home. It made me more conscious as a Muslim. There were so many of us and yet they made us feel so welcome. We renewed old family ties. We attended religious and cultural festivals every night, the ratieb, moulood and so on. I remember that we had to attend a moulood on New Year's Eve. We youngsters pleaded with the elders to finish quickly so that we could go and welcome the New Year in District Six!

Durban's fledgling Malay community formed the Cape Malay Vigilance Association (CMVA) in 1959. Baku Domingo, who had taken care of most matters affecting Malays, felt that younger members of the community should pull their weight. They had acted informally as a loose knit organisation but constituted into an organisation to ensure that the 'Cape Malay' in Durban was given his 'rightful' status. When Group Areas was promulgated Malays were determined force the City Council to set aside an area for them as they did not want to live with Coloureds. They identified Asherville, which bordered the Indian area of Overport, and took up the cause with the DTC and Group Areas Board, but to no avail because the authorities ruled that they should occupy areas set aside for Coloureds. This upset those Malays who saw themselves as different to Coloureds because of their Muslim religion.

One of the anomalies of the fluid race situation was many Indians became 'Malays' and took out registration cards from CMVA. By registering as Malays, they became Coloureds, which meant they could go to better schools, buy at more stores, travel to Transvaal without a permit, and so on. Solly recalls that in 1958 he was stopped by police at Volksrust en route to Johannesburg and forced to return to Durban because he had not carried his registration card and was taken by the police to be 'Indian'. Indians were regarded as a 'foreign element' by successive white governments and treated as an immigrant community that had to be repatriated. It was only in 1961 that the nationalist government officially recognised Indians as a 'permanent element' of the population of South Africa.

### **Cricketer 'Par Excellence'**

'Apartheid' existed long before the Nationalist Party (NP) came into power

in 1948. Africans, Indians, Coloureds, Malays and Whites lived separate lives, and even played their cricket separately. The 1820 settlers in the Eastern Cape, competing for land with the Xhosa, had formed all kinds of stereotypes about them—unassimilable, lazy savages, etc., and attacked liberal philanthropists who advocated integration (Dubow). After the South African War of 1899-1902, Alfred Milner, self-proclaimed British 'race patriot', set out to safeguard British values by creating a stable political and economic order through uniting Whites and segregating Africans. The 1905 South African Native Affairs Commission set out an ambitious programme to achieve race separation, though it was only implemented by the time the Hertzog Bills were passed in 1936 (Dubow). Race awareness and stereotyping was in place long ambitious legislation took effect.

Cricket was *THE* game among Malays. Even community Imams, purveyors of religious wisdom and knowledge, had a deep cricket culture, as supporters or being nominated in honorary positions. Sheik Sharif Ali, popular Imam during the 1940s, was never seen without his green Roslyn's cricket blazer at public functions. Cricket reflected the racial and cultural divisions prevalent in the wider society. In October 1914, the Durban Indian Cricket Union (DICU) barred Coloureds from participating in its activities, while Malays were allowed to partake 'as a matter of privilege' (*Latest* 29 October 1914). Thus, while the state did not officially distinguish between Malays and Coloureds, individuals had embraced separate identities.

The 'privilege' of playing with Indians was short-lived. In November 1924, S.L. Singh's proposal that Malays be barred from 1925 was adopted by the mainly Indian Muslim delegates who felt that because Malays had a different legal status from Indians, and were exempt from many of the restrictions on Indians, they should not be allowed to play sport with Indians (*Latest* 24 October 1925). Ephraim Thomas, an Indian teacher and cricketer, objected to the decision:

I have found the Malays, generally speaking, form a part of our community. They live, work, and indulge in common enjoyments with Indians .... In all our entertainments and socials we find the Malays figuring prominently. If the Malays are worthy to join us in the common walks of life, then let us not deny them also joining us on the field of sport (*Latest* 31 October 1925).



The appeal was in vain. Malays were barred from participating in DICU from 1925 with the Natal Indian Cricket Union (NICU) followed suit in 1926 (*Latest* 8 January 1927).

Expelled by Indians, and barred by Coloureds, Malays petitioned the Durban Town Council (DTC) for facilities, reflecting again a distinct Malay identity. In January 1926, the Malay Association of Durban wrote to the Mayor via its attorneys, Chapman and Didcott that it represented approximately 120 people,

... amongst whom are numbered certain voters. The Association is a well-organised body and is properly governed by the leading members of that community. The Malay community is particularly addicted to sport. The Coloured Grounds Association refuses to allow our clients to take any part on the grounds that Malays were Asiatics, with the result that Malays have no facilities to play sport.

