

The Function of Islam in the South African Political Process: Defining a Community in a Nation

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Islam in the political process in South Africa takes on two broad images. The first image regards Islam in South Africa as part of international religious resurgence in general, and fundamentalist Islam in particular. Since 1996, when an anti-crime organization like People against Gangsterism and Druglords (PAGAD), took Islamic symbols to the streets, this image has become dominant. South African intelligence reports located the activity of the PAGAD to international Islamic militancy: "recent events in the Western Cape were in part driven by the phenomenon of Islamic militancy" which is "a hyper orthodox and distinct interpretation of the Islamic faith which is predisposed to the use of violence and subversion as a means to firstly, impose certain religious beliefs, behavioural codes on all society; and secondly, challenge and ultimately seek to overthrow any non-Islamic political system in order to establish a theocracy based on their unique understanding of the concept."¹ An opposing thesis places Islam in South Africa in the ranks of the liberation process. In this view, barring a few exceptions, Muslims generally played a positive role in the transformation of the country. As early as 1977, Nelson Mandela visited the shrine of Shaykh Matura on Robben Island to pay tribute to the role of Muslims in the struggle against colonialism and oppression. Since then, many scholars have highlighted the role of Muslims in the liberation struggle. Without denying the presence of collaborators and neutral fence-

sitters, Lubbe registered a history of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid figures in South African Muslim history: "both in terms of past involvement and present protest, it is therefore clear that on the basis of the very principles of Islam, Muslims are opposed to apartheid" (Lubbe, 1986:28).

Both these theses contribute to a particular understanding of Islam in the political process in South Africa. Both, however, seemed to place the history of Islam in the context of the dominant themes without an analysis of the processes within the religion. In this contribution, the role of Muslims in the political process examines the discourses within the community on the nation and its forms. I draw here on the idea that religion ought to be regarded as a discourse by which religious actors fashion a new world view out of the given elements within a religion.² Such an approach focuses on the productive way in which religious actors interact, consciously and unconsciously, in the production of approaches and orientations within religions. In this way, the developments within Muslim society may then be appraised in relation to the new nation. For the purpose of this paper, I intend to examine how various groups among Muslims in South Africa tried to construct relations between Muslims and the nation, and Muslims and the new state. Such an examination shall highlight two important facets of contemporary Muslim discourse. On the one hand, it will illustrate the dynamic nature in which Muslims construct an understanding of the Muslim community. Each group or organisation proposed a distinct conception of *ummah*, the universal Islamic society, as well as its South African part. On the other hand, the group or organisation also posited a distinct notion of the post-apartheid nation and state.

Islam and Nationalism

World religions like Islam tend to be regarded as potential threats to modern political formations in general and nationalism in particular. This is also true of Christianity and Buddhism, but the particu-

lar "nature" of Islam in the twentieth century makes this religion particularly suspect. Islam has a powerful concept of *ummah*, community spanning across race, language and ethnicity, which potentially threatened the nation and all patriotic sentiments. This essentialist notion has guided observation of political developments in Muslim societies. Thus, for example, Lewis described the dominant place of Islam as ideology in the pre-modern period: "descent, language, and habitation were all of secondary importance, and it is only during the last century that, under European influence, the concept of the political nation has begun to make headway" (Lewis 1966:71). According to Lewis, moreover, only the essential character of Islam appealed to the masses of Muslims in the modern world. Even before the rise of militant Islam, he declared that Islamic movements alone were authentic: "The religious orders alone spring from the native soil, and express the passions of the submerged masses of the population" (Lewis 1966). Needless to say, this observation suppressed or ignored the dynamics of pre-modern Islamic history, including the successive challenges to the caliphate by Persian, Turkish and regional sentiments. Another approach to illustrating the extreme contradictions between Islam and the modern nation is to search for justification in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, beyond the actual experience of Muslims in the past fourteen centuries. In this way, the researcher takes the place of the ideal Islamic jurist, and simulates a possible reason why Muslims should be objecting to the idea of nation. Vatikiotis, in particular, followed this approach and found that the concept of the nation-state clashed with the Medina constitution where "ultimate authority or legitimacy for acts of the community rested not with the tribal chiefs as before, but with the one deity, Allah, and His Prophet, Muhammad" (Vatikiotis 1987:36). Thus, he concludes, "the nation-state is ... a concept alien to Islam" (Vatikiotis 1987:38).

