

A Religious Minority in Post-Apartheid Political Secularism Muslim Active Citizenship

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Abstract

Cape Muslims perform an active sense of citizenship rooted in their history of political and civic involvement, from slavery and apartheid to the current post-apartheid period. Their active citizenship and sense of national belonging have been fostered by post-apartheid political secularism, which encourages pluralism and inclusive multiculturalism, accommodating a vibrant social life of religion. The post-apartheid era has favored a model of political secularism grounded in inclusive multiculturalism, based on equal human rights and citizenship. Notably, Muslims perceive Islam not just as a cultural difference for a religious minority in South Africa seeking recognition, but as an integral part of this country's culture. This article fosters an understanding of the performance of Muslimness as the Muslim culturalization of citizenship – negotiating and reconciling multiple, intersecting local, national, and transnational belongings without compromising active citizenship and integration within Cape Town's broader multicultural society. Motivated by Islamic ethics, Muslims demonstrate an active sense of citizenship, belonging, and social commitment both within South Africa and internationally. The article presents two main points: First, that the Muslim integration of multiple belongings, active citizenship, and societal engagement offers a model for Muslim minorities navigating identity politics in multicultural societies; second, that post-apartheid political secularism, founded on inclusive multiculturalism and equal rights, provides lessons for how other modern multicultural states can integrate religious minorities as equal citizens.

Significance: The article's contribution lies in advancing the ways in which a religious minority in a secular state demonstrates an active sense of citizenship, belonging, and social commitment both within South Africa and internationally.

Keywords: Cape Muslim, religious minority, post-apartheid political secularism, active citizenship, Muslim minority

Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa, Cape Muslims perform an active citizenship through religious discourse, political

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activity, philanthropy, art, and their daily lives (Alhourani, 2018; 2024). Their sense of active citizenship is grounded in a legacy of political and civic engagement, spanning from slavery and apartheid to the contemporary post-apartheid period. This sense of citizenship and national belonging has been enabled by post-apartheid political secularism, which accommodates pluralism and inclusive multiculturalism, facilitating an active social life of religions in South Africa. Post-apartheid political secularism conferred upon Muslims the rights and liberties to practice their religion, identity, and culture as integral components of South African rainbowism. Post-apartheid political secularism has fostered a resurgence of public performances of Muslimness, some of which are highlighted through heritage sites and national cuisine, reinforcing their status as native South Africans. The notable aspect is not merely the expansion of scale and urban infrastructure of these public expressions of Islam but Muslims' view of Islam as not just a cultural distinction of a religious minority seeking acknowledgement, but as an integral component of South African society. This article fosters an understanding of the performance of Muslimness as the Muslim culturalization of citizenship, negotiating and reconciling multiple intersected local, national, and transnational belongings, without sacrificing a sense of active citizenship and integration into the broader multicultural society of Cape Town (cf. Baderoon, 2014; Bangstad, 2007).

The Muslim culturalization of citizenship involves more than only celebrating post-apartheid rainbowism and the multicultural acknowledgement of diverse cultures that coexist happily. It described Muslims as active, engaged citizens, natives embodying a sense of national belonging within a post-apartheid multicultural community. The active engagement of Muslims and their contributions to broader society are not a phenomenon exclusive to the post-apartheid era but are rooted in the historical context of the liberation movement from slavery to the post-apartheid period. The significance of Muslim identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa lies in their pursuit of active citizenship, which encompasses not just public exposure and acknowledgement but also a profound sense of national belonging. Inspired by Islamic principles, Muslims exhibit a proactive sense of citizenship, belonging, and social responsibility towards the broader community in South Africa and internationally.

The discussions below begin with an ethnographic vignette illustrating Cape Muslims advocating for participatory citizenship. This is followed by a theoretical framework that relates performances of Muslimness to the making of Muslim identity and belonging. Next follows an overview of scholarly ideas about political secularism to highlight the uniqueness of the post-apartheid formation of political secularism. Then the article presents a historical overview of Cape Muslim political and social activism from the slavery era to the post-apartheid period, followed by a more ethnographic account. This ethnography is based on long-term fieldwork conducted from 2011 to the present, examining the resurgence of public performances of Muslimness, Muslim performances of citizenship, conviviality, and differences in South Africa's post-apartheid secular state (cf. Alhourani, 2017).

