

# The first Muslim politician of South Africa Ahmet Ataullah Bey, 1865 – 1903

Halim Gencoglu  
*Religious Studies*  
University of Cape Town  
afrika.effendi@gmail.com

History teaches us that a language movement cannot succeed without struggle on the political, economic and cultural front.

*Ahmet Ataullah Bey, 1896*

## ***Abstract***

Ahmet Ataullah Bey was a South African intellectual and politician who served the South African Muslims in the last quarter of nineteenth century. Ataullah Bey played prominent role in South African history as the first Muslim activist and politician in the country. His endeavours to participate in political affairs at the Cape and be voted into parliament were of significant importance, highlighting his challenges as a person of colour at the height of white supremacy in South Africa. This paper attempts to illuminate in part the challenges faced by Ataullah Bey during his life.

Ataullah Bey also served as a Turkish emissary for the Ottoman State under the Caliphate during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan II. His activities provide insight into the policies of Abdul Hamid Khan II and show the social conditions of the nineteenth century Muslim world. Ataullah Bey came from a very established and well educated family and his ancestors were great Ulama in the Ottoman State throughout history. This short biography deals with Ataullah Bey's educational and political activities from his childhood to his death. It also illustrates his significant endeavours in South Africa as well as in Singapore in light of the broader political and historical context. Details about Ataullah Bey's family are also presented in this paper. The text concludes with Ataullah Bey's unfortunate death in Singapore at the fairly young age of thirty-nine.

**Keywords:** Ahmet Ataullah Bey; South African Muslims; Muslim community; Cape Parliament; Colonial Government; Ottoman State; Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan.

## **Introduction**

Ahmet Ataullah Bey was a South African Muslim intellectual and politician. He fought for freedom and justice, bringing about many significant changes for Muslim people. Ataullah Bey's work established a deep social consciousness during the time of the Cape Colonial Government. In addition, his activities provide insight into the policies of the Ottoman State under the rule of Abdul Hamid II and reveal internationally the social conditions of the late nineteenth century Muslim world.

This paper attempts to illuminate the types of challenges faced by Ataullah Bey, a man who came from an established, well-educated family and whose ancestors were Ulama of the Ottoman State. It offers biographical information about Ataullah Bey and examines his educational and political activities from childhood until his death in Singapore at the relatively young age of 39. Using the Ottoman archival documents, the paper demonstrates his significance to South Africa as well as to Singapore in the light of the broader international historical context.

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify aspects of his historical identity. In this paper, the preferred honorific title used for Ahmet Ataullah is Bey rather than Effendi. In Ottoman literature, Effendi is a title of nobility meaning "a lord or master". This title is more appropriate for Ahmet Ataullah's father, Abu Bakr Effendi because Abu Bakr was educated for scholarly purposes and served as an Islamic scholar.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Beg/Bey refers to the governor of a district or province in the Ottoman Empire, "formerly" a title of respect for a statesman and intellectual in Turkey. Bey has also been used as an aristocratic title in various Turkic states throughout history. Like his father, Ahmet Ataullah has also been identified as Effendi; however, because Ataullah's role in history is different from that of his father, it is more appropriate to use Bey to signal the historical status of the first Muslim politician and intellectual, Ahmet Ataullah Bey. Despite his political and educational endeavours, Ataullah Bey's role as a historical figure has been neglected in South African historiography. Also, due of its pertinence to understanding international socio-political conditions of the twenty-first century Muslim world, this paper seeks to bring this subject back to light through archival records.

---

<sup>1</sup> S Heinz & R Carl, *Islam in South Africa, 1653-2001*. On slavery and political exile edited by T Faizasyah, MS Purba, A Garinto, T Siregar, F Sari (Cape Town, Consulate General of Republic of Indonesia, 2006), p. 20.

## **Ahmet Ataullah Bey's background**

The prominent historical figure, Al Sayyid Al Amjadiy<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Ataullah Bey was born in Cape Town in 1865. His mother, Rakea Maker was a South African of English descent. Ahmet Ataullah's father was the Ottoman Muslim scholar Mudarris Abu Bakr Effendi, who was sent to Cape Town in 1862 in order to resolve religious disputes among local Muslim communities.<sup>3</sup>

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1863, Abu Bakr Effendi married Rakea (Rukiye) Maker who was the daughter of Hajji Haruon, who lived in Keerom Street, in Cape Town. Rakea was the adopted daughter of Hajji Haruon.<sup>4</sup> According to archival documents, Rakea was the daughter of Christians who had embraced Islam and changed their names to Omer (originally, John Maker)<sup>5</sup> and Rasiade (Annie Barry).<sup>6</sup> She conceived two children by Abu Bakr Effendi, one died while she was giving birth.<sup>7</sup> The second, Ahmet Ataullah was born in Cape Town<sup>8</sup> in March 1865.<sup>9</sup>

When Ahmet Ataullah was born, his father was a prominent teacher, engaging in educational activities in his school on the Bree Street. Ahmet Ataullah grew up in an environment where his peers included the grandson of great imam Tuan Guru, Ahmet Rakip, prominent Imam Seraj Hendricks and eminent religious leader Mohammed Dollie, as well as famous politician Dr Abdullah Abdurrahman. These men all grew up to become important leaders and intellectuals at the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>10</sup>

- 
- 2 The meaning of Amjadiy is the most glorious and most distinguished. The term spells as Emced in Turkish. See, F Develioglu, *Osmanlıca-Türkçe Ansiklopedik Lugat* (In Turkish, Aydin Kitabevi, Ankara 2012) p. 113.
  - 3 S Argun, *The life and contribution of the Osmanli scholar, Abu Bakr Effendi: Towards Islamic thought and culture in South Africa* (Master's thesis, Rand Afrikans University, December 2000) pp. 8-9.
  - 4 *Cape Argus*, 18 January 1893.
  - 5 Cape Archive Repository, CSC 2/2/1/128 37, Record of Proceedings of Provisional Case, October-December, A Barry, A Rasida and J Maker, Alias Omar versus Good Hope Savings Bank Society, 1858.
  - 6 Cape Archive Repository, CSC 2/2/1/128 37 Record of Proceedings of Provisional Case, October-December, Ann 1858. See also, MOOC 7/1/221 100, Maker, J. will.1853.
  - 7 *Cape Argus*, 8 January 1870.
  - 8 Achmad Davids mistakenly stated that Rakea's second son disappeared in history which is incorrect. Rakea's second son was Ahmet Ataullah Effendi who was a historical figure in South African History. See, A Davids-Da Costa, 1994 - *Pages from Cape Muslim History*, Abubakr Effendi. S Argun , *The contribution...*, p. 8.
  - 9 Ahmet Ataullah Bey informed the Ottoman foreign affairs and explained his own background to the government before he became Singapore consulate. These are all documented in the "*Sicil Ahval Defteri*" in the Ottoman Achieve, means, the registry book of identifications. See, Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Foreign Affairs, Sicili Ahval Defteri, No. 96, p. 187.
  - 10 M Adhikari, *Straat praatres, language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town 1909-1922* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1996), p. 6.

