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From Tidore to the Cape of Good Hope: Identity Transformation, Diasporic Agency, and Cultural Legacy of Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam

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Abstract

This article examines the life and legacy of Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam, a noble ulama from the Sultanate of Tidore exiled by the VOC to South Africa in the 18th century, from a historical anthropology perspective. Born in Tidore (1712) and died in Cape Town (1807), he represents the complexity of encounters between local identity, colonial politics, and Islamic knowledge transmission across continents. Using Ortner's "serious games" framework and Kottak's concept of enculturation, this article identifies three dimensions of Tuan Guru's contribution. First, as a diasporic subject, he transformed from Tidore prince to religious authority in exile. His childhood enculturation in Tidore shaped his learning capacity, later reproduced in South Africa. Second, as an agent of knowledge transmission, he demonstrated two faces of agency: agency-as-power through symbolic resistance to colonialism, and agency-as-projects through reproducing Nusantara Islamic tradition—writing six Qur'anic manuscripts from memory, the theological work *Ma'rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*, and establishing the first madrasah and mosque in Cape Town. Third, as cultural legacy, he became a symbol of struggle honored across generations—from Nelson Mandela's pilgrimage to his grave to contemporary discourse on proposing him as an Indonesian National Hero. This article argues that Tuan Guru actively played his own "serious games" under colonial pressure, building Islamic institutions foundational for Cape Town's Muslim community today. This research contributes to understanding Nusantara diaspora dynamics and identity negotiation at the intersection of locality, colonialism, and globalization.



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Keywords:

Cultural agency, Islamic knowledge transmission, Nusantara diaspora, Serious games, Tuan guru Tidore

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji kehidupan dan warisan Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdussalam, seorang ulama bangsawan dari Kesultanan Tidore yang diasingkan VOC ke Afrika Selatan pada abad ke-18, dari perspektif antropologi sejarah. Lahir di Tidore (1712) dan wafat di Cape Town (1807), ia merepresentasikan kompleksitas pertemuan antara identitas lokal, politik kolonial, dan transmisi pengetahuan Islam lintas benua. Dengan menggunakan kerangka “serious games” dari Ortner dan konsep enkulturasi dari Kottak, artikel ini mengidentifikasi tiga dimensi kontribusi Tuan Guru. Pertama, sebagai subjek diaspora, ia bertransformasi dari pangeran Tidore menjadi otoritas keagamaan di pembuangan. Enkulturasi masa kecilnya di Tidore membentuk kapasitas pembelajaran yang kemudian ia reproduksi di Afrika Selatan. Kedua, sebagai agen transmisi pengetahuan, ia menunjukkan dua wajah agensi: agensi sebagai kekuatan melalui perlawanan simbolik terhadap kolonialisme, dan agensi sebagai proyek melalui reproduksi tradisi keilmuan Islam Nusantara—menulis enam manuskrip Al-Qur’an dari ingatan, karya teologis *Ma’rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*, serta mendirikan madrasah dan masjid pertama di Cape Town. Ketiga, sebagai warisan budaya, ia menjadi simbol perjuangan yang dihormati lintas generasi—dari ziarah Nelson Mandela ke makamnya hingga wacana pengusulannya sebagai Pahlawan Nasional Indonesia. Artikel ini berargumentasi bahwa Tuan Guru aktif memainkan “serious games”-nya di bawah tekanan kolonial, membangun institusi Islam yang menjadi fondasi bagi komunitas Muslim Cape Town hingga kini. Riset ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman dinamika diaspora Nusantara dan negosiasi identitas pada persimpangan lokalitas, kolonialisme, dan globalisasi.

Kata Kunci:

Agensi budaya, Diaspora nusantara, Serious games, Transmisi pengetahuan Islam, Tuan guru Tidore

Introduction

The 18th century marked an important chapter in the dynamics of forced migration in the Indian Ocean region, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) systematically exiled Nusantara nobles and ulama deemed to threaten

its colonial hegemony. Among the figures who became victims of this political exile policy, Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam—later famously known as Tuan Guru—occupies a special position. As a member of the ulama from the Sultanate of Tidore exiled to the Cape of Good Hope (Cape Town) in 1780, he not only left traces in colonial archives but also carved a civilizational legacy that endures to this day (Haron & Arby, 2021). Tuan Guru's contributions in the land of exile transcended mere survival in imprisoned conditions. He established the first madrasah (1793) and the first mosque (1794) in South Africa, wrote six Qur'anic manuscripts from memory during his imprisonment on Robben Island, "the island of the seals", and produced the monumental theological work *Ma'rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*, which remains an important reference for the Muslim community in Cape Town to this day (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018; Morton, 2018, 2021; Raqiep & Raqiep, 2021). His historical significance is even recognized across generations; Nelson Mandela, the icon of the anti-apartheid struggle, reportedly visited Tuan Guru's grave at the Tana Baru cemetery complex in Cape Town as the first location he visited after his release from prison (Morton, 2018, 2021; Tribunternate.com, 2025).