Vignette: Muslim Active Citizenship

On May 31, 2024, just days after South Africa's national election, I attended the Friday *Khutbah* and prayer delivered by Imam Rashied Omar at the Claremont Main Road Mosque. The *Khutbah* was titled '*Fiqh al-Muwatana*' (*Jurisprudence of citizenship*): *Active citizenship ensures accountable leaders*. Imam Omar began by expressing appreciation for South Africa's successful seventh democratic election since the end of apartheid in 1994. His message focused on the responsibilities of citizens in a post-election context, drawing on three core principles from Islamic jurisprudence: Justice, mutual consultation (*Shurah*), and accountability.

He argued that the Islamic ethic of mutual consultation aligns closely with modern participatory democracy, which emphasizes civic engagement and citizen empowerment. *Shurah*, he explained, is a central Islamic value, referenced three times in the Qur'an: First, in *Surah Al-Baqarah* (Chapter 2), in the context of family life; second, in *Surah Aal-Imran* (Chapter 3); and third, in *Surah Ash-Shurah* (Chapter 42), where it is listed alongside prayer and *Zakah*. This framing positions *Shurah* as a foundational Islamic principle.

After establishing *Shurah* as an essential Islamic ethic of citizenship, Imam Omar linked it to the principles of justice and accountability. He explained that citizen engagement in civic institutions ensures that elected leaders are held accountable for their political and moral actions. He emphasized that citizenship, from an Islamic standpoint, extends beyond voting, entailing active engagement in

building transparent, consultative institutions. He argued that ‘in terms of the jurisprudence of citizenship, citizenship does not begin and end with casting one vote. The Muslim ethics of citizenship demand that we become active citizens who contribute to building consultative and transparent social institutions’.

He underscored this by citing the Prophet Muhammad’s involvement in civic life, reminding the congregation that ‘joining civic organizations is a great virtue and a *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad’. He urged the attendees to join and participate in any civic, cultural, educational, sports, or religious organizations: ‘If you do not belong to any of them’, he declared, ‘then you are part of the problem’.

Imam Omar’s jurisprudence of active citizenship is inspired by and part of the Claremont Main Road Mosque’s (CMRM) discursive tradition of liberation theology, embodied in their struggle for social justice, interreligious dialogue, solidarity, and inclusive pluralism (Tayob, 1999). Historically, the CMRM provided a space for the anti-apartheid struggle during the 1980s under the leadership of Imam Gassan Solomon. In the post-apartheid era, the CMRM maintains a long-standing tradition of social and political seminars that Imam Haron instigated, and they hold a weekly seminar where they invite scholars and activists (Muslim and non-Muslim) to present and engage the crowd in a discussion around social and political matters that address local, national, and global concerns.

Imam Omar’s encouragement for Muslims to engage in any civic organization to express national belonging and active citizenship transcends a mere multiculturalist understanding of the politics of difference and recognition for religious minorities (Taylor, 1994). Cape Muslims’ civic engagements reflect a broader social commitment, against the grain of the liberal paranoia of Islam’s politics of difference (Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995). Muslims in South Africa engage in active citizenship, beyond seeking public visibility and recognition of their cultural differences. They overwhelmingly regard themselves as native citizens, rooted in South Africa, while enacting multiple senses of belonging and attachment to an imagined community of Muslims in Cape Town, South Africa, and to a transnational global Muslim *Ummah* (Alhourani, 2018). The Muslim performance of Muslimness does not dilute but rather underpins their sense of citizenship. Cape Muslims’ sense of active citizenship has been driven on the one hand by their history of slavery and liberation struggle from colonialism through apartheid and post-apartheid; on the other hand, post-apartheid political secularism has enabled Muslim active citizenship by granting them equal citizen rights and freedom to a public performance of Islam.