Ahmet Ataullah received his early education from his father at the Ottoman Theological School at the corner of Wale and Bree Street. At this school, while receiving his Islamic education from his father, Ataullah also had the opportunity to gain a broad worldview in a richly multicultural and multilingual environment. By the time Ataullah was ten years old, he already knew English/Afrikaans as well as Arabic.<sup>11</sup> After his primary education, Ataullah went to the Mc Leahlen Academy in Buitengragt Street, Cape Town which was based on more secular educational programs and subjects.<sup>12</sup>

At the age of twelve, Ataullah joined his father on a trip to Turkey via Mecca. In 1876, the new Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II was appointed. On this journey, Ataullah's father, Abu Bakr Effendi, introduced himself to Sultan Abdul Hamid and mentioned his activities at the Cape of Good Hope. Upon hearing about Effendi's notable activities, Abdul Hamid Khan II devoted his attention to his Muslim subjects at the Cape and ordered the publication of Effendi's *Beyan ud- Din* and *Merasid ud- Din* as a gift for the Cape Muslim community.<sup>13</sup>

After spending time in Turkey, Abu Bakr Effendi returned to the Cape but left his two sons Ataullah<sup>14</sup> and Hesham Nimetullah in Istanbul, the centre of the Caliphate to obtain the best possible education.<sup>15</sup> During their stay in Istanbul, the brothers also learnt to speak Turkish. Ahmet Ataullah received his first degree in Istanbul;<sup>16</sup> thereafter he continued his studies at Jamiu'l Azhar in Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

On the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1880, Ataullah's father passed away in Cape Town.<sup>18</sup> Ataullah returned to Cape Town with his brother, Hesham Nimetullah. Thus, soon after the loss of his father, Abu Bakr Effendi, Ataullah's life's challenge as a future intellectual and politician at the Cape of Good Hope.

---

11 A Ucar, *Guney Afrika'da Osmanlilar* (Camlica yayinlari, Istanbul, 2000), p. 300.

12 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Foreign Affairs, SAID, No. 9/1.

13 National Archives of South Africa, Library 297, Abu Abubakr Effendi: Bayannuddin; a Hanafee treatise on Islam. See also, A Effendi, *The religious duties of Islam as taught and explained, A translation from the original Arabic and Afrikaans by Mia Brandel-Syrier*, 2 (Leiden 1960).

14 J Loos, "The legacy of a learned man", *Cape Argus*, Friday, 3 March 2000, p. 12.

15 A Muhammed, *Identity and assimilation in the Malay community of nineteenth century* (University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 1989), p. 8.

16 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 28 June 1896, 6/1312/C-080.

17 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Foreign Affairs, Sicili Ahval Defteri, No. 96, p. 187.

18 H Gençoğlu, "Afrikanin ilk Osmanli Mektebi", *Yedikita Dergisi*, Istanbul, Ekim, 2013, p. 45.

## Ataullah Bey's Marriage and Children

According to the documents in the Cape Archives, Ataullah Bey's family lived in Cape Town between 1883 and 1893.<sup>19</sup> A considerable number of estates were recorded in Ataullah's name at the Cape. He lived in 90 Bree Street but also had houses on Chiappini Street 48, as well as Strand Street. According to the records, Ahmet Ataullah Bey had many properties in the town left to him by his father, including the school at the corner of Wale and Bree streets.<sup>20</sup>

Ataullah Bey's wife was Muhsine, the daughter of Kadija Dollie and Abdurrahman who were relatively affluent Muslim Cape Malays. Muhsine's grandparents were brought by the Dutch East India Company as slaves, and Abdul and Betsy Jemalee later bought their freedom. Muhsine was one of nine children and his brother was a political leader and physician, Dr Abdullah.<sup>21</sup> Muhsine married Ahmet Ataullah Bey and had four children with him:<sup>22</sup> Mehmet Fuat Ataullah,<sup>23</sup> Abu Bakr Rusdu Ataullah, Havva Khairun Nisa<sup>24</sup> and Khadijah.

Image 1: Ataullah Bey and his children, 1901, Istanbul



Source: Hesham N Effendi Family Archive, Gordon's Bay, South Africa.

19 Cape Town Archives Repository, CSC 2/1/1/341, 114, Illiquid Case, Thorne Stortford and Company versus Achmad Effendi 1897, see also Doc 4/1/142, 234, Mortgage Bond, Achmed Bey Effendi, Alias Achmad Atta Allak Alias 1885. Doc, 4/1/331, 6 Achmed Bey Effendi, 1893.

20 *The general directory and Guide-Book to the Cape of Good Hope and its dependencies as well as the Free State, Transvaal and Natal* (Cape Town, 1885), p. 27.

21 M Adhikari, "Abdullah Abdurahman, 1872-1940", *They shaped our century: The most influential South Africans of the twentieth century* (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau 1999), p. 438; Lewis, *Between the wire and wall*, pp. 124-126, 128-133, 250-256. See also, M Adhikari, "Hope, fear, shame, frustration: Continuity and change in the expression of Coloured identity in white supremacist in South Africa", 1910-1994 (PhD, University of Cape Town, 2002).

22 M Adhikari, *Abdullah Abdurahman, 1872-1940...*, pp. 437-441.

23 AF Effendi, *Turkish self taught* (London, 1942).

24 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 13/10/1920, HR.SYS, No.2654, Shelf number 9. See also, G Colak, *Avrupada Osmanli Kizlari* (Istanbul, 2013), pp. 71-73.

It is thought that in 1910, Ahmet Ataullah Bey's wife Muhsine passed away in London, while she was looking after her children were studying there. She was buried in the new cemetery at Willesden, next to the grave of Hajji Mohammed Dollie who was her mother's relative.<sup>25</sup>

According to archival records, after the death of Ataullah Bey, the Ottoman State looked after his family and the eldest son of Ataullah Bey, Mehmet Fuad Ataullah was accepted into the State School<sup>26</sup> in 1902. The Ottoman State Archives report that Havva Khairun Nisa studied medicine in London and was supported with scholarship from the Turkish State until 1920.

Another archival record shows that the circumcision feast of Ahmet Ataullah Effendi's sons was organised by the decree of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, which is a very unique historical event in the history of the Ottoman State. As far as is understood from the same document, for the other two children, Abu Bakr Rushdie and Khadijah, a program for their further studies was arranged in Istanbul by the Ministry of Education.<sup>27</sup>

Also, an independent house was arranged for Ataullah's wife. By 1905, Muhsine Beyan to receive her salary from the Ottoman State.<sup>28</sup> The following year, the Ottoman State provided a bursary for Ataullah's children. After the death of Ataullah Bey, Muhsine moved to London for her children's studies.<sup>29</sup> Her brother Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman was also studying medicine in England at the time.<sup>30</sup>

According to memories of A Khan, Ataullah Ataullah Bey's family lived in London. The family stayed close to him and as their neighbour, he had good relations especially with the son Abu Bakr Rushdie. He often went out with Rushdie, discussing the future of the Islamic World and the Ottoman State.<sup>31</sup> Rushdie Bey attended the Polytechnic school and later graduated from

---

25 A Khan, *My life and experiences* (Khrishnavas international printers, London, 1951), p. 47. Three grandsons of Tuan Guru, Abdul Rakiap, Abdullah and Mohamad and also Hamien, son of Achmat van Bengalen, and Mohammed Dollie grew up in same environment but also were students of Abu Bakr Effendi in his high theological school.

26 Galatasaray School is one of the most famous high schools of modern Turkey which is located in the centre of Istanbul and was called *Mekteb-i Sultan-i* up until 1927.

27 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, MF. MKT; 439-35/ (Regarding the educational service for the children of Ahmet Ataullah who was the first Ottoman consulate of Singapore).

28 Ottoman State Archive, DH.H No 1/1-31 (Regarding the salary for Muhsine).

29 A Khan, *My life and experiences*, pp. 36-38, 43.

30 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Y.MTV., File:191, Folder:15, 5 September 1901.

31 A Khan, *My life and experiences*, pp. 42, 44, 47.

London University in Modern Languages.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, in order to see his birth place, he travelled to the Cape of Good Hope and later settled in Cape Town. He became a successful businessman in South Africa. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk passed away in 1938, Rushdie Bey gave a speech on South African national television and explained Atatürk's role in history.<sup>33</sup> Rushdie Bey died in the 1970s in Cape Town.