To fully understand the phenomenon of Tuan Guru, we need to place him within the broader context of global history. As historian A.B. Lopian stated in a seminar in Ternate (1996), the global civilization later known as globalization has its roots in the Silk Road, which in turn originated from the Spice Route that began in Maluku (Ruray, 2023). The spice factor became a key element in shaping the fabric of intercultural and international interactions that have lasted for centuries (Ruray, 2023). Arab navigators, according to Hourani, had found routes to the world's spice trading centers since the early spread of Islam, while Chinese sailors with their junks had entered North Maluku since the T'ang Dynasty era in the 7th century AD (Ruray, 2023). Maritime economic historians such as Kenneth Hall (2011) in *A History of Early Southeast Asia* affirm that trade networks had formed long before the arrival of Western nations—that trade (emporium) preceded the state (imperium) (Ruray, 2023). Roderich Ptak (1992) in his monumental study of the clove trade reconstructs the spice route from Ternate, Tidore, Makian, Bacan, Moti and Ambon through two main routes: the northern route across the Sulu Sea, and the southern route through the Java Sea and North Natuna towards East Asia (Ruray, 2023).

From an anthropological perspective, the study of Tuan Guru requires an adequate theoretical foundation to analyze the complexity of diasporic experience, knowledge transmission, and identity negotiation. This article uses the theoretical framework developed by Sherry Ortner (2006) on "serious games" and the two faces of agency. Ortner (2006) explains that the idea of serious games is an attempt to build on important insights from "practice

theory” while simultaneously moving beyond them. The fundamental assumption of practice theory is that culture (in the broadest sense) constructs people as particular kinds of social actors, but social actors, through their lives in the field, through their practices, reproduce or transform—and usually some combination of both—the culture that made them. As in practice theory, social life in the serious games perspective is seen as actively played, oriented toward culturally constituted goals and projects, and involving both routine practices and intentional action. Ortner (2006) emphasizes that the serious games perspective allows us to focus on more complex forms of social relations—especially relations of power—and more complex dimensions of the subjectivity of social actors, namely “intentionality” and “agency.” Ortner (2006) distinguishes two fields of meaning of agency: in one field of meaning, “agency” is about intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally defined) projects; in the other field of meaning, agency is about power, about acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry, and force. Its two “faces”—as the (pursuit of) “projects” or as the (exercise of or against) “power”—either blur into one another or remain distinct but intertwined in a Moebius-like relationship.

The second theoretical framework used is the concept of culture from Edward Tylor and Clifford Geertz as elaborated by Kottak (2015). Tylor defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871/1958 cited in Kottak, 2015). The key phrase “acquired as a member of society” emphasizes that culture is transmitted through learning processes, not biological inheritance. Geertz (1973, cited in Kottak, 2015) further defines culture as “control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions—for governing behavior.”

Colonial history records that the VOC exiled at least 182 Nusantara nobles (*Orang Cayen*) to Cape Town between 1658 and 1795 (Morton, 2021; Haron & Arby, 2021). They were political prisoners sent to break the spirit of resistance of the people in their homeland. However, instead of paralyzing, exile actually opened possibilities for the emergence of new forms of agency. As expressed by Rakiep (2021: 175) in his “Immortal Soul - A Tribute” poem about Tuan Guru:

“Uprooted from the soil of birth,
the children of the Archipelago were sought to be tempered and honed
into submission
to a power foreign from their own.
However, this was not to be;
Al-Fakir, Al-Hakir Abdullah bin Qadi Abdus-Salam
had a message to the Cape – Destiny...”

This poem captures the essence of Tuan Guru's agency: although uprooted from his birthplace, he still had a "message" and "destiny" to fulfill in the land of exile. In his case, exile became a momentum to reproduce the scholarly tradition of Nusantara Islam, build educational and religious institutions, and lay the foundation for the Muslim community in Cape Town that would later be honored across generations.

Based on this theoretical framework, this article poses three main questions. First, how did a Tidore prince transform into "Tuan Guru"—a recognized religious authority figure—in the land of exile? Second, how did he reproduce and transmit the Nusantara Islamic scholarly tradition in South Africa? Third, how does his legacy continue to live and be interpreted in contemporary contexts, both in South Africa and Indonesia?

The significance of this research lies in its effort to fill the gap in studies of the Nusantara diaspora in the African region, while also showing that Indonesian history is not only formed within its territorial boundaries, but also through the traces of its citizens scattered across various corners of the world. In this context, the reconstruction of local historiography through the excavation of facts and documents becomes a necessity, considering that there has been systematic and structured historical manipulation over a long period—manipulation that has unconsciously shaped the collective mindset of the nation (Ruray, 2023). Studying Tuan Guru means participating in the effort to restore historical dignity and justice, especially for Tidore and North Maluku in the map of national and international historiography.

Methods

This research is a qualitative study based on the analysis of secondary sources consisting of academic journals, historical archives, media articles, and scholarly publications. The approach employed is historical anthropology and memory ethnography, focusing on three layers of data: historical records of Tuan Guru's life in Tidore and his exile period, documentation of his intellectual works, and contemporary memorialization practices both in South Africa and Indonesia. Primary sources include news coverage about Tuan Guru from national media (Republika, 2024; Tribunternate.com, 2024, 2025), news publications from UIN Jakarta (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018), and international academic studies (Haron & Arby, 2021; Morton, 2018, 2021; Salie, 2021; Rakiep & Rakiep, 2021; Rhoda, 2021), as well as a field notes from my visit to Cape Town on December 7-11, 2024. Additionally, this research also utilizes other relevant sources, including studies on maritime history and Tidorese identity (Ruray, 2023; Probojo, 2000), which provide important context for understanding Tuan Guru's intellectual formation in his homeland.