Modern political developments are similarly brushed aside in order to unveil the "authentic" and "true" Islamic position. Schulze has correctly identified the *ummah* as a symbol in Arab politics,

equally powerful as “a means for political order and orientation” in pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism (Schulze 1993:171). However, most scholars take this to mean that no significant difference exists between twentieth-century invocation of Islam and that of the earlier caliphs. And even when contemporary Muslim scholars try to do so, their attempts are placed against the universal character of Islam. Nagel finds the Syrian Muhammad al-Mubarak’s idea of multiple *umam* (plural of *ummah*) consisting of a variety of nations “not convincing because the message of the Prophet Muhammad from the beginning had a universal character, and Islam hinders the development of nation states while in opposition to Christianity, it wants also to establish power and state” (Antes et al. 1991:39—40). In one sweep, Nagel assumes essential characteristics for Islam and Christianity: the one universal and hungry for power, and the other not so in spite of centuries of perhaps misguided authority in the form of the Vatican. It is not surprising, therefore, that Nagel finds Mawdudi to be more accurate of Islamic ideology (Antes et al. 1991:40). According to Nagel, by rejecting the nation-state, Mawdudi and others ensure that the “original understanding of *ummah* continues to thrive, strengthened by the situation that a number of post-war international organisations were established” (Antes et al. 1991:42).

Needless to say, such analyses relegate Muslim choices to the overpowering influence of a past, and the useless attempts of the present. Whatever they do, Muslims are condemned to live in the past. The fact of the matter, however, is that even the most eloquent advocates of this form of Islamic ideology have not been able to break the boundaries of the state set by recent colonial and post-colonial history. Forms of political organisation, religious and otherwise, have been competing to define political entities in which people find themselves. The notion of an *ummah* is in this sense a powerful symbol of community which political groups invoke. Careful attention to the concept as invoked in the twentieth-century reveals that the symbol is expected to bear the burdens of contem-

porary needs, and is thus subject to redefinition and re-invention. Thus, for better or worse, the Muslim Brothers in many Arab countries remain national bodies in spite of their common rhetoric of Islamic ideology. Similarly, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, prominent representatives of Islamic political ideologies, remain divided and also generate intense 'national' symbols within their boundaries. The soccer and cricket teams of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan respectively are just two examples which define the nation of these countries in very dynamic ways.

The South African Ummah

During the past two decades, South Africa has gone through a period of rapid transformation. The momentum against apartheid increased from around the mid-seventies, and eventually led to political reforms and changes in 1990. After a period of intense negotiations, the first democratic elections in April 1994 ushered a new era for all the people of South Africa. Muslims in South Africa have been in this country for over 300 years, and built institutions and communities in the context of colonialism and apartheid. Such institutions were generally concerned with the preservation of the Muslim identity, often very specifically located in the different regions, and often in the face of tremendous legal and social obstacles. Rituals and organisations strove to protect the Muslim in the face of these difficulties. The period of negotiations and the first democratic elections posed a number of challenges to such conceptualisations. The negotiations and elections changed the old political order, and thereby Muslims' relations with the state. It also raised questions about political values such as democracy, and the general leadership of the whole South African Muslim community. In one way or another, the new context provided an opportunity for Muslims to redefine the notion of *ummah* for themselves in South Africa. From 1990 onwards, Muslims across a broad spectrum organised extraordinary gatherings, and produced important documents to grapple with these

notions. An analysis of these documents reveals some of the key dynamics of defining an *ummah* in South Africa at the end of the twentieth century. The following documents will be used in the analysis:

