Islam in the Public Sphere in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

The Islamic presence in South Africa dates over three centuries. Islam has mostly been the private affair of Muslims who lived in harmony with non-Muslims in “Indian” or “Coloured” public spaces, and engaged with them in political struggles against various White minority regimes. Islam has been brought into the national public sphere more manifestly in democratic South Africa. The activities of the vigilante group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) in the Western Cape, 9/11 and the “War on Terror”, and heightened salience of Islam as a religious and cultural force in the lives of ordinary Muslims have increased its public visibility to a level disproportionate to population numbers. The veil, beard, dress are all visible denoters of Muslims identity. Boundaries are being (re)constructed around various points of contact: between men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, Muslims and the state, Islam and secularism, and so on. This drawing of boundaries is not a movement of protest but one aimed at reinforcing religio-cultural identity as part of a broader process of religious revival. This paper explores the intense exposure and reaction of the small Muslim community to the public gaze. It also examines divisions among Muslims on a range of issues, calling into question the notion of “Muslim community”.

The author would like to thank Sephis, the Institute of International History, Amsterdam, for a grant to carry out research for this paper.

Journal for Islamic Studies, Vol.27, 2007, pp. 116-149
The activities of the vigilante group People against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) in the Western Cape, 9/11 and the “War on Terror”, and the heightened salience of Islam as a social, religious, and cultural force in the lives of ordinary South African Muslims, has increased Islam’s public visibility to a level disproportionate to population numbers. The veil, beard, Middle Eastern dress, mosques, and religious schools, used to denote Islamic identity, are inadvertently setting Muslims apart as the ‘Other’. South Africa’s Muslims became directly connected to the global War on Terror when Feroz Ganchi and Zubair Ismail of Johannesburg were arrested in Gujarat, India, in July 2004 allegedly attending an al-Qaeda camp and planning to bomb key installations and tourist sites in South Africa (IOL 23 August 2004); the “kidnap” and disappearance of Pakistani national Khalid Rashid from his Estcourt home in the middle of the night by heavily armed police and immigration officials in October 2005 ([Pretoria News](https://www.iol.co.za), 29 August 2006); an October 2004 CIA report listing South Africa as one of the countries where a new tier of foreign al-Qaeda leaders was hiding, one that depended on local Muslim support ([Sunday Independent](https://www.iol.co.za), 3 October 2004); and sensational headlines like “SA terrorism links have been found – Nqakula” ([Cape Times](https://www.iol.co.za), 24 August 2005) and “Al-Qaeda operatives used SA as a base” ([The Star](https://www.iol.co.za), 27 August 2005). Though without foundation, such headlines and incidents suggested that the “War on Terror” had suddenly become a potential risk to South Africa’s national security.

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2 While the division of people into biological groups differentiated by colour (“race”), to which we can attribute specific features, has no scientific validity or explanatory value in social science, these categories have salience in everyday life and are used in this paper without inverted commas. ‘Indian’ describes Muslims whose ancestors arrived from South Asia from 1860; ‘African’ is used to describe individuals whose mother-tongue is a language indigenous to Africa, and who are described in Census 2001 as ‘Black African’; while ‘Malay’ refers to those of the Muslim faith who are part of the category ‘Coloured’ in the Census.
engaged with them in political struggle against various oppressive White minority regimes. A combination of local and global factors has brought Islam into the national public sphere more manifestly in democratic South Africa. This paper explores the intense exposure of the small and heterogeneous Muslim community to the public gaze. Rapid economic, social, and political changes have been fashioning and re-fashioning Muslim identities during the past decade. The geographical and non-geographical spaces (radio, sermons, internet, newspapers, mosques, madrasahs, NGO’s, television, government debates) that provide the location for these identities are examined, as is the transformation in the political attitude of Muslims. At the time of majority rule in 1994, like many Indians and Coloureds, Muslims feared the “Black Peril” and most voted against the ANC. Yet, prior to the 2004 elections, mosques across the country were urging Muslims to vote for the ANC. What underpinned this transformation? In what ways is this linked (or not linked) to local and global factors? This paper also analyses the Muslim embrace of ‘liberated zones’ that incorporate education, finance, media, and entertainment. To what extent are these independent of the nation state and what will be the long-term consequences? The public sphere, after all, is an important realm of socialisation in democracies. It is an arena where individuals can transcend claims of kinship and community and negotiate social bonds that underscore citizenship and hence nationhood.

The public sphere, as used in this paper, refers to “the organized and concretized common space of a given population. It is clearly separate from private space (also well organized and concretized), which allows individuals and families to live their religions privately”. Blandine Chelini-Pont, 2005, “Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities.” Brigham Young University Law Review. Retrieved June 31, 2006, from http://www.findarticles.com/p/search?tb=art&qt=%22Chelini-Point2C+Blandine%22.
Islam is a minority religion in South Africa. Muslims, numbering 654,064, comprised just 1.46% of South Africa’s population of 44.8 million in 2001. This included 74,701 African, 8,409 White, 27,493 Indian, and 296,023 Coloured Muslims. Statistics do not reflect the qualitative experience of being Muslim in South Africa. Residential concentration in racially segregated urban areas meant that many Indian and Coloured Muslims lived in proximity to other Muslims, while the infrastructure necessary to practice Islam, such as mosques, madrasahs, cemeteries, and butcheries, have forged a strong sense of being Muslim. Muslims are deeply divided by race, doctrine, language, class, and ethnicity. Geographically, Indians are concentrated in Gauteng and KZN, most Coloureds live in the Western Cape, while Africans are scattered across townships.

Class differences are stark because of differences in education, unemployment, and income of the employed. The average per capita income of Indian Muslims was R2,163 per month, Malays R1,262, and Africans R935. Work status is influenced by level of education and language. Africans were at a huge disadvantage in both respects. In the 20+ age group, 13.90% of Africans had no schooling, as against 5.23% Indians, and 2.29% Malays. While 35.94% of Indians completed grade 12, only 24.67% of Africans and 24.17% of Malays did likewise. The percentage with university degrees was 7.72% of Indians, 3.09% of Africans and 2.07% of Malays. Language is another marker of differentiation. While 92.70% of Indians regarded English as their first language and the divide was roughly equal between English and Afrikaans among Coloureds; only 18.61% of Africans considered English their first language. Given the importance of English in the economy, language proficiency has given Indians an important advantage. Despite this diversity we can speak of “South African Muslims” because this identity is relevant in the lived experience of the people concerned. Muslims comprise a monolith to outsiders. Grillo refers to this as “tranethnicisation”. By this he meant that “Muslim” was a “supertribal” category, an imagined coalescence of people across race, class, and ethnicity, who are drawn together by religion because the state
recognises religious identity, and partly as a response to global crises in Kashmir, Chechnya, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The construction of this transethnic identity is a dialectical process involving both how Muslims see themselves and how others see them.⁴

**People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD)**

Islam was thrust into the national public gaze when the issues of gangs and drugs gave birth to People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), a movement that attracted international attention with the gruesome murder of gang leader Rashaad Staggie in August 1996 (*Sunday Tribune*, 11 August 1996). PAGAD’s challenge to the state dominated media headlines over the next five years. The organisation attracted many ‘reformed’ drug addicts and former gang members but also provoked the opposition of many, including Muslims, and attracted special attention from the state, to the extent that a confidential government report considered “the right wing Boeremag and Muslim fundamentalists in PAGAD a threat to South Africa’s security” (*Natal Mercury*, 19 June 2000). PAGAD initially gained community support because its call for government to eradicate gangs and drugs resonated with many ordinary people. Abolition of the death penalty, tighter rules governing police behaviour, and perceived corruption in police services contributed to the perception among many South Africans that crime was soaring.⁵