The analysis was conducted using an interpretive anthropological approach to trace the layers of meaning in Tuan Guru's life, works, and legacy. The theoretical frameworks employed, particularly Ortner's (2006) concepts of "serious games" and the two faces of agency, as well as Kottak's (2015) concept of enculturation, serve as lenses to analyze how Tuan Guru negotiated his identity, reproduced knowledge, and built institutions in the land of exile. Data from various sources were compared and thematically interpreted to reveal three main dimensions of Tuan Guru's contribution: identity transformation, diasporic agency, and cultural legacy. This approach enables the tracing not only of historical facts but also of the cultural meanings attached to Tuan Guru's figure in the collective memory of communities on two continents.

Result and Discussion

Tidore: Homeland and Early Intellectual Formation

Tuan Guru was born with the name Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam in Tidore in 1712 (Morton, 2018; Haron & Arby, 2021). He came from the noble class of the Sultanate of Tidore, one of the centers of Islamic power in North Maluku that had possessed an established scholarly tradition since the 15th century. To understand Tuan Guru's intellectual formation, we need to understand the cosmology and social structure of Tidore that shaped him—an enculturation process that would later become the "cultural program" Geertz (1973, as cited in Kottak, 2015) guiding all his actions in the land of exile. As Kottak (2015) states, "the ease with which children absorb any cultural tradition rests on the uniquely elaborated human capacity to learn." Tuan Guru grew up in the environment of the Sultanate of Tidore, rich in the tradition of Islamic scholarship. His enculturation process took place through various channels: direct learning from teachers, observation of community ritual practices, and interaction with complex social structures.

The Tidorese people understand their island as the Veranda of Mecca, meaning that Tidore is seen as equally important as Mecca. The island of Tidore and its sacred mountain, Kiematubu, are the true pilgrimage site for a devout Muslim (Probojo, 2000). The Tidorese used to boast: "We needed no Indian traders to Islamise us, we were always Muslim" (Probojo, 2000). The legend of Syed Jafar Sadik, the first Arab to come to Tidore, became the foundation of Islamic understanding in Tidore. He claimed to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and is known in Tidore as Jafar Sadik. He married a female spirit, *jin*, named Nursafa, who is the ancestor (*gosimo*) of the Tidorese people (Probojo, 2000). This marriage is understood as an alliance between Islam and local tradition (*jin*). They are the forefathers of the native inhabitants of Tidore and represent Islam in Tidore. Being Muslim in

Tidore means accepting, revering, and believing in one's ancestor; this is never against Islam, Allah, or the Prophet. For the Tidorese, local tradition (*jin*) is as important and valuable as Islam itself. Thus, in Tidore, Islam must be accepted as having its origin in the spirit (*jin*), in the ancestor (*gosimo*). To be Tidorese is to be "Islamic" and Tidore is the home of Islam (Probojo, 2000).

The marriage of Jafar Sadik and Nursafa produced four sons, which is relevant to the rise of the four Sultanates of North Maluku, *Moloku Kie Raha*—Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo (now Halmahera), and Bacan. To this day, this is important for the historical and cultural understanding of the close political relationship between these four islands of North Maluku. Tidore, as the center of the four Sultanates, was also the center of 'Islam' (Probojo, 2000). The first Sultan of Tidore, Mohammad Nakel, commonly known as Sahyati, established several clans (*soa*). Each *soa* has certain social and political duties. Two important *soa* relevant to this study are *soa Sowohi* and *soa Joguru* (Probojo, 2000). *Soa Sowohi* consists of five families: Fola Sowohi, Toduhu, Mahifa, Tosofu Lamo, and Tosofu Kene. They represent the spirit (*jin*), that is, the ancestor (*gosimo*) of Tidore and the world. The *Sowohi* people understand themselves as the original inhabitants of Tidore. They live in the village of Gurabunga, at the foot of the sacred volcano Kiematubu—the navel of Tidore island. In the social structure of Tidore, the *Sowohi* is not subordinate to the Sultan in status and is closer to the *jin* than the Sultan himself. The people of Tidore accept him as having the highest authority from the *jin*. He is also the only person allowed to tend the Sultan's grave, which is considered sacred and magical. The *Sowohi* is seen as responsible for the sacred world, while the Sultan is responsible for the profane world (Probojo, 2000).

Regarding *Soa Joguru*, it also consists of five families: Togobu, Fabanyo, Jawa Toru, Jawa Konora, Jawa Yuke, and Doyado. The Joguru people claim that they were originally Arab migrants and traders who came to Tidore. They live on the outskirts of Soa Sio (the capital of Tidore). *Soa Joguru* is responsible for religious affairs in Tidore, namely for the interpretation of Islam and the understanding and teaching of Islam. They are traditional religious teachers, accepted even today as experts on Islam. During the time of the Sultanate of Tidore, the *Joguru* were responsible for the implementation of Islam outside the court, integrating Islamic jurisprudence into society (Probojo, 2000). Almost all Joguru are members of the tarekat (Sufi brotherhood) in Tidore. Even today, they continue to perform various tarekat rituals. However, the head of the tarekat brotherhood in Tidore is not a Joguru but a Sowohi; this fact proves that the *Sowohi* has power in Tidorese Islam (Probojo, 2000).