The other son, Mehmet Fuad Ataullah, completed high school in Istanbul and then moved to London. He worked at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television as a linguist. He knew Arabic, English, Afrikaans, Turkish and Greek. He wrote two books on learning Turkish English which became reference books for teaching at the Oriental department at London University.<sup>34</sup> The first Turkish-English study text book was written by Mehmet Fuad Ataullah in 1942. He was involved in many activities in South Africa and passed away there in 1971.<sup>35</sup>

In 1912-1913, Khairun Havva Nisa Beyan studying Medicine at the University of London. She was probably influenced by her uncle Dr Abdullah Abdurrahman who was the first Muslim doctor and later a politician in South Africa. She specialized in gynaecology and became one of the most prominent medical doctors in her field.<sup>36</sup> She married a Capetonian of Dutch origin who was a businessman and they moved to Holland. In 1926, she lived in Istanbul. When her husband passed away in Holland, she moved to Cape Town and stayed there for the rest of her life.<sup>37</sup> Local South African news provides more information about her study in London and her relations with Dr Abdurrahman.<sup>38</sup>

The year 1913, will probably never be forgotten by the Moslems of the Cape, because of distinction gained by three Moslem girls, Miss Rukie Dollie , a cousin of Dr Abdurrahman , is the first Moslem girl to gain the Cape T3 certificate. She was born in London where her father died a few years ago. Miss Havva Effendi, a niece of the Doctor, has just passed the London matric, in the first division in English, French, Latin, Mathematics, and History. She is the daughter of the late A. Effendi, who during his life time, was well known in Cape Town and Kimberley. Miss Havva is at present in London and intends studying medicine. The third Muslim girl the distinguished herself is

---

32 A Khan, *My life and experiences*, p. 45.

33 HF Es , "Hayat Afrikâda", No. 29, *Hayat Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 13 July 1961, p. 11.

34 AF Effendi, *Turkish self taught* (London 1942).

35 A Ucar, *Güney Afrikâda...*, p. 359.

36 G Colak, *Avrupada Osmanlı...*, pp. 71-73.

37 A Ucar, *Güney Afrikâda...*, p. 362.

38 *Indian Opinion*, 3 February 1913, p. 36.

Miss Waradea, daughter of Dr Abdurrahman. She obtained the Cape Junior Certificate. Our contemporary believes that Miss Havva and Waradea are not only the first Moslem girls but the non - European girls of South Africa to pass either the Cape Junior Certificate or the London matric.

Khadijah specialized in embroidery at the school of art in London. According to the Effendi family, she married an Indian prince and moved to Karachi.<sup>39</sup> Khadijah became the first Muslim woman justice in India.

### **Ahmet Ataullah Bey at the Cape**

When Ataullah arrived at the Cape, he started teaching at his father's school. According to *The Alphabetic Directory of Cape Town*, in 1883 the Ottoman Theological School was recorded under Ataullah's name and he was recognized as the Arabic school master.<sup>40</sup> It was during his educational activities at the school that Ataullah became known as an intellectual leader in the Cape Muslim society.<sup>41</sup> As a Muslim scholar, Ataullah wrote a religious book called *Tuhfat ul Islam*.<sup>42</sup>

In 1886, the oldest Muslim graveyard in South Africa, the Tana Baru cemetery was closed down by the colonial government due to an epidemic in the town.<sup>43</sup> The cemetery's closure caused great grievance among Cape Muslims who wanted to protect the place where great Muslim pioneers such as Tuan Guru, Sheikh Sayed Mohammed Dervish Allawi and Mudarris Abu Bakr Effendi lay buried. Many Muslims supported the cemetery campaign against the government, clearly showing the strong solidarity that existed in the Muslim society at the Cape of Good Hope in the nineteenth century.

One of the prominent figures of the time, Abdul Burn, requested help from Ataullah Bey in leading the Muslim community in this campaign to save the Tana Baru cemetery from closure. At the same time, students of Abu Bakr Effendi encouraged Ataullah to lead this campaign. To mark his willingness to lead the campaign, Ataullah Bey gave a special lecture in the Burhanul mosque in Bo-Kaap.<sup>44</sup> Many prominent Muslims of the Cape such as Shahibo, Hamza

---

39 A Ucar, *Guney Afrika'da...*, p. 362.

40 Cape Town Alphabetic Directory, *Guide Book* (Cape of Good Hope, 1885), p. XXVII.

41 G Babb, Abu Bakr Effendi – "Among the Young Turks in Afrikaans", *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*; January-March 2010, 64(1), p. 27.

42 A Ucar, *Guney Afrika'da...*, p. 187.

43 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap* (Cape Town 1980), p. 61.

44 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, pp. 178-179.

Achmat, Sulaiman, Abdol Khalil and others volunteered to assist Ataullah in the quest to save their ancestral burial ground. After the meeting at Burhanul Mosque, Ataullah Bey organized another meeting at Long Market Street and in so doing, started gaining ground as an activist in the public sphere in Cape Town.<sup>45</sup> Davids notes that:<sup>46</sup>

He (Ahmed Ataullah) was actively involved in the affairs of the Cape Muslim community. First major his impression he made was during the cemetery riots of 1886. (...) Achmat Effendi had sufficient stature; he was an educated man who could possibly use his education in negotiations. He thus came to play a major role in the Muslim cemetery committee serving on the major delegations to the premier, governor and the colonial secretary.

At the time of these events, Bey had just turned 22 years old. In spite of all his efforts in leading a very spirited opposition, he could not win the cemetery campaign. He did however, gain some ground against the government, who agreed at least to provide the Cape Muslim community with a new cemetery on the border between Salt River and Mowbray.<sup>47</sup>

Image 2: Ahmet Ataullah Bey



Source: Hesham N Effendi Family Archive.

According to a Cape archival record, Ataullah Bey also encouraged the involvement of the Indian Muslim Community in religious life in the Cape

---

<sup>45</sup> A Davids, *The History of Tana Baru Cemetery* (Cape Town, 1986), p. 128.

<sup>46</sup> A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> *Cape Argus*, 4 February 1905.

Colony and made a speech to them regarding the Ottoman Muslim relations in Durban. The group in Durban referred to themselves as the Hamidiye Islam Association.<sup>48</sup>

Ataullah Bey's activities appear to cover a number of diverse challenges related to Muslim rights at the Cape. There are many articles in local newspapers with regard to his political work. In 1893, Ataullah Bey's faced his most significant challenge while running for the assembly. The following article appeared in the media:

### **The Coming Election**

#### ***Moslem Candidate for Cape Town***

Ahmed Ataullah Effendi, a teacher employed by the Turkish Government, residing at Kimberley, has decided to present himself as a candidate for the house of assembly at the approaching general election, and is at present in Cape Town with a view to further his candidacy. Ahmed is the son of later Abou Bekr Effendi, who was sent by the Turkish Government from Constantinople, in 1861 to adjust religious differences in this colony amongst the Mussulmen community. He married in the colony a Muhammedan woman whose mother was of Christian parents, and the Parliamentary candidate was born in Cape Town. He is an educated man and understands both English and Dutch languages. He has had training in Cairo, Mecca and Constantinople, and now holds a well-paid appointment as teacher. His brother-in law Abdullah Abdol Ragman, is now qualifying himself for the medical profession at the University of Glasgow and is expected to complete his studies in a few mounts, when he intends returning to the Colony to practice the profession here.

In an interview with a representative of the *Argus* Janaury 1893, Ahmed Effendi stated that there are 900 Moslems on the register in Cape Town, such of whom has four votes, and he added, if these all vote for me I shall win the seat. A conversation by the representative of the *Argus* with Ahmed Effendi then follow:<sup>49</sup>

“And will they all vote for you?”

I am certain of 800, having been to all the priests, and having also visited from house to house amongst the Moslem voters.

“Have you received promise any European support?”