PAGAD’s tactics included spectacular public performances and militant rhetoric. The fact that members met outside the Gatesville Mosque, the language of meetings was dominated by Islamic discourse, slogans, and rhetoric, Qur’anic verses of struggle reverberated at the end of meetings, marchers wore Islamic dress and displayed an array of firearms, reinforced the label “Muslim Movement”.⁶ Due to its Muslim

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face, police and media mistakenly sought explanations for PAGAD’s rise in global Islamic ‘fundamentalism’. PAGAD was very much a localised South African organisation. Support for it was largely a function of local social and economic problems. PAGAD waged war on drug lords and gangsterism, which were of concern to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The estimated 137 gangs in the Cape Peninsula, with their approximately 100,000 members, are responsible for around 60 per cent of violent crime, and a large proportion of muggings and break-ins to houses and cars (Mail and Guardian 2 August 2002). The impulses that led to the formation of PAGAD date to the mid-1980s with the formation of anti-drug community organisations in Salt River, Bo-Kaap, Surrey Estate, Athlone, and Wynberg.

PAGAD’s activities spawned unprecedented levels of violence on the Cape Flats. Bombings and shootings became common as gang members embarked on a systematic programme of killing Muslim businessmen and professionals who supported PAGAD, while petrol bombs were hurled at several mosques during 1996 and 1997. A popular slogan among gang members was ‘one shopkeeper, one bullet’. Ordinary people outside the regular circuits of gang violence were drawn into the conflict. The texture of social life and civil society was altered as PAGAD’s actions created a ‘reign of fear’ among Muslim opponents as well. There was a grenade attack on Sheikh Nazeem Mohamed of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), death threats against Imam Sa’dullah Khan, and a pipe bomb attack on

the home of Ebrahim Moosa. Khan and Moosa subsequently emigrated to the USA.\textsuperscript{11}

Police were ambivalent when killings were confined to gang members, but actively pursued PAGAD when the pipe-bombing campaign from 1998 targeted restaurants, police stations and courts in White Cape Town but achieved little success.\textsuperscript{12} There were 600 cases of unsolved urban terrorism by 1999 because of lack of evidence or seriously flawed investigations (\textit{Cape Times} 12 April 1999). From 2000, the police focused on neutralising PAGAD by arresting its key leaders. The highest-ranking member of PAGAD, Abdus-Salaam Ebrahim, was the first to be charged with terrorism when he was accused of orchestrating bomb attacks (\textit{Cape Times} 6 October 2000). The state relentlessly pursued the entire leadership through lengthy and expensive legal channels. Key figures were apprehended and eventually a number were found guilty and incarcerated. The strategy of targeting the leadership without directly seeking to eliminate it, stalled PAGAD’s momentum and thwarted its ability to carry through campaigns of civil disobedience.

\textbf{‘Turning to the Core’: Debating “Authentic” Islam}

While PAGAD was grabbing the headlines, the lives of large numbers of Muslims were transforming peacefully, arguably even more fundamentally, as Islam became salient in every aspect of their lives. The legalisation of abortion and pornography offended many Muslims. Together, affirmative action policies, the African Renaissance agenda of the ANC, the impact of globalisation, and a discourse of conservative religious purity from \textit{\textsuperscript{7}}ulam\textsuperscript{C} critical of practices deemed “culture” and “custom”, triggered important behaviour modifications, strengthening religious identity and social organisation in the process. Among Indian Muslims there has been a striking growth in personal piety, which includes, for example, a substantial increase in the number of women covering their faces with veils; greater concern with dietary ‘regulations’; rooting televisions from many homes; and a dramatic growth in Muslim

\textsuperscript{12} Pillay, ‘Experts, Terrorists, Gangsters’, p. 308.
schools as parents shun secular education, especially for girls. The challenge of being part of a secular state while remaining oriented towards Islamic institutions is made easier by the South African constitution’s principle of neutrality, which respects freedom of religion. As Salvatore points out, “identities do matter for public participation, … all identities, including religious ones, are a legitimate platform for individuals and citizens to raise claims, on condition that they do not impinge on the identities and claims of other citizens”. Oliver Roy refers to this pursuit of distinctive rights as the creation of ‘liberated zones’, that is, spaces where the ideals of a future society can be implemented without being antagonistic to the state.

The creation of such alternative institutions has given Muslims greater visibility in the national public sphere as new ritual emblems and patterns of consumption and commoditisation set them apart from non-Muslims. Dietary concern, for example, is changing consumption patterns because fewer Muslims eat in restaurants owned by non-Muslims. This has led to a burgeoning of Muslim-owned eating-places, many of which partition areas for women. Piety is “big business” with the emergence of Muslim singers, authors, businesses, Hajj and Umrah-organising enterprises, game parks, and other activities resulting from the desire to practice “authentic” Islam. The attitude of many parents has changed towards education. Girls are either sent to Muslim schools, where the majority of students are Muslim and which combine secular and religious education, or Islamic schools. Islamic schools differ from traditional madrasahs in that students attend all day and the syllabus comprises of Arabic, Urdu, and Islamic jurisprudence, supplemented by English and mathematics to grade seven. Students focus entirely on Islamic subjects in grades eight to twelve and cannot transfer to secular schools.


There is recognition of difference at many levels. At the Johannesburg International Airport, an entire floor is set aside for Muslims to meet family, relax, and pray before embarking for Hajj. Prisons have established Muslim Boards to conduct Salāḥ, advise on diet, and minister to prisoners. The application of Islamic principles in finance and investment has also expanded. The *Albaraka Bank* and *Oasis* have developed a range of *Shariah*-compliant investment and financial products. They do not invest in the shares of companies involved in gambling, non-halal food, alcohol, or interest transactions.¹⁶ Commercial banks like *Standard Bank* and *First National Bank* have also introduced *Shariah*-compliant financial and investment products. The demise of PAGAD opened new spaces in the everyday life of Muslims in the Cape. Emerging trends include the growth of neo-Sufi groupings such as the Alawi and Tijanniyya and stronger emphasis on religious education for children, as reflected in the growth of private Muslim schools, and after-school and weekend religious classes.

*Shariah*-based Muslim Personal Law (MPL) is an important area of contestation, especially with regard to the rights of women. The South African Law Commission (SALC) released a draft Bill on Muslim marriages in December 2001 which journalist Khadija Magardie regarded as “progressive”. She warned, however that ‘while it is good news for some, its contents are likely to have some quarters sighing into their three fists long beards’ (*Mail and Guardian* 7 December 2001). She was referring to the fact that Muslim judicial bodies rejected aspects of the bill such as the requirement that a man wanting to marry a second time had to obtain the permission of a civil court. *Al-Haq* of Port Elizabeth, for example, claimed that a committee ‘consisting of modernists, liberals, and females has assumed the responsibility to impose on the Muslim community a measure which the majority of *ulam* have out-rightly rejected as being in conflict with *Shariah’* (February 2004). The problem for *ulam* to reconcile the Laws of God with the institutional legality

of a secular state, while the state cannot impose *shar*i'a because of the multiple sites of authority within the “Muslim community”. While MPL is unlikely to be introduced in the near future, issues like gender, plural marriages, maintenance, men’s easy access to divorce, and inheritance have been brought into the national public sphere. At the time of writing (November 2006), a case before the Pietermaritzburg High Court could have, in the words of the Ulama Council of South Africa, “far-reaching implications”. Rhia Moolla is suing her ex-husband Nazir Jamaloodeen for half his estate. They married according to Islamic rites and he ended their eight-year marriage in terms of Islamic law. Moolla is claiming that the Divorce Act and its civil consequences, including maintenance and custody, should apply rather than Islamic Law, in terms of which each party would retain their respective estates. The institution of in-community of property is not recognised by Islamic Law. If Moolla is successful, it could mean that all Muslim marriages would be governed by civil law (*Sunday Times* 15 October 2006).

