

Reaching Out, Making Public:

The Jamiat ul-Ulama South Africa and its Online Newsletter

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Abstract

The main objective of this essay is to reflect upon the contents of one of JUSA's newsletters to establish how JUSA or more specifically the editor manages these. In addition to issuing a variety of print magazines on various socio-political and religious matters, the Jamiat ul-Ulama (JUSA/JU) found the need to publish a weekly online newsletter for its audience. So far, it has issued its 14th volume with an average of 50 newsletters per year. This essay reflects on the contents of one of JUSA's newsletters to establish how JUSA in general, and the editor specifically, manages content. It notes that the newsletter, with a global reach, covers religious issues and comments on selected socio-political events. Couched and expressed in conservative language, these issues seem to find support among the public particularly those with internet access.

Key words: Jamiat ul-Ulama, JUON, Contents, Newsletter, Online Media, South Africa

0. Introduction

South Africans like many other societies across the African continent have increasingly become a wired society. In this 'global village' the numerous religious communities, who form an integral part of the vibrant democratic South Africa, have joined their co-religionists via the internet to express their views on a variety of socio-political and religious issues. Among these religious communities, the economically mobile sector of South Africa's Muslims has made great strides in entering cyber-space with the objective of entrenching and expanding their religious identity. Since South Africa became a democracy more than 15 years ago, Muslims like all other religious communities took advantage of their democratic environment which encouraged socialization and interaction at different levels and in various forms.

South Africa's non-homogenous Muslim community consists of a plethora of small and large groups and organizations which claim to represent the interest of this large religious community. Whilst some of them are justified in making these claims, others are not. The

purpose of this essay, however, is not to unpack these differences, but rather to reflect upon one specific bona fide organization, namely the Gauteng-based Jami'at ul-'Ulama (JU est. 1935) that has for decades served the interest of the Muslim community in the northern part of the country. Since this organization has been involved with many activities, this essay is particularly concerned with its latest venture and that is the *Jami'at ul-'Ulama Online Newsletter (JUON)* that has been circulated on a weekly basis since May 2006 and therefore available only to the cyber savvycommunity. In fact, this essay broadly examines the reasons for its circulation, issues covered, and how more importantly, the editorial management of these issues. To appreciate JUON, let us place it within the larger South African Muslim's media industry.

1. South Africa's Muslim Media Industry

The Muslim media industry that has been around for many decades and has grown in leaps and bounds with the coming of the cyber-age.

Since the 20th century, members of the Muslim community have sought ways of communication with their co-religionists through the production of various newspapers. In 1907 Ahmed Osman (Effendi) launched a Gujarati newspaper *Al-Islam: Religious and Political Mohammadan Organ in South Africa* in Durban. While the general focus was on Islam, the sub-title reveals that it concentrated on socio-religious and political matters (Waetjen & Vahed 2011: 26). This publication lasted for only three years and coincided with Gandhi's personal transformation(circa 1906-1909) (Bhana & Vahed 2005). Osman was probably inspired by the success of *Indian Opinion's* circulation; a Gandhi managed newspaper that appeared in Hindi, Tamil, English and Gujarati and one that served the interest of the growing Indian community. About four years after *Al-Islam*, Mahomed Cassim Angia (d.1920?) founded the *Indian Views* to act as another 'moderate political' mouthpiece of the Gujarati speaking Muslims in and around Durban (Waetjen & Vahed 2011: 38).

Unlike *Al-Islam* that had a short-life span, *Indian Views* continued for about six decades until 1972. Ismail Meer became its editor in the late 1920s after his father, Moosa Meer, died. This was about the same time when the Cape Muslims decided to establish *The Moslem Outlook*. Like *Al-Islam*, it looked at socio-political issues that affected the Muslim community and only lasted for three years (circa 1925 and 1927). From the 1930s onwards there seemed to have been many attempts by Muslim individuals and groups in cities and towns to issue pamphlets and circulars as a method of keeping their community abreast of current events (see

Haron 1997). The *Muslim Digest* was among the important monthlies that appeared and was owned and managed by Mr. Mohamed Makki until his death in the 1990s. Apart from this well circulated monthly, Mr. Makki also produced the popular *Ramadan Annual* which combined articles on religious and socio-political issues in and around the Muslim world (Switzer & Switzer 1979; Haron 2018).