The DTC Estates Manager met with the Coloured and Malay Associations on 22 January 1926 and reported that 'an estrangement existed between them .... The Malay section of the Coloured community will be subjected to ostracism under the present circumstances'. Yet the DTC resolved on 26 January 1926 that Malays should 'make the best arrangements they can'. On 14 September 1926 M.G. Sallie of the Malay Association wrote to the Town Clerk to 'protect our interest before coming to a final conclusion in granting a Sports Ground to the Coloured community of Durban, which our community are part and partial also'. Malays formed a Natal Coloured Cricket Union (NCCU) at the end of 1926. It is noteworthy that in choice of name, Malays emphasised their 'Colouredness'. NCCU's patron was Hajjee A.K. Abdurahman, a well-known Malay political figure from the Cape, reflecting identification with Cape Malays (*Latest* 12 November 1926).

Sallie wrote to the DTC on 2 February 1927 that Arshud Garniet, visiting president of the South African Cape Malay Association (SACMA), wished to 'interview' local authorities to discuss the sporting needs of Durban's Malays. Sallie's request was turned down by the Mayor and Town Clerk. The Malay Association became prominent in the 1920s as schoolteachers played a key role in claiming special rights for Malays, the 'autochthonous' population of South Africa. As pointed out by Malan in

1925 Malays were seen as authentic 'sons of the soil' who, with whites, shaped South African history.

Malays again protested to the DTC on 10 October 1928 that the new ground in Stamford Hill, though 'granted to the Coloured community regardless of section, we were rejected unconditionally by the Coloureds'. A request by Malays for a round-table conference 'to reach settlement satisfactory to both parties' was rejected by Coloureds. Malay cricket languished in the absence of suitable facilities. P. Rose of the Federated Council of Social Workers (FCSW) wrote to Councillor Fyfe on 18 June 1935 for financial assistance to renovate Stamford Hill. Ed Rooks, secretary of the Natal Coloured Welfare League (NCWL), informed the Town Clerk on 11 July 1935 that his was 'the only organisation who truly represent the Coloured Community' because it admitted Cape Malays while FCSW disbarred them on the grounds that they were Asiatics. FCSW's constitution confined membership to Coloured 'persons of European descent, who enjoy the right of the European status, and are members of the Christian faith'. The DTC, however, continued to recognise FCSW. The Malay Rovers Football Club complained to the Town Clerk on 22 May 1936 that 'Cape Malays were not permitted to take part in any sport at Stamford Hill' and that FCSW had informed them that 'the Malay would not be allowed to participate in any form of sport while it held the lease'. Malay protest resulted in DTC dissolving FCSW and DCSGA being resuscitated with Malay inclusion.

Coloureds and Malays finally played 'together', just how 'together' is debatable since teams were divided along religious lines. Goodhopes and Roslyns were fully Malay; Pirates, Comrades, Silver Leaf and Universals fully Coloured, while Oaks had a few Malays. The first Malay to play in a Coloured team was 'Miley' Peck who joined Oaks, which had been founded by his father-in-law Joe Abrahams. Neither Goodhopes nor Roslyns could accommodate Solly Kirsten who joined Oaks when his family moved to Durban. Just thirteen, Solly scored a century on debut against Comrades. He joined Roslyns in 1948 when the team was going on tour to the Cape. He did not want to miss the opportunity to visit the 'spiritual home' of Malays. Boeta Peck understood Kirsten's predicament and blessed the move.

Solly's versatility earned him the title 'Ubiquitous Solly' in sporting circles. He was goalkeeper for Arsenal and New Orleans in the local Coloured Soccer League, and played for Thistles Tennis Club as well as

representing Durban in tennis. As administrator during the 1950s, Solly was secretary of the Durban Coloured Schools Football Association from its formation in 1953, delegate to the Durban Coloured Sports Ground association and Natal Coloured Cricket Board and selector of the Durban Coloured Women's Hockey Association. In rugby, Kirsten played wing for Oaks, and represented Durban and for the first-ever Natal provincial Coloured team which played Border in 1953. He was president of the Natal Rugby Board in 1961, managed Natal in 1961 and 1963, refereed the national rugby final between South-Western Districts and Eastern Province in 1965 and was selector of the South African Rugby Union (Coloured) in the same year, the first person from Natal to achieve this distinction.

But it was as cricketer that Solly made his greatest mark. Solly was just above medium height, strong and fit. He was a busy cricketer, aggressive with the bat, lively with the ball, with a bustling action, and safe in the field. Roslyns was dominated by the Jaffar, Schreuder and Domingo families. It was linked to the all-conquering Roslyns of Cape Town. The name derived from a castle in Scotland and the team's motif was a castle in red, white and green, its official colours. Most players were deeply involved in Malay social, cultural and religious affairs, formally through the Cape Malay Vigilance Society of Durban. In 1960, for example, the Societies' president was Solly Kirsten, honorary-secretary Cassim Jaffar and trustees Baku Domingo, Munchie Boomgard and T. Schreuder.