-Yes, I have promises from about twenty Europeans.

“Are they people of any position?”

---

48 Cape Town National Archive, Letter from Governor to Earl of Kimberley, GH 23/37(3); GH 1/413, no.171, 1 April 1881.

49 Achmat Effendi, “*Argus*”, 18 January 1893.

Yes, people of good position. Of course, I cannot give you their names.

“What is your object in wishing to go into Parliament?”

We feel that we ought to be represented in Parliament.

“And what will be your policy?”

It is too early to speak of my policy; I should be a supporter of the present Government.

“You have had no public meeting at present?”

No, but a private meeting has been convened, at which I shall lay any news before the Moslem Community.<sup>50</sup>

Ahmet Ataullah Bey eventually became the first Muslim politician to occupy a significant position in the public life of Colonial Cape Town. From the letter above his endeavours for the democratic rights of Muslims at the Cape were valuable in shaping Muslim consciousness in South Africa. In spite of his productive activities he was barred from the Cape Colonial parliament by the racist political tactics of the senior politicians. Worden notes that:<sup>51</sup>

Broadly similar pattern of class representation and tactics can be identified in the political organization of other South Africans who were threatened by segregationist measures. By the end of the nineteenth century a sense of coloured identity was growing, particularly in Cape Town and amongst the professional classes who were facing ostracism from white racism.

In particular white politicians such as Cecil Rhodes, Sauner and Hofmeyer showed their hostility to Ahmet Ataullah Bey by refusing him entry to the Cape parliament in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Davids states that:<sup>52</sup>

Achmat showed a keen interest in politics and public affairs. It was while he was in Kimberley, that he declared his intention to stand for a seat in the Cape Parliament. This disturbed the white politicians of the time... Achmat Effendi referred to himself as a European, possibly as a result of his Turkish roots, ‘a Mussulmen and a British subject. Rhodes, Sauer and Hofmeyer were too shrewd politically to involve the government directly in legislation which could be construed as racial and constitutional tampering. The Cape Muslim vote was also a sizeable one to be too greatly antagonised.

---

50 *Cape Argus*, 18 January 1893.

51 N Worden, *The making of modern South Africa, conquest, segregation and apartheid* (Oxford, Blackwell, first published 1994, 4th edition, South Africa 2007) p. 93.

52 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, pp. 174-175.

As Davids mentions above, Ahmet Ataullah struggled to use his political capacity under white supremacy at the Cape. With his aforementioned activities, his political successes became a subject of a concern to the parliamentarians at the Cape.<sup>53</sup> His endeavours were publicised in the media which indicates that that he significantly affected society:<sup>54</sup>

#### **A Moslem candidate**

The candidature of Mr. Ahmed Effendi, for the Parliamentary representation of Cape Town, particulars of which will be found in another column is a little more of the “history making” of which we are so busy with just now. It is a very curious answer to those who proclaimed that the Franchise and Ballot Act would role all colonized British subjects of their rights and particularly to the Kimberley coloured people, who petitioned the Secretary of State against the Act, that the very first non Eneinrenh candidate since the grant of our constitution should appear after the obnoxious Act has been passed. In one sense it is the case of the roasting chicken, since there is no doubt that it is the agitation over this Act that has brought Mr. Effendi to the front and led him to claim to represent his co-religionists in Parliament. His presence there, should he be elected, perfect though his constitutional right may be will we believe, lead to political issues from which we would all godly shrink, especially as he is not a native. If a Kafir ever found its way into Parliament, the question would be raised in another form but Mr. Effendi is not even Malay; and the fact that he is a Moslem will make it impossible to regard non- European representation as a purely domestic question. However, the first business to be settled is local; and it is plain that the next Cape Town election is to be no walk-over for anyone.

Regardless his endeavours for democracy, Ataullah Bey lost this campaign against white opposition led by Cecil Rhodes, Holfmoyer and Sauner. As far as can be understood from various sources, an excuse used was that the intention behind Ataullah Bey’s removal from the white House of Assembly was his religious identity. A local newspaper in Durban highlights the contentious issue as follows:<sup>55</sup>

Ahmet Ataullah Effendi is still persevering in his candidature for Cape Town and has issued his manifesto. We had intended to make an observation or two on it, but the Cape register at hand has taken this word out of our mouth. Let it therefore speak for us. This is what our contemporary says: Ahmet Ataullah Effendi has issued his address to the electors and it contains only two statements. The House of Assembly wants men who can deal with the practical questions of the day, and about these the Effendi knows nothing.

---

53 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 174.

54 *Cape Argus*, 18 January 1893.

55 *Invo Zabantsundu* (Native opinion), 10 January 1894.

Compulsory education according to the defined standards is one of the questions. Another is the payments of large sums annually by the Treasury towards the compulsory annotation of every dwelling in Cape Town... The British Empire is what it is because it is the nicest civilizing power in the world. Cape Town has to be civilized up to English standards. What attitude does the Effendi assume towards civilization? When this is answered we may enquire about special questions to represent the capital of the colony on the era of important discussions of profound and far-reaching political questions.

As insinuated above, Ataullah Bey was labelled as a simple religious man, who did not have a grasp of government policies and “is not capable of managing public affairs to the required English civilize standards”. The inaccuracy of assumptions is exposed from archival records which reveal that Ataullah Bey was well educated, had a professorship degree from Istanbul, and knew many languages. With this as a starting point, the cause of his removal from the Assembly was not about his approach to the subject but rather seems to be a subterfuge to have him removed from the field he efficiently challenged. After losing the campaign, Ahmet Ataullah Bey gave a speech to his supporters. His speech highlights his situation and feelings at the time. In it, he said:<sup>56</sup>

It is the first time in the history of South Africa that a non-European candidate has stood for parliament. I had the moral courage to do so. I bear my defeat like a man. When the next general election comes I shall be much older and stand a better chance. I have carried my battles with honour. I have to thank you for your support you have given me. Standing as a candidate cost me nothing, everything that has been spent I have received from my co-religionist. I thank you gentlemen from the bottom of my heart.

Afterwards, Ataullah Bey travelled to Turkey in order to report his activities to Sultan Abdul Hamid. While Ahmet Ataullah Bey was in Istanbul, it is gathered from some personal family letters<sup>57</sup> that he also visited his sister Fehime. He also travelled to England, America, and many other countries as an Ottoman emissary.<sup>58</sup> Later, he returned to South Africa but this time, he did not stay at the Cape but moved to Kimberley for an educational mission which was supported by the Ottoman Caliph. According to an Ottoman archival document, Ahmet Ataullah's name is mentioned along with the title of Ottoman consulate of Kimberley.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> *Cape Argus* 30 January 1894.

<sup>57</sup> A family letter of Ataullah Bey (H Nimetullah Effendi private collection, Gordon's Bay).

<sup>58</sup> H Gençoğlu, *Abu Bakr Effendi – A report on the activities and challenges of an Ottoman Muslim theologian in the Cape of Good Hope, a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies* (Supervisor: Dr Andrea Brigaglia, University of Cape Town, 2013) p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Turkey, Ottoman State Archive, Foreign Affairs HR.TO, 64/73.

## **Ahmet Ataullah Bey to Kimberley**

In spite of his capacity and stature, Ataullah Bey could not achieve his political goals at the Cape. Having lost his campaign, Ataullah Bey left the school in Cape Town to his brother Hesham Nimetullah Effendi and moved to Kimberley.<sup>60</sup> Due to his astute educational and political activities, Ataullah Bey became a well-known figure in Kimberley within a very short time of moving there. Sultan Abdul Hamid II rewarded the valuable endeavours of Ataullah Bey<sup>61</sup> by assisting Bey in opening a school in Kimberley, which was supported by the Caliphate.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to his work in South Africa, according to the Ottoman archival records in Istanbul, Ataullah Bey also established good relationships with distinguished statesmen of the Ottoman Empire. He was encouraged by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and was awarded the Ottoman gold star in 1894.<sup>63</sup> At this time, because of his influence, Ahmet Ataullah Bey supported many progressive candidates among the Muslims in the Cape Colony.