Women have simultaneously become visible and invisible in the public sphere. Far more women are fully veiled, making them invisible from public gaze. As Salvatore points out “the decision to wear one is usually taken in stages and often consciously or even autonomously, in spite of general social pressure and pressure particularly from other women in the family or the workplace, or from spouses”. The position of the KZN Jamiat, whose constituency is primarily middle class, is that ‘due to the immorality of the times and weakness of resistance, it is compulsory for a female to cover her face which is the focus of her beauty’ (*Al-Mahmood* July 1999). By ‘veil’, *ulam*e mean the total seclusion of women from public spaces and not merely the covering of their faces. Veiling is at the heart of the notion of the “good Muslim woman”. This has resulted in another contradiction. Though “invisible”, women are far more visible in the public sphere than a generation ago. Contrary to what *ulam*e advocate, women are not confined to the ‘four

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17 Salvatore, ‘Making Public Space’, 1017.
walls of the home’. The veil has become a means for many women to enter the public arena, in shopping malls, at the beach, flea markets, and other public spaces, often wearing designer sunglasses and jewellery, carrying cell-phones, and driving luxury vehicles, the contradiction of covering themselves but frequenting places where behaviour contrary to Islamic norm is common, lost on them. While the veil is seen in many parts of the Western world as a “symbolic colonisation of the public space which is supposed to be free from religion, contamination of the secular sacrality of public space, or a figurative ‘fist in the eye’ of the average citizen”\textsuperscript{18}, there is, as yet, little overt opposition to the veil in South Africa. Debate is confined to Muslims who disagree over whether Islam requires women to cover the face.\textsuperscript{19}

Some Muslims are challenging traditional $\textit{ulam}$\textsuperscript{A}s they seek space for women’s aspirations. Such challenges to the orthodox standpoints of $\textit{ulam}$\textsuperscript{A}, of course, predate the 1990s. Women’s participation in politics, for example, has seen women like Rahima Moosa participate in the 1956 National Women’s March against apartheid, and outspoken sociologist Fatima Meer was active in anti-apartheid politics since the 1940s. Meer even penned a booklet in 1966 challenging the categorization of South Africa as “Darul Harbe” (“Abode of War”) by Deobandi $\textit{ulam}$\textsuperscript{A}, which would have legitimised Muslim participation in interest-based activities (\textit{Views and News}, 10 February 1966). Many women have continued this tradition in the post-apartheid period. Amina Wudud, for example, gave a pre-\textit{khutbah} (sermon) talk at the Friday congregational prayer at Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town in August 1994, raising the ire of many $\textit{ulam}$\textsuperscript{A}. Shamima Shaikh (1960-1998) was a leading gender activist. She was National Co-ordinator of the Muslim Youth Movement’s

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} This is in contrast to debates about Muslim women covering their head / face in European countries. British Prime Minister Tony Blair entered the debate on 17 October 2006 by supporting former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw’s request that women in his constituency remove their veils if they wished to speak to him. Blair told reporters the veil or \textit{niqab} was “a mark of separation and that is why it makes other people from outside of the community feel uncomfortable…” Retrieved December 12, 2006, from http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/10/17/britain.blair.ap/index.html?section=cnn_world.
Gender Desk (1993-1998), editor of the progressive Muslim monthly *al-Qalam* (1996-1997), and Chairperson of the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust in Johannesburg (1995-1998). During the month of Ramadan in 1993 she and other women in the Muslim Youth Movement started a campaign to perform the night prayer at a mosque in Fietas, Johannesburg. As National Co-ordinator of the Gender Desk, she headed the “Equal Access to Mosques” campaign and “Campaign for a Just Muslim Personal Law”. Sadly, Shamima died of cancer in January 1998. Public *salāḥ* organised by Rassool Snyman, activist, poet, and member of “The Creative Circle”, has also challenged gender barriers in the public sphere. Snyman’s programme of “Taking Islam to the People” includes the Friday congregational prayer outside the Durban City Hall once a month and ‘Family Eidgah’, a prayer on the Durban beachfront during the festival of Eid. The theme for 2006 was “Ramadan, Social Justice and the Human Connection”. Prayer at North Beach was followed by lunch with the Refugee Community (mainly African) at the Anjuman Islamic School in Leopold Street. The KZN Jamiat confronted Snyman on 29 October 2003 stating that women should be excluded because the organisers could not ensure their complete separation (*purdah*) from men. Snyman challenged the Jamiat on 7 November 2003 to a ‘public debate’ on this issue. He believed that Islam permitted women to participate in prayer at mosques and accused *ulamāʾ* of ‘attempting to enforce your oppressive Indo-Pak, male dominated, cultural norms on the Muslim community under the guise of theological legality!’ The World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY), led by Mohammed Amra, organised ‘Family taraweeh’ at its headquarters in Clare Road from 2004.

For gender activists, the mosque had been a public sphere in early Islamic history until it was taken over by men. Women want to reclaim this space and the status they believe they occupied during the period of the Prophet. Given the social and economic underdevelopment of most Muslim countries, they see limits on the participation of women in
the public sphere as a waste of valuable human potential. While some Muslims are challenging traditional ulam over the rights and status of women, the birth of the ‘new’ Muslim woman and the end of patriarchal ideology are not in immediate sight. Traditional ulam see intellectuals as misguided secularists spreading confusion and disinformation among the Muslim masses. They accuse intellectuals of re-interpreting religious texts for their own purposes rather than adhering strictly to Islamic teachings.

The contentious issue of homosexuality was also brought into the public sphere when Imam Moegsien Hendricks of Cape Town, who studied at the Islamic University in Karachi, declared on 27 October 2004 on Cape Talk and Radio 702 that he was gay. He debated this issue with Mufti A.K. Hoosen on Channel Islam International (Cii) on 2 November 2004. Hendricks claimed to highlight a real issue among Muslims: “On a daily basis, I deal with young Muslims who are struggling to reconcile their Islam with their sexuality. The Muslim clergy are not presenting an alternative but saying that they need to find a cure, but there is no cure. What I do in counselling is to tell them not to latch onto a sub culture that is foreign to Islam, but to accept Islam for the goodness that it comes with, and reconcile that with their sexuality. So instead of them leaving Islam or committing suicide, they stick to Islam and let Allah be the judge.” Mufti Hoosen said that the Qur’an condemned

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21 Majlis (vol. 15, no. 11, http://themajlis.net/Article93.html, retrieved July 19, 2007) regarded Muslim intellectuals as ‘the most poisonous enemy for Islam. They proclaim themselves to be Muslim, in fact authorities of Islam … They advertise themselves as being the ‘intelligentsia’ while they grovel in abject jahaalat (ignorance). They are the products of kuffaar universities. They have studied under kuffaar or apostate professors and have acquired scrap degrees in a secular branch of kufr learning called ‘Islamic Studies’…. Their methodology is to create confusion in the minds of ignorant people with the claim that a striking feature of contemporary Muslim society is its failure to have kept up with the contemporary world.’
homosexuality in the strongest terms and implored Hendricks, “my brother, not to fall prey to Shaytaan. The doors of taubah (repentance) and mercy are open. We can only but pray for you and those like you. Don’t play games, Moegsien, don’t try and hoodwink the public.” Hendricks remained adamant that he was Muslim “and I have accepted myself as a person who is attracted to the same sex and I do not see any sin in that. Is Allah just going to throw all my good deeds out on the day of Judgement because of one feeling I have?” (IOL 2 November 2004).