Theoretical Departure: Identity, Performance, and Belonging

Vital to the observation and discussion of this article is the conception of the performance of identity as a mediation of the notion of ‘belonging’, engaging with the concept of identity as a category of practice and not merely as an analytical category (Brubaker and Cooper, 2002). Hall (1996, pp. 4–6) points out that identity is constructed by specific historical contexts and is evoked as a ‘process of becoming rather than being’. This statement is qualified by Hall in his assertion that ‘identity is constantly in the process of change and transformation’, and that it is ‘increasingly fragmented and fractured’. For Hall, identity is never unified or singular but rather ‘constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions’. Thus, ‘identities are constructed through, not outside, difference’.

This understanding of identity as a process of self-making that is not inherent or ‘natural’ but rather negotiated through performance resonates with discursive critiques of essentialized understandings of identity (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013; Bell, 1999; Baumann, 1996). In this field of enquiry, Judith Butler’s work investigates gender performativity to argue that gender identity is not an expression of who someone is but rather something one does. In other words, for Butler, ‘gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be’ (Butler, 1988).

Vital here is also the work of anthropologist Gerd Baumann (1996), who, in his ethnography of multi-ethnic inhabitants of Southall (a suburb of London), distinguishes between ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ discourses in the cultural dynamics and identity politics of South Asians. His notion of domestic discourse involves a performance of cultural particularity and formations of ethnic belonging and identity alongside ‘public discourse’ that signifies a dominant culture of national integration, belonging, and citizenship. Baumann’s emphasis on both ‘public’ and ‘domestic’ performances calls attention to the crucial significance of two spheres of performativity in the creation of an individual’s sense of belonging. This analysis clarifies the importance of focusing on how performances of religious identity

intersect, diverge, and converge with the performance of dominant cultural forms of belonging in national identity and citizenship.

Yuval-Davis (2006) distinguishes between belonging and the politics of belonging. In her analysis, an individual's sense of belonging is 'always a dynamic process and not a reified fixity', and therefore belonging is an emotional attachment constructed along multiple axes of intersectional identification, such as race, gender, class, nation, religion, and age. Within this framework, the politics of belonging is carried out by specific institutional performances (nationalist, religious, etc.) that seek to maintain and generate a sense of belonging and membership within a particular community. This process of belonging involves participatory politics, a sense of entitlement, and a constant construction of narratives of identity and cultural differences that embody a sense of shared identity and collective belonging. The analysis by Yuval-Davis is echoed in the work of sociologist Vikki Bell, who, in the introduction to the edited volume *Performativity and belonging* (Bell, 1999), follows Judith Butler's arguments to highlight the performative dimension of belonging as a series of repetitive practices that connect individuals to collectives through identity formation and the enactment of attachment. For Bell, 'one does not simply ontologically belong to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction' (Bell, 1999, p. 3).

Building on this, my article builds on Askew's (2002) critique of Gellner's (1983) and Anderson's (1991) conception of nationalism, on the grounds that they fail to account for citizens' active engagement in influencing state culture. Here, the realization of the active role of ordinary Muslims invites us to move beyond state politics of cultural difference – as in the work of Robins (2008), Comaroff and Comaroff (2005), and Wilson (2002) – toward an observation of conviviality of Muslim identity politics.

Performances are regarded to constitute the foundations of national identity and collective culture – fundamental requirements for nationalism and the 'national imaginary' (Askew, 2002). Askew's work is exemplary for its ability to develop the connection between the state, power structures, and performance in the making of post-colonial nationhood. She argues that 'as politics are predominantly performative, so too is performance predominantly political' (Askew, 2002, p. 127). This statement clearly emphasizes the strategic power and ideological implementation of performance as a means of authenticating national identity.

Askew's work clarifies the vital role of performance in the *creation* of social reality. She explains this by stating that performance is always 'contingent, emergent, undetermined, and susceptible to unrehearsed actions' (Askew, 2002, pp. 14-15). Here, Askew's work channels the notion of performance as a creation championed in the work of Victor Turner (1982) – who argues that performances are 'making, not faking' social facts – and Johannes Fabian (1990, p. 9), who finds that 'a performance does not "express" something in need of being brought to the surface, or to the outside; nor does it simply enact pre-existing text. Performance is the text in the moment of its actualisation'. Similarly, this approach echoes the work of Paulla Ebron (2002, p. 1), who argues that 'performance and the politics of culture-making come together to inform one another's ability to exist'. Ebron (2002, pp. 1-2) argues that cultural performance is a 'frame of enactment' of power, in that cultural events, political rallies, and other cultural performances represent and authenticate collective values.

