Tension in Religious Practices of Muslim Students when Studying Emergency Medical Care

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Abstract

The Bachelor of Health Science degree in Emergency Medical Care (BHS EMC) in South Africa requires that students participate in clinical learning and medical rescue practicals. This study explores the views and experiences of a sample of Muslim students studying EMC at one university regarding potential areas of conflict between their religious obligations and the required academic activities. Second, in presenting the outcomes of these interviews, the article also reflects on the challenges facing secular universities when confronted with heterogeneity in understanding the religious requirements or obligations of the faithful – articulated or unarticulated – in the same religious community on the one hand, and the dilemma of maximum religious accommodation and embrace of religious pluralism versus pragmatism and the limitations of programmatic and budgetary constraints, on the other. Third, in discussing the challenges presented by the students, and their understanding of Islam and its requirements, we use the ideas of Shahab Ahmed (d. 2015) as articulated in his magnum opus, *What is Islam?* (Ahmed 2016). He argues that the term 'Islam' 'expresses a historical and human phenomenon in its plenitude and complexity of meaning' (Ahmed 2016:5). Finally, in locating the responses of our informants within their religio-theological and legal contexts, as well as in the broader world of Islam in social and cultural

contexts, we draw attention to the nuanced realities of both textual and lived Islam.

Introduction

South Africa (SA) is the continent's largest educational and economic hub. It is the headquarters of its largest relief and disaster management international organization, Gift of the Givers Foundation (est. 1992), which has projects in 168 countries (cf. Gift of the Givers Foundation n.d.). While its services are faith-indifferent in the composition of rescue teams and whom it serves, its leadership, orientation, and funding base are primarily Muslim. SA universities offer a Bachelor of Health Science degree in Emergency Medical Care (BHS EMC). This degree falls under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a system implemented by the SA Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and is framed around the credits assigned to each level of learning in the country. BHS EMC graduates also register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), the regulatory body that coordinates all health professions – including EMC – in SA (SA Government Gazette 2017). The EMC degree programs in SA focus on developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights required by emergency care practitioners to practice acute clinical care and rescue predominantly in pre-hospital settings. Students in EMC programs are required to participate in clinical learning and medical rescue practicals[1].

Anecdotal observation before this study was that Muslim students experienced and articulated tensions between their religious practices and obligations and certain academic activities. Examples include the times of classes and traveling for emergency and medical rescue outings clashing with the formal daily prayer (*ṣalāh*) times, living arrangements on medical rescue

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[1] Some of the work is done in an authentic setting with actual patients for the clinical work, while others are simulation rescue exercises that the university tries to make as realistic as possible.

exercises, and interactions between opposite sexes[2], regarded as incompatible with Islamic gender relations prescriptions. These initial observations prompted us to attempt to better understand the experiences of Muslim students studying EMC with a focus on developing a deeper understanding of potential conflicts between the religious beliefs and practices of Islam – in its multiple interpretations – on the one hand, and academic activities associated with their studies, on the other[3].

Islam is the second-largest religion globally (approximately 23% of the world's population – Hacket & McClendon 2017). Furthermore, in the more immediate context of SA, the most recent (2016) census indicates that 892,685 people (1,6% of the population) identified Islam as their religion (Stats South Africa 2016)[4]. Despite their relatively small numbers, Muslims play a disproportionately influential role in the SA socio-political and economic life (Argyle 1981:223). More pertinently, Muslim organizations such as Gift of the Givers[5] and Islamic Relief (est. 2004) are the major players in relief work – including emergency relief work – in SA, and arguably on the continent. The former routinely outperforms the state regarding intervention disasters (Desai 2009:5).

Several studies have been done on the challenges Muslims face in non-Muslim educational institutions with a Christian religious background (Naparan & Balimbangan 2020), or where they are a religious minority in a

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[2] We use the terms 'opposite sex' and 'gender', as understood by our study interviewees: These are members of the opposite sex regarded as legally eligible for marriage to the other sex.

[3] The university where this study was done has a minority of Muslims, although the exact percentage could not be obtained because application forms do not inquire into one's religious affiliation. While an indication of the presence of Muslims can be gauged through membership in the Muslim Students Association, this only provides an estimate. However, studies indicate that more Whites, Indians, and Brown people (ethnic groups) enter higher education than Black South Africans (Stats South Africa 2016:30).

[4] Schoeman, writing in 2017 and citing figures purportedly from 2013 – three years before that of StatsSA (the official South African census body) – provide a total of 1,042,046 Muslims in South Africa (Schoeman 2017).

[5] Its website describes the Gift of the Givers Foundation as 'the largest disaster response non-governmental organization of African origin on the African continent' (Gift of the Givers Foundation n.d.).

non-Muslim country (Chen & Tabassum 2019). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study that deals with the challenges that observant Muslims[6] face in studying EMC. Some of these challenges coincided with the challenges of being a religious minority. Our study also differs from all the others perused, which invariably approached Muslimness and Islam as a reified monolithic and ahistorical entity and made unchallenged assumptions about these.

'Islam', a term coming from the Arabic trilateral root *s-l-m* that can be translated with 'to submit' or 'peace, soundness, and safety' (Ayoub 2013:8) – is understood by Muslims as a 'voluntary submission or surrender to the will of God' (Ayoub 2013:8). Islam has also become the name of a world religion with followers who are mainly born into it and diverse cultures with multiple interpretations and approaches to their faith, even as they contribute to it on an ongoing basis (Ahmed 2016:5-109). In other words, it is a discursive tradition. Most Muslims agree on two sources of their faith and practice's legal and moral foundations. The first is the Quran – a scripture they believe to have been revealed to Muhammed (d. 632) over some time (609-632 CE). According to the Muslim belief system, that is the unaltered *ipsissima verba* of God (Esack 2001:195). The second source, which theoretically enjoys much less authority, is the Precedent (*Sunnah*) of Muhammad – his sayings, practices, acts of omission, or turning a blind eye to the actions of others which may suggest permissibility. The *Sunnah* is captured in a body of canonical literature of varying authenticity called the *Ḥadīth* (Brown 2009:6-9)[7]. Despite the religious affirmation of these two sources as authoritative, the Muslim religio-legal life is primarily governed by the interpretation of religious scholars and legal schools of thought. It is therefore uncommon for a Muslim layperson to directly approach these sources for ethical or religious guidance. Equally important is that in various parts of the Muslim world, the notions of custom (*ʿurf*, lit. *the known*) and tradition (*ʿādah*, lit. 'habit')[8] are also regarded as significant parts of what governs socio-cultural

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[6] We acknowledge that the term 'observant Muslim' is fraught with complexities. In the case of this study, we selected those who self-described as such.

[7] *Ḥadīth* (lit. *report*) is an account of something that Muhammad is reported to have said or done, or his response to something done in his presence.

[8] Retaining the technical term in its Arabic form, rather than using the translation, is common practice in the study of Islam. We have placed the Arabic term in brackets at the initial mention. Where an Arabic term has gained traction in Eng-

life and serve as sources of religio-social mores, often with legal implications.

Furthermore, the texture of Muslims' locale and the context in their ever-varying permutations also impact the lived Islam of the believers as much as they influence it. After all, like other religions, Islam is also 'a tangible, human, and historical phenomenon' (Arab 2019), of which its foundational canons are only a part. In the words of Wendy Shaw, an art historian:

> Far from being subscribed by doctrine, Islam, like any other religion, is informed by its internal discourses, including religious practices and cultural production. Thus, Islam is not constituted solely in its 'fundaments' and doctrinal interpretations but is enacted within cultural products that can alter how these fundaments are understood within any given context (Shaw 2012:32).

It is important to note that, despite the hegemony of the textual and canonical tradition in contemporary Islam, this textualism has not always been the case throughout the Muslim world transhistorically. It is essentially the outcome of what Ahmed describes as 'an orthodoxizing trajectory in Islamic history' (Ahmed 2016:281). Other than the Ismailis who defer to the living Imam – Prince Karim al-Husayni (1936-), known as the Agha Khan[9], as the Living Quran, and therefore the final authority of what Islam says – for several periods and in many different parts of the Islamicate[10], the textual prescriptive tradition did not hold sway as normative Islam. Instead, the non-legalistic, more esoteric expression of Islam, which embraced local forms of spiritual practices – later described as 'Sufism' – had the allegiance of large parts of

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lish, such as 'halal', we used the term instead of the English one without italicizing it.

