

The *Ratib al-Haddad*: Tradition and Transition of a Text-based Ritual in East and South Africa

Anne K. Bang¹

¹Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, NORWAY

anne.bang@cmi.no

The *Ratib al-Haddad* is a *dhikr* – a “remembrance of God” performed by Muslim Sufis. It is recited communally in mosques or private homes, by men and women, to express devotion and is thus a performed ritual. It is also a text, composed by the Hadrami poet and Sufi Abd Allah b. Alawi al-Haddad (1634-1719). Historically, Hadramawt has been a land of emigration, and migrants took the *ratib* to the shores of the Indian Ocean, including to East and Southern Africa. The *Ratib al-Haddad* thus conveys and expresses spiritual, social and cultural value for people in locations as diverse as Tarim (Yemen), Antsiranana (Diego Suarez, Madagascar) and Maputo.

This paper aims trace the spread of the *Ratib al-Haddad* to three locations: Lamu, Zanzibar and Cape Town. The discussion focuses on modes of transmission and local adaptations, as well as social change over the past century and the ways in which this influenced adaptations and changes in the ritual. It also discusses how the recitation of the *Ratib*, along with other practices, has increasingly come under criticism from Salafi/Wahhabi-oriented groups and the inherent conflict between individual adherence to religious regulations and emotional and communal expressions of devotion.

This paper also raises the questions as to what factors influence the form and meaning a specific ritual holds in specific locations at specific points in time. Interpreting the *Ratib al-Haddad* as both text and performed ritual, this discussion will be based on field work in Lamu and Zanzibar, as well as the textual tradition that follows the *Ratib*. What causes ritual adaptations and what factors influence the meanings and symbolic values attached to a ritual? The reverse may also be asked: What factors cause a ritual to be transmitted un-altered over time and space?