Ataullah Bey left Kimberley in August 1898, arriving at Zanzibar in September after rerouting for Khartoum as special correspondent for the Arabic Journal. He later returned to the Colony and over the course of ten months, visited Uganda, Mombasa and the Island of Johanna. Ataullah Bey claimed that he was the first Moslem War correspondent from the Cape Colony.<sup>64</sup> At the same time he was also the editor of the Muslim Journal in Kimberley.<sup>65</sup>

During his time in educational service in Kimberley, Ataullah Bey also visited many places in the world. This made it seem as though he was acting more like a consulate than a Muslim school teacher. As time went by, the pertinence of Ataullah Bey's travels was noted by the Caliphate and he became recognized as an emissary in Istanbul because he regularly reported his activities to the Ottoman State. One of his reports translated to English reads as follows:<sup>66</sup>

---

60 R Shell, "Madrasahs and Moravians. Muslim educational institutions in the Cape Colony, 1792 to 1910", *A Journal of Historical and Human Sciences for Southern Africa*, 2006, p. 6.

61 R Shell, *Madrasah and Moravians*...., p. 187.

62 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Foreign Affairs, HR.TO 12/8/1893, File: 538, Folders: 94.

63 A Ataullah's activities were extremely respectful and he gained their respect. Afterwards, even after he passed away, his son Ahmad Ataullah Effendi had continued his affairs. Sultan II Abdul Hamid had considered the valuable endeavors of Ahmed Ataullah Effendi. According to an Ottoman Archival document, he had got his first degree Ottoman Ulama certificate from the Ottoman State. See, Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Sicili Ahval Defteri,, no; 96, page, 187

64 *Standard Digger News*, 17 October 1898, p. 4.

65 E John, *The Kimberley Malay*, 1882-1957, 2006, pp. 90-91.

66 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 7 May 1895, Y.PRK.AZJ. 31/17.

### **May it please Your Highness**

When I arrived in London I met notable Muslims and important merchants through a student of my father, Abu Bakr Effendi, Haji Mohammed Doulie from Cape Town. For a week I could also visit the local Muslim community that met regularly. In these meetings, the members of the community discussed the apathetic attitudes of the English towards Muslims. Politically, they seem to be friends of the Muslim Community, although this is not actually true in reality. I pointed out to them that the Muslim Community in London believes that although the antagonistic behavior of British policy is known, and although their attitudes have demonstrated to us that they are not a friend of Islam, yet be that as it may, the English must remain the friend of Muslims here as before. I also stated that Monsieur Gladstone used some insulting words for our Prophet Mohammed; that these horrible attitudes cannot be acceptable; and I emphasized that we should unite and challenge their disrespectful behaviors. Moreover, I told them about the unfairness of the English, which Muslim community understood and applauded me. After that, they promised me to that they will protect the honor of the Caliphate in Muslim World. Next week, I am planning to travel to the Cape of Good Hope via Liverpool.

*Your Obedient Servant, Achmad Ataullah Effendi*

In this letter, it is indications are that Ataullah Bey was working as a diplomat for the Caliphate. During his trip to London, he met with Abdullah Quilliam who was an influential Muslim leader who promoted Islam in Britain in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> After Ataullah Bey's death, his brother-in-law, Dr Abdullah Abdurrahman initiated political activities for Muslim rights and Coloured identity within the Cape Parliament.

Ahmet Ataullah Bey's activities were captured extensively in the media as far Mozambique and Zimbabwe. According to local news, he was a spiritual representative of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire and was a resident at Kimberley, South Africa. They reported that during a visit to Istanbul, he handed to his Majesty a lengthy report to the effect that there are 78.000 Moslems in South Africa united in the work of propagating the faith. He also relates via the media an interview he had with the Sultan of Zanzibar who expressed a wish to visit Istanbul, which Bey doubted would be allowed, without risking the British subvention he received.<sup>68</sup>

Another newspaper provides further information with regard to Ahmed Ataullah Bey and his works. According to the news, he was the political leader

---

<sup>67</sup> A Ucar, *Güney Afrika'da...*, p. 301.

<sup>68</sup> *The Christian Express*, 2 January 1899.

of the Muslims in South Africa and a strong supporter of British interests among his co-religionists, as well as being a candidate for parliamentary honours for the city of Cape Town.<sup>69</sup> He had been twice decorated by the Sultan of Turkey and came to Bulawayo as special correspondent to the Egyptians.<sup>70</sup>

A local newspaper in Natal highlights his political activities regarding the Cape Parliament during his stay in Cape Colony.<sup>71</sup> Ataullah Bey's political endeavours appeared as bad tactics in light of his political challenges.<sup>72</sup>

That it was bad tactics for the Effendi and his admirers to boast of the cumulative vote which exists in Cape Town and nowhere in the colony for putting (...) in their man may be seen from the fact that a more is already Bey unto abolish that system of voting at the ensuing session of parliament. It is an unfortunate circumstance that the mere mention of the Effendi candidature should be the only reason assigned for the contemplated change in a practice which is as old as the constitution itself, but what else could be expected when the country has been allowed to fall into unscrupulous hands, such as those of the Bound which is now in a position to dictate to all sections of the people.

It is also discussed in a column of the Cape Argus how the proposal to deal with the Cape Town's cumulative vote originated and why a bill was being introduced to abolish cumulative voting in Cape Town in the forthcoming session. According to the news, this is all owing to the indiscretion of the Moslem candidate and his friends who made such a flourish of trumpets a few weeks before about what the cumulative vote would do for them in putting forward as candidate, Ahmet Ataullah.<sup>73</sup> The newspaper, *Daily Independent* provides further explanation about the subject, in which it seems that the Bound party had decided not to offer any opposition to the candidature of Ahmet Ataullah and that in correspondence there is every prospect of his being returned to parliament at the next general election.<sup>74</sup> Davids remarked that:<sup>75</sup>

He (Ahmet Ataullah) was the first and last attempt by a black voter to gain a seat in the Cape parliament. He was followed by Dr Abdullah Abdurrahman who served Cape Town as a city councillor for thirty five years and as a member of the Cape provincial council for twenty-five years.

---

69 *The Beira Post*, Wednesday, 4 January 1899.

70 *The Bulawayo Chronicle Weekly Edition*, Thursday 18 November 1897.

71 *The Standard and Diggers' News* (Johannesburg), 17 October 1898.

72 *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion), 16 February 1893.

73 *Imvo Zabantsundu*..., 2 March 1892.

74 *The Rhodesia, Herald*, Saturday, 1 April 1893.

75 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, pp. 180-181.

Apart from these political activities Ahmet Ataullah Bey was engaged in spiritual leadership while he was providing educational services at his school in Kimberley. According to local news, he was actively delivering his duties as an eminent emissary.<sup>76 77</sup>

### **A Muslim Celebration**

The anniversary celebration of the birthday of his majesty the sultan of Turkey come off on the 5<sup>th</sup> instant, and was no doubt observed with rejoicings by his imperial majesty's subjects and co - religionists in various portions of the globe where the adherent of the Islam faith are to be fund. At Kimberley the Moslems seem to have good and substantial cause to commemorate the birth day of his imperial majesty Abdul Hamid Khan II. From a deeply interesting and instructive speech by Ahmed Effendi, head of the Ottoman and Arabic School in Kimberley, we gather that the present Sultan has emphatically espoused the cause of education. The occasion of this anniversary was improved by the Malays in Kimberley for the purposes of the distribution of prizes to the pupils of the school that exist as that place aided and patronized by the Sultan. Ahmed Effendi's speech, reviewing the aspect and prospects of education in the Turkish Empire and bringing the most prominently the relation of his imperial majesty to the progress made, was particularly apropos. We rejoice that an opportunity has thus been given A. Ahmet Effendi to give us all a luminous, although not a voluminous account of what is at the present moment transpiring within the dominations of the Ottoman Empire, much of the doings of which are a sealed book to outsiders.