Roslyns was more than a cricket club; it was a close knit family. Annual picnics on New Year's Day and over Easter did much to cement community feeling. Buses were hired to ferry players and their families to La Mercy. Musical instruments were a 'must', and players and officials sung old Malay songs like 'Rosa' as well as the favourites of the day by Sammy Davis jnr., Elvis Presley and others.

Roslyns greatest rival was Goodhopes, formed in 1945 by Roslyns players Shafie and Toyah Nassiep, Aziz and Solly Hendricks, Ismail 'Mattie' Jacobs and Gamiem Gaffar to accommodate the rapid growth in Malay cricketers. Like Roslyns, 'Goodhopes' reflected orientation to the Cape, the name deriving from the Cape of Good Hope. Goodhopes was joined by Malay artisans from the Cape who began arriving in Durban from the late 1940s. Although family members played for both Roslyns and Goodhopes, rivalry bordered on hostility. Matches between Roslyns and Goodhopes were

a central feature of the Malay social calendar. For a week prior to the game, wives and mothers prepared rosettes and ribbons in the maroon and yellow of Goodhopes and red, white and green of Roslyns. Match-day had a marvellous festive atmosphere. The ground was packed, food and music being as significant as cricket. Music included 'Dutch Hollandse Lidjies' (songs) such as the famous Rosa as well as Gomma Lidjies ('fast' numbers), named after the musical instrument to which they were played. The 'gomma' was a drum over which buck skin was tightened.

**Rosa, Rosa (Laas toe ek een meisie bemin)**

Laas toen ek een meisie bemin  
Haar naam was Rosa Fern  
Sy was noemliks sestien jay oud  
Sy was een meisie van haar word

**KOOR-**

Sy seg sys al my nooit verlaat  
Sy volg my waar ek gaan  
Rosa Rosa diet een hart  
En sy volg my waar ek gaan

Dit was op een aand voorlaat  
Toe ontmoet ek Rosa op straat  
Spraak ek met Rosa een word  
Dit was die word van trou akoort

Dit was drie dae daarna  
Toe kom haar ouers na my vra  
As ek vir Rosa sal bemin

Al met myn hart siel en sin

While matches between Roslyns and Goodhopes were hostile, those between Pirates and Roslyns were very competitive. Reggie Montgomery of Pirates recalled that 'Roslyns were good, but so were we, so were we'. Pirates, in fact, won the Knockout Cup 7 years in a row during the 1950s.

Roslyns won the league as many times. Reggie fondly remembers Solly's gamesmanship: 'Solly was a very competitive cricketer. He would say something every now and then. He even tried to pull the wool over our eyes by speaking Afrikaans. But we also spoke a bit of Afrikaans and coped with him' (Interview).

Roslyns broke away from the Coloured Board as a result of a dispute in 1958. When Roslyns beat Pirates the latter protested that Roslyns had fielded two ineligible players. When the cricket union ruled against Roslyns, Baku Domingo felt it was being pedantic to hand Pirates an advantage. Baku withdrew Roslyns from the association, and formed a separate Barnato (Malay) Cricket Union with 5 teams, Roslyns, Young Roslyns, Violets, Caledonians and Victorian, comprising around 90 players, mostly Malay. The president of Natal Cricket Board (Barnato Trophy), as the new association was known, was Baku Domingo with Solly Kirsten as secretary.

The Barnato League fostered Malayness. A Malay representative team was chosen to play against Indians and Coloureds in a Natal inter-racial tournament in 1960, and a team was also chosen to represent Natal Malays against Malays from other provinces for the national Barnato trophy. This tournament had been taking place since 1897 but catered solely for Malays from 1926, when Indians and Coloureds broke away. Natal's Malays represented the Natal Coloured team against Coloureds from other provinces for the David Harris Trophy, which had begun in 1927. Solly made his Natal debut in Port Elizabeth in 1952-53, where Natal finished last and Solly's all-round performances were the only bright spot. He scored a century and two half centuries, and took 14 wickets. Solly achieved three honours: highest individual score (109), highest run aggregate (356) and highest average (44.50). The *South African Non-European Almanac* (1953:148) described him as 'one of the up and coming batsmen. He has all the shots and when in full rein attacks the bowling with venom. I presage that we shall see a great deal of him in the future'. Kirsten was the marquee player in Natal Coloured cricket during the 1950s. he was, in fact, the only Natal member to represent the South African Coloured team in inter-racial competition against other black 'race' groups.