The second half of the 20th century and the 1960 to be precise, witnessed the launching of the *Muslim News (MN)* which at one stage was issued on a bi-monthly basis. Due to family disagreements, the paper was forced to close in 1986. In the same year members of the editorial board not related to the Sayed family except for one decided to issue a paper that would continue in the footpath of the *MN* and because *Muslim Views*. By 1970 the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa issued *Al-Qalam* as a newsletter but transformed it into a monthly newspaper by 1973. Both papers have remained afloat despite the economic and other challenges. These papers were, occasionally, challenged by the formation of others such as the *Islamic Times* and the *Muslim Voice (MV)* which nevertheless lacked the stamina to continue on a regular basis. The South African Muslim community was therefore generally active in the printing sector.

However, the Muslim print media was challenged by other media developments. In particular was the formation of Muslim radio stations during the 1990s and the setting up of TV channels during the first few years of the new millennium. Apart from these media structures, the print media also faced the onslaught of the internet. It is indeed this sector that forced the print media to reassess their monthly status. Even though the internet as a new kid on the block was not there to replace print media, it compounded the challenges that the print media already faced.

In the case of *MV*, its owners/investors decided to go online with the hope of reaching a wider audience and also tapping into the global readership. But whilst the print media was grappling with these challenges, some organizations that had their own in-house publications decided to come up with ‘independent’ online papers for their cyber-space audience. An example was the Jami’at ul-‘Ulama of Gauteng which having regularly issued *Ar-Rasheed* for the Gauteng region, opted to establish the *Jami’at ul-‘Ulama Online Newsletter (JUON)*. This was a major development within the theological fraternity that also issued on an irregular basis *Al-Jamiat* in the KwaZulu Natal region and *Ad-Dawah* in the Cape.

It is clear from the above that the Muslim was active, vibrant as well as changing with new platforms invented and uploaded. With this as a backdrop, let us now turn to the theoretical frame within which to appreciate our analysis of *JUON*.

2. Defining and Explaining Concepts and Ideas

As we reflect upon the Muslim media in and outside South Africa, we should ask a few pertinent questions: what was the purpose of publishing newsletters, magazines and newspapers over the years? Who were the individuals who spearheaded these ventures? Why did they do so and for whom? In which way did they reinforce the religious identity of the community? And how did they succeed in doing this? In addition, what are the differences between the various types of media and for which audiences were they meant for? Let us first begin with the function of the (print and electronic) media, and Shannon Martin's co-edited, *The Function of Newspaper on Society* (2003) is a useful starting point.

According to Martin, "(print and electronic) newspapers fill a social role, and modern (print and electronic) newspaper is an evolving artifact of a social need to learn and distribute news" (Martin 2003: 4). He underlined the fact that this type of media essentially carries and conveys news to its restricted or unrestricted audience/readers wherever they might be or find themselves. For example, Mr. X might land in Johannesburg in the morning and pick up the latest issue of *The Washington Post* or Ms. Y might find herself leaving Accra and perusing today's issue of London-based *The Guardian* without missing out on the news. And when it comes to electronic newspapers, both Mr. X and Ms. Y will have immediate access to these if they have their iPad or Tablet at hand since a range of newspapers are available online.

What then is the difference between 'a newspaper' and a "newsletter" since both of which are sometimes clubbed together as 'periodicals'? Basically the difference between the two is that the latter is printed and circulated by a particular organization (in this instance, by a religious body) and it is significantly shorter than the former which contains inter alia investigative pieces, travel features, newsworthy stories and general information that is of relevance for the region/state/town/ or the country. Newsletters are generally published with a specific audience in mind, whereas the newspaper considers anyone as its potential reader.

Since the Jami'at ul-'Ulama has printed and issued its newsletter online, as a religious organization it did not do so with the idea of attracting each and every literate person who had access to the internet. Rather, it had in mind the Muslim individual who accesses the internet

regularly and its purpose was to target what Bunt called the iMuslim who operated in the cyber-Muslim environment. On the contrary, South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, clearly reflects that its contents are for all and sundry and therefore not confined to a specific target audience. With the differences between these two types of media, let us now proceed and state that the newspaper - and by implication the newsletter – is a platform or vehicle that strikes a relationship between the originator of the news item or information and the reader. Martin made reference to Anthony Smith's *Newspapers: An International History* (Thames & Hudson 1979) in which he identified the various evolutionary stages of newspapers that generated news; and Martin observed that the newspaper "found its modern form because of the kinds of inventions available for its needs and uses among an increasing literate society..." (ibid 9).