In my analysis, ethnographic accounts of 'politics' are not narrowed to a formal conception of politics but are rather framed and understood as the politics of everyday Muslim self-presentation and staged performances of Muslimness in private and public spheres (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). Eickelman and Piscatori (1996, p. 11) draw upon various case studies in societies that have both majority and minority Muslim populations to establish their argument that Muslim politics rely on 'persuasion rather than force'. To demonstrate this argument, they advocate for the unpacking of the persuasive power of language as a symbolic act. That is to say that, as a symbolic act, language attempts to construct communal identity by evoking stable Islamic expressions charged with political resonance (and is therefore never neutral).

A Glimpse of Political Secularism

The dismantling of apartheid in South Africa necessitated a transition to a secular state and society, grounded in political secularism that upholds the principles of human rights, freedom of conscience, and equality (Sachs, 1990). Two interrelated points distinguished South Africa's political secularism from that of other modern secular states: Its balance and articulation of tolerance, recognition, and

governance of cultural diversity (multiculturalism), and its regulated accommodation of religion in the state and society (Sachs, 1990; Leatt, 2017). Post-apartheid has favored a model of political secularism rooted in inclusive multiculturalism based on equal human rights and citizenship (Modood and Sealy, 2021).

Though proto-political secularism spans various civilizations, pre- and beyond Western modernity, the works of Martin Luther and John Locke (1689) have planted the seeds of modern political secularism. Luther (2008) acknowledges the need for secular authority to maintain order and peace, while maintaining Christianity at the center of state power and social morality, thereby failing to recognize that all humans are equal. Locke (1689) advocates the equality of all citizens regardless of their religious orientation or commitment, and complete autonomy of the state power, detached from any church.

Political secularism, the modern state, and the rise of human rights were shaped by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which aimed to end European wars. The secular state guarantees individual rights to freedom of conscience and religious choice, accommodating pluralism, including religions within secular ethics (Taylor, 2007). The formation of secularism is a long-term project that entails the secularization of the state, society, and religion. State secularization relies on constitutional law independent of religious ethics, differentiating religion from politics (Taylor, 2007). Societal secularization differentiates religion, science, art, and economy as autonomous spheres, confining religion within a limited sphere. The secularization of religion entails the individualization and rationalization of practices, in line with the Protestant Reformation (Casanova, 1994).

Modern states have developed various models of political secularism, differing in how they manage and regulate religion in society. Political secularism does not reject religion but involves legal state intervention in religious practices (Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2016). This ranges from militant secularism, which suppresses religious expression, and moderate secularism, which accommodates religions as part of social life and the public sphere, regulated by the state and distinct from the Constitution's Bill of Rights. Against the grain of militant secularism, religious motivation and discourse have been valued as sources and resources for public reason and democratic politics, insofar as they require a specific religious understanding that contradicts the secular claim of rationality (Rawls, 2001; Habermas, 2008). In the post-secular age (Habermas, 2008), religious knowledge and ethical values are acknowledged in public discourse within the bounds of human rights and conscience. Allowing individuals to practice or abstain from religion promotes tolerance of pluralism and safeguards individual freedoms and equal rights as secular entitlements. Crucially, state neutrality requires not favoring any religious or ethnic group over others. To maintain neutrality, the state must champion freedom of conscience, human rights, equality, the rule of law, and democracy as essential principles of a secular state and society (Taylor, 2007).

Without losing sight of the postcolonial critique of the Western politics and power vested in the formation of secularism and the modern state (Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2006), and while considering the centrality of Christianity in the formation of secularism (Taylor, 2011; Habermas, 2008; Asad, 2003) and its inherent limitation and contradiction of religious freedom and minority rights (Mahmood, 2016), political secularism remains vital in managing religious diversity in multireligious societies (Bhargava, 2011). To rethink political secularism, we need to move beyond European conceptions of the privatization of religion and the differentiation of social spheres and seek an alternative formula for political secularism that, while maintaining a principled distance between state and religion, admits a constitutive role of religion in individual and collective public life.