Natal Malays played in the last Barnato tournament in Port Elizabeth in 1960, the only time Natal participated in the tournament. The team, managed and captained by Solly, beat Griqualand West but lost to Eastern

Province and Eastern Transvaal. Solly, with a batting average of 27 and nine wickets, was the leading all-rounder at the tournament and the only Natal player chosen for the representative South African Malay team. He thus had the unique distinction of playing for both Coloured and Malay national representative teams.

Solly's experience shows how identities were continually constructed and re-constructed. Among Blacks, separate national cricket bodies controlled African, Indian, Coloured and Malay cricket. At a Council Meeting of SAICU in Durban on 25 January 1945 a committee was mandated to create a national cricket board for all Blacks (Govender 1952: 25). Two years of negotiations resulted in the convening of a meeting in Johannesburg on 10 July 1947 at which a South African Cricket Board of Control (Sacboc) was formed. Sacboc was constrained by the intensification of apartheid and segregation, paucity of facilities, meagre financial resources, different cricketing cultures and traditions and fears among many players and administrators that change would threaten vested interests. The comfort zones of many were challenged. Fear and anxiety were as much part of the process of change as excitement and anticipation. While cricket was played mainly along inter-racial lines during the 1950s, though a number of impulses spurred non-racialism.

At national level Sacboc organized four racially defined tournaments between 1951 and 1958. Indians and Coloureds dominated the tournament, with Indians winning in 1951 and 1955 and Coloureds in 1953 and 1958. Though Malay, Solly represented Coloureds in 1953 alongside legends like Basil D'Oliveira and Basil Waterwick. He finished third on the Coloured averages in 1955. Against Malays he scored 39 runs batting at number nine in the first innings, his undefeated tenth wicket partnership yielding an invaluable 55 runs. With Coloureds needing quick runs to win on the double innings the aggressive Solly was promoted to number 4 in the second innings. Coming to the wicket with the score 3 runs for 2 wickets, Solly was involved in a partnership of 48 with D' Oliveira to secure victory. Solly scored 25 to D' Oliveira's 23.

Malayness resurfaced when Tills Crescent was being developed in Overport as a sports field for Coloureds. The Cape Malay Vigilance Society (Durban) wrote to the Town Clerk on 26 October 1960 to request that two playing fields be set aside specifically for Malays. The Society wrote that the

Coloured Grounds Association had refused them permission to use Tills 'because of their Islamic faith and some members having intermarried with members of the Indian community'. The request by the Vigilance Society was turned down by the DTC and Tills was developed as a sports field for Coloureds.

The challenge to racial segregation of cricket during the 1950s led eventually to the birth of a non-racial Natal Cricket Board on 15 October 1961 under the presidency of S. Bridgemohan, with Solly given recognition as secretary. The formation of the NCB was significant at a time when apartheid South Africa was consolidating race boundaries and identities. Natal's Coloured and Malay cricketers, who had split in 1959, merged in 1961 to form a separate unit, Marban, within the NCB, rather than play with their Indian counterparts. Coloureds had their own ground at Stamford Hill from 1962, the lease of which specified that it was to be 'occupied by persons of the Coloured Race Group only', which included Malays. Solly recalls that some Coloureds were uncomfortable with change:

the formation of non-racial cricket was a sore point because some Coloured players were worried about not making the grade, while others were opposed to mixing with Indians.

Marban was one of nine affiliates of the Natal Board, comprising Coloured and Malay teams from Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

Solly, however, was elected captain of Natal's first non-racial team which took part in the first inter-provincial Dadabhai tournament in Cape Town in December 1961. This honour came as a great surprise to Solly: 'I never, never, imagined this in my wildest dream because we [meaning Coloureds] were in the minority. I did not have any problems with the Indians. It may be that many of them were Muslims and I saw them regularly in the mosque'. Natal beat the highly fancied Western Province, but finished second behind Transvaal in the tournament. Beating 'arrogant' Western Province, according to Solly, was one of the 'greatest moments' of his' cricketing life. Solly retired from competitive cricket after the tournament, mainly because he transferred to Howick as school principal. He would return as administrator in the late 1960s.

### **Kirsten: Dedicated Teacher**

Solly was a teacher for four decades from 1951 to 1991, principal for 32 of these years. His first appointment was as Afrikaans teacher at Clairwood, the largest Coloured primary school in Natal. Being 'Coloured' meant that he could not teach at an Indian school. One of Solly's first actions was to formally request time-off from the Education Department for the midday Jumuah prayer on Fridays. As a result of Solly's action Muslim teachers were given time-off for Jumuah by the Department. Solly married in the late 1950s. He met his future wife Maryam Bardien while playing cricket in Port Elizabeth in 1957. Solly and Maryam have three sons, Faez a medical doctor, Adil a lawyer and Razin a businessman, and a daughter Suraya, a merchandiser with a leading retail chainstore.