[9]   Known by the religious title 'Mawlana Hazar Imam' (our master, the present Imam) within Ismaili Muslim circles and as Aga Khan IV elsewhere, he is the 49th Imam of Nizari Ismailism, a tendency within Shīʿī Islam.

[10] This term was first coined by Marshal Hodgson (d. 1968), a historian and scholar of Islam, 'to denote the distinction between Islam as a faith…and the culture in of which it has formed the core' (Hodgson 1974:3), on the one hand, and the Islamicate phenomena – 'the cultural and even material productions of regions in which Muslims were culturally dominant, actually rooted in religious traditions or texts' (Hodgson 1974:6), on the other.

the community and many parts of the world. This contestation continues in various ways (Ahmed 2016:274-297, 303-304).

In SA, where the textual and prescriptive tendencies have gathered hegemony over the last 30 years, these scholars are organized along geographical, cultural, and theological lines[11]. Furthermore, there are unarticulated religious tendencies or approaches to the faith among Muslims, which are often reluctantly acknowledged, while their nomenclatures, such as 'traditionalist', 'modernist', and 'progressive', are extensively debated (Esack 2018). More easily recognized are the Islamic legal and theological schools followed by Muslims. We, therefore, pay more attention to this aspect of our sample's responses[12].

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[11] These are primarily the following: 1) Sunni Broadly: This group accommodates all expressions of Sunni Islam with official organizational structures such as the Muslim Judicial Council in the Western, Northern, and Eastern Cape. 2) Sunni Deobandi: Represented by the Jamiʿatul' Ulama of Gauteng and its partners in Limpopo, the Northwest Province, Free State, and KwaZulu-Natal. The latter is ideologically much more conservative than their Gauteng counterparts. They confine membership to a more conservative interpretation of Islam, conforming to the Deobandi school of Sunni theology, which is rooted in the city of Deoband in India. During the Covid-19 pandemic, serious theological and legal fissures emerged in this group and were ventilated in the Gauteng High Court. One tendency among them veers towards a much more literal and strict application of religious legal texts with a minimal accommodation of science, religious pluralism, and the demands of a secular constitutional dispensation. This tendency among the Deobandis also opposes education – particularly in the social sciences – at a non-religious institution of higher learning (Ulama 2017). While these differences are being played out in the various Deobandi seminaries which train the religious scholars who are staffing the mosques and madrassas attended by the interviewees, they have not sedimented into clearly defined separate religious authority structures. 3) Organized as the Sunni Jamiʿatul' Ulama, at a superficial glance, they differ from the Sunni Deobandis, primarily on the theological status of the Prophet and the permissibility of innovating 'new religious practices' which were not formalized in the first three generations of the earliest Muslims. Significant distinctions exist between these groups at a larger sociological and anthropological level.

[12] For the various legal positions of the four primary Sunni schools, we have relied mainly on ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī's (d. 1429) *Al-Fiqh ʿalā al-Madhāhib al-*

A specific legal school is held as the norm in every different community. Although most Muslims are aware of the existence of other schools, they are generally only familiar with the dominant one in their community. In the province where this study was conducted, the dominant Islamic law school is the Ḥanafī one, and we can safely assume that all our informants adhere to this school[13]. It is essential to note this mediated nature of religious authority because in dealing with Muslims – as with other religious and cultural communities – we never engage a monolithic community. Instead, we deal with specific students who come from a particular location and frame of religious authority. These are all elements they may not even have consciously reflected upon, let alone be able to articulate[14]. The nuances in specific locations and their frames of authority are central to the work of Ahmed (2016) that we employ in our responses to the issues raised by those interviewed.

Developing a better understanding of Muslim students' experiences studying EMC is essential in many African countries, including SA, where the constitution protects religious freedom and tolerance (Art. 15 of the SA Constitution's Bill of Rights 1996), while Muslims are a significant religious minority (The Constitution 1996:7 of 177). However, in attempting to do so, more critical issues of rights, religious pluralism and freedom, and the question of the obligation of a secular state institution about these arose, which we did not anticipate when we initially set off to examine the experiences of Muslim students.

ʿArbaʿah (al-Jazīrī 1987). For the Twelver Shīʿī positions, we utilized Abū al-Qāsim Khūʿīʾs (d. 1899) *Minhāj al-Ṣālihīn* (Khuʿī 2013).

[13] There are currently four Sunni Schools of Law, of which two are common in SA – the Shāfiʿī in the Cape and the Ḥanafī among Muslims of Indo-Pak origin who are predominant in the eastern and northern parts of the country – the Ḥanbalī and the Mālikī. The Shīʿī schools – predominantly in Iran and Bahrain and common in India and Pakistan – consist of the Jaʿfarī and the Ismailī. Peculiar to the Sultanate of Oman is the ʿIbāḍī school. SA has a small but growing community of Shīʿīs.

[14] Further complicating matters in relation to these schools are that their legal positions are often not those held by the eponym of that school but by one of his leading students or even a position arrived at much later by a body of scholars identified with that school (Khalafallah 2005:49).

When entering higher education institutions, most individuals (including Muslims) desire to fit in and be accepted by the general university population (De Vaus 1982). Depending on the levels of strictness that individual Muslims attach to their religious obligations, and the category of obligatoriness according to different schools of Islamic law, these levels can be a minefield to negotiate. Nevertheless, the university is expected to formulate a position on these questions because, from time to time, observant Muslims raise religious obligations as an obstacle to fulfilling the required practices in their academic program. Other than the difficulty of completing all the program requirements, the public fulfilling of these religious obligations also presents tensions for them in terms of complete acceptance by their peer groups within tertiary educational environments where peers are not familiar with a Muslim's religious obligations. One or more Muslims, hiving off from the group for about 10 minutes to perform a ritualized prayer, may place them in an awkward situation, caught between the desire to adapt to university life and fit in with friends on the one hand and holding on to one's religious beliefs on the other. An analysis of the transcripts revealed seven core tension areas experienced between the religious practices of the interviewees and academic activities associated with studying EMC. These core themes, in no order of priority, are:

1. Interactions with the opposite sex.
2. The presence and consumption of alcohol.
3. Catering and dietary requirements.
4. Finding time to pray in the prescribed periods.
5. Provisions relating to dress code and uniform.
6. Shift work and travel arrangements.
7. Observation of religious holidays/events.

After discussing our methodology, we look at each of these separately in relation to the students' location and within the larger discursive tradition of Islam. In doing so, we consider the relevant support texts that the students invoked and how this issue has been dealt with in the Islamicate as part of our argument that Islam is not a reified entity, but an ever-evolving discursive tradition.

Methodology

Interviews

To study the tensions between the religious obligations of Muslims, on the one hand, and the responsibilities which the university's program places on them, on the other, we have chosen a qualitative descriptive design for this study (Colorafi & Evans 2016). Qualitative research involves collecting data through observation, interviews, or document collection from the interviewees in the study, who are often in a familiar setting. Such a design is well suited to developing a deep understanding of the interviewees' experiences and related events in simple terms (Sandelowski 2000:335).

We conducted one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with a sample of observant Muslim students studying EMC. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of the core experiences of a specific event as described by each individual. We applied purposeful convenience sampling in the selection of interviewees, adopting this approach to ensure that, as far as possible, each interviewee would possess the required depth of knowledge and experience to make their responses valuable in terms of the aim and focus of the study (Creswell 2008). Of the six interviewees, three were male, and three were female. The face-to-face method allowed the researcher to build rapport with the interviewees, allowing for easier recounting of the subjects' experiences. We chose the one-on-one model to reduce the sense of judgment interviewees might have felt compared to being interviewed with their peers in a focus group interview (Creswell 2008).

The interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission while the researcher took field notes. The discussion began with a central opening statement: 'The Emergency Medical Care degree offered at your university involves activities that require group work, traveling outside of the immediate area, and contact with the opposite sexes. Please describe your experiences relating to the activities mentioned above, keeping your religious background in mind?' We used follow-up prompts to encourage the interviewees to share sufficiently deep and rich information.