1. *The Struggle*, F. Esack (Cape Town: Call of Islam, 1988)
This booklet was produced by the Call of Islam (est. 1984) wherein the author outlined an Islamic ethic against apartheid. Of particular concern was his grappling with the Muslim community which did not espouse the values of justice, and did not resist apartheid.
 2. National Muslim Conference: Western Cape Convening Committee (1990)
The pamphlet prepared the groundwork for a national Muslim conference. It outlined the history of Muslim struggle against oppression in South Africa, and situated the challenges to democracy and negotiations for Muslims.
 3. *The MJC Speaks* (1990)
The undated pamphlet by the Muslim Judicial Council, a group representing religious leaders in Cape Town, expressed its position in relation to celebrating the pilgrimage *Id* (*Id al-Adha*) with the pilgrims in Mecca. The importance of this document lies in the fact that the Council claimed to be the “most representative group of *ulama* in South Africa”, a statement which was not only important in relation to ritual decisions but contemporary political ones as well.
 4. “A Muslim Response to Albie Sachs’s “To believe or not to believe”—the perils of the third option,” by Imam A. Rashied Omar, pp. 49—52. In *Believers in the Future: Proceedings of the National Inter-faith Conference on Religion-State Relations, December 2—4 1990, Johannesburg* (Cape Town: WCRP, South African
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Chapter, 1991)

The author, Imam at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, reminded the conference of pluralism within religious traditions as well as non-religious ideologies. Secondly, he focused on the ambiguous record of religious tradition in relation to apartheid, and appealed for confessions from this quarter as well.

5. Islamic Workshop on "The Draft Declaration on the Rights and Obligations of Religious People," for 25 October 1992, by Qiblah. This pamphlet was produced by Qiblah, a prominent anti-apartheid organization which, however, has rejected democratic alternatives. It called Muslims to a discussion on a proposed document that would suggest a model relationship among religions, and between religious traditions and the state in the country. The workshop's announcement clearly rejected this document by pointing out some of the problems that "genuine religion" would not tolerate.
 6. "The Holy Grail of Democracy," *Ar-Rasheed*, vol. 1, no. 12 (Shabaan 1412/ March 1992)
This editorial reflects on the West's acceptance of the coup in Algeria while supporting democratization elsewhere. Democracy, according to the editorial, was simply a convenient political tool for the subjugation of Muslims.
 7. "Transvaal & Natal Jamiat's Memo to Codesa," *Ar-Rasheed*, vol. 1, no. 12 (Shabaan 1412/March 1992)
The Transvaal and Natal Jamiats are regional guilds of religious scholars following the Deobandi religious outlook from India. The organizations excluded religious leaders from the Sunni Jamiat, as well as the eclectic Muslim Judicial Council. As representative of the Muslim community and its religious leaders, the Jamiats requested full observer status during the negotiations. They also took the opportunity to remind the negotiating teams of Mus-
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lims' rights and obligations towards the new nation.

8. The Role of Muslims in the New South Africa—Mohamed Shoaib Omar (1994)

Mr. Omar, a practicing attorney closely aligned to the Jamiat al-Ulama in Durban, wrote this essay outlining the two-fold responsibility of Muslims in the new South Africa. Firstly, Muslims had a responsibility towards the transformation of the society, and secondly, an opportunity for maintaining their Islamic identity and spreading Islam.

9. Sheikh Yusuf Tricentenary Commemoration Committee: Draft Mission Statement (1994)

The committee, headed by social worker and community historian Achmat Davids, was responsible for a highly successful tricentenary celebration in 1994. It attracted thousands of Cape Muslims to ceremonies, marches, and mass rallies. The statement, inspired by Davids, is a good example of how the Commemoration Committee regarded the meeting of Muslim and South African history.

