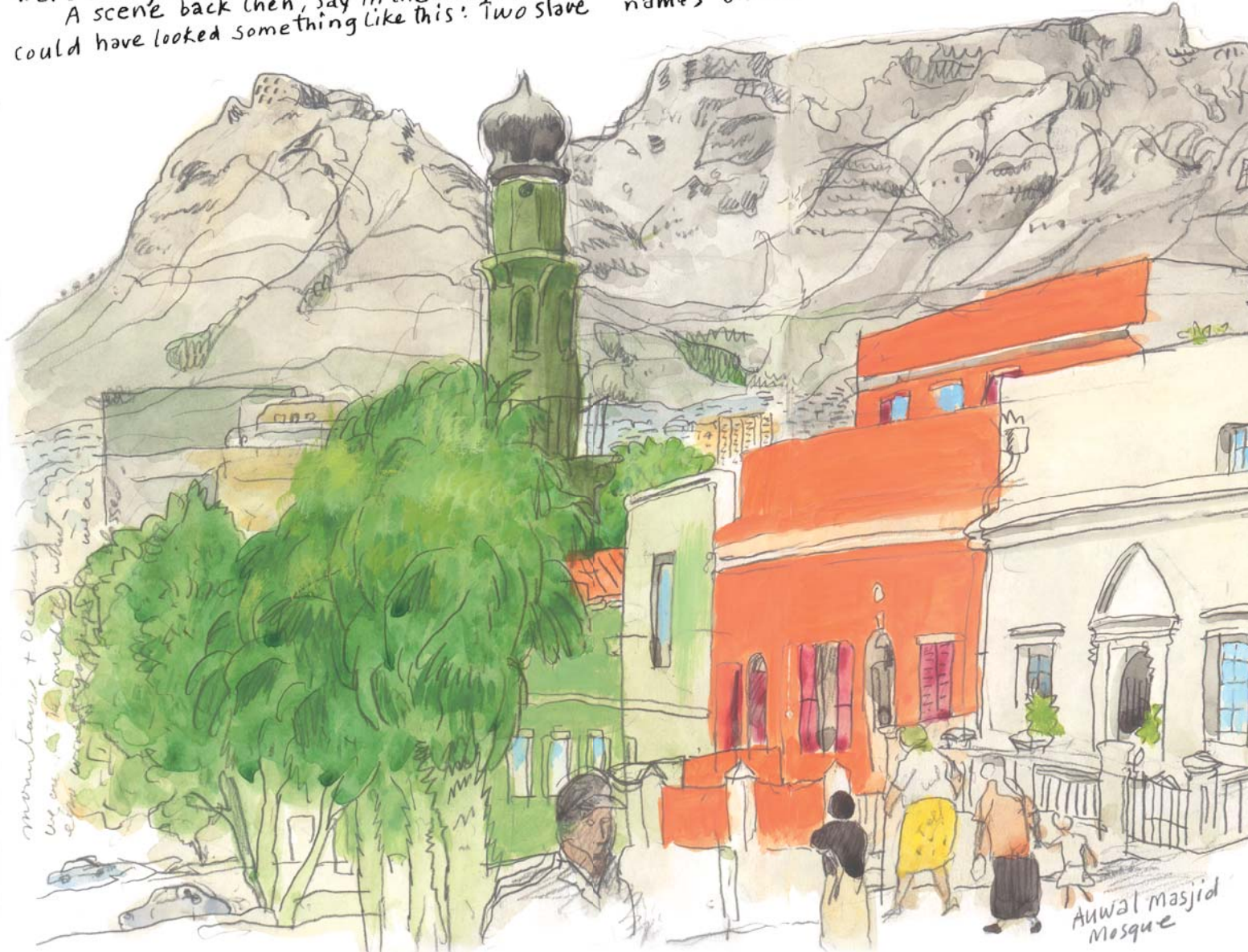


When Cape Town began as a resupply staging post, Protestant Holland was at war with Catholic Spain, and the Dutch Reformed Church was the only denomination allowed in Cape Town—at least visibly. But Lutheran Christians built a "barn" that was only later remodeled into the church it had always been, and Muslims prayed in their homes. Their situation was more complicated because Muslim leaders and teachers wrote in Arabic, and people today say the Muslim slaves (who were often called "Malay" because they came from the East) studied hardest of all to prove their value to their masters, even though they were doing it in secret.

A scene back then, say in the early 1700's, could have looked something like this: Two slave

boys of Malay origin are on their way to the madrasa, or school, but they can't let on that's where they are going. The boys are barefoot, for slaves were not allowed to wear shoes. Their clothes are one notch up from rags. They hold a piece of paper, because slaves always had to have in their possession a written reason to be on the street. A Dutch soldier steps in front of the two and asks where they are going. He examines their paper, which is in Arabic. Although he can't read it, he sends them on their way because Malay slaves are expensive, and he doesn't want to anger their owner by making them late. When the boys enter the schoolhouse, the teacher tells one to sit over there next to Africa, and the other to sit next to January Batavia. Slaves were given names that reflected where they came from



and in which month they arrived; slaves born at the Cape were often given Biblical names by their owner. The boys would study the alphabet, the Qur'an or arithmetic. But they did go to school, even as slaves. At least some did. That's how people here say it was.

"I'm not an imam. I only assist. Our imam is not well and the committee asked me to stand in. I have the time. I'm a plasterer by trade. I fell in Durban when a scaffold broke, and I was injured. The orthopedic surgeon said I had to have a hip operation, which has been done.
"I was born in District 6. We moved here in 1945. We were given green ID cards from the government that identified us as 'Cape Malay'; one of the colored groups. I never believed I was 'colored.'"

Mohammad Faldil Soeker

"The Auwal Mosque we are in became a reality in 1794 thanks to Prince Abdullah Kadi Abu Salaam, later called Tuan Guru. In Arabic, 'auwal' means 'first'. Tuan Guru is a person on a high spiritual level.
"There was a woman here yesterday. She asked if I had seen a film on TV about Abraham Lincoln, and she asked if I knew the poem about the death of the American president. I said, 'Yes, I know that poem,' and promptly began—
Oh Captain! My Captain!
our fearful trip is done;

The ship has weather'd every rack,
the prize we sought is won; ...
And I recited the rest for her.
She couldn't believe it, at my age. I thought she was going to faint. (Laughs). I had memorized the poem in grammar school. I love history and poetry. Tuan Guru wrote the whole Qur'an from memory while imprisoned on Robben Island. What a memory that was!"