Data Analysis

We transcribed the interviews verbatim and read through them thoroughly. Following this, we performed a manual coding process focused on summariz-

ing the data (Sandelowski 2000:335). Once we completed the coding, we developed common themes and emerging trends.

Trustworthiness
We focused on ensuring that our study meets credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability criteria. We achieved credibility by ensuring that the interviewees we chose for the study were carefully and appropriately selected. In addition, we confirmed that all the interviewees were students registered for a BHS EMC degree and identified (at the time of the study) as 'observant Muslims'. Dependability refers to the data obtained from the research, unaffected by time and changing conditions (Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen, & Kyngas 2014). Confirmability is strengthened when the data and findings correspond between two or more independent reviewers. In this case, the method and coding were independently verified and checked by a second person. Finally, transferability is present in that the study could be replicated and anticipated to have the same or similar results and is ensured by the researcher, compiling a detailed written report, outlining the exact method used to collect and analyze the data (Kaariainen *et al.* 2014).

Ethical Considerations
The Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg granted ethical clearance for this study (REC C1-54-2019). We completed information letters containing details of the study and consent forms before each interview. To ensure confidentiality in the write-up, we allocated alphabetical letters to identify interviewees (cf. Creswell 2008). The interviewer was the only individual familiar with their identities.

Results of the Interviews
In this section, we first discuss the common tension areas or problems raised by our informants. We then peruse the Islamic legal and nuanced ethical positions about them, which lend legitimacy to the issue raised by the students who, in their own way, approach the themes in a personal way that they expect to be esteemed, being respectfully accommodated by the university. A nuancing of the issues follows, based on the relevant religious texts the interviewees would theoretically follow, albeit via their religious leaders, institu-

tions, local customs, and broader applications. Nuancing these positions do not pit the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees – their lived Islam – against a normative textual Islam. This does, however, highlight the complexities and lack of agreement among the interviewees on what constitutes the religious obligations that the university is expected to facilitate.

The following section discusses the challenges for students and the university in the latter's quest to become a more inclusive space for religious minorities. We focus on the difficulties that these tensions present and the quest to accommodate them that arise in a democratic society that allows diversity and celebrates it. However, there are limitations to any affirmation of diversity based on a pre-determined Global North culture and ideological underpinnings that masquerade as secular but are profoundly Christian and Western. Thus, we also deal with the necessity to articulate to others the discomfort experienced by the interviewees and turn it into a part of learning in a pluralist post-apartheid society.

Interactions with the Opposite Sex
All six interviewees shared information regarding challenges experienced concerning expected interactions between the opposite sexes.

Shared Accommodation
Sharing tents between genders, sleeping areas, and changing areas during rescue activities created discomfort for several interviewees.

'*I found it quite shocking that males and females would both sleep in one tent irrespective of anything*'.

'*...when like on the hike and stuff...uh some people [females] had to share tents with guys*'.

Close Interaction with the Opposite Sex
The interviewees experienced close interaction between male and female classmates as a source of discomfort.

'*…so, then we're not comfortable with that close relations with guys*'.

'*…so, if it's for socializing, I'm not allowed to do that*'.

On some occasions, these were new experiences for many of the interviewees who usually attended same-gender high schools, often with an Islamic orientation, and were reared with the notion that marriageable males and females (also referred to as 'non-*maḥrams*') should have minimal physical contact. The idea of males and females sharing a tent would be exceptionally rare among Muslims. In the Quran and the *Sunnah,* some prescriptions dictate how strange males and females are allowed to interact with each other, and the Quran speaks explicitly about males and females averting their gazes[15] from one another:

> Tell the believing men that they lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is aware of what they do. Moreover, say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and guard their private parts…and that they display not their beauty save to their husbands, or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands or their sons (Q. 24:30-31)[16].

This text assumes that such looks (gazes) may be considered a prelude to extra-marital sexual encounters, which are prohibited in Islam. However, one may also argue that, given the prescription's context, it would not be applicable if there is little or no possibility that the encounter itself would lead to such sexual encounters. The second noteworthy point is that although the Quran imposes modesty on both men and women, the prescription for women is more extensive.

Interpretations of this prescription and the permissible spaces or occasion of exemptions have varied throughout the history of Islam – inside the Islamicate and where Muslims are in the minority, both with regards to the textual interpretation of Muslim scholars as well as the lived Islam of Muslims (Abdulla & Keshavjee 2018). In SA households, for example, where the strictest interpretation of this segregation is observed, one will still routinely find a female domestic worker interacting with all the male members of the family. In the university where we conducted this study, we observed complete gender segregation only in the *muṣallā* (a designated building for the

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[15] In contemporary English, the expression 'lower your gaze' in this Quranic verse has emerged as a peculiarly Muslim expression.

[16] All translated texts from the Quran cited are from Asad (1980).

formal Muslim prayers). Even if this justificatory text is invoked to support gender segregation, a more significant reason for the discomfort expressed by the Muslim interviewees is the extent and the naturalness with which the inter-gender interactions occur during camps or rescue expeditions. While this is common across the university, in larger university spaces one can easily find ways to mitigate this contact, for example, if one is a female sitting next to another female in class or two males sitting on the lawn with two females. In the more confined spaces of an expedition, such opportunities are much more limited, and there are more situations where one is compelled to interact more closely with members of the opposite sex. This explains why sharing tents for sleeping evoked particularly strong opposition from interviewees.

Given the nature of the BHS EMC degree, the interaction between males and females is inevitable. However, most of the interviewees saw their religion as allowing for 'sufficient leeway' under certain circumstances in this regard. All interviewees indicated that they were personally able to manage any discomfort and participate in the required activities along with members of the opposite sex.

The circumstances mentioned, included seeking or providing medical attention to a member of the opposite sex and performing teamwork tasks with mixed-gender teams, as this was for work/educational purposes. While our interviewees would be hard-pressed if required to justify the basis, legitimacy, and parameters of 'sufficient leeway', they all had a general expectation that somewhere in their religion there had to be some commonsensical approach that trumps non-negotiable religious laws. Their attitude can be legitimated from Islamic legal sources and religious authorities, based on necessity (*ḍarūrah*)[17] and need (*ḥājah*), although not without contention.

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[17] Wahbah al-Zuhaylī (1932-2015), a pre-eminent Syrian jurist, describes *ḍarūrah* as 'when a person finds himself in a situation of danger or extreme hardship, such that he fears the occurrence of harm to his life, bodily organs, honor, or wealth. In such a case, a person is allowed to do something that would normally be forbidden, abandon that which is normally obligatory, or delay an obligation from its proper time of performance – all to repel any harm that he feels will affect him, within the predefined principles of the Sharia' (al-Zuhaylī 1969:67). The notions of necessity (*ḍarūrah*) and need (*ḥājah*) are derived from the Quran, which suggests that there are degrees of hardship and that some may be so significant, that to avoid them is permissible even if it means violating a clear commandment.

Farid Esack, Raeesah Boomgaard, and Craig Vincent-Lambert

Presence in a Group where Alcohol is Consumed

In their responses to the challenges faced in an environment where alcohol was consumed, interviewees raised the behavior of non-Muslim students at 'after-parties' and the challenges of fitting into a group where drinking alcohol was an essential social lubricant.

Behavior at 'After-Parties'/Functions where Alcohol was Served

Interviewees felt uncomfortable surrounded by alcohol and being present at 'after-parties' held upon completion of events and practical exercises. While they never felt that others expected them to consume alcohol, they nevertheless thought it was an inappropriate environment.

'*…the after-party, there's a lot of drinking. We are not allowed to drink… uhm, so that was a bit of a problem*'.

'*I am very uncomfortable at those after-parties*'.

'*…rescue exercises, also like the after-parties and the drinking and stuff are very awkward and uncomfortable*'.

'*We are not allowed to indulge in, you know, partying or consuming alcohol*'.

Difficulty Fitting in with a Team that Drinks

Several interviewees highlighted that they experienced a challenge bonding with classmates as they felt that their inability to consume alcohol at social gatherings and teamwork events created a social barrier for them.