Issues of gender have been brought in the public sphere during the past decade with many and diverse voices contributing to the debate.

There are competing claims for the right to articulate “authentic” Islam. Ulama, who enjoy the support of the majority of Muslims, shun theological debate. For many Muslims, in fact, ‘truth’ has become synonymous with the ulama and to question them implies questioning the truth. The power and reach of ulama increasing as more Muslims, seeking self-reformation, are becoming attached to Shaykhs (spiritual mentors) in their search for personal guidance.22 Ulama, through their control of mosques and theological institutions, are in a powerful position to shape the production of knowledge and disseminate their normative beliefs. But this has not dissuaded dissenting voices from providing an alternative narrative of what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary South Africa. The Cape-based Ebrahim Rasool, Ebrahim Moosa, Farid Esack, Rashied Omar, and Abdulkader Tayob, espouse what they broadly called a ‘democratic’ (or what Zubaida calls “accommodationists”23) Islam, one that is willing to participate within secular society. They see ‘democratic’ Islam as ‘nationalist’ while ‘traditional’ Islam, with its gaze towards an international ummah, as ‘utopian’ and out of touch with South African realities. ‘Democratic’ Islam respects diversity and accepts that Islamic values are one of a number of values co-existing in a politically plural and multicultural society. They are at ease in inter-cultural and


inter-religious dialogue. Others like Wits University academic Na’eeem Jeenah, Rassool Snyman, and Lubna Nadvi, are also prepared to challenge the status quo.

During a particularly animated e-mail exchange on the web thread politicalislam@yahoo.com in August 2004, Imran Khan of the Johannesburg-based Voice Radio Station demanded that Lubna Nadvi retract her article “Enemies of the Faith” in Mail and Guardian (11 August 2004) in which she criticised suicide bombings and beheadings in Iraq. Nadvi branded Islamic extremist groups as “the enemies of the faith whose interests they claim to advance”. Khan was particularly incensed that Nadvi wrote in a newspaper with a majority non-Muslim readership and thus brought the debate into the national public sphere. Nadvi replied on 24 August that it was incumbent on Muslims to make people “outside Islam aware of its beautiful teachings and principles. The only knowledge of Islam that they have is what they read in mainstream media, and at this point it is highlighting negatives”. Fatima Seedat, a political scientist at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, wrote in support of Nadvi on 26 August 2004 that Khan was resorting to the standard tactic of ulam of silencing dissent through “fatwa enforcement”: “Fatwa enforcers are generally very rich or very loud”. Their techniques included public denouncements, keeping proponents of alternative ideas out of Muslim controlled spaces like mosques, and attacking personalities rather than ideas. This public and private pressure resulted in individuals “who were at first energetic, being sapped of their energy, throwing up their hands and retreating into themselves. Emotionally exhausted, they prefer to save themselves from the ignorance surrounding them”. Seedat found consolation in the fact that the power of Muslim elites was confined to Islamic public spaces and called on voices of reformation to challenge “fatwa enforcers” in secular courts in the national public sphere.

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“Modernists” were not deterred. At a conference at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in September 2004 they formed “The Conference of the Islamic Movement of South Africa” (CIMSA). CIMSA comprised Muslims across South Africa, cutting across gender, geography, and race. Office bearers included Firdouza Waggie, Moefidah Jaffer, Mariam Patel, Nooria Sosibo, Lubna Nadvi, Ebrahim Jadwat, Faizel Sulaiman, Ighsan Hendricks, Naeem Jeenah, Ebrahim Bofelo, and Mahmood Amra. CIMSA’s aims included “networking, sharing experiences, and charting common directions” with “government, social movements and organizations of the poor and the rest of civil society” to “work collectively towards socio-economic justice”, “realise the rights guaranteed by the South African Constitution”, and “highlight the human and social crisis as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and work with groups that already address the crisis”. CIMSA also aimed to “contribute to the development of a new fiqh more relevant to a Muslim minority context and a fiqh that takes into consideration the Qur’anic position of gender justice; prioritize the development of Muslim women’s scholarship; and address the oppression faced by Muslim women” (IOL 20 September 2004).

At the heart of the debate is the proper way to interpret Islamic knowledge and apply it locally. Ulam remain resolute that law cannot be changed and refuse to deviate from a literal reading of Qur’an and Sunna. Others are advocating ijtihad (independent reasoning) and a “fiqh of reality” that should be the prerogative of all Muslims. Many believe that Islam went into political and intellectual decline when the ulam forbade ijtihad because they feared that multiple interpretations would lead to dissension. What Ziauddin Sardar describes as the “heavy hand of orthodoxy” resulted in Muslims seeking to preserve existing knowledge rather than investigating new sources of information. While some Muslims have responded to Western-style modernity by violently rejecting it, the challenge is to understand that modernity does not have a single Western viewpoint and to utilize contemporary technologies and scientific knowledge to transform Muslim societies from within. Muslims need to engage with modernity without sacrificing Islamic
values. The growth of Islamic media, in particular the internet, has made it possible for non-conforming voices to be heard in the public domain, whereas the dominant ulam and conservative elements were once the exclusive articulators of Islam.

**Islamic media**

Muslims are utilizing the instruments of change to disseminate their own counter-discourses. Islamic media, covering radio, magazines, websites, books, audiocassettes, videocassettes, television, pod casting, and newspapers, has mushroomed over the past decade. While beheadings on videos and the Internet seem to have become synonymous with Islam over the past five years, many are using technology to disseminate positive messages. New media includes sermons circulating beyond the mosque through videocassettes, DVD’s and websites; religious instruction material for children; and “media muftis” dispensing religious advice on radio and interactive websites, as the message is spread to the masses. There are discussion threads like politicalislam@yahoo.com and www.samuslams.com. Rassool Snyman circulates a weekly collection of articles via e-mail called “The Washington Taliban” and media personality Abie Dawjee circulates a newsletter “RAIN”. Both aim to provide an alternative paradigm to mainstream media. Radio Islam, Cii, KwaZulu-Natal Jamiat, and numerous other Islamic organisations circulate weekly newsletters. New media has made it easier for counter-voices to challenge the authority of traditional ulam and articulate different Muslim agendas. Ulam monopolised this function historically through their control of mosque pulps. But now that Islam is moving away from hierarchy, traditional ideas are being...

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challenged, and alternative ideas propagated. The anonymity of the
Internet is helping to give more people a voice. New media has made it
easier for dissenting voices to be heard, while at the same time blurring
boundaries between public and private Islamic discourse because
dialogue over important issues is taking place in the public sphere. Like
print before it,26 new forms of electronic communication involve new
actors and sites of production and consumption. While conservative
moneyed elites are best positioned to exploit new media to extend their
patterns of “religious expression and piety, whose production and
consumption is increasingly developed around their specific needs and
resources”27, it is now easier for dissenting voices to get their message
in the public sphere.