It was in this context that Tuan Guru grew up and was raised. He was born into an environment where Islam and local tradition blended

harmoniously, where the social structure recognized a balance between sacred authority (*Sowohi*) and formal religious authority (*Joguru*). As a nobleman, he would certainly have received religious education from the *Joguru*, while also understanding the position of the *Sowohi* in Tidorese cosmology. In academic discussions regarding the proposal to designate Tuan Guru a national hero, it was revealed that he has a genealogy connected to Syarif Hidayatullah or Sunan Gunung Jati of Cirebon or as “a descendant of Sunan Gunung Jati and the blessed Prophet Muhammad as well as a member of the Tidore royal family” (Morton, 2021; Tribunternate.com, 2024; Rakiep & Rakiep, 2021). This finding is anthropologically significant because it shows that the scholarly and kinship network of Nusantara Islam was already extensive—from West Java to North Maluku—long before Dutch colonialism consolidated its power.

The intellectual environment in Tidore at that time was exposed to the tradition of Islamic scholarship through a network of ulama connected to centers such as Ternate, Gresik, and even the Middle East. Tuan Guru grew up in this tradition, which would later become the main provision when he had to undergo exile in a foreign land. As Kottak (2015) states, culture is transmitted through observation, learning, and interaction with others. Tuan Guru absorbed the values, beliefs, and practices of Islam through a long process of enculturation in Tidore, and this cultural system became the “program” guiding his behavior and perceptions throughout his life (Geertz, 1973 cited in Kottak, 2015). This cultural program included not only the teachings of the Qur’an and hadith, but also an understanding of social structure (the roles of *soa Sowohi* and *soa Joguru*), cosmology (the meaning of Mount Kiematubu as a spiritual center), and ritual practices (*tahlil and ratib*) which he would later reproduce in Cape Town. In the tradition of the Sultanate of Tidore, Islamic education was given from an early age, especially among the nobility. Tuan Guru not only studied the Qur’an, but also the sciences of fiqh, tawhid, and tasawwuf—the scholarly traditions he would later reproduce in his monumental work *Ma’rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*.

Resistance and Exile: Colonial Politics and Deportation

Tuan Guru’s activities in Tidore were not only religious but also political. Together with his father, he was involved in resistance against the Dutch in Patani, Central Halmahera (Morton 2021: 209). Here we see Tuan Guru’s agency in the first field of meaning: agency-as-power. Ortner (2006) explains that agency-as-power is relevant to domination and resistance. People who are in positions of power “have” what might be considered “a lot of agency,” but the dominated also always have a certain capacity to exert some influence on the ways in which events unfold. Tuan Guru’s resistance led to his arrest and exile through a series of places: Batavia (Jakarta) and finally Cape Town in

1780. Tuan Guru and his three brothers—Abdurrauf, Badaruddin, and Nurul Imam—were initially arrested and taken to Ternate, Ambon, and Batavia (Jakarta) as part of the exile process by the VOC. From Batavia, according to Morton (2021), Tuan Guru was subsequently exiled to Cape Town, South Africa. On April 7, 1780, Tuan Guru arrived in Cape Town on the VOC ship *Zeepard* after 70 days of sailing, although there is no information available as to whether his two brothers accompanied him or not. Upon arrival, he was 68 years old (Morton, 2021; Fathurrohman, 2024). In Dutch archives, he was named in the bandit records, or *Baditen Rollen* (Fathurrohman, 2024). The VOC deliberately exiled him to the farthest place because he was accused of being a very dangerous figure who conspired with the British government.

This exile was part of the VOC's strategy to eliminate figures deemed to threaten colonial stability. As recorded by Rhoda (2021: 232), during the Dutch colonial period (1652-1795), more than 200 political prisoners were sent to Cape Town. They were *Orang Cayen*—men of political and economic influence. In addition, there were also *bandieten imams* (rebel imams) exiled for endangering VOC commercial interests. From an anthropological perspective, Tuan Guru's exile is an example of what is called "forced diaspora." Unlike voluntary migration, forced diaspora brings the trauma of losing one's homeland, but also opens possibilities for the emergence of new forms of identity in a new land. As expressed by Rakiep (2021: 175) in his poem:

"Grieve, bereavement and loss for the Archipelago
for the exile of a mighty son had disturbed the Order.
Unjustly banished to the Cape for fear of his might,
a missing link he had become, to serve the colonisers' plight.
Yes, as they've tried to put out the Light."

On Robben Island Prison: Writing the Qur'an from Memory and Agency-as-Projects

During his imprisonment on Robben Island—the same island that would later become Nelson Mandela's place of exile—Tuan Guru demonstrated extraordinary intellectual agency. During my visit to the Auwal Mosque on December 19, 2024, I wrote the following field notes:

"In a corner of the Auwal Mosque, I found the object that struck me most profoundly: an ancient manuscript carefully preserved in a glass case. It was the first handwritten Qur'an in South Africa. From my conversations with various South Africans, I learned that this manuscript was written entirely from memory by Tuan Guru, a scholar from Tidore, during his bitter imprisonment on Robben Island. I gazed intently at the pages of that manuscript, seeing the strokes of a hand born from the depths of a prison cell, from the

memory of a scholar whose spirit never dimmed. Here, within this simple room, I realized that the Auwal Mosque is more than just a place of worship—it has become a “living monument.” Extraordinarily, I think. In that era, while his body was imprisoned, Tuan Guru was able to write this manuscript from memory. This manuscript is a bridge connecting me, as an Indonesian, to the long history of struggle of our ancestors who brought Islam to the southern tip of Africa. I stood for quite some time in front of that glass case, absorbing the meaning of the journey that had brought me to this place.”