'*We felt awkward and out of place and uncomfortable*'.

'*We were more like sidelined*'.

The Quran and the Hadith are explicit in their prohibition of intoxicants (*khamr*), widely and commonly understood as alcohol. The Quran also mentions that *khamr* has some positive elements, but that the bad in it outweighs

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Abdullah provides examples of an emergency where 'a person may delay and even skip prayer if it is to save the life of a drowning person' (Abdullah 2018:2).

(*akbar*, lit. 'is bigger than') its benefit (Q. 2:219)[18]. The relevant issue for our consideration in this study is not the nuances to the question of the permissibility or otherwise of alcohol or the more encompassing term 'intoxicants', but the acceptance/rejection of and participation in its sociability. Given the larger argument that we are interested in the permeability or nuanced nature of religious injunctions in the context of lived religion as distinct from text-based religion, it is interesting that even though the abstention from *khamr*, and more specifically, alcohol, had become 'one of the distinctive marks of the Muslim world' (Ahmed 2016:57-58), this has not always been the case. The Ḥanafī school – the school of law with which all our interviewees identify – earlier had a much more nuanced position on alcohol consumption and only moved towards its complete prohibition in the 12th century (Sheikh & Islam 2018)[19].

It should be noted that the incidence of alcohol consumption in SA is considered one of the highest in the world, with SA being ranked sixth, despite relatively high levels of abstinence (65%), i.e., those who do consume alcohol tend to be heavy drinkers (Pelzer & Ramlagan 2009). Locally, alco-

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[18] The evolution of the Quran's position on *khamr* is a classic example used to prove and explain the notion of abrogation (*naskh*), whereby one part of the text may abrogate another. Abrogation functions as a means of explaining seemingly contradictory verses in the Quran. For Muslims, this theory explains how God gradually (*tadrījan*) weans the believers off from evil in a manner that recognizes limitations in how rapidly they can abandon social practices, which the new religion viewed with disdain or rejected it. The first text said to have been revealed is a relatively benign one: 'Do not go near to prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying' (Q. 4:43). This text is believed to have been followed by one proclaiming that there is more harm to consuming alcohol than benefit: 'They ask you about wine (*khamr*) and gambling. Say, "In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. Nevertheless, the sinfulness in consuming it, greater than their benefit"' (Q. 2:219). Finally, this verse is said to be followed by one that unambiguously declares intoxicants (*khamr*) as evil, 'to be avoided as "defilement" (*rijs)* from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful' (Q. 5:90).

[19] Shahab Ahmed deals extensively with the nuances around alcohol consumption and its social ubiquity in many parts of the Muslim world, even among some religious scholars (Ahmed 2016:57-73). Najam Haider (2013:85) attributes this shift on the part of the Hanafīs to the increasing pressure placed on them by the Mālikīs and Shāfiʿīs – two other schools of Sunni Law.

hol use is widely accepted to facilitate entertainment and bonding between teammates, colleagues, and friends (cf. Monahan & Lannutti 2006).

Despite being uncomfortable in an environment where alcohol is present, the interviewees acknowledged that alcohol use is a norm for most of their colleagues and respected their right to consume it. However, there was also a single response where clear language was used, blaming the majority for the discomfort of the Muslims – 'We are sidelined'. Some indicated that they put their religious sentiments aside and chose to 'socialize a bit' to build good relations within the team. Building good relations between classmates and colleagues is essential to the Emergency Medical Care and Rescue professions. Teambuilding is thus highly valued within the EMC degree programs in SA (Makkink 2016:1). However, the consumption of alcohol in the program as an intrinsic part of teambuilding has been uncritically accepted and adopted by the department in question.

Dietary Requirements
All interviewees highlighted challenges with their dietary requirements while traveling for camps or rescue activities and the lack of halāl (lit. 'permissible') food[20].

'…*like, we [should] have our own Muslim ḥalāl stuff catered*'.

'…*on all these trips and stuff, there's always the issue of ḥalāl food*'.

Islamic law requires that Muslims consume only ḥalāl food[21]. What exactly constitutes ḥalāl and how to verify that is widely debated (Tayob 2012). While there is unanimity around the prohibition of pork and pork products in

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[20] 'Ḥalāl' is an Arabic term that means 'permissible' and is contrasted with *ḥarām* (*forbidden*). Both terms are primarily used in the context of food to suggest that it is either permissible or prohibited for Muslim consumption.

[21] The determining Qur'anic text which broadly outlines what is prohibited is Quran 5:4: 'Forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which you [yourselves] may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and [forbidden to you is] all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars'.

SA, there are extensive disagreements and turf battles between various organizations involved in the meat[22] slaughtering industry to ensure that the products certified as such are indeed ḥalāl. Muslims in SA are among the strictest Muslim minorities in the world in observing the ḥalāl requirements. The same usually applies to the South Asian diaspora in the UK and other parts of Africa (and to some extent in the US) and Muslims in South Asia and South East Asia. The Quran, for example, explicitly allows the consumption of meat slaughtered by the People of the Book, who are always understood to include Jews and Christians (Q. 5:5). This position is endorsed by the Ḥanafīs (Desai 2019) with some caveat that the slaughterer pronounces, 'In the name of God' at the time of slaughtering. Unlike Europe and the US, where it is common for Muslims to distinguish between properly slaughtered, i.e., according to Islamic law (*dhabīḥah*) and ḥalāl (i.e., permissible, including that which Christians and Jews slaughter) and despite the Quranic text and the position of the Ḥanafīs, most Muslims in SA are unaware of this permissibility. They routinely synonymize *dhabīḥah* with *ḥalāl,* thus refusing to acknowledge the permissibility of meat slaughtered by Jews and Christians[23].

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[22] For Sunni Muslims, all sea animals are *ḥalāl*, while Shīʿī Muslims only permit fish that have scales. All other sea animals, including lobster, prawns, and octopus, are regarded by them as *ḥarām*. The Ḥanafīs regard all the latter as disliked/disapproved to the point of impermissibility (*makrūh taḥrīman*). There are two categories of disapproval: *Makrūh Taḥrīman* (disapproved to the point of impermissibility) and *Makrūh Tanzīhan* (mildly disapproved). Interestingly, in countries such as Bangladesh, where the entire and largely Ḥanafī population is dependent on various seafood products, the Ḥanafī scholars have all dissented from the dominant opinion of their school. In SA itself, anecdotal evidence suggests that Ḥanafī Muslims are increasingly ignoring the prohibition on prawns and lobster and blurring the lines between *makrūh tanzīhan* and *makrūh taḥrīman*.

[23] Studies in US Muslim approaches to this distinction between *dhabīḥah* and ḥalāl show that the South Asians there are more likely to insist on *dhabīḥah* than Arab Muslims, who are much more comfortable with the meat of the *Ahl-al-Kitāb*. We detect this in the following question from a Pakistani based in the US, posed to an online *Mufti* (jurisconsult): 'Most of the Arab brothers eat *Ahle Kitab* meat. What are the basis of Shaafi *madhab* [legal school] and any other *Madhab* in this respect? For Pakistani Hanifis [sic.] it is a question of Islam or *Kufr*. I try to explain and pacify them but I do not know Shafis or Hanbalis [sic.] arguments. Will you

On the contrary, recent studies suggest that there has been a deliberate institutional narrowing of the definition of ḥalāl among Muslims in SA (Tayob 2012)[24].

The department concerned confirmed that for wilderness search and rescue operations, where students carry all their food with them, they usually buy the food themselves, with the department providing a stipend to assist with the cost. However, in other exercises, such as water rescue and the like, where they set up larger field hospitals and base camps, the department provides the food. The department reimburses Muslims for the costs they incur on procuring their ḥalāl food: 'Given the remoteness of some of the locations, it is not always easy to find a caterer or restaurants that have the ḥalāl certificate' (Interview departmental spokesperson 2021)[25].