When Clairwood was declared an Indian area in 1961 the school was 'given' to Indians. Coloureds were relocated and became part of Durban East. Around this time Johnson, the principal of Clairwood Primary, died. Nel, chief inspector of Education, called the staff together to elect a principal from within the school rather than appoint an outsider. Solly was elected principal in a secret ballot. In June 1962 Renton of the Education Department asked Solly to apply for the position of principal at Howick West advertised in the *Education Bulletin*. He was interviewed in October 1962 and took up the position on 1 April 1963. Solly lived in Maritzburg and travelled to school daily in the back of Baker's Bread delivery van.

This was a difficult assignment as the school catered for a very poor community. Not a single pupil had passed the external examination set by the Natal Education Department (NED) since the school's opening in 1952. This changed in Solly's first year. He recalled vividly that on 10 January 1964 he received a call from Stampf of NED, while he was holidaying in Port Elizabeth with his in-laws, who congratulated him because the school's pupils had passed the external examination for the first time. Solly also initiated programmes to cope with poverty. He attained contributions of bread from the local Rubber Factory, grew vegetables at school, and gave kids cool drinks in summer and hot cocoa in winter. From Howick, Solly was transferred to Briardene, south of Durban, as principal in 1968. He remained here until his retirement in 1991. In term of the ratings assigned to schools by NED, Briardene was five jumps up the scale. It was unheard of for individuals to jump so rapidly up the promotion ladder, and this was



testimony to Solly's excellent work at Howick.

Controversy and Solly were inseparable. As principal of Briardene he was concerned about improving the sporting standards of the largely underprivileged children and accepted an offer from Barclays Bank in 1978 for white cricketer Paddy Clift to coach pupils. For this, Solly was suspended by the non-racial Natal Council of Sport, which shunned contact with whites. After his return to Durban in 1978 Solly was involved in cricket administration. He was variously secretary of the Natal Cricket Board, selector and manager of the provincial team. He was banned from all involvement in sport. Politically, this was a sensitive time. Non-racial cricket bodies were determined to root out contact with white sporting organisations. The NCB, in fact, took a resolution in September 1978 that 'any player who participates in or is a member of any sporting club whose national body is not a member of SACOS cannot be a member of the NCB or any of its affiliated units'. Solly was upset and hurt by the decision, especially because the 'very people who suspended me were in the Durban racecourse every Saturday under permit from the racist authorities' (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31). Solly recalls his brush with NACOS' 'double-standards' rule:

In early 1977 I visited Mr Fraser, branch manager of Briardene, to discuss ways of investing the school's surplus money. While waiting outside his office I heard him instructing Paddy Clift to coach in Durban North. When Clift, Fraser explained that he was employed by Barclays and coached on their behalf. I questioned Fraser as to why my school did not receive similar free coaching. Fraser's reply was that I had never asked. I asked him. Fraser built a cricket net and pitch at Briardene and sent Clift to coach my boys. After a few sessions I got a call from Archie Hulley, who said that I had to appear before a disciplinary committee of the Natal Primary Schools Sports Association. I was chairman of the association but was being summoned. Anyway, I went. I was told that I had to appear within two hours at a NACOS hearing, which was chaired by Krish Mackerduhj. They accused me of breaking the law by seeking the assistance of white cricket. I denied the charges because Clift was not an employee of a white cricket body but Barclays. They said that

it was the same thing and they did not care about such technicalities. I asked them for a coach to replace Clift and they said that they would get me one within two weeks. I am still waiting for that coach! So I got Clift back. I was called to another meeting and told that I was suspended from NACOS. That was the lowest point of my sporting life. I never thought they would do this. I had given my life to cricket, rolling pitches, carrying mats, and so on, and suddenly they got rid of me. I called Sybil Hotz, the mayor of Durban, to ask where my children could play. She said that NACOS should be the last to adopt such an attitude because its members were attending the Durban Greyville Racecourse with a special permit. I called NACOS and asked them about these 'double standards' and told Krish Mackedhuj that he was a hypocrite. Do you know what his response was? That horseracing was not a sport. I called Hassan Howa<sup>1</sup> but he did not even listen, he spoke about the political situation and said that sport was irrelevant in our conditions. Howa was a great man but very parochial and narrow in his vision. He was not prepared to listen to other viewpoints. I did not get anything out of Clift. I only wanted to do something for the youngsters. I could see the unity would come and was trying to give the youngsters a kickstart. And who was right in the long run? Anyway, that was the end of my association with sport.

Solly believes he has less to answer for than administrators who punished him but subsequently 'sold out' to Ali Bacher in post-apartheid South Africa (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31).