Monthly newspapers like Majlis, Al-Haq, Al-Ummah, Muslim Views,
Al-Jamiat, and Al-Qalam, reflect contested opinions. Muslim magazines
like KZN Islam and Muslim Woman provide alternatives to mainstream
women’s magazines and project images of the ‘ideal’ Muslim woman.
Islamic storybooks are freely available for children, as are Islamic songs
for children and those dealing with the sufferings of Muslims in
Afghanistan and Iraq. Songs are not accompanied by music, which is
considered haram (forbidden) by many Muslims. Radio stations have
grown from strength to strength. Some target local and regional markets,
such as Al-Ansaar in Durban, Radio 786 in the Cape, and Radio Islam
and Voice of Mayfair in Johannesburg, while the Johannesburg-based
Cii, which started broadcasting in October 2000, is an international station
broadcasting to over a hundred countries across Africa, the United

26 Francis Robinson, ‘Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia

27 Jon W. Anderson, ‘Muslim Networks, Muslim Selves in Cyberspace: Islam
in the Post-Modern Public Sphere,’ Working Papers on Media and
nmit.georgetown.edu/papers/jwanderson2.htm.
Kingdom, and Europe. Professionals manage Cii with expertise in information technology, marketing, law, and finance, but Islamic scholars supervise the overall content. The radio station is playing a crucial role in forging identification with Muslims internationally through call-in programmes that include callers from as far as Nigeria and Italy, regular broadcast of sermons and lectures by international dignitaries, broadcast of Eid and taraweeh prayers, and Friday prayer from Mecca, live coverage of funerals of prominent Muslims like Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, who was murdered by the Israeli government in March 2004, live broadcasts from Lebanon during the Israeli invasion in July-August 2006, interviews with Muslims harassed in the West, or the family of prisoners on Guantanamo Bay, is raising deeper identification with the global Islamic community. Radio is especially important because many Muslims, as part of the reform drive, have gotten rid of televisions.

Traditional religious authorities are also utilising modern communication to disseminate their normative outlook on how to be a Muslim in the contemporary world. Many Islamic organisations, including theological institutes, have set up websites that cover theological, political, economic, and social issues. The Muslim public is free to communicate online for fatwas (religious decrees) or other advice. Organizations often use invented queries of general relevance to peddle their viewpoint. The interactive quality of websites permits strangers to enter a sphere of “dialogue” and makes these spaces akin to public spaces like mosques. National borders are no barriers. Mufti A.K. Hoosen of Cii receives questions from as far a field as Australia, Nigeria, and Italy. The link between Muftis and the public may be impersonal, but some form of conversation is taking place and many more issues are being placed in the public domain for discussion. Developments in media

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The Johannesburg-based Channel Islam International (Cii), which started broadcasting in October 2000, is an international station broadcast to over 60 countries across Africa, the United Kingdom and Europe. Its aim, shared by much of the new Islamic media, is ‘to bring Muslims around the world into the information age, to use the fruits of the twenty-first century to provide high quality Islamic content designed to sow the seeds of religious education and growth as tools for upliftment and empowerment’. Retrieved October 10, 2006, from http://www.channelislam.com/welcome.htm
have altered listening habits, brought Muslim debates into the public sphere, and resulted in a re-imagining of identity to include the broader Muslim *ummah*.

The impact of these new media forms is contradictory. Websites, electronic newsletters, and issue-specific blogs address groups defined by specific concerns and identities. News and information is circulating more rapidly and widely and could, theoretically, bring Muslims together around common issues, strengthen the faith, reinvigorate Islam. But the new media is extremely heterogeneous. In reality, therefore, they target narrow audiences and shape localised identities. It can be argued that by making more people aware of differences and conflicts among Muslims, the new media is leading to further fragmentation. To take radio as an example, Cii, by broadcasting on satellite radio and charging a monthly subscription, is pitched at more affluent Muslims. Radio Al-Ansaar, on the other hand, has a conflictual relationship with traditional *ulam* as we shall see below. Many Muslims are consequently denied access to some of the more progressive voices on radio. Likewise, many listeners of Radio Al-Ansaar do not listen to Cii because they cannot afford the subscription or do not share its stricter interpretations of Islam. In a similar vein, newsletters, web logs, newspapers, and magazines, tend to be targeted at like-minded constituencies. Even though many of the political, social, economic, and religious conversations are extremely serious, even profound, they tend to be restricted to narrow groups. This is fragmenting the faith and challenging institutional religion in another way. It might even result in people picking and mixing as a way of understanding Islam. It remains to be seen how this pans out. Notwithstanding this, the new media has made Muslims much more aware of local and global developments and has been important in forging Islamic community-(ies).

9/11, the ‘War on Terror’, and Conflict in Palestine:
PAGAD’s demise did not reduce Islam’s public profile in South Africa. 9/11 and subsequent global developments kept Islam and Muslims in the public gaze as protestors were brought on to the streets, on television,
radio, and newspapers. Most Muslim organisations condemned the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 11 September 2001. The attacks on the Twin Towers instigated a debate on the permissibility of suicide bombings. South African ulam distinguish between random suicide bombings and self-defence. Speaking on Channel Islam on 11 September 2003, for example, Imam Quick and Mufti A.K. Hoosen explained that random suicide bombings were prohibited, but that internationally distinguished between random bombings like 9/11 and self-defence in places like Palestine. Victims of aggression could engage in “legitimate martyrdom operations” under occupation and warlike conditions. Notwithstanding this, the MJC in Cape Town was subjected to “very abusive” calls and an arson attack, while Muslim organisations, community radio stations, and newspapers across the country received hate mail (Mail and Guardian 21 September 2001). Sympathy for the USA over 9/11 dissipated when it attacked Afghanistan. Together with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and Western Cape Council of Churches (WCCC), the MJC organized a peace march of around 5000 people on 11 October 2001 (Mail and Guardian 12 October 2001). Fringe Muslim groups like Abduraghman Khan’s little-known Muslims Against Illegitimate Leaders (MAIL) called for a jihad against the ‘infidel’ even though South African law prohibited military assistance to any foreign country unless authorised by the state (Mail & Guardian 12 October 2001).

Like the ‘War on Terror’, the Palestinian Intifada spawned important debates and publicity. According to Naeem Jeenah, president of the MYM and member of the Palestinian Solidarity Committee (PSC), the participation of the South African Communist Party (SACP), Cosatu, and the Anti-Privatisation Forum in pro-Palestinian protests helped forge alliances with a broad constituency on the left of politics. This strengthened inter-faith solidarity, dispelled the myth that the struggle

