

Editorial

Since its conception, the **Annual Review of Islam in South Africa** has aimed at providing commentary on developments pertaining to the Muslim community. However, it has taken five years to finally crystallize this objective into a standard format. Therefore, a significant feature of this year's issue is that all the articles are categorized under four broad sections. The first two sections, **Art & Literature** and **Media & Society** are self-explanatory. The third section, **In Perspective**, aims at highlighting a certain area of interest and articles under this heading therefore share a common theme. The focus of this section will naturally shift from year to year. The final section on **Writing & Research** relates more to the academic than to the socio-political, but not exclusively so. These categories are broad enough to encompass the diverse voices within the Muslim community of South Africa, while simultaneously grouping together the common elements.

The **Art & Literature** section opens with a review of a play written by Nadia Davids, a talented young Muslim playwright making her mark in South African theatre. The review is followed by an interview with Nadia, wherein the broader text that gave rise to the play is explored. The two articles together transcend the limitations of the stage and speak about the Muslims of the Western Cape with all their diversity and pathos. In this unobtrusive manner we witness, first hand, the power of Art as a means of engaging the harsh challenges of lived experience. This grappling with reality is carried forward in the two articles that follow, where two recent works of fiction are reviewed. These are Ahmed Essop's *Narcisuss and other stories* and Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*. Both books exploit the porous boundaries between fiction

and history, making strong statements about society and the joys and struggles of everyday life in the process. The final article of the section examines the work of Saeed Rahbeeni, an uncelebrated Muslim cartoonist plying his trade for many years now.

The **Media & Society** category opens with a statement on Religion and Politics in South Africa. Ebrahim Rasool, a prominent South African politician, reflects on the role envisaged by the new constitution for religion in our society. This is followed by a penetrating analysis by Abdulkader Tayob on the responses of South African Muslims to September 11. Tayob explores how political participation has served to temper the responses of certain Muslim organizations, in addition to the role of the media in exploiting the political naivety of groups that expose themselves to such abuse. In the two articles that follow, Heribert Adam and Na'eem Jeenah address an issue that is a constant preoccupation for Muslims in South Africa by exploring whether our country has any solutions to offer to the Palestinian / Israeli conflict. Adam suggests that the parallels between Apartheid South Africa and Zionist Israel are not similar enough to allow for a South African style settlement. He therefore favours a two-state solution as opposed to a unified democracy endorsed by the likes of Edward Said. By contrast, Jeenah argues for a far more nuanced application of the Israel-Apartheid analogy but still feels that it is valid and that the South African model of a negotiated settlement based on equal recognition for all citizens still holds much promise. Jeenah therefore endorses the idea of a single bi-national state with equal rights for all its citizens. Both articles are an important step in the direction of fostering debate on the basis of informed opinion and analysis, not raw emotion and sentimentality. The articles will no doubt generate much needed debate and reflection

and will hopefully be met with equally well-informed responses. The next article in the section returns to a local focus and examines South African women's struggle for access to sacred spaces. In her article, Farhana Ismail concentrates specifically on the Eid-Day prayer and uncovers the political motives behind the initiatives that support women's participation in the prayer gathering. In the final article of the section, Muhammad Haron pays tribute to Dr Abu Bakr Fakier, a unique and talented individual, who passed away this year. The article is more than an obituary and provides unique insight into the currents and trends prevalent in Cape-Muslim society.

The special focus section of this year's **ARISA** brings Islam in the townships **In Perspective**. The first article draws attention to a township luminary, Imam Essa al-Seppe, who tragically past away in the course of the year. Tahir Sitoto locates the efforts of the Imam within the broader context of the South African Muslim community and grapples with the difficulty of confining the Imam's influence solely to the townships. The sheer force of Imam al-Seppe's authority is clearly recognizable in all of the remaining articles of the section. While Ebrahim Fakude gives an overview of Islam in the townships in general, the voice of Imam Essa al-Seppe is distinctly audible in the very manner in which Fakude engages the differences between Muslims at the centre and those on the periphery. The third article of the section has a strictly provincial focus, concentrating on developments in the Western Cape. In the article that follows, Rebekah Lee also concentrates on this region but specifically examines the phenomenon of African women's conversion to Islam. In the final article Auwais Rafudeen ponders over ways in which we, the children of Africa, are able to forge identities that are both true to Islam and to our inherent *African-ness*.

The two articles in the **Writing & Research** section are by acclaimed international scholars who have spent some time in South Africa recently. Abdullahi an-Naim was a participant in the final symposium of the Islamic Law in Africa Project (ILAP) hosted by the Centre for Contemporary Islam. In his article he reflects upon the encounter between Islamic law and secular politics. His insights provide a glimpse into the nature of the ILAP project itself and also reveal current research concerns in the field of Islamic law. Margot Badran's article was prompted by her recent teaching experience at UCT, where she convened a postgraduate course on Islamic Feminism/s. She describes the course not only as an academic exercise but as an expression of feminism in practice. Her experiences in South Africa have stimulated further research and she is currently preparing a book on comparative Islamic Feminisms, concentrating on Egypt, Yemen and South Africa. **ARISA** concludes with a select bibliography of recent works relating to Islam and Muslims in South Africa.

It is truly an honor to be able to dedicate this Issue of **ARISA** to the memory of the late Imam Essa al-Seppe and the late Dr Abu Bakr Fakier, 'elders' of the South African Muslim community, whose legacies surely remain but whose presence is sorely missed.

As always, all views expressed in this issue are not necessarily shared by the editor, the Centre for Contemporary Islam or the University of Cape Town and remain the intellectual property and responsibility of the respective authors. The contribution and effort of all participants in this volume is gratefully acknowledged. Special mention must be made of Nabowayah Jardien who helped with the data capturing and shathely

Q, who assisted with proof reading. Previous editions of **ARISA** can be accessed on our website at www.uct.ac.za/depts/religion. Click on **Annual Review of Islam in South Africa** and follow the links.

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