Now since the internet is considered for all intents and purposes a digital media invention, the newspaper as well as its sister conduits reinvented itself in a more creative form. Apart from having merely reported news and having included, among others, feature writings, gender pages, political commentaries, and editorial essays (cf. Hodgson 1997; Keeble 2005), the newspaper transformed itself from the physical to the virtual. This move remains a critical development since the traditional printed newspaper had to compete with virtual or cyber-newspapers that had an audience which migrated from the traditional stage of reading printed texts to browsing virtual texts. Li (2006:1) observed that internet newspapers grew exponentially during the first few years of the new millennium.

He pointed out that many traditional print newspapers, which initially resisted this shift, have since embraced it and as a result have now changed into 'a mainstream medium' that is viewed as a serious publication (ibid 2). He highlighted the fact that readers migrated to the virtual text because it was easily accessible, regularly updated and richer in content compared to its print counterpart. Whilst these might be seen as some of the reasons for this change, other reasons that have been given are the internet newspaper's enhanced multimedia and interactive features that usually take place in online forums and chatrooms. Greer's (2006: 30) longitudinal study demonstrated that since internet newspapers responded regularly to online surveys regarding the newspapers' contents, structure, and features, they are in a constant process of evolving and thriving.

The evolution of these newspapers is also connected to the owners, editors and journalists that are associated with them. In many instances, the owners through the position of the editors steer the newspaper in a direction that usually keeps the tastes, interests and

responses of their readers in mind. Armed with the relevant feedback, the newspaper management team brings about online changes at regular intervals in order not to lose readers and nor to see a fall in the newspaper's revenue.

The question is whether the online Muslim newspapers in South Africa, were successful as compared to the secular newspapers studied by Li and others. Although it is not useful to undertake this evaluation here, we may wish to argue that Muslim newspapers have not been as responsive to change as might have been expected; and, as a consequence, they do not thrive online like the mainstream media. Using the Cape based *Muslim Views* and Durban's *Al-Qalam*, it is evident that they have not developed as the others such as *Muslim News* in the UK and have remained rather traditional in their respective presentations. Compared to *Al-Qalam*, *Muslim Views* made sure that it gets a global footprint via its digital issues and therefore readily available access to these almost immediately. Be that as it may, let us evaluate *Jami'at ul-'Ulama Online Newsletter* and see whether it has managed to thrive and evolve into a viable media conduit.

3. *Jami'at ul-'Ulama Online Newsletter*

The *Jami'at ul-'Ulama* is a theological body that was established in 1935 in Johannesburg (Naude 1982). and has developed tremendously with branches all over the country. However, these branches are not the same. For example, the Gauteng JU is not the same as the Durban-based JU. They do have similar objectives but operate independently from each other.

JUON is an online newsletter is issued by the Gauteng-based JU. As mentioned earlier, JU also issues *Ar-Rasheed* on a monthly basis. It is perhaps fair to argue that *JOUN* which appears on a weekly basis, is a summarized version of *Ar-Rasheed*. This is based on this researcher's brief comparative evaluation of the newspaper's print and *JUON*'s electronic issues. Let us begin with its structure and other related issues before we compare and analyze selected items in the two issues.

3.1 *JUON*'s Structure

JUON follows a simple structure. Being an online text, all items such as the commentary and other columns are found on the same screen. It, in fact, appears as if it is on an endless page. What this means is that one must scroll down from the top until one reaches the final section of the text. The electronic newsletter consists of about 10 different sections.

The first is the ‘weekly comment’ column; herein the editor usually inserts his editorial opinion on a specific issue. Along the margin of the ‘weekly comment’ it contains ‘information’ about economic issues such as *zakat* (that is, the obligatory purificatory tax) and this is followed by ‘words of wisdom’ (i.e. a prophetic statement).

Below the weekly comment, a summarized version of the *jumu’a bayan* (Friday sermon) appears, and this is accompanied by a list of (theological cum jurisprudential) Questions & Answers and general ‘reflections’ regarding particular issues. This is followed by an ‘update’ on local or regional events pertaining to JU activities. The newsletter is concluded with a weekly ‘message from the *ameer* (leader/president) of the JU’.

Although the structure was slightly altered since it began circulation on 5 May 2006, the format did not change at all. For the benefit of this essay, it is useful to peruse, at least, two different issues to offer an insight into their coverage with some attention being given to the editorial.