10. "Muslim Personal Law," *Ar-Rasheed*, vol. 2, no. 8, September 1994/Rabi-at-Thaani 1415

The statement reminds Muslims of the opportunity provided in the constitution to implement Muslim Personal Law. It presents the acceptance and implementation of Muslim Personal Law as a responsibility given by God.

11. "Qiblah: Muslims and the Elections," by Imam Achmad Cassiem, in *Boorhaanol Islam* Meelad-un-Nabi edition, vol. 28, no. 4 (January 1994), pp. 29—32.

This was a pre-election issue of the magazine in which Cassiem and others clarified their views on the first democratic elections. In this article, Cassiem situated the Muslims in the context of

the oppressed of South Africa, but called upon Muslims to make unanimous decisions based on unity without being “mezmerized” by the 1994 April elections.

12. Proposed Constitution: People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) National Conference March 1997

PAGAD burst on the South African scene in August 1996 when it marched onto the house of notorious drug-dealer, and killed him. Photographers and television cameras relayed this image all over the world. PAGAD's Islamic connections are clear from the slogans and symbols it uses.

It is clear from these documents that Muslims were divided on a number of issues in relation to the emerging South African nation. However, one notion that persists across the spectrum is the recognition of a community located geographically in southern Africa. This is true of Cassiem who insists that “it is first of all necessary to locate the Muslims in the context of South Africa ... The Muslims are indissolubly part of the oppressed people; they do not desire, nor demand, nor expect preferential treatment either from the oppressor nor the oppressed” (Document 11:29). In his contribution, Esack brings into sharp relief the reality of the “community” and the goals of liberation. Even though covered by “lots of muck” which is “embarrassing” and “painful”, the activist has no choice but to be in this community (Document 1:69). On the leadership level, the documents reveal an acute desire or aspiration to represent the South African Muslim community. In this case, the Muslim Judicial Council declared that it was “the widest and most representative group of ulama and Imams in South Africa,” while the Jamiats of Transvaal and Natal rightly claim that they too “represent a broad cross-section of the Muslim community in South Africa” (Documents 3 and 7). In one way or another, the reality of South Africa informs the discourse of both politically oriented groupings (Call of Islam and Qiblah) as well as religious leadership groups. The latter have been

regional groupings which have now come to adopt the South African nation as their point of reference. This is a point that also comes out very clearly in Shoaib Omar's essay when he argued for Muslims making a contribution to South Africa as such. The Muslim community, as part of the *ummah* in a geographical region, seemed to have grappled with the idea of a nation without too much of a difficulty. Unlike the predictions of the purist Islamic rhetoric cited earlier in this essay, Muslims do not seem to see a fundamental contradiction between the South African nation and their community as part of the *ummah*.

This does not mean that there are not any fundamental differences among Muslims on what they regard as their responsibility towards the South African nation. This is, however, true of Muslims as it is true of other communities in South Africa. A careful look at these differences provides evidence of how Muslims grapple with this issue of the nation. For South Africa particularly, the dividing line between South Africa under apartheid and democracy provides some contrasting scenarios of how the 'nation' is conceptualized by various Muslim groupings. The attitude towards South Africa can be divided between two approaches. The first, represented in varying degrees by Cassiem, Esack, the National Muslim Conference, the Tricentenary Celebrations Committee, adopts South Africa as a nation with a unique Islamic history and destiny. Both Cassiem and Esack regard themselves as part of the oppressed in the country; the former embarrassed about the lack of justice among Muslims, but the latter identifying all Muslims as part of the oppressed. The National Muslim Conference and the Tricentenary Celebrations Committee gave it a special narrative focus. Concluding a history of Islamic political struggle in South Africa, Davids captures the sentiment of the National Muslim Conference pamphlet with eloquence:

The Muslims of South Africa have a history of struggling against political injustices. Our hope, as the present generation, lies in the continued struggle against injustice. On us, therefore, rests the onus to

ensure that justice prevails for all people in this country. In this struggle lies our salvation and our coexistence in a happy, just, equitable, democratic South Africa of the future.