Aside from his political and diplomatic activities, Bey was also a scholar, who contributed to developing the practical writing of the Afrikaans – Arabic style.

Image 3: A letter written by Achmat Effendi after his defeat in an election for a seat in the Cape Parliament in 1894



Source: A Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim*, p. 97.

76 SA Rochlin, "Aspects of Islam in the nineteenth century", *Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1939, p. 220.

77 *Imvo Zabantsundu...*, 14 March 1893.

Ataullah Bey was the first person to use modern Arabic letters in writing the Afrikaans language.<sup>78</sup> In this Arabic-Afrikaans letter (shown as an illustration above) Ataullah Bey explained his feelings and thoughts to Muslim society. Davids remarked that:<sup>79</sup>

Effendi's speech shows that the objective of the South African Muslims' Association was the political, cultural and economic upliftment of the Cape Muslim Community; and this he claimed could only be achieved through compulsory education. Effendi's use of Falamank as the language of his translation could not have been without political consideration.

Ahmed Ataullah stated in this letter:<sup>80</sup>

I care for others. Today, I have heard that a prophet (nabee) is never honoured in his birthplace; so I shall not stay too long in Africa. I have a different policy now and if I leave Africa then I shall get a place for you too. Today I am twenty nine years old. Everything I have done was (done) before I turned thirty. Mister Roudes ( Cecil John Rhodes) did everything after he turned thirty; not in the Cape but in Batavia, Java; now I give this portrait to you as a present, because when I go on a visit, then I bear {?}. Everyone who goes to the palace bears kofia {?} as the portrait {?}

As seen above, in this Arabic- Afrikaans letter, Ataullah Bey spoke about his activities and the situation of the Muslims at the time. It is clear that Ataullah Bey always challenged the current system of government in order to obtain equal rights in South Africa. In one of his speeches, he emphasized that “history teaches us that a language movement cannot succeed without struggle on the political, economic and cultural front” which demonstrates his intellectual viewpoint and scholarship.<sup>81</sup>

According to Ottoman Archival records, Ataullah Bey made many speeches in his constituency in South Africa and reported his activities to the Sublime Porte, informing the Ottoman statesmen's about his work.<sup>82</sup>

**To Your Excellency**

***May it please Your Highness***

I have the honor to transmit herewith, for the information of His Majesty; I arrived at the Cape from Istanbul (Dar-ul Caliphate) where the Muslims community of the Cape Colony has welcomed me very warmly, due to their

---

78 A Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim* (Pretoria, 2011), p. 97.

79 A Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim...*, p. 130.

80 A. Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim...*, p. 95.

81 A Davids, *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim...*, p. 130.

82 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 6 June 1895 – Y.PRK.AZJ-31/12; Y.A Private, 337/131, 15 October 1895.

empathy of the Caliphate in Istanbul. Today, when I have given a discourse to the Muslims regarding the Caliphate in the Nur-i Hamiddiye Mosque, all of my Muslim brothers couldn't stop their tears. After my discourse, they in unison said "Amin" I then gave them the presents which Your Highness donated to them. I cannot describe how happy Your Majesty's interest has made the Muslims in Cape Town upon receiving your highness's valuable gifts. After this warm celebration, the Cape Town Muslims re-analyzed the significant of the Caliphates and your kindly consideration. All of these activities appeared in the local newspaper. I would, hereby like to inform Your Excellency with regards to the faithful Muslims of Cape Town who really love to keep contact with the Caliphate.

*Abmet Ataullah*

That Ataullah Bey was the first Muslim politician in South Africa<sup>83</sup> is has been demonstrated by the evidence found in existing Ottoman archival records. According to official records in the Ottoman Foreign Office, Bey spoke English, Afrikaans, Turkish, Arabic and Urdu. Numerous Ottoman archival documents describe his noteworthy political activities for the Muslims of South Africa. It is reported that the Muslim community in Kimberley, South Africa celebrates the birthday of Abdul Hamid Khan II for building an Ottoman School in their city.<sup>84</sup>

A large number of archival documents in the Ottoman State archives in Istanbul exist relations between the Ottoman Caliphs and Muslim community in South Africa. The local Ulama at the Cape demanded religious instruction from Istanbul and Mecca.<sup>85</sup> One archival document records the request from the Muslim community in Kimberley in South Africa to celebrate the birthday of Abdul Hamid II by building an Ottoman School in the city:<sup>86 87</sup>

Celebrating the birthday of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Muslim community in Kimberley in South Africa has declared their loyalty to the Ottoman rule in a petition. In addition, they have asked for an Ottoman school to be built in their city.

---

83 *Cape Argus*, 18 January 1893, A Moslem Candidate; A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap...*, p. 180.

84 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 29 May 1890, BOA. Y. A. Hus. 235/73; 7 May 1895- Y. PRK. AZJ. 31/17.

85 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap...*, pp. XX, XXI.

86 Another Ottoman archival document illustrates the difficulty of traveling overseas caused by the combat conditions in South Africa because of the Anglo- Boer War - 1899-1902. As a result of the Anglo- Boer War, Ataullah had not received his salary for a while and this was a concern of his because he wanted to go on Hajj duty in 1900, See, Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, ME. MKT, No; 408 – 40 (Regarding Ahmet Ataullah's salary due to his hajj request from the Cape of Good Hope).

87 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, 29 May 1890, Boa Y. A. Hus. 235/73 Nezâret-i Umûr-i Hâriciye.

Ataullah Bey also contributed to the continued development of the social-cultural system of the dress style of the Muslim community in South Africa, which was started by his father Abu Bakr Effendi. Ataullah Bey influenced the Muslim community not only with his very particular dress style but more so with the wearing of the Ottoman Fez. As a Muslim intellectual leader, he bequeathed a remarkable dress style to the Cape Muslim society. Tayob states that:<sup>88</sup>

Number of traders did wear the Turkish fez and the European suit. The kind of adaptation called for by Effendi may be match with Abdol Burns' view of the "uneducated Malay" who refused to have their cemeteries moved out of the Cape Town. However, unlike his father who contributed to lasting development of Islamic resurgence in the Cape...

Ottoman archival records provide further information with regard to the services of Ataullah Bey during his stay in South Africa. In 1895, the Ottoman State prepared to send another Ottoman scholar to Kimberley because of Ataullah's political interest in joining the Cape Parliament.<sup>89</sup> For this reason, one of the students of Abu Bakr Effendi from Cape Town was appointed to the school in Kimberley.<sup>90</sup>

### **Singapore Consulate, 1901-1903**

Ataullah Bey attracted the attention of the Ottoman Sultan with the efficiency of his activities in South Africa, and his loyalty in reporting to the Caliphate. As a result, in 1901, he was appointed to the Singapore consulate on behalf of the Ottoman State.<sup>91</sup> Upon arrival, he immediately organized a meeting with statesmen and gave an influential speech to them. His activities in Singapore were often recorded in the media. According to a local newspaper, on his arrival in Singapore, he emerged quickly as an intellectual in the public sphere - especially in the Muslim society and gathered thousands followers in the town. Undoubtedly he gained a lot of credibility locally because of his relationship with the Caliphate in Istanbul. There are numerous archival documents between Ottoman foreign affairs and Ataullah Bey which indicate

---

88 A Tayob, *Islamic resurgence in South Africa* (South Africa, 1985), p. 101.

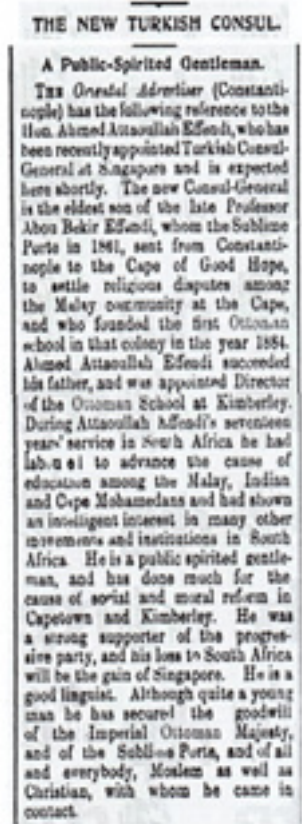
89 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, Y.A Hus. 283-282 (Regarding the school principal of the Ottoman School in Kimberley Ahmet Ataullah).