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29 Majlis, for example, condemned suicide bombing. “Regardless of the injustices, the cruelty, the brutality which Christians (Americans and British) are perpetrating and regardless of their conspiracy to eliminate Islam, we, the Torch-Bearers of true civilization are not allowed by the Shariah to descend to the inhumane level to which the Madrid bombers had sunk to.’ Retrieved September 21, 2005, from http://al-haq.themajlis.net/node/21.
of the Palestinians was ‘a Muslim cause’, and created the possibility of building a unified identity across the religious divide. It also broadened Muslim concerns to include the problems of the landless and negative impact of privatization in South Africa (Mail and Guardian 12 April 2002). Qibla brought Muslims into the public sphere with its defiant protest strategies. A march to the American Consulate on 28 November 2002 was led by two young boys dressed as suicide bombers, who wore Hezbollah headbands and dressed in black with cardboard dynamite sticks strapped to their chests. Marchers shouted slogans like ‘Death to America, death to Israel’ and ‘One American tourist, one bullet’ (Cape Argus 29 November 2002). Pro-Palestinian protest led by the PSC in Durban and Johannesburg included marches in PLO headscarves during peak hour traffic to the City Hall or home of the US Consul-General, as well as a call to boycott American products. In September 2002, the PSC protested the presence of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in South Africa. Protesters, carrying banners reading ‘Sharon is a terrorist’ and ‘Zionism is racism’, were subjected to police water cannon when they blocked the intersection of St Andrews and Queens roads in Johannesburg. Sixteen protesters were arrested, including Salim Vally, a leading member of the PSC and acting director of Wits’ Education Policy Unit. Several protesters, journalists, and policemen were wounded during altercations at the University of the Witwatersrand where demonstrators attempted to pelt Peres with glass bottles and stones. Police responded with water cannons and rubber bullets (M & G 3 September 2004). To mark Yasser Arafat’s death, the PSC in Durban held a Symbolic Janaza prayer after Eid prayer on 14 November 2004 to “mark the passing of a Comrade who gave support to the struggle in our land. Our joy at Eid is mingled with sadness at the passing of Yasser Arafat, who, to the Palestinian people, was a symbol of hope, and to the world the face of their pain. Show your solidarity with the people of Palestine and say a prayer for a man who dreamt the extremely dangerous dream of freedom”.

The US-led invasion of Iraq thrust Muslims in the forefront once again. On 15 February 2003 South Africans joined millions of demonstrators in approximately 600 cities worldwide to protest impending

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30 Interview, Ashwin Desai 20 April 2003.
war. Cosatu, New Unity Movement, Socialist League, and MJC as well as politicians Kader Asmal, Pallo Jordan and Ebrahim Rasool of the ANC took part in an anti-war march in Cape Town; 3000 people formed a human chain outside the US consul-general’s office in Johannesburg; and around 1000 marched in Durban (Sunday Argus 16 February 2003). As many, if not more, non-Muslims participated than Muslims. Thirty-two South Africans went to Iraq as ‘human shields’ under the banner of the Iraq Action Committee. Their objective was to position themselves at civilian structures like schools, hospitals and water filtration plants to stop US bombing. They left under great publicity on 18 March and reached Iraq around the time of the first attack on Baghdad. They provided firsthand reports in daily newspapers as well as live interviews on Cii, giving graphic accounts of the suffering of ordinary Iraqis. Once bombing began, families pressured volunteers to return as ‘they could not stop the war’, and most returned to a ‘Heroes Welcome’ on 1 April 2003 (Natal Mercury 2 April 2003).

Mainstream ulam in KZN and Gauteng generally discouraged Muslim participation in public marches. They attribute the weak position of Muslims to ‘spiritual shortcomings’ rather than Western military superiority. Muslims were being ‘punished’ by God because of their transgressions, they explained, and would only regain lost ground when individual Muslims perfected their spiritual practices and implemented shari‘a. Public demonstrations were considered counter-productive as they involved transgression of Islamic norms such as the separation of sexes.31 Rassool Snyman criticised the reasoning of ulam in a widely disseminated e-mail on 23 October 2004:

31 To cite one example, Al-Haq of Port Elizabeth wrote that ‘in flagrant defiance of the Qur’anic prohibition for women to remain ‘glued’ inside their homes, we find Muslim females ‘marching’ like prostitutes in the streets, mingling with men, screaming obscenities and vulgarities in total negation of the Sunnah concept of Haya (shame and modesty)’. Retrieved September 25, 2005, from http://al-haq.themajlis.net/node/102.
Muslims of conscience must protest even if the numbers dwindle to one. The silence and apathy of our community is an indictment of the worst kind against a people who are self absorbed and do not relate to injustice to another but will raise a furore if any bad publicity is aimed at them. Prophets would hang their heads in shame at a people who are obsessed with acquiring a personal and selfish piece of paradise as though it is nothing more than a prime real estate divorced from the right to earn it by shaping society and fighting the evil therein. We busy ourselves with false piety, stuffed mouths and empty consciences. We are too afraid to question “our” political masters lest they rebuke and shame us for our past subservience and perhaps as we make wudhu the blood stain on the hand that cast the ballot will be washed off.

Whether they choose to protest publicly or not, most Muslims are convinced that George Bush is leading a global war against Islam. The level of anger at the West for its perceived attack on Islam is reflected in the reaction to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. For the first time ulam actively encouraged Muslim males to participate in public protest marches. Cii, for example, organized a public seminar in Durban on 31 July 2006, where the main speakers were sociologist Ashwin Desai and political scientist Naeem Jeenah. Both men and women attended, though they were seated separately. The fact that the organisers invited speakers who were often critical of their religious conservatism, reflected the depth of anger.

Although the reaction of Muslims to international events is complex, the perceived ‘Islamic threat’ is given prominence in the local media. Journalist Max Du Preez made unsubstantiated allegations of Muslim complicity in the attack on the Israeli-run Paradise Mombassa Hotel in Kenya on 27 November 2002 (Star 5 December 2002). Martin Schonteich, senior researcher at the Institute of Security Studies in Pretoria, told the Crime Writer’s Club that Muslim resentment against the USA and Israel constituted the greatest danger in South Africa: ‘Polarisation will see more radical sections within that community come to the fore, with even
traditionally moderate Muslim leaders becoming increasingly outspoken’ (*Citizen* 13 February 2003). The Institute continued to warn of “imminent” terrorist threats against South African targets by “Al-Qaeda cells”. In November 2005, for example, it warned that “South Africa, with its strong banking sector and large Muslim communities, functions as an important logistical and terror finance transit point.” In August 2005, the *Star* made “startling claims” that a clandestine organisation based in Cape Town shipped ten al-Qaeda operatives to South Africa from Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2003 and 2004. The Scorpions investigated the claims and concluded that they were “bulls**t”, in the words of spokesperson Makhosini Nkosi (27 August 2005).

There is little to support the typecasting of Muslims as ‘extremists’, ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘terrorists’ in the South African context. While the religious commitment of Muslims is ever deepening, Islamic resurgence thus far is aimed at deepening religio-cultural identity rather than usurping power. However, because of what is happening in the ‘radical’ face of Islam, there is a tendency to treat this assertion of Islamic identity with suspicion and fear.32 Iqbal Jhazbhay, senior lecturer at Unisa, prepared a paper in November 2004 “Terrorism: Reflections on Islamic Trends” which had been commissioned by the South African National Academy of Intelligence following concerns about al-Qaeda cells in the country. Jhazbhay reported that the South African state in the post-1994 period “managed” the expression of Islam in conjunction with mainstream Muslim leaders. Radicalism was contained through the ANC’s commission for religious affairs meeting several times a year “to get religious leaders (to take) on board its political and social goals”. There was a tacit alliance between mainstream Muslim leaders and the ANC which succeeded in sidelining radical voices. The state also undercut radical appeal through the statutory Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Rights for Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities; the Muslim Personal Law Framework Bill which allowed for traditional Muslim family practices within the Bill of Rights; and the Department of Foreign Affairs’ assisting the South African Hajj and

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Umrah Council get pilgrims to Mecca. In addition, Jhazbhay felt, Muslims themselves played a “check-and-balance role”. Most mosques were controlled by United Ulama Council of South Africa (UUCSA), Muslim Judicial Council, and various Jamiats who were able to control what was said from mosque pulpits. While mainstream mosques differed from the ANC on certain issues, this was not to “the point where they would take on the state” (The Star 20 November 2004).