This article proposes post-apartheid political secularism as an alternative that overcomes many of the limitations of Western secularism's treatment of religious diversity and the rights of minorities. What is most significant is that post-apartheid political secularism offers all its citizens, whether majority or minority, a sense of being a native South African, whose performances of their religious or cultural style do not position them as different from the majority culture and hence do not question their national belonging. In Europe, political secularism has failed to integrate the Muslim minority, positioning them as a feared other, a burden to modern sensibilities and secular ethics (Asad, 2006; Modood, 2019). In the Middle East, Christian and Jewish minorities have been classified as second-class citizens, subject to legal and everyday discrimination. In her study of religious minorities in Egypt, Mahmood (2016) points out the inherent contradiction in political secularism's concepts of religious liberty and minority rights which, while encouraging minorities to express their religious identity,

subsequently positions them as cultural differences, thereby perceived as a threat to national unity. Although Christians living in Egypt are native and have participated in the Egyptian nationalist anticolonial liberation movements, in the postcolonial period they have been treated as second-class citizens, subject to various forms of discrimination (Mahmood, 2006). Egypt's political secularism favors Islam as the state religion, which has led to polarizing religious differences and violates the principle of modern state neutrality toward religion. Egypt's state recognition of religions is limited to the Qur'anic concept of 'people of the book', which includes the Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. At the same time, other religious groups, such as the Bahais, are excluded. In Egypt's political secularism, Islam shapes public morality and law, as well as national identity and culture. Therefore, the Coptic Christian community in Egypt must carefully balance expressing its religious identity without being perceived as different from the national community (Mahmood, 2006). Such a balance is mainly achieved through keeping their Christian identity private, while in public, they assimilate into Islamic culture. For Mahmood (2016), political secularism hardens religious boundaries and interfaith strife. She invites us to rethink how a religious minority group can perform their religious identity without the risk of being othered. Here, post-apartheid South Africa provides a model of political secularism that transcends the limitations and contradictions that Mahmood saw as inherent in its formation.

In both the Global North and South, the fulfilment of political secularism has fallen short in maintaining state neutrality, addressing the reality of multiculturalism, balancing tolerance and recognition of cultural diversity, while accommodating and regulating religion (Modood, 2019). The fear of religion as an incompatible cultural difference with modern society stems from the Western overemphasis on rationality, which underpins their tactic of classification and desire for assimilation and cultural homogeneity. Post-apartheid political secularism not merely grants religions a constitutionally recognized sphere of autonomy but also advocates for active interaction between the state and religion and collaboration in tasks of mutual social concern (Sachs, 1990). It acknowledged the freedom of religious practice, provided it adheres to the Constitution's Bill of Rights and principles of liberty, equality, and democracy (Leatt, 2017). The legitimacy of the post-apartheid formation of political secularism was further achieved by involving the broader public and religious leaders in the drafting and finalization of the Constitution. Religion embodied divine intervention, enacted as a politics of authenticity for the transition and formation of post-apartheid political secularism. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was among the religious leaders who closely engaged in the transition to post-apartheid, advocating for reconciliation and pluralism (Leatt, 2017). In November 1992, religious groups and individuals signed the Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities, promoting religious freedom and the potential contributions of religious communities in a post-apartheid South Africa. The document struck a careful balance between religious liberty and the state's commitment to political secularism. This constructive cooperation between religion and the post-apartheid state does not mean religion is subordinate to the state but reflects a long history of social involvement and influence on groups and individuals (Tayob, 2015).

Forging Muslim Political Engagement: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid South Africa

Muslim political engagement in South Africa emerged from the historical entanglement of slavery, exile, and resistance. From the outset, Islam was not only a religious identity but also a means of cultural and political survival for enslaved and marginalized communities. The foundation of Islam in South Africa is closely tied to the arrival of enslaved and exiled individuals from Southeast Asia and East Africa under Dutch colonial rule. Scholars such as Gabeba Baderoon (2014) assert that slavery and Islam jointly shaped the early cultural and religious landscape of the Cape. Islam offered enslaved people a sense of dignity, cultural identity, and spiritual autonomy, often in defiance of colonial hegemony.