Given the challenges faced in accessing ḥalāl certified food while on off-campus exercises and rescue expeditions, and the difficulty in explaining to the academic unit exactly what ḥalāl food is as well as the related problem of contamination[26], most interviewees found it more convenient to purchase and prepare their food before the rescue outings. Sharing meals during expeditions, though, is a significant part of creating a team spirit, and both not

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please explain?' (Islamweb n.d.). This also suggests that the SA position – particularly among Gauteng Muslims – may have long roots in South Asia.

[24] Tayob (2012:49) argues 'that the unique position of ḥalāl authorities afforded them the opportunity to both service consumer demand for ḥalāl authorisation and contribute to the creation of demand and…that this position has been used to produce a consumer that is fearful of the possibility of consuming impermissible products and demands ḥalāl certification. Furthermore, certifying authorities have used their position to pursue rigid interpretations of Islamic dietary law to demarcate and define ḥalāl as separate and identifiable from that which is *ḥarām*. In the context of ḥalāl food products, this means that Muslim consumers would increasingly desire the public consumption of certified products as a means of asserting their own, personal, Muslim identity'.

[25] Note that the quest is not for a provider of ḥalāl food, but for a place that is 'certified as ḥalāl'. As Tayob (2012) points out, this is a relatively new shift in the Muslim demand. Earlier, a Muslim supplier of products and the relationship of trust between the supplier and consumer were assurance enough that the product was ḥalāl.

[26] Contamination is the mixing at any stage from production or sale between ḥalāl and non-ḥalāl products.

eating with the group or bringing one's own food when the rest of the group is sharing an everyday meal, enhance the sense of the otherness of the Muslims who, given that they can share each other's food, are likely to sit next to each other during meals. This accommodation through a benign and mutually agreed exclusion detracts from the *esprit de corps*.

While, as a state-funded university, the institution is always under obligation to enhance attempts to foster inclusion, it should be noted that several studies have shown that Muslims, particularly in minority situations, also invoke the ḥalāl requirements, certification, and definition as markers of their own identity. Slater (2018:33) argues that 'many of our questions about the form we take as modern subjects, about our moral and social value, about our privacy, about who we are, are taken up in relation to consumption and our social status as a rather new thing called a consumer'. As Varul concludes, the result is that 'values are no longer defined by Holy Scriptures but by the culture industry' (Varul 2008:237), as individuals demand products that enable them to assert their choice of values and identity. 'In the context of ḥalāl food products', says Tayob, 'this means that Muslim consumers would increasingly desire the public consumption of certified products as a means of asserting their own, personal, Muslim identity' (Tayob 2012:49).

Finding Time or a Proper Opportunity to Perform Ṣalāh (Daily Required Prayers)[27]

The performance and establishment of daily ritualized prayers (ṣalāh) within prescribed times, regarded as the second pillar of Islam, is one of the fundamental obligations imposed on Muslims in the Quran (11:115; 2:111) and the Hadith literature. The Prophet is reported to have stated: 'Ṣalāh is the basis of the faith; Whoever establishes it, establishes the faith and whoever ignores it, ignores it'[28]. The ṣalāh takes between five to ten minutes to perform and is

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[27] *Ṣalāh* (pl. *ṣalawāt*, lit. *invocation*) is the technical term for the ritualized Sunni and Shīʿī Muslim prayers, of which there are five daily ones. The prayers (*ṣalawāt)* are named after the time of the day when they are supposed to be performed, i.e., *Fajr* (daybreak) *Ẓuhr* (noon), *ʿAsr* (dusk), *Maghrib* (sunset), and *ʾIshāʾ* (night).

[28] Oral evidence suggests that most Muslim students do not regularly obey this requirement of praying five times a day, and even fewer perform the *Fajr* (pre-

preceded by a minor ablution (*wuḍūʾ*)[29], which requires about three minutes to complete. Performed in a series of prescribed bodily movements, *ṣalāh* may be performed anywhere, such as on the sand, grass, or the curb of a road.

All six interviewees raised concerns and shared their experiences regarding their challenges while keeping up with their prayers. Concerns related to 1) the time frame in which the prayer must be completed, 2) the state of cleanliness of the student, and 3) the non-availability of water to perform ablution. Here we briefly discuss the three issues that students indicated, impacted negatively on the performance of *ṣalāh* in its prescribed time frame, while doing the program, which resulted in their frequently missing the *ṣalāh* during practical rescue sessions and shift work. The interviewees acknowledged concessions from individual lecturers, allowing them to leave class to pray. However, some exercises and practicals could not be stopped or postponed.

Performing Ṣalāh in their Prescribed Time Frames
'…*prayer, it's an issue, um, so if we travel for long periods, we tend to miss prayers*'.

'…*traveling alone, I can stop to pray; with the rescue [team], it is a bit harder*'.

'*So with traveling distances and working shifts and stuff, it gets, not [really] gets in the way, but effects prayer times*'.

The interviewees provided the following reasons for their difficulties: a) Students traveling on or towards rescue operations or a training camp. In this case, the time frame would have passed when they arrived at their destination; b) the rescue operation may still be ongoing when the time frame for the prayers has passed; and c) the departure of the emergency rescue vehicle may occur while the obligatory Friday congregational prayers are in session, caus-

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dawn) prayers. Furthermore, far more Muslims attend the Friday congregational prayers, considering it more crucial without explicitly stating it.

[29] The relevant Quranic injunction reads as follows: 'Oh you who believe! When rise for *ṣalāh*, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and pass your [wet] hands over your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles' (Q. 5:7).

ing a delay in the team's departure or resulting in a departure without the student.

The Quranic basis for performing *ṣalāh* in specific time slots is affirmed by Quran 4:103: 'Indeed, *ṣalāh* is enjoined on the believers to be performed at fixed hours (*kitāban mawqūtan*)'. For Sunni Muslims, the *ṣalāh* must take place within five prescribed time slots, and for Shīʿī Muslims, the same five prayers should be completed in three-time slots (Khūʿī 2013:1560). The pre-dawn prayers (*Fajr*) are performed in their specific time frame, and the two prayers scheduled for the day – Noon (*Ẓuhr*) and Dusk (*ʿAṣr*), on the one hand – and the two scheduled for the night – Sunset (*Maghrib*) and Night (*ʿIshāʾ*) – are performed together during the time slot of either of the two[30]. Three of the four Sunni Schools of Law agree that when one is traveling, in a state of fear, excessive rain, or other emergencies, the *ṣalāh* may be combined along the lines that the Shīʿī consider normative (al-Jazīrī 1987:473-477). Various definitions of the distance and period of sojourn at the destination constitute 'travel' or 'fear'. The Ḥanafīs do not permit this combination of *ṣalāh*, except on two specific occasions during the pilgrimage to Mecca (ḥajj). This notwithstanding, local Ḥanafī jurists (muftis) or juridical authorities would consider the local context and approve of combining prayers.

Concerning missed prayers, even though regarded as obligatory in their time frame, some leeway allows an individual to perform them as soon as possible. This delay is referred to as 'performing *qaḍāʾ* (lit. *carrying out* or *fulfilling*)[31]. The students were aware of this and usually resorted to this option when compelled by circumstances. However, they still felt uncomfortable about having to miss their *ṣalāh*.

Inability to Achieve and Maintain a 'Clean' State for Praying
'*Often when you're busy with rescue exercises and stuff, you're not, like in the state – like a pure state – to then go and pray*'.

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[30] The prayers which are the most challenging for Sunnis in terms of the time available to perform them are *Maghrib* (sunset) which has a time frame of between 70-80 minutes and, for both Sunnis and Shīʿī, *Fajr* (pre-dawn), which has a period of about 50-70 minutes, depending on the season.

[31] The term is routinely restricted to such deferred religious duties.

In this case, one interviewee indicated that she could not pray because she was in an impure state. A condition for formal daily prayers is to be free from ritual impurity of both a major and a minor type. The *wuḍū* (ablution to cleanse oneself from minor impurities), having urinated or passed winds or having fallen asleep against a solid backdrop or on the ground, is relatively easy and takes about three minutes to complete. Cleansing from major impurities (resulting from menstruation, sexual intercourse, emission of semen, or childbirth) requires a *ghusl* (complete bath). It is, however, quite common for Muslims in some situations to conflate ritual impurity with a more common non-technical understanding of 'being unclean'. An example is when an interviewee has just participated in a rescue mission or exercise and is covered in mud. There is a strong possibility that this interviewee would feel that they are not 'clean enough' to pray. This feeling is entirely at odds with the Islamic religious requirement. This is another case of lived or perceived Islam, unrelated to its religious or legal sense.