Tuan Guru wrote six manuscripts of the Qur'an from memory (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018). Morton (2021) affirms that in 1780, Tuan Guru wrote a Qur'anic manuscript from memory while on Robben Island. This was “his first public act of resistance”—designed to lighten the burden of the slaves and unite the broken people around him. One of these manuscripts is still preserved in the Auwal Mosque, Cape Town, serving as physical evidence of the transmission of Nusantara Islamic scholarship to South Africa (Republika, 2024). It is here that we see a shift from agency-as-power to agency-as-projects. Ortner (2006) explains that agency-as-projects is the most fundamental dimension of the idea of agency—about intentions, goals, and desires formulated in terms of culturally constituted “projects.” It is also what develops as power for the powerful, and what the less powerful seek to maintain and protect by creating or protecting sites, literally or metaphorically, “on the margin of power” (Ortner, 2006).

The act of writing the Qur'an from memory in prison has deep anthropological meaning. First, it proves that culture internalized through enculturation cannot be seized by colonial power. As Kottak (2015) states, culture is an attribute “acquired by man as a member of society”—and this knowledge is inherent in the individual, cannot be eliminated through physical violence or exile. Second, writing the Qur'an from memory is a form of cultural reproduction in a new space. Tuan Guru used culture to fulfill the psychological and emotional needs of the slaves suffering around him. Ortner (2006) raises an important question: how do people maintain culturally meaningful lives in situations of massive domination by powerful others, including slavery, colonialism, and racism? Tuan Guru answered this question through his actions. He maintained “life on the margin of power”—an arena where dominated actors maintain their own culturally constituted projects, to create or maintain a certain kind of cultural authenticity amidst the colonial situation (Ortner, 2006).

In addition to the Qur'an, Tuan Guru also wrote a monumental work entitled *Ma'rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman* (Knowledge of Islam and Faith), 613

pages thick (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018; Morton, 2018, 2021: 173, 179; Rakiep & Rakiep, 2021: 214). Haron and Arby (2021) note that this work was completed in 1781, containing knowledge of *kalam* (Ash'ari theology), *tawhid*, and *fiqh*. Rakiep and Rakiep (2021) call this book the “Compendium” which became the main guide for Muslims in Cape Town. From an anthropological perspective, this book is not merely a text, but a tool of knowledge transmission connecting generations of Cape Town Muslims with the scholarly tradition of Nusantara Islam.

Building Institutions: The First Madrasah and Mosque in South Africa

After being released in 1793, Tuan Guru immediately established the first madrasah in South Africa (Republika, 2024; Morton, 2018, 2021: 176, 179). This madrasah was founded in a warehouse owned by Coridon van Ceylon, a freed Muslim slave, on Dorp Street in the Bo-Kaap area. This madrasah became very popular among slaves and the black community interested in Islam. Salie (2021: 202) explains that the education he developed was based on Ash'ari educational philosophy, encompassing concepts such as destiny (*takdir*), will (*iradah*), piety (*takwa*), acquisition (*iktisab*), divine decree (*qadha*), and predestination (*qadhar*). Rhoda (2021: 235) notes that the opening of this madrasah marked “the dawn of public Islamic practice” in Cape Town. The success of this madrasah, according to Rhoda, was demonstrated by the complaint of the young minister Helperus Ritzema van Lier in 1786 that so many slaves were embracing Islam. By 1832, there were already twelve madrasahs operating in Cape Town—a remarkable growth.

The following year (1794), he established the Auwal Mosque—the first mosque in South Africa—on the same land (Morton, 2021: 180; Republika, 2024). Morton (2021) notes that although permission had been granted by Dutch Governor Jan Willem Janssens and British General James Henry Craig, the construction of the mosque faced many obstacles from local bureaucrats. However, Tuan Guru had already led the first public prayers at the Chiappini Street quarry in 1797. The Auwal Mosque was finally officially recognized in July 1804 after the Statute of India—which prohibited the practice of any faith other than the Dutch Reformed Church—was abolished. Within the structure of the Auwal Mosque, Tuan Guru became the first imam (Republika, 2024). Morton (2021) explains that he formed a structured administration by appointing himself as *qadi* (chief imam), as well as recruiting teachers, *imams*, *khatibs* (assistant imams), and *bilals* (mu'adhdhins). This model was adopted from the Javanese system, which was a variation of the traditional role of a *qadi*. He not only built the physical mosque but also built a community—creating a space where Muslim identity could be freely expressed amidst the Protestant Dutch colonial dominance.

The establishment of this madrasah and mosque is a perfect manifestation of what Ortner (2006) calls “serious games”—the social play of cultural goals organized within and around local power relations. Tuan Guru did not merely survive but actively built institutions that became the foundation for the Muslim community in Cape Town. He played his own serious games amidst colonial pressure. Kottak (2015) notes that “culture is not an attribute of individuals per se, but of individuals as members of groups. Culture is transmitted in society.” The madrasah established by Tuan Guru became a space for new cultural transmission in Cape Town. The slaves who came from various corners of the world not only learned Islamic teachings but also internalized the system of meanings and symbols brought by Tuan Guru from Tidore. In this process, a new identity was born, later known as the “Cape Muslim”—a hybrid identity blending elements from the Malay Archipelago, Africa, and Europe (Morton, 2021).