Similarly, the Tricentenary Celebrations Committee seeks a similar meeting of destinies for Islam and South Africa, when it proposed:

To promote the spirit of the pioneers of Islam in South Africa through highlighting the admirable social conscience prevalent in early Muslim history...

This approach clearly mythologizes the history of struggle and political liberation, where the past seems to be moving inexorably towards the new democracy. The destiny of Muslims was locked with the destiny of the nation. This position becomes even clearer when contrasted with the position of the Jamiats. Here, one does not find any celebration of a common history. The Jamiat Memo speaks of the religious needs of the Muslims, particularly "full recognition in South African courts of law" to Muslim personal law. Similarly, Omar's eloquent essay urges Muslims to participate in the new political dispensation, and contribute meaningfully to it, but does not allude to a South African Muslim history of establishing such a dispensation. On the contrary, in the Foreword to M. S. Omar's essay (Document 8), the President of the Jamiatul Ulama Natal, Maulana Yunus Patel, states that "people of intellect, wisdom and knowledge could not make their rightful contribution towards the full and proper development of South Africa because they happened to be of the wrong colour." Whereas the Tricentenary could easily compile a list of such contributions, the Jamiat stands apart from that history. Most clearly, Document 10 (Muslim Personal Law) of *Ar-Rasheed* (Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal) spells out this contractual relationship between Muslims and South Africa. It deals with the difficult period in the past when the Jamiats were "negotiating for the enactment of Muslim Personal Law in South Africa." The article applauds the success of these "negotiations" in 1986 out

of which a 1990 report was ready but “owing to the political changes taking place at the time, the report and subsequent research and implementation of Muslims Personal Law was shelved until a new dispensation was in place.” The use of “negotiations” is interesting as the article tries to legitimate the 1986 collusion with the Apartheid State. Such “negotiations” were a form of cooption which the apartheid state exercised among willing groups in black, coloured and Indian communities (Moosa 1993:73—81). More importantly for this essay, however, is the manner in which these bodies representing religious leaders deal with the new state. Just as they had concerned themselves with the affairs of the Muslims” in the apartheid state, they now wrote to the negotiating teams and made demands for the “basic religious needs” of the Muslims. In terms of history and destiny, they are as far removed from the emerging new nation, as the earlier groups were part thereof. This does not mean, thereof, that their concerns and demands were illegitimate. The point being made here is how two groups of Muslims positioned themselves to South Africa at the end of the apartheid era: the one saw its destiny merging with the symbols of the new nation; while the second chose to establish a formal, legal relationship with the new state. Both were dedicated to the changes taking place, but they had different expectations of and commitment to the new nation.

Strange as it may seem, my analysis has so far placed Esack, A. Rashied Omar, Cassiem, and Davids in one group. With regard to the documents selected for analysis, however, there exist a number of differences among these as well. The principal disagreement lies in the acceptance of democracy as a fundamental principle of governance. Cassiem, in contrast with most of the other documents cited, supports democracy conditionally:

... this also means that if “Democracy” opposes Islam, then Islam opposes democracy. For example, if by so-called democratic procedures the majority of citizens

in a country support the legalization of marijuana, Muslims will oppose that democratic decision. (Document 11)