Key exiled figures like Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar and Tuan Guru (Abdullah Kadi Abdu Salaam) played vital roles in establishing Islamic education and practices among the enslaved and free Black populations. Their teachings provided a framework of resistance against dehumanization and laid the groundwork for communal cohesion. By the early 19th century, under British colonial rule, Muslims in the Cape gained limited religious freedoms, including the right to establish mosques and Madrasahs.

These institutions not only became centers of worship but also spaces for education, resistance, and social mobility, especially for freed slaves after emancipation in 1834. The Tana Baru cemetery protest in 1886, sparked by the cemetery's closure under colonial public health laws, became a pivotal moment of Muslim political assertion. The protest, involving over 3,000 Muslims, is regarded as the first urban uprising by a Black community in South Africa, demonstrating the Muslims' early political mobilization around religious and communal rights (Davids, 1987).

The early 20th century saw Cape Muslims engage more directly in formal politics. Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman, a Muslim and leader of the African Political Organization (APO), was the first Colored person elected to Cape Town City Council in 1904. Under his leadership, the APO mobilized for educational and civil rights, reflecting the integration of Muslim political consciousness with broader Colored political identity. The Call of Islam, launched in the 1960s, played a central role in politicizing Islam as a tool for anti-apartheid liberation. Figures like Imam Abdullah Haron, who died in police custody in 1969, became martyrs of resistance. His legacy influenced the creation of progressive Muslim organizations, such as the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), the Muslim Students Association (MSA), and later the Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA). Under apartheid, Muslims were forcibly categorized as 'Cape Malay' – a racial construct designed by apartheid ideologues like Izak du Plessis to fragment non-White political unity (Du Plessis, [1942] 1972). However, this imposed identity was increasingly rejected by Muslims from the 1970s onwards, as many embraced a broader Black consciousness and joined the anti-apartheid movement (Jeppie, 1987). With the rise of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, the Call of Islam, established in the 1980s, aligned itself with secular anti-apartheid forces, despite internal tensions within the *Ulama* (Islamic clergy). Influential figures such as Ibrahim Rasool and Hassan Solomon argued for Islamic theological justifications for anti-apartheid activism, helping to bridge religious values with political resistance. This period marked a significant shift: Muslims no longer engaged politically just as individuals or ethnic groups but as a religious community actively participating in national liberation.

With the fall of apartheid and the introduction of a liberal democratic Constitution in 1996, Muslims secured full religious freedom, cultural rights, and equal citizenship. The post-apartheid state's emphasis on inclusive multiculturalism enabled Muslims to express diverse religious identities while participating in civic life publicly. Politically, Muslims have continued to contribute to South Africa's democratic development. Figures such as Ahmed Kathrada, who was directly involved in the drafting of the post-apartheid Constitution, and Ibrahim Rasool, who served as Premier of the Western Cape and later as South Africa's ambassador to the US, exemplify the integration of Muslim leadership into the national political landscape.

From their origins as enslaved and exiled communities, Muslims in South Africa have forged a unique path of political engagement rooted in faith, resistance, and social justice. Their evolving participation – from religious educators and protest leaders to political activists and post-apartheid citizens – demonstrates how Islam has been both a spiritual refuge and a vehicle for liberation across centuries of oppression and transformation.

Imam Omar's *Khutbah* on active citizenship resonated throughout my fieldwork from 2011 to 2024. On July 30, 2014, I visited Ighsaan Hendricks, the former president of the MJC in Cape Town, at the MJC office in Athlone to discuss the Muslim sense of citizenship and belonging in the post-apartheid era. I have met Ighsaan Hendricks several times at various events, the most recent being at the March of Palestine that the MJC organized on July 16, 2014. After welcoming me warmly into his office, Hendricks explained that since 1994, the MJC has focused on cultivating a sense of Muslim citizenship in South Africa. The MJC, he insisted, regards its role as revitalizing civic engagement among Muslims, encouraging contributions to the broader South African society. He lamented, however, a decline in Muslim political and social engagement over time, citing diminished interest in national politics. Hendricks affirmed Muslim national belonging and a sense of citizenship that is neither compromised nor fractured by Muslim belonging to an imagined community of Cape Muslims nor by their attachment to the Muslim *Ummah*. He stated, 'The MJC has strong ties with the Muslim *Ummah*, but we are not submissive to any Islamic countries. We are active participants in the Muslim *Ummah* and Muslim global political affairs; however, we are first and foremost South African citizens'.