South Africa has not entirely escaped Islamophobia. Sensational media coverage seems to be impacting on some South Africans. A survey into Islamophobia by Shenaaz Muslim, a lecturer at the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal, in two predominantly white suburbs in Durban, found that respondents saw Muslims as “being very, very wealthy” and thought that with their wealth, Muslims stick together. They expressed a fear that Muslims will unify and use their wealth and unity “as a means of taking over the world.” Media, Shehnaaz found, influenced perceptions by presenting Muslims both “as submissive and subversive” (The Star, 3 September 2006). Anti-Muslim discourse, however, should not be homogenised. As a result of political opposition to US hegemony, many South Africans, including large numbers of non-Muslims, have strongly opposed American actions through trades unions, civic organisations and tertiary institutions. Anti-Muslim sentiment in the press, for example, is dominated by White respondents as well as non-Muslim Indians, perhaps reflecting tensions in India. Due to the anti-US feeling among large numbers of Blacks, Muslims in South Africa are spared the badge of opposition and political dissent. As the following section shows, the political loyalty of Muslims to the South African state has arguably been strengthened by international events.

**Politics: Muslims and the ANC**

Events post-9/11 have reshaped the citizenry practices of many South African Muslims. Debate among Muslims over whether to embrace the broader democratic movement has a long tradition. The Port Elizabeth-based *Majlis* (‘Voice of Islam’) condemned co-operation with non-
Muslims in anti-apartheid structures during the 1980s because it meant working with ‘polytheist priests and godless communists’. This was not the majority view. Farid Esack and Ebrahim Rasool of the Cape-based *Call of Islam* were senior members of the anti-apartheid UDF. Pressure from these activists resulted in the MJC declaring participation in the 1984 tri-cameral election juridically forbidden. The Natal *Jamiat* also called for a boycott of the election.\(^3\) Debate over Muslim participation in the political process resurfaced during democratic elections in 1994 and 1999. The Islamic Unity Conference (IUC) under Achmat Cassiem, which claimed to represent 600 Islamic organisations, called for Muslims to boycott the 1999 election. Cassiem argued that to vote in an un-Islamic state would make Muslims partners to legalised abortion, gay rights, and other un-Islamic practices (*Daily News* 20 May 1999). However, the majority feeling, articulated by mainstream Muslim organisations was that Muslims should vote in the elections for a party of their choice (*Al-Qalam* May 1999). Both the Africa Muslim Party in 1994 and Africa Moral Party in 1999, purporting to represent Muslims, failed to gain representation in Parliament as Muslims voted for predominantly non-Muslim parties (*Al-Qalam* May 1999).

Muslims, whether practicing or nominal, have been prominent in the national public sphere in democratic South Africa. Members of Parliament have included Minister of Education Kader Asmal, Minister of Environmental Affairs Vally Moosa, and former Minister of Justice Dullah Omar; Essop Pahad is a key member of President Thabo Mbeki’s office, Naledi Pandor is Minister of Education; Ebrahim Rasool has been ANC leader in the Western Cape, Dr R.A.M. Saloojee and the late Ismail Meer featured at provincial levels, the late Justice Ismail Mohammed occupied the most senior legal position in the country, while Ms Gadija Khan was head of all magistrates in the Western Cape. This was not matched by support for the ANC among the masses in 1994 and 1999 when white parties exploited minority fears of affirmative action and escalating crime to gain conservative support. The ANC failed to win elections in KwaZulu

Natal and Western Cape provinces with significant numbers of Indians and Coloureds respectively.

The 2004 election was marked by three important developments: the absence of debate over whether Muslims could participate in the democratic process, no Muslim party contested the election, and Muslims voted in large numbers for the ANC. This was connected to local and global events. Locally, the stability of the first decade of apartheid rule and economic prosperity of the middle and upper strata has resulted in the Indian and Coloured minorities becoming increasingly optimistic about the future. Globally, events since 9/11 have given rise to Islamophobia in many parts of the world. Across mosques in South Africa, Ḥulam regularly acknowledge the absence of such Islamophobia and South Africa’s independent line on world issues. Prior to the 1994 elections, they reminded Muslims that South Africa’s Muslims have not been stigmatised and, openly and subtly, advocated support for the ANC in mosques, Muslim newspapers, and radio stations. Muslim voters were constantly reminded that the DA was pro-Israel and that DA councillors had in several instances objected to mosques being built in predominantly White areas. The MJC ‘guidelines’, for example, left Muslims with just one choice, the ANC (Al Qalam April 2004: 5). This had a discursive impact on voting behaviour. In areas where Muslims live in significant numbers, there was an overwhelming victory for the ANC, which took control of KZN and Western Cape for the first time. Ebrahim Rasool became the first Muslim provincial head when President Thabo Mbeki appointed him premier of the Western Cape. According to a delighted Rasool, ‘the fact that the president of this country could elect a Muslim as premier even though most people in South Africa are not Muslims, says a lot for the respect Islam has in this country’ (Al Qalam April 2004: 5). This statement succinctly captured the feelings of the majority of Muslims in present-day South Africa.

Although Ḥulam including the Jamiat in Gauteng and MJC in the Cape, called for ANC support, their theory of citizenship differed from that of intellectuals and activists who want Muslims to embrace the broader society rather than expand and deepen what they see as a self-
segregated Islamic public space. ŢUlamŒ some Muslim activists felt, were motivated by Muslim self-interest which included the right to practice Islam freely and the South African government’s relatively independent international stance. The attacks on the Twin Towers changed the international environment. What many Muslims, as gathered from interviews, letters to the press, and radio talk-shows, regard as a new “crusade” by George Bush, whose slogans include “Global War on Terror” and “Islamofascism”, has ushered changes in attitudes among Muslims towards South Africa and their place in it. The “War on Terror” is forcing Muslims to embrace non-Muslims as they search for broad alliances; it has also deepened the loyalty of many Muslims to South Africa as they witness rising Islamophobia in the West. While ŴUlamŒ support the ANC, the imagined transnational deterritorialised ummah transcends the state. In the short term, however, because the government has not actively supported the US, the national loyalty of South Africa’s Muslims has not been questioned as is the case in many Western countries.

Many Muslim academics, social activists, and community leaders, in contrast, believe that central to being a good Muslim is being a loyal citizen. For intellectuals, such as Farid Esack, Ebrahim Moosa, Lubna Nadvi, Na’eem Jeenah, Abdulkader Tayob, and others, Muslims live in a national sovereign state and should accept that their Islam is framed by this context. They should see themselves as South African Muslims rather than Muslims in South Africa. Jaffer warned that Muslims “occupy a respected and solid presence, astounding for so small a community. There is however a very real threat [that] the setting in of a greater conservatism, could lead to isolation”.34 Some of these voices, as is evident, for example, in discussions on the web thread politicalislam@yahoo.com are also critical of “blind” Muslim support for the ANC. They believe that Muslims should not support the ANC uncritically simply because its foreign policies are favourable to Muslims.

What about rising unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and other negative effects of neo-liberal policies in South Africa, they ask? Should Muslims not be more principled about human rights issues? In this regard they particularly underscore the fact that while concerned about Muslims in other parts of the world (Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq), South Africa’s Muslims do not display the same concern about ethnic cleansing in Rwanda or racism against non-Arabs in Sudan. These threads emphasise that while Muslims were prepared to take to the streets over cartoons of the Prophet that they regarded as offensive, their silence over the murder of several hundred thousand Muslims in Sudan by the Arab Janjaweed militia is deafening. Thus, while to outsiders, Muslims may project an image of a monolith, in reality they constitute a community divided by competing interpretations, ideologies, ethnicities, and identities, with vibrant debates around a host of issues.