3.2 Two Issues of *JUON*: Vol.12 No.44 and Vol. 12 No. 49

The two, which were randomly selected from Volume 12 were circulated on the 7 November and 8 December 2017 respectively. As explained above, each of the issues has a list of salient items that form part of the right sidebar alongside the editorial. For the purpose of this essay, items that appear on the right bar will be discussed and compared to show the prophetic reports or statements chosen and the relevance of the inserted quotes and sayings. First are the prophetic statements followed by the other two items.

3.2.1 *Hadith*, Quote and Saying

a) The *Hadith* (Prophetic Statement)

For volume 12 no. 49, the editorial board chose the following ‘*hadith* of the week’: “Anas ibn Malik reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: ‘None of you has faith until he/she loves for his/her brother or his/her neighbor what he/she loves for him/herself’.” For Volume 12 no. 44 it identified the following: “Ibn Salamah As-Sulami narrated that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: ‘I enjoin each one to honour his mother, I enjoin each one to honour his mother, I enjoin each one to honour his mother (three times), (and) I enjoin each one to honour his/herfather/guardian who is taking care of him/her, even if he/she is causing him (that is, the father/guardian) some annoyance’.”

Before commenting on the two prophetic statements, it is important to note that these types of statements consist by and large of three parts: the first is the narrator who met the Prophet and who quoted from him; in one instance, the narrator's name is Anas (who is) the son of Malik and in the other it is: Ibn Salamah As-Sulami; both quoted directly from the Prophet. The second part contains the contents of the Prophet's statement to which attention will be given shortly. The third refers to the compiler/collector of these statements; in the first case the compiler's name is Imam Bukhari and in the second it is Ibn Majah (d.887). Both hailed from the Central Asian city of Bukhara, and the second from another Central Asian city respectively. Their places of birth imply that both were non-Arabs who devoted their lives to undertake the onerous task of compiling various prophetic statements over a long period.

The first statement extracted from the Bukhari (d.810) collection, revealed that it is a 'golden rule' statement that has been quoted in different religious traditions in slightly altered versions. Though randomly selected, one is of the view that the board chose it to deliberately persuade to the reader to subscribe to this understanding of faith. The statement stressed that one cannot possess faith without demonstrating love for one's fellow human beings such as one's neighbor. So faith should be reflected in one's action and it should not be a mere verbal utterance and nor a feeling that remains located in one's heart. In fact, it is an outward expression that should be in sync with one's act of love for the other.

The second statement from of Ibn Majah's collection makes it obvious that the Prophet held the mother in high esteem and for that reason repeatedly stated that one should honour one's mother first and later the father or guardian. Like other religious traditions in the house of Islam much emphasis is laid on respect for one's parents. This prophetic statement, stresses one's attitude towards one's parents/guardians no matter how annoying they are.

b) Quote of the Week

The board followed up this *hadith*, with an informative 'quote of the week'. In number 49 it lifted a statement from the Prophet's closest companion Umar (who is) the son of Khattab who was appointed the second Caliph in the House of Islam. The statement is: "You remove your gaze from the splendor of the World. Do not let the love of this World enter your heart. Beware that the love of this World does not perhaps destroy you, just as it had destroyed previous nations." The lesson in this statement emphasizes that splendor has the capacity to destroy a person and he advised that one removes one's gaze from it. He also warned that one

should be mindful of the love for worldly affairs. The quote complements the *hadith* mentioned earlier.

Issue number 44 quoted a statement from one of the leading Muslim jurists, Imam Ash-Shafi'i (d.820) whose followers eventually established a school of jurisprudence that was named after him. The latter's quote is: "The one who admonishes his/her brother/sister secretly, he/she has advised sincerely and has honored him/her. If he/she does it outwardly (among others) then he/she has dishonored and shamed him/her." The quote is quite instructive in that it highlights one's way of addressing an issue. That is, if one's friend or relative committed something that was abominable then it is best to admonish or advise that person in private; and this reflects that one honours that person's dignity and self-worth. But if one does the opposite, then one has indeed showed dishonor and disrespect towards that person.

c) Saying of the Week

The *hadith* and the quote are further complemented by 'a (simple) saying of the week'. This is usually a proverb that is lifted from other cultural communities and as long it harmonizes with the principles and values taught within the house of Islam, then it would be endorsed.

The first proverb chosen for issue number 49, is a Finnish proverb: "It is not worth it to go further than the sea for fish." This proverb, enjoins one to use one's common sense in all circumstances. That is, if one wants fish one doesn't have to go to the market, but one just goes to the nearby sea where the fishes are in abundance.