Tuan Guru’s Teachings and Educational Philosophy

Tuan Guru’s teachings can be traced in his magnum opus, *Ma’rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*. Salie (2021: 201-202) summarizes the core of his teachings as follows:

1. Muslims must make the word of Allah, the Qur’an, the foundation of their existence, and make the Prophet Muhammad, his family, and his companions their exemplars in the “world of the infidel.”
2. Allah as Necessity (*al-Wujūb*) is Oneness (*al-Wahdāniyyah*), Omnipotent, and All-Powerful. His non-existence cannot be conceived, and He has no partners.
3. Allah wills good, not evil. Injustice (such as slavery) is human error.
4. Humans possess free will only to the extent that they choose among possibilities willed by Allah. All human acts are willed by Allah, but humans are responsible for those acts because they have internalized and “acquired” them (*iktisab*).
5. The ultimate destination of Muslims is the hereafter, as this world is only a “stepping stone” to the next life.
6. Faith is the heart of religion and expresses itself through various modes, while the construction of a self-funded mosque constitutes the center of the Muslim community.
7. Supplications and amulets contain magical elements that are Islamic in character and constitute an integral part of the faith.
8. Cultural weapons such as the Javanese dagger (*kris* or ‘keris’), sword, and shield symbolize warfare, discernment between truth and falsehood, defense, rank, status, and character.

Shafiq Morton adds that in the *Ma'rifat* there are various prayers and litanies, including *Hizb al-Wiqaya* (The Litany of Protection) from Ibn Arabi, *Hizb al-Bahr* (The Litany of the Ocean) and *Hizb al-Barr* (The Litany of Benefit) from Imam Abul Hasan al-Shadhili (2021: 182, 183). These prayers provided spiritual strength for the oppressed slaves. Interestingly, Shafiq Morton notes that Tuan Guru also included prayers of resistance in his book, such as:

O Allah (may You) protect me from every devil, every ruler and every human being...from the evil of the devil and the ruler...That the oppressor, tyrant or compeller who wrongs me tastes the misfortune of Allah's punishment...

And let them taste, O One who harms, O One who causes death, an exemplary punishment, worry, and disappearance. So root out the people who have oppressed...

And I seek refuge in you, O Lord. From the tyranny of every tyrant, and the injustice of every unjust one, and the envy of the envious one, and the schemes of every scheming one, and the oppression of every oppressor ... (2021: 183)

These prayers, according to Morton (2021), were forms of subtle resistance that the colonial authorities would never read because they were too lazy or too arrogant to learn Malay or Arabic. Here we see how the two faces of agency—agency-as-power (symbolic resistance) and agency-as-projects (Islamic teaching)—merge into one. Ortnner (2006) emphasizes that the distinction between these two faces of agency is largely heuristic; in practice, they are often inseparable.

Ritual Practices: Tahlil and Ratib

Understanding Tidore's religious traditions is also crucial to understanding the background of Tuan Guru. Probojo (2000) explains that the Tidore people distinguish between local traditional rituals in which ancestors are "contacted" and revered through trance and ritual prayer, and rituals without trance. The latter rituals consist solely of recitation of the Qur'an. *Tahlil* and *ratib* are recitation rituals. There are two types of recitation in Tidore: partial recitation of the Qur'an and secret recitation, not from the Qur'an, but in Arabic. The ritual prayer of *tahlil* is nearly identical in its implementation; both are night recitations, or evening prayers. The practice of *tahlil* as a ritual prayer has a unique function. As a ceremony, it is able to unite both 'traditional' and 'modern' members of the village. *Tahlil* is not 'traditional' because this prayer ritual is not performed to contact ancestors, but it is also not 'modern' in the sense of being completely new and extraordinary for the villagers.

It is interesting to note that the participants in *tahlil* are almost all civil servants in the village. The civil servants are eager to come to *tahlil*, but not to ancestor worship rituals. For them, *tahlil* is more acceptable to Islam, in the sense that trance plays no part in the ceremony. This is strongly related to the idea that everything connected with trance is primitive, or at least not modern, and also not Islamic. It is very easy to ascertain in Tidore that *tahlil* is 'the ritual for the civil servants,' whereas *gahi sou* or *dabus* or *salai jin* are 'the ritual for the farmers and the fishermen' (Probojo, 2000). Kottak (2015) explains that "a symbol is something verbal or nonverbal, within a particular language or culture, that comes to stand for something else." The practice of *tahlil*, for example, is not merely a series of prayers; it is a symbol connecting Tidore Muslims with the scholarly tradition of the Archipelago. Although the recitation may be the same, its meaning can adapt to the local context. In Tidore, *tahlil* is understood as a "ritual for civil servants" that is more acceptable to modern Islam, different from trance rituals for farmers and fishermen (Probojo, 2000). In Cape Town, similar practices may take on new meaning as markers of communal identity amidst colonial dominance. Kottak (2015: 5) affirms that "culture is integrated not simply through its dominant economic activities and related social patterns but also through sets of values, ideas, symbols, and judgments." The ritual practices brought by Tuan Guru from Tidore became part of the value system integrating the Cape Town Muslim community. He created social cohesion amidst a plural society consisting of various ethnic backgrounds.