90 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, BEO; Educational (Maarif 19436) No.408-30553 (Regarding the new appointment for the Ottoman school in Kimberley).

91 A Reid, "Nineteenth century Pan-Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 26(2), February 1967, p. 271.

his active services during his office in Singapore.

Image 4: News about Ataulah Bey in Singapore



Source: *The Straits Times*, 28 April 1904, p. 5.

Perhaps his activities disturbed some politicians in Singapore. In his speeches, he openly addressed his concerns about the political environment around him. As was the case in Cape Town, Ataulah did not have a very smart bureaucratic approach to society as a diplomat noted by Davids:<sup>92</sup>

Achmat Effendi's fatal mistake was his announcement that he would stand in the general election while the 1893 parliamentary session was still in progress. If this announcement had not been made so early it is doubtful if Cecil John Rhodes and the Afrikaner Bond would have jointly manoeuvred this act through parliament at the very end of the 1893 session. Shortly after the 1894 elections, he left South Africa never he returned.

92 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 180.

After his death many articles about his life were written in the social media in Singapore, South Africa and Turkey. His remarkable activities were mentioned on different occasions in various places. The governor of Johor, Ibrahim Khan reported this sad news to the Ottoman foreign affairs with the letter below:<sup>93</sup>

**Your Excellency**

I sadly inform you regarding the unfair death of the Ottoman Consul general of Singapore, Ahmet Ataullah Bey who passed away in a car accident this morning. I am saddened to inform you of this unfortunate news.

*Obediently servant Ibrahim, governor of Johor*

Ahmet Ataullah died in 1903<sup>94</sup> at a relatively young age of 39 in a tragic traffic accident while serving as the Ottoman ambassador in Singapore. This event seemed as an accident which appeared to be a planned assassination. According to a Turkish source he was killed by an English secret agent due to his political affairs in the name of the Ottoman Caliphate.<sup>95</sup>

Ucar holds that Ataullah Bey's activities in Singapore caused concern among English politicians because of the religious impact of the Ottoman Pan-Islamic policies<sup>96</sup> on the global Muslim community. Moreover, it is an essential historical fact that the British State tried to interfere strongly with the Pan-Islamic policies of the Ottoman State in British colonies. The British power in India held that the Ottoman Sultan cannot be the Caliph of the Muslims because by lineage, the Caliph must be of the Arab tribe of Qureshi. However, according to the English orientalist William Redhouse this is an erroneous statement. He clearly states in his article:<sup>97</sup>

These assertions then we hold to be erroneous, because, in the first place, so far from the title being a new assumption by the present or late Sultan of Turkey, it dates from the year a.d. 1517, and has been, gradually perhaps, but generally, admitted, accepted, adopted by the whole orthodox world of Islam, from China to Algiers, from the snows of Siberia to the tropical isles of Sumatra and Java, to the British colony of the Cape of Good Hope.

As seen above, like other Ottoman statesmen, Ahmet Ataullah Bey was one of the influential Ottoman politicians who eagerly worked for the Muslim community in Singapore in order to build the link between the two countries.

---

93 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, [BOA. Y.PRK.NMH. Nu. 9/44].

94 *Standard Digger News*, 17 October 1898, p. 4.

95 I Abdurresid, *Cin ve Hindistandaki Islamiyet*, II (Editor, Mehmet Paksu, Istanbul 1987), p. 200.

96 A Ucar, *Guney Afrika'da...*, p. 344.

97 JW Redhouse, *A vindication of the Ottoman Sultan's title of 'Caliph': shewing its antiquity, validity, and universal acceptance* (The University of Manchester, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1877), p. 4.

Due to his noteworthy activities, he attracted attention on him which is also emphasized by historian Anthony Reid.<sup>98</sup>

The most remarkable statement about Ataullah Bey's assassination was made by a contemporary historian of the time, Suleyman Sukru Karacinzade who published his book in Petersburg in 1907. According to Suleyman Sukru, Ahmet Ataullah Bey was a very sincere and outspoken diplomat which cost him his life.<sup>99</sup> In a meeting between the Johar Sultanate and the Ottoman State, Ataullah's Bey said to the Sultan of Johor "I will attach your State to the Ottoman Caliphate and will stop British colonization in this lands" which was welcomed very gratefully among Muslims in the meeting. However, Suleyman Sukru states that English colonial governor of the Johor who was at the same meeting and got seriously concerned and upset when he heard about this statement of Ahmet Ataullah Bey.<sup>100</sup> That is why, according to Suleyman Sukru, Ahmet Ataullah Bey was killed by English colonial agents.

When Atatullah Bey passed away in Singapore, a new emissary was appointed to the Ottoman consulate in Singapore.<sup>101</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Ahmet Ataullah Bey was the eldest son of the late professor Abu Bakr Effendi, whom the Sublime Porte in 1862 had sent from Istanbul to the Cape of Good Hope to settle religious disputes among the Muslim congregations at the Cape.

No doubt, Ataullah Bey was influenced by prominent pioneers like his father Abu Bakr Effendi, Sheik Yusuf of Makassar, Sheik Tuan Guru, who became a source of inspiration for him. Davids recounts the legacy of some prominent leaders at the Cape like Achmat Ataullah, stating that: "All made magnificent contributions to the development of Cape Muslim culture. Memories of them are beginning to fade as oral histories become obscure."<sup>102</sup>

---

98 A Reid, "Nineteenth century Pan-Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 26(2), February 1967, p. 271.

99 IS Karacinzade, *Seyahat-I Kubra* (Elektrik Mat, Petersburg, 1907), pp. 532-533.

100 A Ucar, *Guney Afrikada...*, p. 348.

101 Turkey, Ottoman State Archives, BEO; 1655-124078/ (Regarding appointment for consulate in Singapore for a short term, 1903).

102 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 6.

Many Muslims scholars had contributed to establishing Islamic consciousness and Islamic way of life in South Africa, such as the great Sheikhs, Yusuf of Makassar and Tuan Said (Guru), who spread Islamic knowledge and impacted Muslim society from their arrival to South Africa to the present.<sup>103</sup> Despite the tumultuous political background of Sheik Yusuf and Tuan Guru in their home countries, they were recognized as Islamic scholars in South Africa which evidences the legacy they left. Certainly, the absence of freedom of thought was another valid reason for earlier Muslim activism. There were other reasons to stay away from political activity such as the excessively strict rules imposed on South African Muslims during the Dutch period.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, in the last quarter of nineteenth century, due to freedom of thought, Ataullah Bey was able to challenge the white colonial government at the Cape. Davids points out: “Achmat Effendi who stood for a seat in the Cape Parliament in 1894. He was the first black person who attempted to gain entry into the Cape Legislative Assembly.”<sup>105</sup>

Ahmet Ataullah Bey succeeded his father and was appointed schoolmaster of the Ottoman School in Cape Town and then Kimberley. During Ataullah Bey's seven years of service in South Africa, he laboured to advance the cause of education amongst the Malay, Indian and Cape Muslims. He showed intellectual interest in many other movements and institutions in South Africa. He was recognized as a public speaker and leader and had done much for the cause of social reform in Cape Town and Kimberley. He was a strong supporter of the Progressive Party and his loss to South Africa was a gain for the Muslim Society in Singapore. He was a good linguist, spoke fluent Arabic, Afrikaans, English, Urdu and Turkish. He visited many countries in the world and contacted various Muslim communities on behalf of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Upon his arrival to Singapore, he quickly established himself in a position of high popularity with his co- religionists and also with the Europeans there. Upon his death, flags of all the foreign consulates were flown at half-mast in his memory.