The proverb in number 44, is a North American **Cherokee proverb and it stated:** "The pain you feel today is the strength you feel tomorrow. For every challenge, encountered there is opportunity for growth." The proverb's import is that as one encounters painful tests and agonizing challenges, one gains the necessary strength to deal with what lays ahead.

3.2.2 Q & A, Friday Sermon, and the Editorial

a) Q & A

Let us turn to the three elements that appear on the left side bar of the online issue. In Muslim communities there is a tendency to pose various theological and jurisprudential questions to the theologians and jurists; and generally, those who perform this task have been trained in a traditional Muslim seminary where they cover, among others, both theology and jurisprudence (Hoosen 2008).

The theologian who responded to the question in this issue is Maulana Y. Patel. The term ‘Maulana’ is a South Asian construction; and since the individual graduated from one of the South Asian seminaries he would be among the thousands that adopted this nomenclature. This differs from the term that is used in the Arab world where graduates from the Faculties of Theology and Jurisprudence are referred to as ‘Shaykhs.’

Maulana Patel was asked a simple question about ablution. Since Muslims are expected to perform five times a day, he/she should wash the necessary parts of the body before performing the obligatory ritual prayer. If one, for example, must answer the call of nature, that would imply that one has to re-do the ablution. If, however, one has a major bladder then the theologian would try to offer appropriate answers in the circumstances. The questioner stated that he is in the habit of taking ablution when he performs the early morning ritual prayer. He added that by and large he manages to hold onto his/her ablution for much of the day; and as a consequence, he succeeded in performing all the five rituals without having to take ablution in between. However, he was informed by a friend that doing that is not acceptable and this got him/her worried. He then asked Maulana Patel who commended him/her for remaining in a state of ablution for much of the day and for having carried out the obligatory rituals. Maulana Patel hastily advised him that though it is approved to do so, it is preferable to take ablution for each daily ritual prayer.

Though this was a rather simple question, the theologians and jurists weigh up these matters and make attempts to answer as best as they can since these decisions will also be of interest to others who have or have had similar questions. Compared to this question, the one in issue number 44 was different and not simple. The questioner quizzed whether it would be better or rather acceptable - from Islam’s perspective - to merge his banking account with that of his wife’s account.

The learned respondent or theologian, offered a reasonable reply. He said that it was best for the two of them to keep their respective banking accounts separate. He, however, added that they may open a joint account with the proviso that an agreement exists between them as to how the funds will be used. He, moreover, reminded the questioner that when doing so one should, among others, determine one's inheritance as well as that of one's spouse and one should also decide whether each will own 50% of whatever is agreed upon. Normally when these theologians offer answers, they would lace their responses with Qur'anic verses and prophetic statements in support of his arguments. Here the respondent avoided doing that.

b) Friday Sermon

Turning to the Friday Sermon that appears below the Q and A in number 49, one observes that the content was the fifth section of the sermon. The section's focus was on performing the ritual prayer in congregation. The theologian who delivered the sermon studded the sermon with more than ten prophetic statements that underlined the importance of doing the ritual prayer in congregation. The reports of these prophetic statements followed the same format as the one explained earlier.

In this report, it was stated that one should purify oneself by taking a bath, dressing oneself, and then using perfume before joining the Friday congregational prayers. When at the mosque one should faithfully perform the supererogatory prayers and attentively listen to the sermon. The report concluded that if all these acts are done sincerely then one's sins would be forgiven from that Friday to the previous one. Similarly, another report stated that taking a bath on a Friday with the intention of performing the Friday prayers in congregation means that one's sins will be removed.

In these reports, it was confidently conveyed that the worshipper's sins which he/she committed during that week would automatically be wiped out. However, this is dependent upon one's intention and attitude when attending the Friday sermon as well as one's truthful performance of the mandatory ritual prayer. All the reports maintained the fact that after having genuinely observed these basics, one's bad actions will be part of one's past because God, who observed one's act, will readily forgive.

In no. 44 the Friday Sermon's focus was on 'reward for good deeds'. The board inserted four verses from different chapters of the Qur'an, and these were accompanied by seven corresponding prophetic statements. The board drew the reader/listeners' attention to chapter

11 verse 114 where the Almighty God said: “establish the ritual prayer in the two ends of the day and in some parts of the night. Surely good deeds drive away evil deeds.” The verse underscored the idea that one should perform one’s prayer when one wakes up and before one returns to sleep. In addition, performing extra prayers at night is also encouraged, and the regular performance of these rituals would ward off any sin or evil in an effective manner. In other words, establishing one’s prayer helps to keep evil at a distance.