Cultural Legacy: From Mandela's Pilgrimage to the Discourse on National Hero

Tuan Guru's legacy did not cease in the 18th century. It continues to live through social practices and collective memory across generations, both in South Africa and Indonesia. Kottak (2015) explains that "today's parents were yesterday's children. If they grew up in North America, they absorbed certain values and beliefs that were passed down from generation to generation." The same thing happened in the Cape Town Muslim community. The values, beliefs, and practices taught by Tuan Guru at the madrasah and mosque continue to be transmitted from generation to generation, albeit with certain adaptations according to the context of the times.

In South Africa, Tuan Guru's grave at the Tana Baru cemetery complex in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, has become an important pilgrimage site. Former President Nelson Mandela, after his release from prison in 1990, reportedly visited this grave as the first location he visited and described Tuan Guru as "one of the best sons of Africa" (Tribunternate.com, 2025; Morton, 2021: Pandor, 2021: 9). Mandela's action was symbolic: he honored Tuan Guru as

an inspiration for the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. Tuan Guru, for Mandela, was part of South Africa's "national struggle." Haron and Arby (2021) note that the South African Government has designated Tuan Guru a National Hero. His name is also immortalized as the name of one of the bridges in Cape Town. Rakiep and Rakiep (2021) add that Nur-el-Erefaan Rakiep, a fourth-generation descendant of Tuan Guru, visited Tidore in 1993 to re-establish family ties severed for centuries.

Research on Tuan Guru continues to develop. Haron and Arby (2021) document various studies, from Gerrie Lubbe (1980s) who wrote Tuan Guru's biography, Achmat Davids who analyzed his manuscripts and educational philosophy, to Shafiq Morton who wrote the biography *From the Spice Islands to Cape Town: The Life and Times of Tuan Guru* (2018). Bunyamin Marasabessy and Auwais Rafudeen have also produced various publications on Tuan Guru's thought. In Indonesia, especially in North Maluku, the discourse to propose Tuan Guru as a National Hero is strengthening. Indonesian Minister of Culture Dr. Fadli Zon, during his visit to the Kedaton of the Sultanate of Tidore in November 2025, expressed his support for the national hero proposal for Tuan Guru (Tribunternate.com, 2025; Cermin Halmahera, 2025). Governor of North Maluku Sherly Laos and Mayor of Tidore Muhammad Sinen have also committed to processing this proposal. In December 2024, three researchers from the Negeri Rempah Foundation—Yanuardi Syukur (Universitas Khairun), Abdul Kadir Ali (Universitas Nuku), and Irma Zahrotunnisa—conducted a visit to Cape Town to trace Tuan Guru's footsteps (Indopos, 2024; Eljabar.com, 2024). This visit resulted in plans for further academic study to support the national hero proposal. In an online discussion held in December 2024, various parties agreed on the importance of a comprehensive study of Tuan Guru, including tracing manuscripts in Cirebon (related to Sunan Gunung Jati's genealogy), studying the work *Ma'rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman*, and producing a documentary film (Sinarmalut.com, 2024).

In a broader context, figures like Tuan Guru also serve as reminders of the importance of reconstructing national historiography. As emphasized by Professor Susanto Zuhdi: "we must not get trapped in the romanticism of memory, but forget to act, not record, and become a nation that always loses" (Ruray, 2023). The figure of Enrique of Tidore, who became Magellan's interpreter on the first circumnavigation of the world, is a turning point for Indonesia and North Maluku, particularly Tidore, to reformulate national historiography, where Tidore was a starting point of classical globalization in its time, which has so far eluded the nation's collective memory. The glorification constructed so far has only belonged to European sailors where colonialism began in the Archipelago (Ruray, 2023). Now is the right time to

position Indonesia as the center and mother of spices of the world, where the history of the archipelago was shaped by the spice factor (Ruray, 2023). Nelson Mandela's pilgrimage to Tuan Guru's grave after his release from prison became a symbolic moment connecting the struggles of two figures from two different eras. Mandela, as a symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle, recognized Tuan Guru as part of South Africa's "national struggle." This shows how cultural heritage can transcend ethnic and religious boundaries, becoming the shared property of a nation. In Indonesia, the discourse to propose Tuan Guru as a National Hero shows that his legacy is also recognized in his homeland—a process of "symbolic repatriation" returning the memory of Tuan Guru to the narrative of Indonesian national history.

Reflection: Tuan Guru and "Serious Games" in the Land of Exile

From the entire analysis above, we can see that Tuan Guru's life journey perfectly illustrates Ortner's concept of "serious games" and the two faces of agency. Ortner (2006) emphasizes that social life in the serious games perspective is seen as something actively played, oriented toward culturally constituted goals and projects, and involving both routine practices and intentional action. Tuan Guru, in his exile in Cape Town, played his own serious games. On one hand, he demonstrated agency-as-power—resistance to colonialism through prayers of resistance and the symbolic act of writing the Qur'an in prison. On the other hand, he demonstrated agency-as-projects—pursuing meaningful cultural projects: reproducing the scholarly tradition of Nusantara Islam, establishing madrasahs and mosques, and building community.

Ortner (2006) raises an important question: how do people maintain culturally meaningful lives in situations of massive domination by powerful others? Tuan Guru answered by creating what Ortner calls "life on the margin of power." In Bo-Kaap, he built a space where the culture of Nusantara Islam could be reproduced and transmitted, despite being amidst Protestant Dutch colonial dominance. Ortner (2006) also emphasizes that agency is never something in itself, but is always part of the process of making and remaking larger social and cultural formations. Tuan Guru, through his actions, not only built the Muslim community in Cape Town but also reshaped social and cultural formations in the land of exile. The madrasah and mosque he established became the foundation for the "Cape Muslim" identity that endures to this day.