In this statement, Cassiem cannot see how Muslims could endorse the democratic alternative for South Africa. This sentiment was also addressed from another angle by the *ar-Rashied* when it casts democracy as the political tool of the West (Document 6, "The Holy Grail of Democracy"). This suspicion of democracy is evident in many other international Islamic movements as well. The unconditional acceptance of democracy as the basic framework for legislation and governance has often been regarded as a fundamental theological problem for Muslims. The sovereignty of God as the sole legislator could not be compromised by the will of the people, or any other democratic right or freedom. This is a widespread sentiment among Muslims as well as observers, and has not been directly addressed by those endorsing democracy in South Africa. A brief examination of this challenge, however, indicates that modern political theorists have inadequately dealt with what they perceive to be the problem of democracy. The assumption is that if an issue is clearly stated in the Qur'an or the normative example of the Prophet Muhammad, then no parliament may legislate contrary to such an issue. For example, since intoxicating substances were regarded harmful and prohibited in Islam, no laws may be enacted which allow people to consume them. However, Muslims have neglected some fundamental implications of this approach. If democratic procedures reflect the desire of the people, whether Muslim or not, to do that which is harmful or evil according to Islam, how do Muslims respond? What do Muslims do with a majority decision that alcoholic substances may be consumed. Presumably, protagonists of an Islamic solution argue that the strong arm of the law would be used to enforce Islamic law. Irrespective of the wishes of the majority, the law of God has to reign supreme, and the instruments of the state will be used to enforce the law. Upon careful

reflection, however, this approach towards non-practising Muslims or non-believing citizens in a country is fraught with difficulties, not least from the Islamic tradition itself. Such an authoritarian and mechanical approach to enforce compliance falls in the face of the ethical teachings of Islam. For the purpose of this essay, the following Prophetic statement, which is often used to invoke an authoritarian approach to Islam, makes for interesting reading:

Whoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest faith.³

Clearly, the statement advocates a constructive approach to ridding society of evil, but equally allows for other approaches as well. Islamists choose to adopt the first part of the statement as the manifesto of an Islamic approach to politics. Such a choice is open to question, and certainly makes mockery of the broad ethical guideline contained in the statement.

This approach to democracy, however, conceals another problem which Cassiem and other contemporary Muslims do not address. Real power lies theoretically in the hands of the religious elite who have the capacity to interpret the will of God for people. Mawdudi, the most important theorist of this ideal, underscores the authority of this elite: “every Muslim who is capable and qualified to give sound opinion on matters of Islamic law, is entitled to interpret the law of God when such interpretation becomes necessary” (Mawdoodi 1976:161). It is this absolute authority to which Cassiem and the Jamiats allude, in essence their own authority, when they speak about the limits of democracy. A. Rashied Omar’s response to Albie Sach’s poses this fundamental problem when he asked the most eminent theorist in the African National Congress, as to how the state would relate to the pluralism inherent within religious communities (Document 4). This is a legitimate question in itself, and has not been adequately addressed by either the state or by

religious communities themselves. With respect to this essay, however, Omar's question underscores a fundamental dilemma at the heart of Islamic leadership mechanisms within Islam in general, and Islam in South Africa in particular. In the absence of a central authority that regulates religious leaders and leadership, the Islamic tradition recognizes leaders within fairly broad parameters. Leadership arises out of knowledge expressed in education and ritual settings. In the past, such expertise and ritual leadership was recognized by the state and accordingly rewarded. In South Africa, in the absence of an Islamic state, leaders equipped with some Islamic disciplinary expertise were recognised and accepted by the people. Not surprisingly, expertise on the one hand, and community acceptance on the other, admitted a great deal of diversity in religious leadership. More than any other group in South Africa, the Muslim Judicial Council reflects and admits to this diversity:

The community appoints its own imams. We are the collective of people who—through their masajid, Islamic institutions and through the religious service to the community came to be in the MJC. Any person whose community appoints him as an Imaam or who has studied Islam at any of the recognized institutions is welcome to apply for membership (Document 3, p. 18).

The problem that Omar asks, and which Cassiem and the Jamiats cannot answer, is how and which religious leadership, vested with full authority in an ideal Islamic state, would address issues of governance. It seems that Islam stipulates knowledge as a minimum requirement for eligibility, but that the community or society as a whole supplemented this recognition of their leadership. The latter factor, the recognition of leadership, has not been adequately dealt with in modern Islamic thought. The democratic method, espoused by many Muslim organisations in South Africa, poses a possible solution to this problem, but Cassiem and the Jamiats are more

ambitious.