Conclusions:
Muslims have been very conspicuous in the national public sphere in post-apartheid South Africa, partly because of debates internal to Muslims, such as MPL and women’s rights, and partly as a result of global factors. This was encapsulated by the controversy surrounding publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish

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35 Political scientist Lubna Nadvi of the University of KwaZulu Natal, for example called on Muslims to “attend the protest marches that have been happening and will continue to happen... They can also attend the community meetings to discuss such issues as cutoffs, evictions, etc. In addition we need to grow a new generation of Muslim activists who understand the language of protest against neo-liberal / imperialist forces. We are good at rallying around marches in support of Palestine / Iraq etc...but why not the problems facing fellow South Africans back home?... Muslim agencies can contribute monies like Zakaat and Sadakah to the projects of the poor...over and above feeding schemes. This will help the organisations of the poor, set up offices, get equipment and training and acquire capacity to lobby for their cause. More Muslims should ideally join these social movement structures... Political apartheid may have ended, but economic apartheid is still very much alive in this country.” (Retrieved October 16, 2006, from politicalislam@yahoo.com)
newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* which provoked worldwide protests during early 2006. In South Africa too, many Muslims reacted angrily to what they regarded as contempt for their values and religion. Some participated in protest marches, others boycotted newspapers which published or threatened to publish the cartoons, threats were issued against *Mail and Guardian Weekly* editor Ferial Haffejee for publishing the cartoons; and some Muslims even demanded an apology from the Danish prime minister. While, on the one hand, the controversy thrust Islam into the public sphere once again, reaction to it also underscored deep divisions among South African Muslims. Many intellectuals and professionals called for a more measured response. In letters to the press and internet discussion groups, while conceding that the cartoons were reflective of increasing Islamophobia in contemporary European societies, they argued that aggressive reactions reinforced stereotypes of Muslims as ‘violent’, ‘intolerant’, and incapable of reasoned debate, and that violence would probably increase restrictions on civil liberties against Western Muslim communities.

Following publication of the cartoons by the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, the Jamiatul Ulama (KwaZulu Natal) and Jamiatul Ulama Gauteng successfully approached the High Court on 3 February 2006 for an interdict to prevent the *Sunday Times* publishing the offensive cartoons. This was followed by disagreement between the Jamiatuls. The Gauteng Jamiat met with representatives of the *Sunday Times* on 9 February 2006 and ended its boycott even though the matter of the interdict remained on the roll of the court for adjudication. The *Sunday Times* followed with an editorial on 12 February 2006 that the cartoons were designed to “offend and provoke” and would not “grace their pages”. The Jamiat KwaZulu Natal maintained that in any matter pertaining to “possible harm to the dignity of our noble Prophet and the religion of Islam, an agreement must be clear, unequivocal, transparent, reduced to writing, and shared with the public,” and sustained its boycott. It felt vindicated when the *Sunday Times* (3 September 2006) carried a review of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s *The Caged Virgin*. The Jamiat described the review “Taking the Prophet To Task” as “offensive” and a “sacrilegious
defilement of the honour of Rasulullah (Prophet) and a clear indication of the newspaper continuously disregarding Muslim religious sensitivities...The repeated publication of such articles demonstrates deep seated contempt for the religious beliefs of the Muslim Community and show total disregard for sensitivities of Muslims. The Jamiatul Ulama (KwaZulu-Natal) calls upon the public NOT to advertise in the Sunday Times; NOT to purchase the Sunday Times; NOT to sell the Sunday Times; and TO BOYCOTT companies that advertise in the Sunday Times."

This furore points to important trends among South Africa’s Muslims. It epitomizes the deep divisions among South Africa’s Muslims even though there remains a tendency, reflected in letters to newspapers and call-in programmes on radio, for example, to view Muslims as a monolith. Differences of race, class, ethnicity, beliefs, and practices mean that there will always be multiple reactions to local and global developments and that this will continue to transform identities in different ways. South Africa did not witness the levels of violence evident in many parts of the world. This may very well reflect the fact that the South African constitution respects the rights of its citizens to freedom of expression, to protest peacefully, and seek redress through legal means. As Sheik Ebrahim Gabriels, president of both the MJC and UUCSA said, Muslim protest against the cartoons was conducted the ‘South African way’: “We have been marching for Palestine and for other purposes and we always had a very peaceful march, ... we always tell our people ‘Let us do it in the most responsible way’” (NEWS24 8 February 2006). Violence elsewhere may have been more pronounced because it provided an outlet for restive populations deprived of their basic rights. In addition to the protection given by the Constitution, Muslims are fortunate to be living in a non-aligned country in which a large proportion of the population abhors what they perceive to be Western and, in particular, American high-handedness in foreign policy. There is not the same

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outrage at attacks against Western targets, and hence anti-Muslim sentiments, as one might expect in Western countries. But the cartoon controversy raises broader issues such as how Muslim organizations in South Africa should use the legal, political and economic leverages at their disposal to protect their values and religion. How long will non-Muslims continue to tolerate what they perceive to be constant grumbling by Muslims? The Gauteng Jamiat probably has greater political nous and is aware of the limits of Muslims demands. There has to be give-and-take on the part of Muslims. In its own words, “turning away an amicable resolution would be treading a path of arrogance....”

Following the interdict against the Sunday Times, the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef) issued a statement signed by 25 editors and senior media practitioners:

We represent a long tradition of respect for the traditions and sentiments of the South African Muslim community in the same way as we respect the traditions and sentiments of other religious communities. Our media frequently carry the opinions of Muslim leaders and thinkers across a broad range of subjects and we are proud of the ties that exist between ourselves and this community. We therefore note with shock and dismay the attacks that have been launched against our newspapers and our colleagues … Legal action has been taken to prevent publication of these cartoons without any evidence that such publication was being planned. Newspaper vendors have been threatened with death as have editors and their staff. It is outrageous behaviour… We are determined to defend the right to free speech in South Africa. It is not just an editorial right but a right that is owned by all the people, including the Muslim community. It is their shield against discrimination and tyranny… (Sunday Times 12 February 2006).

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This points to broader concerns about freedom of expression versus protecting religious sensitivities. It also raises the crucial issue of whether Muslims are prepared, in turn, to modify their beliefs in order not to offend other groups protected by the constitution. For example, many Muslims believe that homosexuality is an abomination in the eyes of God. Are they going to stop saying so because it would offend the sensibilities of gay and human rights groups? What all of this points to is that rather than reduce the public profile of Muslims, Islam has become an increasingly more conspicuous part of the South African national public sphere over the past decade, initially because of local factors such as the activities of PAGAD, debates around MPL, women’s rights, and other issues, and growing individual personal piety; over the past five years, global factors such as the attacks on the Twin Towers, and London and Madrid bombings, conflict in Palestine, 9/11, the ‘War on Terror’, and increasing Islamophobia in Western countries have sustained this tendency. Local and global developments have impacted unevenly on Muslims, and prompted diverse responses. Muslim unity and homogeneity is wishful thinking despite their being drawn together by global events and “Islam”; they are plural even though outsiders find it expedient to subsume them under the broad rubric of a Muslim identity.