Ahmet Ataullah Bey's remarkable activities are well-recorded in history. He managed to achieve commendable deeds before his premature death at 39 years of age. He is recognised as a pioneer for many societies in Batavia, Java,

---

103 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, pp. 37, 43.

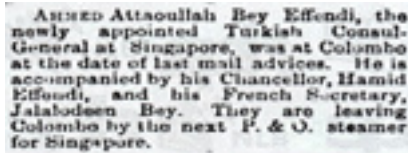
104 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 39.

105 A Davids, *The Mosque of Bo-Kaap*, p. 170.

Singapore and South Africa. Ahmet Ataulah Bey's life therefore represents a prominent historical milestone for the democratic challenge in South Africa, for South African Muslims specifically, but also internationally because of its pertinence to the early twenty-first century Muslim world.

## Appendices:

Image 5: The new Consul General



AHMED ATTAULLAH BEY EFFENDI, the newly appointed Turkish Consul-General at Singapore, was at Colombo at the date of last mail advices. He is accompanied by his Chancellor, Hamid Effendi, and his French Secretary, Jalabdeen Bey. They are leaving Colombo by the next P. & O. steamer for Singapore.

Source: *The Straits Times*, 25 October 1901, p. 2.

Image 6:

### THE TURKISH CONSUL-GENERAL AT SINGAPORE.

THE Hon. Ahmed Attaulah Effendi, the new Turkish Consul-General at Singapore, whose arrival we have already noted, is thus spoken of by the *Ceylon Muhammadan* :—

The Consul is a man of great culture and has a thorough knowledge of many foreign languages. He speaks and writes the Dutch language with great fluency, and is altogether an accomplished personage. As we have said before, the Straits Muhammadans have much cause to congratulate themselves on the good fortune of their being about to have the Consul-General as a resident amongst them. He displays a keen interest in the cause of Muhammadan education and has visited almost every Muhammadan educational institution in Colombo during his short stay here, promising that he will do all in his power to advance the efforts that are now making to raise the Muhammadan population of the island to as good, if not better, a level as that of the other communities in the country. We shall not be at all surprised were the Consul to devise an educational scheme for the benefit of the rising generation of Muhammadan youth both here and in the Straits. It is men of this kind that are so much needed amongst us to lend support to schools, to impress on their fellow-religionists a lively sense of their responsibilities in the matter of educating our young men and women in the paths of knowledge, to point out to them how great a factor in this process are newspapers and journals specially devoted to their interests, and the duty of every Muhammadan to do all in his power to aid and encourage both pecuniarily and otherwise those who, as school-masters, priests, editors, and authors, are labouring to benefit their fellows. We expect to hear a great deal of the Hon. Ahmed Attaulah Effendi in the future and of his doings for the benefit of the Straits Muhammadans, and we heartily wish him all success, health, and prosperity in the new country, to which he is going.

Source: *The Straits Times*, 28 April 1904, p. 5.

Image 7:

<p><b>DEATH OF THE TURKISH CONSUL.</b></p>	<p>in the roadway with his life blood running out of his wounds, and his skull fractured, until the next carriage came along, and the syce saw in the clear moonlight the uniformed figure in a pool of blood. In a few moments other guests returning from the scene of festivities were also arrested by the spectacle of a little crowd on the roadside, and a couple of minutes after the accident Mr. Whitehead, Superintendent of Police, who was also among the guests of the evening, had been notified of the accident and had hurried to the scene. Under his direction, the seemingly lifeless body was removed to the side of the drive-way and an ambulance was sent for. In the meantime, Dr. McDowell P.C.M.O., who had also been among the guests at Government House, arrived and found that the Bey was beyond human assistance. He was subsequently taken to the General Hospital where life was pronounced extinct.</p>	<p>The funeral will be held to-morrow morning. The cortege will leave the town residence of Syed Mahommed Alsagoff, No. 15 Java Road, Campong Glam, at 7 a.m., and the interment will take place at the Mahomedan Cemetery, Telok Blangah, at 8 a.m.</p> <p>We understand that to-day H.H. the Sultan of Johore sent a telegram of condolence to the Sultan of Turkey. The Hon. Ahmed Attaoullah Bey was only about forty years of age, had only been in Singapore two years.</p> <p>The flags over all the foreign Consulates were at half mast to-day out of respect to the memory of the deceased.</p> <p>An inquest will be held this afternoon.</p>
<p><b>THE HON. ATAOUILLAH BEY KILLED BY ACCIDENT.</b></p>	<p>While this sequel to the tragedy was being enacted on the Government House driveway, the syce had pulled up his pony; but, not noticing that his fare was no longer in the gharry, drove all the way to the Consul's residence at Balestier Road three miles away, where, when he opened gharry door, he found only the sword which the Bey had unbuckled as he entered the vehicle, and had left behind when he took the fatal jump. He immediately drove back about a third of a mile to the Thomson Road Police Station, where he reported the disappearance of his fare; but it was not till a later hour to-day that he learned the fact that the Consul had been killed.</p>	
<p><b>Tragic Sequel to the Birthday Ball at Government House.</b></p>		
<p>It is with great regret we announce the death, under tragic circumstances, of the Hon. Ahmed Attaoullah Bey, the Turkish Consul General at Singapore, who was killed while attempting to jump from a run-away gharry when leaving the Birthday Ball at Government House at an early hour this morning. The Bey, who had celebrated his own ruler's birthday as recently as Saturday last, when he entertained the principal representatives of the Mahomedan and European communities at the Arab Club, was among the official guests at the Governor's Birthday Ball. He remained until shortly after supper, and left in a hack gharry at about 1.45 o'clock for his residence at Balestier Road near Thomson Road.</p>		
<p>From what can be gathered of the subsequent facts, the pony was too fresh, and bolted down Government House hill with the gharry. When Attaoullah Bey, fearing a smash-up, opened the door and jumped from the vehicle, fracturing his skull. The syce—too busy with his runaway pony to even glance behind—saw nothing of the tragedy. The Consul lay</p>		

Source: *The Straits Times*, 10 November 1903, p. 5.

Image 8:

**THE LATE ATAULLAH BEY.**  
*To the Editor of the "Straits Times."*

Sir,—It may be of some interest to you as well as to others personally known to the late Hon. Ahmed Ataullah Bey to know that a copy of the *Straits Times* containing a report of his death was sent to his relatives at Capetown. In acknowledging the feelings of sympathy and condolence expressed on that occasion, Hesham Neematollah Effendi, the brother of the deceased Consul, writes as follows in a private letter received by me:—

"Our family desire, through you, to convey to one and all who knew and esteemed my brother during his lifetime, and who assisted at his funeral, our most grateful and sincere thanks."

As it would be impossible for me on behalf of his brother to individually thank the numerous friends of the deceased Consul, I shall deem it an especial favour if you could kindly insert the above in your valuable columns for their information.

I am, etc.,  
**Mohd. S. Baker.**  
Singapore, 25th April.

Source: *The Straits Times*, 5 November 1901, p. 3.