Solly's most-prized momento is not one of the many awards he received as sportsman and administrator, but a poem written by an African Silus Langa whom he had admitted to the Coloured Briardene School in the face of censure from the education authorities and opposition from parents:

Mr Kirstin, I had no school to attend  
You admitted me

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan Howa was president of the South African Council of Sport, NACOS' mother body.

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What I am today is through you  
You helped us emotionally, spiritually, socially, intellectually  
You have been a wonderful team leader  
All your products are a challenge to others  
You are so good to me, to us all (17 July 1971).

The career of this dedicated and devoted teacher came to an end when he retired in 1991. How sad, then, that on the whole only 'Coloured' children benefited from what Solly had to offer.

### **Kirsten: Community Imam**

Solly regarded his suspension from cricket as a 'blessing in disguise'. He began to study Islam more deeply and extended his responsibilities as Imam. Solly had always been involved in community and religious affairs. As a young man he attended 'Ratipoel Ga'dat', a particular form of *zhikr* or recitation of praise for the Prophet, derived from the name of a saint. This tradition was started among Malays in Durban around 1950 by Boeta Ismail Fredericks, captain of Rossllynns and first *Khalifah* ('leader') of Ratiboel Ga'dat. *Zhikr* was held at different homes on Thursday evenings and attended by forty to fifty men and women. When Fredericks died in 1959, Solly became *khalifah*. His responsibilities included leading the congregation in *zhikr* and making a communal *dua* or convocation at the end of the *zhikr*. Ratiboel Ga'dat consisted of 28 short *zhikrs*, the following being typical:

Those who verify things and the learned who practice their knowledge and all the Saints and Martyrs of the world both East and West.

The *faatigah* (convocation) for the Scribe of this Ratib, the inviter to righteousness and benefactor, to the countries and worshippers of Allah.

The *faatigah* for us and you. O you who are present, and for our parents and grandparents and for our learned, and those of us present, and those of us who are now absent, and for the dead and the living and those who are constant on this Ratib.

## *The Quest for 'Malay' Identity in Apartheid South Africa*

May Allah forgive them and Exalt them, and make us benefactors in Knowledge and Secrets and enjoin us with them in goodness, ability and health. And illuminate our hearts with their light and on the Earth and the Hereafter.

*Zhikr* was one of many activities that Malays engaged in communally. They also organised the *Meelad* or birthday celebrations of the Prophet at Kajee Hall in Leopold Street. The 'spiritual leader' of Malays during the 1950s was Solly's cousin Oupa Taliep of Kimberley. When Taliep died in 1958, Imam Reid of Overport assumed the mantle of spiritual leader until his death in the late 1980s. Imam Reid, like Oupa Taliep, was not attached to a particular mosque, unlike Indian Muslims, Malays did not have a separate mosque. Imams undertook community work and led the *janazah* (funeral) prayers, conducted marriages, and attended to social and marital problems.

On the Sunday prior to the Prophet's birthday, the community engaged in *rampie-sny* at Kajee Hall. While men socialised, women cut small pieces of kite paper into triangular shapes. In it they placed orange and lemon rinds and *attar* (incense). Once the triangular shapes had been prepared, they were placed in a basket, and *oejered*, that is, the basket was placed close to burning *lobaan* (*mi'ang*) so that the smoke of the *mi'ang* blew onto the triangles. Proceedings were overseen by Titti Fiya Jaffar, who rendered a communal invocation (*dua*) when the activities of the day were completed. At the end of proceedings on the birthday, each man was handed a *rampie-sny*, which he usually carried around for months. According to Solly, the *rampie-sny* was a perfume with a sweet and beautiful scent, thought to symbolise the aroma that emanated from Aminah, the Prophet's mother, when she was pregnant with him. According to Solly, the *rampie-sny* was handy at a time when deodorants were hard to come by, and especially valuable when one went out to meet young woman.

*Doepmal* was a ceremony to name a new born child. *Doepmal* is an Afrikaans word that means thanks or *shukur*, in this case the parents and family thanking God for blessing them with a child. The family settled on the name by the sixth day in conjunction with the Imam, and the child was named at a formal ceremony on the seventh day. Thankful parents and family members usually invited the entire community to express their *shukur*. At the 'House of Birth', the child was placed on a beautiful

embroidered pillow covered by a *medoura*, a special white and silver cloth with lots of gold braiding, brought especially from Makkah. It was expensive and rare, rare because few people went for Hajj during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, a few such *medoura*'s circulated in the community. Malay brides also covered their head with the *medoura* as a sign of their virginity. The baby was placed on the *medoura*, with lots of flowers, usually pink, red and white roses, scattered around. The baby, whether boy or girl, was dressed in a *doepmal rok*, a white robe crochered and passed down from generation to generation.