The prophetic statement that was inserted was: “Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah narrated that the Prophet (s) said: ‘Which deed is best? He replied: ‘Standing for lengthy periods (in the ritual prayer)’.” In this statement, the Prophet once again underlined that prayer helps a person in acting righteously. Put differently, when one performs the ritual prayer by lengthening the performance of each posture such as standing or prostrating, it causes one to be conscious and mindful of God’s presence in one’s life and this will aid one to stay away from wrong acts.

3.2.3 The Editorials

It is now clear that the online newsletter is very much religious in content and outlook. Put differently, differently, the newsletter evidently managed by Muslims and that its contents are constructed to and disseminate news about Islam as an all-encompassing religious system.

Editorials play a pivotal role in that the editor, who is its thought leader, offers critical guidance on specific matters, and this depends on what pertinent subject is being addressed (Haron 1993). Usually, editorials respond to the issue at hand by offering a solution drawn from both the Qur’an and Sunnah (the prophetic tradition), it steers away from this type of presentation on occasions; and this depends on the topic that is tackled. In numbers 44 and 49, topics that were raised were mainly political ones with major impact on the affairs of Muslims not only within the Muslim heartlands, but globally. In particular, they were concerned by the Zionist project that brought about a radical shift in Palestine and the sacred city of Jerusalem since the early 1900s.

a) Zionist Project’s Balfour Declaration

Historically this declaration that was signed 100 years ago had a snow-balling effect on the whole of the Muslim heartlands. The editorial recalled the signing of this document by Arthur Balfour (d.1930) (Linfield 2017), and narrated the painful effects it had on the Palestinian society.

Britain was undoubtedly colluding with the Zionists and this resulted in the formation of the Zionist state. Religion (that is, Judaism) was conveniently used by political leaders such as Theodor Herzl (d.1904) to achieve political ends rather than religious goals as some pro-Zionists tried to argue. These Zionists created a messianic appeal to get all Jews on board except the Orthodox Jews who argued differently because they did not support the formation of such a state in Palestine. They were, however, in the minority and their voices were muzzled and those with the political agenda won at the end of the day.

b) Zionist State's Annexation of Jerusalem(Abu-Munshar 2007)

In issue number 49, the editorial inserted (UUCSA)'s press statement instead of a crafted editorial. It seems to have felt that the public statement by this representative theological body echoed the newsletter's ideas as regards the sacred city of Jerusalem. In any event, United 'Ulama Council of South Africa's (UUCSA) president, Maulana Y. Patel, circulated a statement condemning both the Zionist state and the USA government for declaring Jerusalem as the new capital of the Zionist state. It is a well-known fact that this city remains sacred in the eyes of the Jews, Christians and Muslims, and it has, for generations, remained a neutral territory where these believers freely worshipped and performed their various ritual prayers.

Since Jerusalem's mosque of al-Aqsa has always been and continues to be a sacred city in the eyes of the Muslims, it sparked a major debate since the USA's announcement on 6 December 2017 recognizing it as the Zionist state's new capital (Neff 1993; Gordon 2019). Though the disputes regarding this decision, which transgressed international laws, have gone unabated, the UN and other related bodies have been silent. When the press statement was released, it passionately implored the international community to intervene. Two years have gone by and no decisive action against the USA and the Zionist state was taken. In the light of these willful political developments, UUCSA requested the South African government to downgrade the Zionist state's representation. When the statement was issued the South African government did not heed the UUCSA call and only did so when other events unfolded subsequent to this questionable declaration.

4. Conclusion

The essay reflected upon the Gauteng-based Jami'at ul-'Ulama's (JU est. 1935) newsletter which was circulated on weekly basis since 2006. It began by placing it in a broader historical context and pointed out that the JU, as a theological body, has served the interest of

the Muslim community in the northern part of the country for decades. Instead of issuing and circulating hard copies, JU chose to use cyber-space to reach out to those cyber savvy (Muslim [and perhaps non-Muslim]) readers. The essay examined the reasons for the newsletter's circulation and explored, inter alia, what issues its editorials focused on. It also placed *JUON* in a larger media context with the main purpose of appreciating its contribution in an ever-changing media environment. It thus selected two sample issues from which its extracted religious and socio-political themes that illustrated the extent to which it covered and engaged with these issues.

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