The Non-Availability of Water for Ablution
On specific exercises such as wilderness search and rescue exercises, the available water is carried primarily for drinking, and there is thus no water available for ablution purposes. The non- or limited availability of water for ablution has been extensively discussed in Islamic Law.

Permission to perform the ritual ablution with sand or dust instead of water in some instances is based on two similar passages in the Quran (Q. 4:43-46; 5:6). In Quran 4:43-46 we read:

> O you who have attained faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying; nor yet [while you are] in a state of *junub* (i.e., requiring total ablution) until you have bathed – except if you are traveling [and are unable to do so]. However, if you are ill, or are traveling, or have just satisfied a want of nature, or had sex with a woman and can find no water – then take resort to clean sand (*ṣaʿīdan ṭayyiban*) and rub your faces and hands with it.

The Ḥanafīs allow for *tayammum* to be performed when water is unavailable or when the quantity of water is only sufficient to meet the necessities such as drinking, cooking, or water for the animals. However, the conditions placed

on the person needing the water to determine whether there is no alternative source in the vicinity are much stricter than that required by the other law schools (al-Jazīrī 1987:154). In addition, the long distances needed to search for water would significantly waste the expedition's time. However, even if the school permitted it, the additional challenge that the option of *tayammum* presents, is that the students have, likely, come across this option during their earlier religious classes, but have since become unfamiliar with it in practice. They would thus be reluctant to resort to it. Here we find another example of lived Islam being at variance with textual Islam and the institution expected to accommodate lived Islam.

Modesty – Concerns Regarding Uniform Requirements
The challenges faced by interviewees regarding uniform requirements were mainly expressed by female interviewees concerned about the uniform impacting their modesty. The two major concerns were around exercise or swimming garments that exposed too much of their bodies and the challenges their choice of headscarves evoked.

Modesty in Conflict with Physical Training (PT) Uniform and the Swimming Costume
The interviewees indicated that the concerns and challenges with the PT uniform and swimming costumes were revealing and highlighted the female body shape[32].

'We end up showing much skin…um that's frowned upon…Females are required [on training] to wear [swimming attire] that is very tight and very revealing'.

'*…with the PT-shorts and like your swimming costumes and stuff, that's not covered*'.

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[32] Interestingly, as we stated above, men also demanded the requirement of modesty. However, none of them in this study expressed it as an issue, even though their swimming in PT wear also does not comply with Islamic dress obligations, in this case, always to wear clothes that do not reveal the shape of the body and to cover the parts between the navel and the knee.

'*Also, um, women are not supposed to wear tight clothes because it takes the form of their body shape, and that's revealing*'.

The question of the suitability of uniforms or otherwise reflected on their tightness or how much of the body was exposed, was primarily framed in the context of modesty. In turn, the interviewees limited the meaning and applicability of modesty to women's bodies[33]. The primary foundational text for this covering/modesty requirement of women in the Quran is the following:

> O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, as well as all [other] believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]: this will be more conducive to their being recognized [as decent women] and not be annoyed[34]. Nevertheless, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace (Q. 33:59). And tell the believing women to lower their gaze, be mindful of their chastity, and not display their beauty [in public] beyond what may

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[33] The centrality of modesty, particularly concerning women in Muslim societies, has extensively been discussed in Gender Studies, Islamic Studies, Anthropology, Law, and Sociology. Several of Muhammed's narrations use the term in a broad sense. Aziza al-Hibri (1995:127), after dealing with the broader meaning of modesty at length, describes it as 'freedom from vanity and arrogance to dress and to eat modestly'. She notes that 'the emphasis on discouraging early symptoms of arrogance, combined with increasingly entrenched patriarchal tradition in the Islamic world, has led some jurists to demand that women veil their faces and avoid public life. In fact, during the life of the Prophet Muhammed, women were not required to do either' (al-Hibri 1995:127). Although the Quran also uses the term 'modesty' in relation to men's clothes, it is increasingly used by Muslims only in relation to women. Furthermore, this term is also increasingly stripped of its more significant connotations of vanity, excess in the display of wealth, and personal demeanor – a kind of abstemiousness – and confined to matters of sexuality in relation to the behavior and dress of women.

[34] Muhammad Asad (1980:651) has rendered the Arabic expression *fa-lā yuʾdhayn* here *so they may not be annoyed*. Others, however, have come up with translations that more accurately reflect the term *yuʾdhayn* as *hurt* (Arberry 1955:128) or *molested* (Ali 1989:1076). Even if Asad's rendition was to be accepted, one could still conclude that, in this case, the Quran, in contrast to contemporary ethics and sexual morality, especially as evolving in the Global North or the West, places the responsibility on women to prevent being sexually harassed.

[decently] be apparent; hence, let them draw their head coverings over their bosoms (Q. 24:37-38).

The interpretation and application of these texts and the styles of face or bosom covering – indeed the very meaning of 'modesty' – varies worldwide and changes in all societies over time, including SA[35]. Thus, while we can nuance the issue in an article such as this one, in the field, we only have the religious habit of the student that we must accept at face value and negotiate.

Conflict and discomfort experienced by female interviewees regarding the expected religious dress codes and practices were linked to their belief that their uniforms (especially the ones used for PT and swimming) are too revealing and impact the female requirement for modesty. The interviewees regarded the PT shorts as too short and the outfit too tight. This resulted in more skin exposure than allowed, and their body shape could be discerned. When asked about the tightness of the rescue uniforms, a departmental spokesperson responded:

> I'm not sure why it's tight...There is no requirement for it to be tight. I guess the nature of combat pants and rescue wear may reveal the underlying body shape more than a loose-fitting garment...or the wearer has put on weight since they bought their uniform. Many EMS and rescue uniforms do not always have the female figure in mind. This is not an uncommon observation made by female students

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[35] In Pakistan, until the last two decades, women were only required to wear a *dupatta* (a thin longish chiffon cover) over their breasts, with little attention paid to them if it hung from the neck over to the back without covering their bosoms. In neighboring Afghanistan – other than in the capital, Kabul – women are expected to wear blue cloaks that cover their entire bodies, including their faces, with small holes below the area where the chador covers their eyes to offer them some visibility. In SA, until about three decades ago, modesty for Muslim women from the Cape meant that they had to have their head covered – even if some of the hair was visible, and their dress had to reach their knees. In the northern parts of the country, where Muslims are predominantly of Indian origin, religio-cultural modesty demanded that women wear pants beneath their dresses, but not necessarily a head covering. Today, in Pakistan, face covering is far more ubiquitous. In SA, the religio-cultural modesty for women now requires that all women wear scarves with no hair showing and that their legs also be covered.

in our courses. For interest's sake, we are actually in the process of changing our uniform, and one of our female staff members was involved in the selection of the items. That said, I don't know if the tightness and closeness of the fit would change (Interview departmental spokesperson 2021).

Wearing of the Ḥijāb (Headscarf)
During the interviews, the female interviewees described their challenges wearing the headscarf (*ḥijāb*) and seemed to lack sympathy or understanding for their choices.

'*We were confronted and asked for our reasons*'.

'*...they had an issue with our wearing it; they said it's not part of the uniform*'.

'*...with Islam, um, it is compulsory for us Muslims, females to use the ḥijāb... to, um, preserve our modesty too, um...uh, to keep our dignity and, um, to be noticed as Muslims*'.

'*...supposed to cover from people who aren't our families, and it's like a symbol of how Muslim woman should be*'.