He has claimed Muslim citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa as a continuation of political engagement against apartheid. He asserts a political affinity with the oppressed people of Palestine and elsewhere: 'Our support for Palestine is a continuation of the South African struggle against apartheid.'

We stand with the people of Palestine not because they are Muslims, but because they are oppressed, as we South Africans used to be’.

Furthermore, Hendricks spoke proudly to me about his meeting with George Habash, founder of the leftist socialist party, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The citation of Habash served to emphasize his point that the MJC’s political commitment extends beyond religious identity and is more closely tied to a shared sense of political oppression.

Achmat Cassiem, the founder of Qibla, also emphasizes the Muslim sense of national belonging and citizenship. For Cassiem, the Cape Muslim attachment to the Muslim *Ummah* should neither be regarded as submission to transnational influence, nor as a lack of Muslim national belonging. Cassiem regards the attachment and sense of belonging to a Muslim *Ummah* as a source of inspiration and support for Cape Muslims to ‘learn how to engage and contribute to the broader society of Cape Town through Islamic values’.

Cassiem was born and raised in Cape Town and joined the armed struggle of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) against apartheid in the 1960s. This resulted in his arrest and five-year incarceration at Robben Island. I first met Cassiem in 2018 at the inauguration of the Student Representative Council (SRC) at UWC. In that year, I was elected secretary-general of the SRC, a coalition of the MSA and PASMA. PASMA invited Cassiem as the PAC keynote speaker. He spoke about his days on Robben Island and his continuous struggle against oppression. After the event, we met at the SRC office, where Cassiem was introduced to the 12 new SRC executive members. Upon learning that I am a Palestinian, he hugged me warmly and asked me to contact the Mustadafine Foundation to help with my university debt registration fees.

From 2012 to 2015 I volunteered with the Mustadafine Foundation, teaching drumming and drama at its township branches. Founded in 1986 by Ghairunisa, Cassiem’s wife, to empower women and the youth and provide social relief amid poverty and violence, the foundation’s social commitment is rooted in its anti-apartheid struggle. Ghairunisa emphasized that Islamic values strengthened social commitment (cf. Alhourani, 2024).

In August 2014, I invited Cassiem to join the Mustadafine Foundation staff and my drumming students for a relaxed trip up Table Mountain. During our conversation that day, Cassiem clearly expressed his disappointment with the MJC as merely ‘a representative of elite and upper-class Muslims who are implicated in the marginalization and misrepresentation of the majority of poor and lower-class Muslims’. He extended his critique of the MJC to broader post-apartheid state politics, which he viewed as continuing to exclude and marginalize poor communities. For Cassiem, post-apartheid state politics serve ‘elite nationalists’ who have failed to abolish the discrimination inherited from apartheid. Within this context, Cassiem believed that the MJC’s alliance with the ANC was a betrayal of the Muslims’ anti-apartheid struggle. The MJC’s active participation in post-apartheid nationalist rhetoric has been criticized as ‘ambiguous accommodation’, which has constrained Muslims from engaging in a direct political challenge to those in power (Bangstad and Fataar, 2010).

Several weeks after our trip to Table Mountain, I visited Cassiem at his home in Lansdowne. We sat in the living room, which was decorated with a few photographs. Among these were pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian religious and political leader, and Robert Sobukwe, the founder of the PAC. On his bookshelf, there were South African and Iranian flags. During our conversation, Cassiem expressed a deep commitment to the oppressed people of South Africa and beyond. He draws inspiration from the Iranian Revolution and Ali Asha’ari’s Islamic liberation theology, as well as the PAC’s tradition of liberation, in his ongoing struggle for the marginalized in South Africa from apartheid to post-apartheid. While recounting his political biography, Cassiem expressed pride in his youth’s anti-apartheid activism and the five years he spent on Robben Island in the 1960s, during which he developed his political views within the PAC. After a decade of activism, Cassiem found inspiration in the Iranian Revolution, which never wavered but instead supported his anti-apartheid struggle, national identity, and social commitment to South Africa.