The Imam sat in the middle of the room with his two assistants (*khatiebs*) seated on either side. The baby was brought to him by a family member especially chosen by parents. This was an important choice on the part of parents because the individual appointed such would be 'responsible' to take care of the child in the event of anything untoward happening to the parents. The Imam then gave the call to prayer or *azaan* in the right ear of the child, the *iqamah*, the call immediately preceding the prayer, in the left ear, and recited several *ayahs* or verses from the Holy Quran as protection against evil.

Thereafter the Imam placed something sweet, usually sugar or honey, into the mouth of the child, indicating that the child will be a 'sweet' human being when he or she grows up. He then took a scissor and cut off a small piece of the child's hair, as per Islamic tradition. The Imam then formally named the child and rendered a short discussion on the meaning of the name. Finally, he would make a special invocation (*dua*) that the child would be obedient to his or her parents and the will of God, and be among the pious of God's creations. Food and refreshments were then served to the gathered crowd.

Imams were not paid for their work. In Solly's case his involvement was purely voluntary as he had a career as teacher. Those for whom the imamate was a vocation, it was etiquette for hosts to give a *slavat* or gift as a token of appreciation. Money was usually collected, placed in an envelope and privately handed over to the Imam.

Kirsten's Islamic functions attest to the fluid race dynamics at play. At Howick, where he was for most of the 1960s, Kirsten lectured at Howick mosque, at which Indians predominated, every Friday as well as at the 'middle' Mosque in Church Street, Maritzburg. This was instigated by

cricket colleague Tar Dada and Ganie. Again, this was an Indian mosque. This contact marked, in Solly's case at least, increasing contact with Indians which broadened his identity. In his talks, Solly focused on ending ethnic division and consciousness among Muslims.

Solly's continued his involvement among Indian Muslims when he returned to Durban. He lived at Randles Road, Overport, when he taught at Briardene and regularly attended Sparks Road mosque, where the 'sparks literally flew', according to Solly. Shortly after his move to Durban, the well-liked and popular Mawlana Naseem was dismissed by Abdullah Khan of the Mosque Committee. The congregation demanded his reinstatement. A committee of five was formed under a lawyer Mr. Suleman with the congregation roping Solly in because of his standing as principal. They called up a meeting attended by 300 people at which Solly was appointed chairman of a Committee tasked to ascertain who was responsible for dismissing Naseem. It emerged that the decision to dismiss the Mawlana had been taken by Abdullah Khan, who simply informed other trustees. They did not hold a meeting to discuss the issue. When Solly visited the chairman of trustees Baboo Paruk he discovered that not a single meeting had been called since the mosque was opened in 1952. At a meeting at Paramax Wholesalers, all the trustees, Baboo Paruk, A.G. Paruk and Joosub said that Khan had phoned them and they had agreed to his decision telephonically. Khan was the secretary but did not keep any records. Everything was done by phone. The reason for dismissal was that Naseem had requested three months leave to visit Makkah but actually visited Pakistan. Under Solly, elections were held for the first time with Khan as trustee and Solly as secretary. Thus began his long association in an official capacity with the mosque.

When a mosque opened in Avoca in 1984 Committee members led by Gaff Manaff visited Briardene and told Solly that they would like him to officially open the mosque. He was honoured to have given the first Friday kutbah at the mosque. Solly saw this as indication of the esteem in which he was held considering the large number of competent and respected Indian imams. Solly preached regularly at the mosque until he suffered a heart attack in 1987.

After his retirement in 1991, Solly decided to settle in Cape Town, his spiritual home. There, he continued his religious work at Madrassah Gheedma-Tul Islamia in Rondebosch East, where he was principal and

deputy-Imam from 1996, and lectured at Eagle Park Mosque. Solly feels he achieved new spiritual heights during these years. Solly realized his life ambition when he went on pilgrimage to Makkah in 1992. He was forced to return to Durban in 2001 on medical advice. He was suffering from arthritis and medical practitioners felt the warmer climate in Durban would suit him. He found very vibrant spiritually. In Durban, he resumed giving talks lecturing at Avoca, Sparks Road and at mosques in Phoenix.

## **Conclusions**

This paper examined the construction of identity under an apartheid order that attempted to impose rigid and essentialised race identities. A newspaper headline 'Sulaiman Kirsten: Hero or Villain?' (*Muslim Views* October 1998: 31) sums up Solly. He always acted on the basis of what he believed was correct, even if this upset others. He once told an Australian television reporter that 'if blacks were given an equal opportunity, there would be no whites in the South African team' (*Muslim Views* October 1998:31).