The headscarf worn by Muslim women has become a significant contemporary contested symbol with various impulses connected to Muslims, including Islamophobia, Muslims feeling a need to assert their identity as Muslims or to signal their religiosity. SA is relatively free from Islamophobia on any significant systemic scale, but minority groups may experience internal needs to express their identity, as some of our interviewees indicated above. For example, the unusualness of wearing a head covering in summer can also prompt questions from others about its possible discomfort, and simple questions from non-Muslims may be interpreted as judgmental. (One interviewee spoke about being 'confronted…about our reasons'.) On the other hand, SA courts have also affirmed the right of Muslim women to wear scarves in educational institutions (Lenta 2007:299), places of work, and all state institutions, as part of their uniforms in the different branches of the defense force (News24 2021). Universities thus allow uniforms to incorporate some Mus-

lim females' needs to wear headscarves and longer sleeves, provided the color of such fits in with the uniform. However, certain situations in the program remain under discussion where the use of the headscarf is not allowed.

An example would be the aviation rescue environment, where wearing caps, scarves, or loose articles is not permitted, to avoid safety hazards. These loose objects may become airborne due to downdraft and then be caught in the winged aircraft's tail rotor. Similarly, operating in a swift water rescue environment with loose clothing items presents a snagging and drowning hazard.

Concerns Related to Long-Distance Traveling for Females
The female interviewees spoke about their uneasiness while traveling far distances from home for rescue activities and working alone with males during operational shifts.

'*We are [in our religion] not allowed to go out of the home without a male chaperone*'.

'*…they [Muslim women] are allowed to travel to, I think, it's 70 kilometers from their house; otherwise, they'll need a male to travel with them…a male as in one of their family members or someone they can't marry*'.

Other than in the most rural parts of the northwest Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and much of Afghanistan beyond the capital Kabul, the idea of women not leaving their homes without a chaperone is not the dominant religio-cultural requirement anywhere in the Muslim world. On the contrary, it is regarded as more of a local practice (*ʿādah*) than a religious prescription in those areas. However, this strict observance of *purdah* is not alien in SA, although it is implausible that someone with that level of observance would attend a non-religious institution of higher learning.

There are several *ḥadīth* on which this supposed restriction on the traveling of women on their own is based, and they differ significantly: One refers to a 'distance of three days', another to one day and one night, while a third leaves the distance or period wholly open. A fourth stipulates the length as equal to 12 miles (19 km). Most scholars have approached these *aḥadīth* (pl. of *ḥadīth*) as part of the requirements of modesty in a patriarchal society. Others have interpreted them as a measure to protect women in a community

where such protection was needed and that the injunctions are instructions to men to take care of women. 'The discussion regarding this matter', says Abdul Kodir, 'can be directed to ensure the protection of those who are weak, as the principal and social mission guided by Islam, not to the direction of domestication and restraint' (Kodir 2018:7).

Given the differences in the *aḥadīth* and the complications that inevitably accompany contemporary living – even in the remotest part of the Islamicate, such as Afghanistan – the *maḥram* requirements have been subject to constant changes, and there is no uniformity inside and between the countries that have entrenched Islamic law as the basis of their socio-political order[36]. Some countries also amend their rules from time to time (Mansyuroh 2019). However, the general rule is to let the requirement pass by ignoring infractions. A religious opinion on the question is also likely to elicit a variety of responses from muftis based in the Global North or in countries where the global economy with its need for women to enter the labor market, will likely invoke Quran 22:78 to trump the *ḥadīth* requiring a *maḥram* for travel: 'God has imposed no difficulties for in religion: and God desires ease for you, and He desires not difficulties for you'.

Due to the nature of the EMC degree, there are many off-campus trips, rescue exercises, and excursions in different regions and provinces. These may be far from the homes of female Muslim students. Given the nature of EMC and Rescue training and related operational work, it is neither pragmatic nor permissible to have male chaperones accompany female students on such exercises. All the interviewees acknowledged that they chose to register for the EMC degree and accepted the limitations of the university to accommodate this type of accompaniment.

Observations Regarding Religious Holidays and Related Practices
The interviewees shared concerns about missing religious holidays and events and how certain rescue activities and traveling affect these. These concerns pertained mainly to celebrating the two ʿĪd festivals and the difficulty of going on rescue operations during Ramadan.

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[36] For example, the last three decades of relentless war in Afghanistan have left numerous women widowed, often without any male children who could act as their *maḥram*.

'*…when for our sort of Christmas things, so like for ʿĪd…you're not allowed just to get the day off where you have actually to put in a leave day for it*'.

'*…the guys had to go for the [rescue] hike irrespective of whether ʿĪd was on that day or not*'.

There are two major Muslim festivals during the year[37]. Both appear on the university's calendar as religious holidays, which prohibit all departments from setting any obligatory tasks on that day that cannot be repeated on another day. While the other three Schools of Legal Thought do not regard the prayers on the morning of this festival as obligatory, the Ḥanafīs do. The rest of the day is typically spent in celebratory family gatherings[38].

The interviewees highlighted the challenges that they faced on the course while fasting during the month of Ramadan:

'*…when we're fasting, it's very difficult to fast and do rescue*'.

Muslims universally acknowledge fasting during the month as a religious obligation on the same level as *ṣalāh*, i.e., being regarded as one of the Pillars of Islam. Fasting entails abstaining from food, drink, and sexual activity from dusk – usually an hour and a half before sunrise – to sunset. Like the *ṣalāh*, there are exemptions for menstruating females and those traveling. Given that Muslims follow the lunar calendar, the month of Ramadan shifts earlier every year by 10 to 12 days, and thus, the length of the fasting day, as well as the Gregorian dates on which the university's calendar is based, also vary from year to year, making it rather difficult for the university to plan programs around Ramadan.

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[37] Muslims celebrate ʿĪd twice a year: The first, the Festival of Charity (*Īd al Fiṭr*), is celebrated after the fast of the month of Ramaḍān, while the second, the Festival of Sacrifice (*ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā*), about two months and ten days after that, commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice for God.

[38] Interestingly, regardless of the optionality of the ʿĪd prayers for the other three Schools of Law, the Muslim world, in practice, treats it as obligatory. For many men, it may be the only two times of the year they attend formal worship, i.e., the ʿĪd prayers.

Farid Esack, Raeesah Boomgaard, and Craig Vincent-Lambert

The interviewees highlighted the hardship they experienced with fasting during rescue activities. This is understandable, for rescue training is by its very nature physically strenuous and requires the intake of sustenance if rescue teams and team members are to function effectively. During physical training sessions, facilitators are encouraged to allow some leeway if it is known that a Muslim student is fasting. The interviewees recognized this but continued to experience guilt while participating in the rescue activity. If they skipped one or more days of fasting, they follow the same principle as with a *ṣalāh* that they missed – complete a *qaḍāʾ* (compensatory) fast. It was unclear if our interviewees cited this challenge as one accompanying the responsibility to fast and which is routinely experienced and embraced by observant – and even many not-so-observant – Muslims throughout the world, or if they thought of it as a challenge imposed by the program and that the university should find some way of addressing it.

Reflections on Concrete Suggestions

While interviewees acknowledged attempts by their educators to accommodate religious practices, unavoidable discomfort and internal conflict between specific exercises and activities associated with studying EMC continue to be experienced. The study did not set out to find solutions for any of these problems or resolve any tensions. This notwithstanding, several suggestions to alleviate some of the tensions emerged from this study – some proposed by interviewees and some by the authors. However, we also raise questions about the value of these tensions as a necessary part of the university experience, placing the issues in a larger context where they become learning moments for students of other religions instead of confining them to Muslim issues. The challenges of inclusivity for a small minority whose own positions on religious matters are often unclear and ever-mutating, even as the students believe they are ahistorical and reified, are complex. While at a superficial level of listening to the interviewees and finding short-term ways of accommodating their needs, a more critical approach compelled us to examine these challenges in a historical manner, which considered the nuanced nature of Islamic law, as well as the law school that students prescribed to along with the reality of intra- and ever mutating-Muslim diversity. We are dealing with these reflections in the next section.

Offer Prior Information to Applicants

The interviewees suggested that universities should expressly inform applicants about exactly what studying the EMC degree entails at the time of enrolment. This would enable candidates to make better-informed choices, considering their religious practices before deciding to study EMC. First, notwithstanding the university's commitment to diversity, and along with it, its embrace of religious pluralism, we are not sure if the university should be expected to consider the entire gamut of religious and cultural requirements of all of its prospective students and then to ask all the Muslims, Orthodox Jews, and African Traditionalists about their needs which, in all likelihood, would vary from individual to individual inside each group. Second, University life is a transitional stage for most young adults who enter as a part of their learning and growing process. Thus, they are expected to move beyond their comfort zones – one of which, in this case, is usually single-sex schools – and negotiate these. This is precisely what many interviewees have done, as is evident from the frequency with which they invoked the term 'leeway' to fulfill their religious obligations.