Cape Muslim expressions of active citizenship and national belonging are not merely institutional discourses of the CMRM, the MJC, or the Mustadafine Foundation, but rather embodied sentiments among individual Muslims. Hamedata Deedat offered a compelling reflection on Muslim citizenship and being a South African nationalist. When asked whether she identified as a ‘South African Muslim’ or a ‘Muslim South African’, she responded,

The desire to be part of a nation with a common national identity was our struggle. Once democracy was attained in 1994, I could return the misleading identity of being 'Indian' to the oppressor and embrace a national identity. I never felt that being Muslim and being South African were at odds. So, I say proudly: I am a South African. I also suppose that since our constitution enshrines the right to religious freedom to all its citizens, we are South Africans of diverse cultures, races, religions and practices, and so, in keeping with that, I would say I am a South African Muslim.

Deedat's statement affirms her national identity, sense of citizenship, and cultural rights as a Muslim in South Africa. She does not see a conflict between her national identity and her attachment to Islam or Indian heritage. Her sentiment is not a rejection of Indian heritage but a deliberate redefinition of identity within the context of post-apartheid multiculturalism, reaffirming rights to both national belonging and cultural diversity. Born in 1970 to a South African Muslim family of Indian descent, Deedat was raised in a devout environment. She attended *Madrasah* from age three and began fasting at five. In 1989, she enrolled at the University of Cape Town, where she completed her honors, during which she actively participated in the student protests against apartheid. Deedat's religiosity underpins her political engagement, her sense of citizenship, and her national belonging. Cape Muslims demonstrate multiple forms of belonging and attachment, neither of which compromise the other.

Cape Muslims' multiple belongings exemplify their culturalization of citizenship, rooted in their history of struggle and liberation, which has cultivated their sense of being native South Africans. Muslim active citizenship has been enabled by post-apartheid political secularism, granting all South Africans equal rights and the freedom to perform Islam publicly. Post-apartheid political secularism ensures that Christianity is not the state religion; it does not shape the national identity or culture or influence the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Public performances of Islam have resurged in the post-apartheid period; therefore, they are not confined to private domains or need to assimilate into Christian culture. South African Muslims have the right to practice or abstain from Islam; in both cases, they are granted constitutional equal citizenship rights. In both the Global North and South, most modern states have fallen short in two ways: First, in establishing political secularism grounded in inclusive multiculturalism that grants all citizens equal rights and the freedom to practice their religion in public without fear of being othered as threats to national unity or secular sensibilities; second, in accommodating the constructive role of religion. However, post-apartheid political secularism fosters a national identity based on diversity rather than enforced hegemony. What is more notable is that, while most modern states fail to establish distance between religion and the state – causing a dichotomy between religion and the secular – post-apartheid political secularism accommodates religion as constitutive of public life, knowledge, and ethics, provided it does not contradict the Bill of Rights. Gabeba Baderoon (2014, p. 14) points out that 'today Muslims form an integral part of the post-apartheid nation and are visibly represented in politics, education, business, the media, and art'. She argues that South Africa's 'relationship with its Muslim citizens in many ways offers a model to the world, treating them as fully integrated members of a secular democracy that expressly protects religious expression' (Baderoon, 2014, p. 159). Having witnessed and participated in formal and everyday performances of Muslimness, I have come to realize the pronounced public visibility of the Muslim community and its dynamic integration into Cape Town's broader multicultural society. Thus, with Baderoon in mind, the ethnographic accounts and analysis presented here support two interrelated points: First, that Muslim dynamic integration of local, national, and transnational belongings, their sense of active citizenship, and their integration into the broader society of Cape Town provide a model for Muslim minorities' negotiation of identity politics and position within a multicultural society; second, this article effectively supports the notion that post-apartheid political secularism, grounded on rainbowism and emphasis on equal rights, provides a lesson regarding the extent to which and ways in which other modern multicultural states might integrate religious minority groups as equal citizens.

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