The Jamiat letter addressed to the chief negotiating teams of South Africa offered their services “to discuss the feasibility and the practicality of establishing a fully-constituted Islamic Court of South Africa” (Document 7). Cassiem is even more ambitious as he speaks from a more dynamic national position examined above. Consequently, he regards the Muslims to play a vanguard role in South Africa. Reflecting on the 1994 elections, Cassiem revealed how he viewed the destiny of Islam leading the destiny of the oppressed:

If Muslims cannot unite then how on earth are the amorphous oppressed masses going to do it! We should not be mesmerized by the 27th April 1994 but pursue our goal of unity of the Muslims AND the unity of the oppressed masses. For after all, it is the oppressors who are the minority. (Document 11, 32)

Cassiem seemed to be expecting the liberation of South Africa taking place under the leadership of the Muslims. This sentiment, inspired no doubt by Cassiem, was reflected in the preamble of PAGAD’s constitution. Re-constituting a verse of the Qur’an, the anti-crime organization configures the goal of South Africa in Islamic terms: “You are the best of people evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in the Creator and followers of the books: Zaboor (David); Taurat (Moses); Bible (Jesus); Qur’an (Muhammad S.A.W.). All those persons who thus surrender themselves to the will of God are welded into a community and that how the Society comes into being” (Document 12). The preamble takes a verse of the Qur’an (3:110) and re-reads it in the context of post-apartheid South Africa that is aware of religious pluralism. Cassiem’s sentiments of leading the South African oppressed is clearly evident in this reading. It reflects his ambition within the South African nation. Thus, a guarded rejection of democracy is really a dissimulated bid for leadership over all Muslims for the Jamiats and the oppressed South Africans for Cassiem.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that cultural and religious communities in South Africa often face judgement and evaluation in terms of their concurrence with national and developmental themes. Such approaches are useful for evaluating the extent to which such communities have matched or evolved according to such criteria. Focusing on the final conclusions and desired expectations, such approaches, however, ignore the processes and discourses within cultural and religious traditions. Thus, for example, Islam in South Africa is regarded as universally and potentially militant, or part of the liberation movement. Moreover, the Islamic religion is regarded as essentially hostile to the nation. Such generalisations and conclusions miss the important nuances within Muslim discourses. Taking a careful look at a variety of documents produced at the close of apartheid, it is very clear that the presumptions about Muslims and Islam are unfounded. These documents revealed the debates and arguments among Muslim leaders and organisations. One group of Muslims, generally youth who were engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle, constructed a mythology where the Muslim community and the South African nation converged. Religious leaders, exemplified by the Jamiats in the old Transvaal and Natal, were more aloof, and chose to lead the South African Muslims and represent them in negotiations with the state. These contrasting mythological and contractual models divided the Muslims towards the nation. With regard to post-apartheid South Africa, Muslims were re-divided between those who opposed or resisted democracy, and those who endorsed it as the foundation of the new nation. The former, consisting of both youth as well as religious leaders, draw easily on modern Islamic political theory developed elsewhere in the Islamic world. Those in favour of democracy have not directly addressed the democratic challenges to religion in general, and Islamic thought in particular. They have been content to join the pro-democracy chorus, but refrained from addressing the challenges lurking in anti-democratic discourse in modern Islamic thought. Clearly, there are

signs of such a debate as Muslims develop their destiny as part of South Africa. Much more, however, needs to be done.

Notes

- 1 Cabinet Secretariat, Minutes of the Cabinet Committee for Security and Intelligence Affairs: August 15, 1996.
- 2 I have developed this analysis in more detail in my *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermons*, University Press, Gainesville: Florida, 1999. See also Asad (1993) and Asad (1986).
- 3 Narrated by Muslim and reproduced in Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith, Translated by Exxedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Damascus, The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1976), 110.

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