Greater Willingness to Accommodate Muslims' Religious Obligations

We argue that higher education institutions should be more willing to accommodate Muslims regarding their religious practices, such as dress codes, allowing for adherence to prayer times, and observing religious holidays where practical and feasible. Considering the program with which two of us are concretely familiar, there remains a good bit of additional space where some of the issues raised by the interviewees can be addressed. This, however, requires greater familiarity with these issues by the students and, more particularly, the staff. Explorations should be done jointly by the department or faculty and the Muslim participants to ensure that the implementation of decisions reached does not depend on a particular staff member.

Regular Feedback

After each program or expedition, time should be set aside for all participants to express their feelings about the program. This should be done in a carefully facilitated way that encourages non-judgmental learning, an appreciation of vulnerability, and an undertaking of no negative consequences for anything stated. In addition, a written evaluation should also be conducted with some open-ended space for students to reflect or comment on their experiences.

Finally, a proper and well-facilitated debriefing on the conclusions drawn from these exercises can contribute significantly to team spirit and lead to an ongoing awareness of how the experience can be enhanced for all the students.

Short Learning Programs

One option that the university should consider, particularly given the significant demand for EMS workers and volunteers by the Muslim EMS NGOs – the largest in the country – is the development of Short Learning Programs specifically geared towards Muslims and possibly Orthodox Jews who face similar challenges. These modules and the required programs can fulfill the requirements and serve as an equivalent module inside the usual University modular requirements. While the university must imbibe and promote diversity, extending such a program to the Jewish community will prevent the ghettoization of the Muslim students in this program. A welcome preliminary step in the direction of all three suggestions above would be a nationwide consultation on the challenges facing Muslims and (Orthodox) Jews in a secular university with particular reference to EMS.

Introduction to Religio-Cultural Diversity

There are no indications that any of the socially awkward responses that Muslim students experienced when trying to exercise their religious obligations, were anything more than a surprise for other students, negatively impacting how some Muslims experienced the program or expedition. The department or faculty should consider offering a general introductory lecture or seminar for all newcomers, introducing the constitutional embrace of religio-cultural diversity and concrete examples of challenges to participants in such a program[39].

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[39] While not of immediate relevance, such an introductory program should ideally cover other aspects of students' identity, which these programs, such as gender, ability/disability, and sexual orientation, may impact.

Reflections on the Larger Questions

Secularism

Like all SA universities, this university is secular but without any statute prescribing this. Secularism, while the norm in SA, rests very lightly in public discourse. With a complete absence of secular fundamentalism in the socio-political domain, the country experiences ongoing and generally amicable negotiations between the realms of state secularism and religion, along with either a deep appreciation or profound – even if reluctant – awareness of the religiosity of most South Africans.

The operation of secularism in SA is somewhat unique because there is no obsession with secularism from the state's perspective. However, the dominance of Christianity in society is an under-theorized study area, as is the perspective of religious minorities, of which Muslims are only one example. How minority religious communities experience themselves as marginalized, requires a post-secular perspective which argues that the study of secularism and religion should adopt two strategies (Mavelli 2012:7): One is the critique of secularism for its dominance compared to religion on public reasoning. This aspect is not valid for the case of SA for the reason mentioned above. Second is the critique of majoritarian politics of religion over other minority religions.

The operation of religious and secular power in society functions through the politics of the public sphere (Cooke 2007:227). The public sphere is the place of communication for various political subjectivities (Cooke 2007:227). The open speech by different societal actors leaves the public sphere's pluralism intact. The less-heard voice or experience of the public sphere fulfills the demands of the democratization of the normalizing of one religion (Casanova 2007:112).

The official discourse of the public sphere in SA has been a robust experience of intermixing religious and secular worldviews to make the public reason more plural without foregrounding religion or secularism. However, power operations in society are often revealed by presenting the majoritarian religion as value-neutral in public life by 'normalizing' an authentic religious experience. Thus, the critical discourse on the public sphere demands a continuous consideration about the appropriation of the public sphere by a dominant religious experience in the name of the neutrality of religion. An-

other lesson from a post-secular perspective is that a minority religious perspective makes the religious neutrality of the public sphere more democratic by adding less heard voices and politics to the forefront of general reasoning.

Religious Accommodation and Pluralism

The SA society and its constitutional dispensation not only allow but also celebrate pluralism of various kinds, including religion. It would be somewhat inappropriate to speak of religious accommodation or tolerance because both imply some majoritarian favor or particular dispensation towards a minority. In contrast, it is simply a case of equality. SA, whatever its other social ailments, is remarkably free from Islamophobia. However, there is also a sense that many communities were disadvantaged under Apartheid which was not only a system based on racial discrimination. Under Apartheid, the physically challenged, sexual minorities, non-Christians, and women faced various challenges. The dominant equality discourse in the country's constitution allows for the redressal of these forms of discrimination. Furthermore, in all the relevant court judgments, there has been a particular sensitivity towards the rights of minority communities despite the arguments that exemptions for minorities amount to unfair preferential treatment[40].

Minority communities are entitled to claim their constitutional rights. The challenge in a democratic and pluralist dispensation to those communities is threefold: a) How to carry others along with them. In this study, there was no indication of any consideration even to inform others about their needs, let alone engage with them seriously and make them allies. b) How to

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[40] Referring to a judgment of the Constitutional Court of SA in MEC for Education, KwaZulu-Natal and Others vs. Pillay, Lenta argues that when a cultural or religious group constitutes a minority and is, therefore, less powerful than majority groups, as Muslims are in SA, then its members are disadvantaged compared to members of majority (or more powerful) groups. Laws and regulations are often framed in a way that is consistent with the beliefs and values of the dominant, mainstream cultural groups, but not with those of vulnerable, minority groups. As a result, members of minority groups bear the costs of pursuing opportunities with which members of the mainstream and more powerful groups are not confronted. Since, in this argument, membership of a cultural or religious group is like a physical handicap, as it is usually an unchosen feature of individuals which is in certain respects disadvantaging, exemptions should be granted to create equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of power and influence (Lenta 2007:299).

extend the logic of accommodation and pluralism that they are seeking from the external other to the intra-other, in this case, e.g., Shī'ī Muslims, equal gender prayer spaces and facilities. c) How to accept that this logic necessarily implies acceptance of the rights of other minorities that their (Muslims') prescriptive and textual tradition denies.

Without considering these questions and publicly articulating them, Muslim minorities risk being regarded as self-centered, making demands on society without conceding the rights of others, and thus contributing to the emergence of Islamophobia.

Heterogeneity of Muslims?

All our interviewees reflected a commitment to 'prescription as the primary constitutive trajectory of Islam/Islamic' (Ahmed 2016:282), which they, nonetheless, felt gave them some 'leeway' in deferring some of their religious obligations at critical moments. This 'leeway' was viewed as a temporary deviation from the dispensation (*rukhṣah*) provided by the law. However, none of them gave any indication of entertaining the possibility of any framework outside this as authentically Islamic. It may be argued that part of the problem was our (the researchers') call for 'observant Muslims' and that, regardless of the more nuanced understandings we may have about what the term meant, those who read our call, invariably understood it, or our intentions with it, as the dominant understanding of the term, i.e., a Muslim who follows the laws of Islam. While there are pockets of Muslims throughout the country who are engaged in far more heuristic, experimental, and creative ways of practicing – as in 'to practice a skill' – Islam, they are too numerically inconsequential to have been considered for our purposes.

In hindsight, our study could have included questions seeking to probe the various tendencies that the interviewees identified, either entirely or more closely. Furthermore, our questionnaire was directed explicitly at 'observant Muslims', which further studies need to interrogate more closely and with a more precise definition or levels of markers of observance provided by us to determine how severe the problems are.

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Farid Esack, Raeesah Boomgaard, and Craig Vincent-Lambert

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