Kottak (2015) affirms that "anthropologists also accept the doctrine that was called in the nineteenth century 'the psychic unity of man.' This means that although individuals differ in their emotional and intellectual tendencies and capacities, all human populations have equivalent capacities for culture."

Tuan Guru proved that the capacity for culture is not lost when one is forcibly moved to a foreign land. Precisely in conditions of exile, that capacity can produce extraordinary new cultural creations. The “message” that Tuan Guru brought to Cape Town was the entire system of meanings and symbols of Nusantara Islam that he had internalized through enculturation in Tidore. This message not only survived but also developed and adapted, creating a new cultural reality that still lives today in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town. From an anthropological perspective, this is the clearest evidence of the power of culture: that it can survive, adapt, and thrive even in the most inhospitable conditions.

Conclusion

Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam is a complex figure namely as a Tidore prince, political prisoner, ulama, educator, and symbol of struggle. Through the analysis in this article using Sherry Ortner’s theoretical framework of “serious games” and the concept of enculturation from cultural anthropology, three main dimensions of his contribution have been revealed. First of all, as a diasporic subject, he transformed from a Tidore nobleman into “Tuan Guru”—a recognized religious authority figure in the land of exile. His life journey from Tidore to Batavia and finally Cape Town represents the complexity of encounters between local identity, colonial politics, and individual agency. The enculturation process he experienced since childhood in Tidore shaped his learning capacity as a cultural being (Kottak, 2015), which he later reproduced in the new context of South Africa. The understanding of Tidorese Islam that integrates local tradition (*jin*) with Islamic teachings (Probojo, 2000) became the foundation for his tolerant and adaptive approach in the land of exile.

Secondly, as an agent of knowledge transmission, he demonstrated the two faces of agency identified by Ortner (2006): agency-as-power and agency-as-projects. Agency-as-power is evident in his symbolic resistance to colonialism—the prayers of resistance in the *Ma’rifat* book that colonial authorities would never read, as well as the act of writing the Qur’an from memory in prison as “his first public act of resistance” (Morton, 2021). Agency-as-projects is evident in the reproduction of Nusantara Islamic scholarly tradition in South Africa through his monumental works: six Qur’anic manuscripts written from memory on Robben Island prison (Morton 2021: 178), the theological work *Ma’rifat al-Islam wa al-Iman* of 613 pages (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018), and the establishment of the first madrasah and mosque in Cape Town (Republika, 2024). These madrasah and mosque became the foundation for the Muslim community in Cape Town that continues to endure to this day (Rhoda, 2021: 235). Ritual traditions such as

tahlil that he brought from the Archipelago (Probojo, 2000) became an effective medium for knowledge transmission among slaves and the Cape Town community.

Moreover, as a cultural legacy, he became a symbol honored across generations and across nations. Nelson Mandela's pilgrimage to his grave after release affirms his position in the narrative of South Africa's struggle (Morton, 2021). Ortner (2006) emphasizes that agency is always part of the process of making and remaking larger social and cultural formations. Tuan Guru, through his actions, not only built the Muslim community in Cape Town but also reshaped social and cultural formations in the land of exile—a process that continues to this day. Academic research continues to develop, with various studies documenting his life, thought, and legacy (Haron & Arby, 2021). In Indonesia, the discourse to propose him as a National Hero, supported by the Minister of Culture, the Governor of North Maluku, and the Mayor of Tidore, shows that recognition as a hero is not only appropriate but also urgent (Tribunternate.com, 2025; Cermin Halmahera, 2025).

From an anthropological perspective, Tuan Guru teaches that identity is never singular and static. It is a product of continuous negotiation between past heritage, present pressures, and future projections. As Ortner (2006) affirms, social actors are always involved in, and can never act outside, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed. Tuan Guru, although uprooted from his birthplace, remained connected to Tidore through memory, knowledge, and cultural practices he carried with him. In Tidore, he was a prince. In Cape Town, he became "Tuan Guru." In the eyes of history, he is a bridge connecting two nations, two continents, and two different scholarly traditions. As noted by Kottak (2015), religion unites as well as divides. Participation in shared rites can affirm and thus maintain the solidarity of a group of adherents. Tuan Guru, through the madrasah and mosque he established, created new solidarity amidst the plural society of Cape Town. He also showed that Islam, as a global religion, can adapt to various peoples and cultures without losing its essence (Kottak, 2015). In Bo-Kaap, Islam hybridized with Malay Archipelago, African, and European cultures, creating the unique "Cape Muslim" identity that endures to this day (Morton, 2018, 2021).

Last but not least, further research is needed to trace more deeply Tuan Guru's extant works, record oral traditions about him in Tidore and Halmahera, and understand how younger generations in both countries interpret his legacy. But one thing is certain that Tuan Guru's footprints prove that from the small islands in the eastern Archipelago, an unexpected global influence was born—a reminder that history is never linear, and that the "exiled" often become the most significant agents of change. In Ortner's

(2006) language, they are actors who maintain their own “cultural projects,” creating “cultural life on the margin of power” that becomes the foundation for future generations. Reinforcing Ruray’s (2023) argument, it is fitting that Tidore should obtain historical dignity and justice in the map of national historiography, and the moment has now arrived.

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