This narrative illustrates that lived reality was complex and fluid under apartheid, and did not fit in with fixed nationalist creations. There were no clear-cut race boundaries, no beginnings and certainly no ends to the construction of identity. Solly's identities have been continually forming and transforming. Depending of the context, he was variously 'Malay', 'Coloured', 'Indian', 'Black' and even mistaken for 'white'. His identities were heavily shaped by the political and cultural milieu in which they were constructed. Context was crucial.

The individual is joined to the world through social groups, structural relations, and identities. These are not inflexible categories to which individuals can be reduced. Context is not a script. Rather, it is a dynamic process through which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by her environment. Similarly, an analysis of context, which emphasises these dynamic processes, is an interpretive strategy, which is both diachronic and synchronic (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 19).

Solly's story shows that distinctions between people, based on biology, culture or religion predated apartheid, and that it would be a misnomer to

draw a distinction between the colonial and apartheid periods. In the case of Malays, it is evident that from the early decades of the twentieth, and long before David Du Plessis published *The Cape Malays* (1944), the category 'Malay' was a clearly distinguishable identity in Durban, both among Malays as well as non-Malays. While Malays were distinguishable from Indians on the basis of biology, the distinction between them and Coloureds was on the basis of culture and religion. Such notions of classification became taken-for-granted and were crucial in shaping, interpreting and giving meaning to social behaviour in everyday life.

Solly expediently moved between identities. To begin with he was flabbergasted to be tagged 'Coloured' when he moved to Durban in the 1940s. He played 'Coloured' cricket but primarily as Malay. At national level he was a 'Coloured' as he represented Coloured representative teams in inter-racial competitions that included matches against Malays. Later he became Malay and competed against Coloureds. Coloureds, after 1960, played non-racial cricket as Coloureds. All this shows that even under apartheid, identities were never fixed and boundaries were always in a state of flux. They were often contradictory, and involved struggle over definition and self-definition, and were mostly a combination and assortment of identities. Sometimes these were essentialised as in 'Coloured', 'Malay' or 'Muslim'; at other times they could be political, as in 'black' or 'non-racial'.

Malays have certainly been attempting to assert their Malayness since 1994. The transition to a non-democratic state has further fragmented political identities and revived religion, culture and ethnicity. This has been very marked in the Cape. It was emphasised during the April 1994 festival in the Cape commemorating 'Three hundred years of Islam in south Africa', where Islam was presented as a religion of the Malays of Cape Town. According to historian Achmat Davids, 'when we [Cape Malays and Malaysians] rediscovered each other there was total amazement on both sides that the culture had been so well preserved'. Malaysian defence minister Datuk Seri Mohammed claimed that 'the evil system of apartheid separated us for three centuries, but now we have found you, we will never let you go' (*Mail and Guardian* 25-31 August 1995, in Jeppe 2001:81). In November 1997 then president of Indonesia Muhammad Suharto visited South Africa on an official state visit. He was awarded the highest state honour, the Order of Good Hope. Researcher Achmat Davids wrote in the



*Cape Argus* (21 November 1997) that Indonesia was 'the ancestral homeland' of the 'greater majority' of the Muslims of the Western Cape who 'can trace their roots to one or other island of the Indonesian archipelago' (in Jeppe 2001:81). The roots of Malay Islam was thus presented as not being of local origin but wholly foreign. This was a mythical construction of community because few of those who consider themselves 'Malay' are actually from Malaysia. However, it would be wrong to consider these simply as 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities' because the resurgence of 'Malay ethnicity' in the post-1990 has very strong historical roots.

Solly is ambivalent about this re-assertion of Malay Diaspora identity. He now considers himself first and foremost a 'Muslim'. He does have a desire, a very slight one he emphasises, to visit Malaysia and trace the roots of his paternal grandmother. But he is now in his seventies and he feels that it is unlikely that he will ever fulfil this ambition. If the opportunity does present itself to travel abroad Solly would like to travel once more to Saudi Arabia. In fact, while Malays in the Cape have been reasserting their Malayness Solly feels that the opposite is the case in Durban. The position of Malays has changed since the 1970s. Apartheid reshaped urban space. As a result of forced urban removals Malays were relocated from their close-knit community setting in Greyville to Coloured suburbs like Sparks Estate and Greenwood Park. Communal activities gradually decreased. Solly's own involvement is very limited. Certainly the public aspects of being Malay are less evident. The Meelad is no longer a public event, the *zhikr* is held on special occasions rather than every Thursday, while farewells to Hujjaj (pilgrims), once a major community activity, is a low key and personal event. Notwithstanding, this, however, Solly believes that he cannot be stripped of his heritage and culture. Though perhaps constructed, and certainly fluid and permeable, this study also suggests that such identities became essentialised over time, and hence explain why they continue to have emotional appeal in non-racial, democratic South Africa.

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